



The Effects of Availability Heuristic Cues on Online Related Purchasing Decisions

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ABSTRACT

In the rapidly growing Internet of the world, online related purchasing decisions has spread to the daily lives of most people. People use the internet for a variety of purchases and choices, such as direct online shopping, ordering food or purchasing physical products based on online reviews, booking hotels, etc. Online product review and other online information that contain cues which may activate availability heuristic is increasingly valued by online consumers. This review article document various availability cues like vividness format, frequency and familiarity, negativity, primary-recency and the interaction of one another, along with the concrete explanation of their effectiveness on consumer purchasing decisions in different scenarios. First of all, graphical, descriptive and specific information with stronger vividness will be more likely to attract consumers' attention. Also, consumers are more inclined to consider the brands they are more familiar with. Furthermore, the negativity plays the role of evoking strong responses for which will have greater impact on consumer decision makings. Apart from that, the first piece of information affect purchasing intentions more than the subsequent ones.

Keywords: *Availability heuristic cues, online purchasing decision*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving electronic information age, online platform has inevitably become an important edged sword that influences the market. People use the internet for a variety of purchases and choices, such as direct online shopping, ordering food or purchasing physical products based on online reviews, booking hotels, etc.

The rise in the smartphone owning population and the accessibility of the Internet have allowed consumers to be able to get information about products or services that potentially would be purchased through online platforms, based on the reviews of fellow buyers. Previous studies has shown the significance of online consumer reviews and other online information on the sales markets. For purchasing physical products or making dining out choices, people tend to read online reviews before in-store purchasing to help minimize the uncertainty and confidence. Consumers saw online evaluations as the second most trustworthy form of advertising behind direct recommendations from people around, according to an industry research [1]. Similarly, for hotel reservations, since hotels provide a typically experiential

service, and customers cannot fully judge the how and what their services are like before booking or paying, they must have information a huge quantity of consulted in the during making decisions to decrease riskiness. As a result, hotel internet booking systems place a premium on the accurate presentation of hotel information. In previous research, online reviews have been proven to influence the resort selection [2], the marketing of the hotels [3], and willingness to pay. [4]

The great volume of reviews available online is not necessarily beneficial, even though internet reviews may be a great source of information. Therefore, academics and researchers need to grasp the factors influence decision-making, as well as the situations that enhance or lessen the impact of reviews on customer assessments. When consumers are exposed to a plethora of online information, they face difficulties in processing big volumes of information offered in a variety of reviews. Because analyzing information is a rigorous task for the humans' brain. The easily accessed internet information reduces consumers' effort needed to look for information at the price of increasing the cognitive work necessary seeking for the meaningful information [5] since analyzing information is a taxing task for the human intellect [6]. What is more important, inadequate

cognitive processing power makes evaluating all relevant information before purchasing a tough work. The concept of "bounded rationality" states that reason is limited by cognitive constraints and information accessible [7]. As a result of this constraint, people cannot use all the information to evaluate their decisions before purchasing. Humans are said to as "misers" because they regularly employ mental shortcuts or heuristics to make instant judgments, with cognitive effort being avoided [8]. In this case, when presented with scarcity cues, humans purchase decisions are usually governed by fast and intuitive System 1 [9]. Such cues are thought to impair brain sensitivity, making it difficult for consumers to absorb information logically and they are forced to depend on mental shortcuts. While judging a particular topic, approach, idea or conclusion, customers frequently depend on the availability heuristic, which is when people focuses on quick instances that spring to mind. As a result, something must be regarded essential if it is easily remembered. Adversely, human brain will be less alert to the other things that are not as easily remembered.

2. DIFFERENT AVAILABILITY CUES AND THEIR MANIPULATION IN CONSUMER DECISIONS

Consumers use the marketplace's inherent availability cues as a guide to making decisions, consumers' behavioral intentions, evaluations, expectations. These cues can help people perceive value more quickly. The availability of information is influenced by its relevance, frequency, vividness, frequency of co-occurrence, and apparent significance. [8]. The main focus in this review article is on the manifestation of different availability heuristic cues in online related environment and how they manipulate consumer purchasing decision in specific, including vividness, format, frequency and familiarity, negativity, primary-recency and the interaction of one another.

2.1 Vividness

Vivid information is conveyed in a way that is emotionally engaging, tangible, and picture provocative [7]. Visual and tangible information might elicit meaningful connections in working memory, increasing the availability of vivid information in memory and, as a result contributing to systematic judgment bias.[7] According to a research of the vividness effect in persuasion, tangible, graphical, or descriptive information was more persuasive than conceptual, text-only, or statistical information [9]. Furthermore, the availability heuristic was shown to reduce the amount of the vividness impact. Individuals prefer verbal explanations of items or services to information supplied in the form of graphics because they need less systematic processing, governed by the system which is fast and intuitive, leading consumers more likely to notice the

images rather than words [10]. Pictures and brand names influence consumer choices throughout the first purchasing phase. A previous research project discovered that visualisations aided individual in processing product categories more quickly than simple text forms reviews [11].

According to previous study, vividness is manipulated by the degree in specificity of language descriptions, the presence or absence of pictures, the quality of pictures, the form in which evidence exists, and how information is delivered. [12]. Ordinary information that is vague and boring can be taken more effort to pick up than specific vivid content, emotionally arousing, rich in pictures or graphic reviews.

In the online restaurant review system, the most popular goods are generally the ones that get the most attention. This circumstance arises because conspicuous things provide more vivid information and are more likely to attract people's attention, influencing how buyers assess information. Then the positive effect of review suggest that an online review system or website may drive users to submit more comedy remarks, for example, by using "funny" to designate specific comments and rewarding these "funny" posts. [13]. It is therefore important that vivid messages are reflected in the restaurant environment to influence consumer decisions. This can be done by manipulating online reviews to make them more concrete and using exciting words rather than boring, abstract and routinely mundane comments.

Firstly, the previous research examined impact factors of perceived online review usefulness suggested that the perceived value of internet reviews is affected by the depth of the reviews. [13]. It is therefore important to control the amount of text to optimise the depth of content. The system should guide users to post the right amount of text. A text count that is too short may make the user feel that the comment is useless. Then, the positive effect of humorous comments indicates that line official websites or systems can direct customers to post humorous comments. This can be done by marking some comments with 'funny' and giving special rewards for these 'funny' comments. Similarly, it is found that the level of descriptiveness of internet evaluations were used to influence the information vividness. [12]

Apart from the descriptiveness of the online reviews, the presence of visual cues is another factor that affect vividness of the online reviews. Amit, Algom, and Trope [14] pointed out images are more concrete in the level of representativeness compared with narrative languages.

Kim, Kim, Kim, and Magnini collaborated on an experiment [15], where participants rated two hotels based on either actual or conceptual information are provided. The scientists controlled concrete information by providing particular details with concrete photographs

of the suites and abstract information by describing in broad with abstract visuals. The outcomes of this study demonstrate that individuals with a short time horizon respond strongly to concrete information.

2.2 Format

In the aspects of hotels and tourism, travellers like summated evaluations in the travel and hospitality industry since they save time and may be consider as beneficial with its help in heuristic. In contrast, consumers prefer descriptive evaluations over summated ratings when evaluating the worth of a hotel room, according to a study of Noone and McGuire [16]. The impacts of quantitative evaluations were overridden by the effects of descriptive reviews, which were perceived as more important. [17].

Statistical data or ratings can help reduce the work required of human brain to make purchasing judgments in the case of online reviews [18]. Noone and McGuire [16] contend that the substance of reviews has a greater impact on quality and value judgements than aggregated ratings.

In the research conducted by Tsang and Prendergast, G. [17], it is investigated how the combination of valences between ratings and review texts affects customers' responses to the reviews and the product in concern. The experimental method used hypothetical movie reviews to find how consumer's intentions to purchase a product and their impressions of the review are affected by inconsistent text-rating reviews. The result shows that the valence of the text largely affect the trustworthiness of the reviews. An intersecting interaction of texts and ratings was also discovered, which influences the credibility of a review.

2.3 Frequency and Familiarity

The availability heuristic can be influenced by familiarity, which is stimulated when consumers are more knowledgeable about a topic, they are less dubious of the information they are given. According to research, consumer perceptions of tourism locations can be influenced by messages about the environment and the sort of destination [19]. Consumers generate more negative opinions and are more dubious of the message offered because unfamiliar information requires longer to break down, depending on what particular tourism location it is.

The Internet and mobile applications give consumers instant access to a wealth of information. Consumers may make selections with comprehensive information thanks to the abundant of information available online and in the purchasing situations. The results of an experiment by Nazlan [12] indicates that presenting information to customers on a regular basis boosts their preference and

they are more likely to buy the target item. Frequency increased familiarity, and familiar events were more likely to be retrieved than unfamiliar ones. Recognizable brands are more likely to be inclined to be noticed than new ones, according to previous study [20]. Furthermore, research reveals that customers' intention to purchase are influenced both by the reliability of an online reviewer, and the quantity of reviews [21].

This also holds true for the impact of brand awareness on customer decision-making where regardless of any other relevant information, more familiar items will be preferred above unknown ones. The study's findings indicated that the respondents' selections were mostly dependent on recognition, with the well-known brand being selected even when extra star ratings made it appear less appealing. Although extra information influences selection, it appears that recognition is used as a crucial first step in the decision-making process. This is also called as "brand heuristic" which is how brands in the home category can use brand heuristics to increase mental availability. Since we rely on mental shortcut that allows us to make judgments quickly and efficiently, more familiar brand will be more likely to inspire consumers' emotion, attention and action and to stimulate shortcuts in consumer's minds.

The power of these heuristics is a large part of what makes these companies so readily familiar to us, as it helps to boost mental availability. Taking IKEA as an example, its iconic use of the yellow and blue colors from the Swedish national flag, Habitat's unique device that depicts a heart in a home allows consumers recognize the brand easily even online.

2.4 Negativity Bias

According to research, people value negative information more than positive ones [22]. Negative reviews may contain complaints and harsh descriptive or narrative sentences [23]. Positive reviews are delightful descriptions of events. According to psychology research, positive and negative information may not be perceived to the same extent and negative information often seems to be have stronger impact on decision makings [22]. Because negative comment provide information that evokes fast and strong physiological responses. Online reviewers' opinions are seen as more trustworthy than sponsored advertising since they are not paid by the firm they are evaluating and they are totally experience and emotion driving [24].

The negative bias also plays the role of external factor which affect availability. Putting it in a real life scenario, if a customer once experienced terrible services in KFC, he may have a strong negative impression on this restaurant and thus associate the experience with the whole fast food industry. The memory of the meal will induce negative mood, and it is suggested that subjects in

the negative mood induction judged the negative future event as more likely to happen than did subjects in either the positive or neutral groups [25]. Therefore, the person may be more likely to overestimate the risk level of eating at another fast food restaurant.

There is plenty of data to support the negative bias in reviews online. Chevalier & Mayzlin [4] determined that internet reviews had a considerable influence on hotel room sales, but that negative reviews are more influential than good ones, based on an examination of book attributes and online reviews. Consumers would rather pay extra staying at a holiday inn that has received favourable reviews, but will not choose a hotel that has received poor reviews at a similar bargain, suggesting an imbalance between review valence and price. Positive internet reviews are less appreciated than negative ones, Positive ratings are often attributed to the reviewer, while unfavourable reviews are attributed to the item they purchased. [26]. According to a content study of internet restaurant evaluations, negative ratings had a stronger effect on usefulness taken by consumers than positive ones. [27]. Negative tourists' ratings might trump other considerations such as pricing and the feelings towards the destinations before [4].

2.5 Primacy- recency

When the majority of comments were passive, the first information affected evaluations and booking intentions more than subsequent ones. Consumers keen on information that was simple to access, which is aligned to availability heuristic theorem [28]. Because buyers must browse around to seek for further information in the online shopping context, primacy–recency becomes much more important. Pan, Zhang, and Law, for example, discovered that [29] customers' are more likely to pay attention to hotels near the top of a hotel reservation page or websites, and those information had a higher effect on choices. Moreover, in further studies, by presenting favourable or unfavourable reviews as initial information appear to customers when they browse through the reviews can be considered as controlling the primary-recency.

2.6 Interaction of Cues

Cues are almost never isolated from one another. As a result, consumers tends to make decisions according to a mix of cues. The findings indicate that number of times of information being presented and vividness combined together to influence customers' evaluation of quality and the acceptable value of the good or services. There are many availability cues that may act together and diminish each other's influence when acting as separate cues in the Internet commenting system. According to the findings of an experiment, more positive opinions of its quality, worth, and price rationality are collected when the

particular dish is concrete and vividly commented in a high frequency. This is because customers' familiarity with the dish can be built up by vivid and frequent display of particular information, allowing them to retain and retrieve idea about the target item more quickly. [30]

According to the previous discussions, there are several factors that influence the vividness, primary recency and negativity, and thus can manipulate the availability of the information. From the past researches, it can be seen that how these cues interact to affect consumers' evaluations, intentions or expectations.

In the first experiment carried out by Nazlan, Tanford and Montgomery [12], they used experimental design with multiple situations consisting positive and negative, different types of format interacting with each other. The respondents were carefully selected from the online research company, and they were shown a general introduction of the restaurant and actual reviews form Yelp with picture.

They manipulated the sequence of reviews to create primacy-recency effect. They play the favourable and unfavourable reviews in different orders. When the rating is corresponding, positive ratings were indicated by more stars and negative ones were represented by fewer stars. The manipulation of review type used the display of the review with description only, star rating only and both being presented.

In the situation where reviews included both descriptions and star ratings, the restaurant received the highest appraise, followed by ratings alone and descriptions only, which were not substantially distinct from each other. When reviews included both descriptions and star ratings, the chance of recommending the restaurant to others and the expectation on the dining experience were greater than when reviews only featured descriptions, although ratings solely were not substantially distinct from either group. The results and outcomes of this study can help explain why the assessment of negative evaluations isn't as harsh as it appears since negative information elicits an instinctive emotional reaction [31]. This can also inspired some reference value and indication for an online review system for food service. The review system should be set up to provide both rating system and text commentary to enable consumers to make quicker and more accurate consumer judgments.

Another crucial experiment has also been conducted by them to refine the results of experimental findings even further. In the second experiment they eliminated the isolation of the rating type valence and sequence and investigated by further applying the availability of restaurant reviews to the selection of menu items, these effects are further combined with other availability cues in a comprehensive and informative restaurant setting.

For this experiment, a student was recruited as the

sample that is suited for e-commerce research and ideal topics for researches on the Internet using (King & He, 2006) [32]. The study utilized a two-part experimental design containing different rating formats, with or without pictures, and positive versus negative. The rating structure was changed to include both numerical and star ratings. The inclusion or deficiency of an image with a review describing a target item was used to modify visual signals. The review valence of positive or negative was used to test the negativity bias.

The findings support Ziegele's [33] hypothesis that an individual online review is more significantly valued in product evaluations than overall review ratings. An alternative opinion lowers the effect of a dominant source, according to social impact theory [34]. This conclusion is in line with studies that suggests that a lack of agreement lowers the influence of the current review valence [4]. It is also found that pictures also improve the chance of choosing a well evaluated menu item but have no effect on the likelihood of choosing a poorly reviewed item. This research includes visual signals to elements can be overcome by bad evaluations, bolstering the case for negativity bias. [4].

When evaluations are in numerical rather than star style, customers are inclined to pick a menu item with photos. Consumers favour the traditional star rating system because it has always been identified the quality of the product or service, even when numerical ratings give them with more precise ratings. The preference can also be explained by the prediction that star ratings would be easier to understand in human's brain and have a greater influence on product selection than number ratings.

3. CONCLUSION

There is now over 20 years' worth of research and development on the effectiveness of availability cues on online related purchasing decisions which shows the strong manipulating power of the primary-recency, the vividness of the comments and the negatives comments will especially influence the behavioral outcome like evaluations, intentions and expectations on the products or services.

For practitioners such as online retailers and marketers alike, the availability heuristic has great practical value in internet-related customer decision-making. Marketers and restaurateurs are suffering as a result of consumers' lack of attentiveness while making online purchasing selections, therefore they must make sure that the positive feedback they receive is widely distributed through various mediums. Restaurant owners, hotel management, and online retailers may benefit from online review platforms by incentivizing customers to submit favorable reviews.

The findings on how more vivid information may be

easily recalled show that dramatic plots can have greater impact on consumers, hence concrete or story alike evaluations are more compelling than descriptive ones. Restaurateurs may select the ones with the most vibrancy and feature them on their restaurants' official home sites. Nazlan's earlier study indicated that the marketing team seek positive evaluations by urging customers to share their favorite recollections of the restaurant. This might be done as a regular competition with meal coupons as the winner. Since internet plays a crucial role in companies, sellers should understand the value of keeping a favourable online environment to preserve the long-term viability. Secondly, because pictures may stimulate individuals' instinctive processing, businesses might develop appealing social media accounts or hashtags to make consumers to post appealing photographs or narrative comments through their own account. Furthermore, since people prefer the traditional star ratings, restaurateurs might employ star ratings for promotional purposes since they stimulate consumers' heuristic associated with quality. Aside from that, review systems don't pay much attention to the review source and instead focus on displaying the comments. As a result, this article suggests that an online review system or webpage may label and publish certain key facts about the review source in a prominent location to assist other users in determining the review source's expertise and reliability. Finally, the past findings indicate the extreme effectiveness of the negative bias. This might dissuade potential customers from buying items or eating at a restaurant. So that it is crucial for sellers to manage the online review system and social media account to ensure the negative reviews or comments do not appear on the top pages.

According to a study aimed at developing a framework that explains online consumer behavior using the strategy implemented in the cognitive dissonance theory, a consumer has greater cognitive dissonance when there is a greater lack of consistency between his or her opinions about an online retailer. When a consumer is confronted with cognitive dissonance, he or she will make purchase decisions based on personal views. Similarly, the influence of information about the hotel's own characteristics far outweighs that of referral information and online reviews. This might be because high expense hotel customers are usually business travellers, whose travel expenditures are typically covered by governmental departments or enterprises. When choosing a hotel, they attach more importance to matching the class of the hotel with their social status, have higher requirements for hotel hardware and facilities, value quality and brand, and are less influenced by other reviewers. They are less influenced by other reviewers. So taking different sample groups can lead to different experimental results. However, the existing researches hardly considered these external validity. Further study can take the various groups of participants and involve

different products, populations and setting in consideration to draw a more valid explanation and conclusion.

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