



# The Impact of Online Comments on Other Consumers' Purchase Intention

Yupeng Cheng<sup>1,†</sup>, Beier Huang<sup>2,†</sup>, Jingrong Zhong<sup>3,\*†</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Yupeng Cheng School of Journalism and Communication Shanghai University Shanghai 200000 China

<sup>2</sup>Beier Huang School of Business Administration Shanghai University Shanghai 201800 China

<sup>3</sup>Jingrong Zhong School of Communication Studies American University Washington D.C. 20016 America

†These authors contributed equally

Jz8725a@student.american.edu

**Abstract.** With the development of the Internet, electronic shopping has been more and more popular in modern society. Online comments of consumers who purchase goods through e-commerce websites and other shopping websites often influence other consumers' purchasing decisions, behaviors, evaluation of products and services. This report discusses and analyzes the influence of comments on consumers' purchase intention from two aspects and draw two conclusions: first, the quality of online comments is positively correlated with consumers' purchase intention; second, there is a moderating effect between social distance and different types of online comments. For enterprises, it is necessary to correctly understand the significance of online comments to consumers, attach importance to online comments, and pay attention to the collection and management of different content types of online comments.

**Keywords:** online comment; purchase intention; quality; social distance

## 1 Introduction

The increasing advances in technology account for diverse changes in the way individuals and groups carry out their daily operational activities across the social, political, and economic domains of the global society. Advances in telecommunication technologies have, for instance, played a significant role in bridging the geographical barriers towards forming a global village and globalization of human activities across the said spectrum. The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have led to cross-cultural interaction and integration, leading to the formation of networks with worldwide coverage [1]. Individuals and groups alike make use of these networks to share feelings, opinions, ideas, and perspectives on different issues ranging from social, political, and economical. Online networks tend to be so powerful that they can even bring the desired political or social change, as witnessed in

different countries around the world. The increasing competition witnessed across different sectors of the global economy necessitates the capitalization of these online networks for sustainable growth and development of both the local business entities and the multinational corporations [2]. The correspondences on these established networks are known to have varied impacts on the performance of a product or feature being marketed online, including its sales volumes [3]. It is, therefore, important to evaluate the impact of online comments on other consumers' purchase intentions.

A consumer's purchase intention refers to the subjective potential for customers deciding or choosing to buy products, which can also be used to predict customers' purchasing behaviors [4]. Multinational Corporations such as Amazon and Alibaba and other e-commerce business organizations make use of online platforms to conduct their diverse daily business operations [5]. The sustainable growth and development of such companies thrive on the approval ratings, reviews, referrals, and other from the online network of customers or users of such e-commerce platforms [6]. The profitability and revenue generation of these entities is dependent on their management and response to online comments. Effective management of such comments leads to higher approval rates of products and services, leading to increased referrals and recommendations. The overall impact of such outcomes is the increased customer base and higher retention rates of consumers leading to long-term profitability and revenue generation. It is for this reason that these organizations maintain their competitiveness in the market while also securing and expanding their market shares.

Online comments by customers who have purchased goods through e-commerce sites and other vending sites often affect other consumers' purchase decisions, behaviors, and evaluations of products and services [7]. Online commentary or reviews can take either the literal or figurative form based on the content features of the product or service on sale and style of language used on the site [8]. Both literal and figurative reviews on purchased products and services impact the purchase intentions of other customers in equally diverse ways. Positive comments about a particular purchase, for instance, enhance the purchasing intentions of customers who are searching for the same product online. Such comments tend to provide the search product or service a strong social presence and thus easily convince other customers to make the same purchase. On the other hand, negative reviews will result in lower purchase intentions from other customers based on the obvious evaluation of the products and services to be of poor or low quality.

Online comments or reviews constitute a system of commentary networks serving as an online reference point for other consumers who use it in their decision-making process towards making a purchase. These systems of networks provide excellent platforms for consumers to evaluate the quality of products offered based on the correspondences available online. These correspondences can go on to become word of mouth in the real world and on the internet, which entrusts other customers to the brand of products and services commented upon or under review [9]. According to a 2015 survey, 70 % of customers refer to the comments of other consumers who have bought a particular product or service before making a purchasing decision [10]. In essence, online comments play a significant role in influencing the purchase behavior of other customers leading to higher purchasing intentions for positive reviews and vice versa.

Online comments are prone to manipulation by some companies that seek to increase their customer base and sales by luring unsuspecting customers into enhancing their purchasing intentions based on false information. There are cases where business organizations entice customers to make positive comments or reviews about their products and services, which often tend to be of poor quality. Such cases may misguide consumers towards higher purchase intentions leading to disappointment and frustrations with their expenditures on the products [11]. It is advisable for consumers to be careful and highly selective in evaluating the content of online reviews by cross-checking with other vending sites for more information on a given brand of products and services that they seek to purchase.

## **2 Research Hypothesis**

### **2.1 The Quality of Online Reviews is Positively Correlated with College Students' Purchase Intention**

Existing studies typically define and measure review quality based on the content of online reviews. Based on the characteristics of the information content itself, Park et al. proposed that the quality of comments can be measured from four indicators: relevance, intelligibility, adequacy and objectivity [12]. They believe that high-quality reviews contain rich information on the product use process and experience, have clear logic and strong persuasion, and describe products that are true and detailed with sufficient and objective reasons; on the contrary, low-quality reviews which is more subjective and emotional by comparison, usually fails to do that, does not provide objective and practical information related to the product, and lacks convincing basis and order. In online purchases, high-quality user reviews are more likely to be trusted by recipients and more influential in their purchasing decisions because they have sufficient arguments and can better reflect the true attributes of the product. Studies by scholars such as Godes and Mayzlin have confirmed that review quality has an important impact on product sales [13]. Research by Park et al. found that online review quality affects consumers' purchase intention, and the impact of review quality on consumers' purchase intention is affected by the number of reviews and consumer volume. In-degree adjustment. Zheng Xiaoping found that the higher the quality of the review content, the greater the impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. Zhou Jingjing's research confirmed that the quality of the review content has a positive effect on consumers' brand evaluation, thus affecting the results of brand decision-making; and accordingly, if they are both positive reviews, the impact of user reviews with high content quality on consumers' purchase intention will be higher than that of user reviews with low content quality. Based on the above analysis and related research results, this paper proposes:

H1: The higher the review quality of online reviews, the higher consumers' purchase intention for the products pointed to by positive reviews, that is, the quality of online reviews is positively correlated with the purchase intention of college students.

## 2.2 Moderating Effects Between Social Distance and Different Types of Online Reviews

The theory of construal level holds that close psychological distance leads to low construal level, so individuals will pay more attention to the specific situational characteristics of stimuli, while long psychological distance leads to high construal level, and individuals pay more attention to the abstract general characteristics of stimuli. Since the construal level affects the way of information classification, and the individual decision-making process is easily affected by information that matches the construal level, psychological distance can have an effect on decision-making results through the construal level [14]. For example, when people describe their own behavior, they will pay more attention to the specific factors in the current situation, while when describing the behavior of others, they will emphasize stable generalized elements, because other people are more distant in psychological distance than themselves. As an important dimension of psychological distance, social distance will have an impact on the perception of individual psychological distance, resulting in different levels of interpretation and influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Even though online reviews influence the purchase intention of consumers who shop for others, this intention is also moderated by social distance. According to the construal level theory, people will pay more attention to the value of the target at a long distance and prefer high-value information, while at a close distance, they will pay more attention to the feasibility and prefer simple and easy-to-obtain targets [15]. Accordingly, this paper proposes the following assumptions:

H2: Social distance can moderate the influence of different types of online reviews on the purchase intention of other consumers, which means there is a moderating effect between social distance and different types of online reviews.

## 3 Research Design

In order to explore the problems above, the paper mainly chooses questionnaire survey method and the database data analysis method as experimental methods. The main subjects of the survey are college students, supplemented by people from different industries. Among them, the subjects of the questionnaires are college students, and the database comes from people in different industries. The main reasons for this choice are as follows:

First of all, students are heavy Internet enthusiasts, and among online shopping consumers, college students account for a large proportion. According to the 2017 survey by the China Internet Information Network Center, 52.7% of Internet users are between the ages of 20 and 39; among them, 24.8% are students, so the representativeness of college students in all occupations is relatively high; Furthermore, as college students, the paper chooses the population closest to authors as a sample, which can reduce the difficulty and cost of the investigation; In addition, a large number of samples of different social groups in the database are used as supplements, so that the data of the whole survey sample can be combined and representative.

In this survey, the paper distributed questionnaires to the students around them. A total of 193 questionnaires were distributed, and 150 valid questionnaires were finally recovered. Among them, there are 55 boys (36.7%) and 95 girls (63.3%). All respondents are between 18 and 25 years old, with an average age of 21.6 years; 98.8% of respondents have experienced online shopping, 56.2% of the respondents of have an average of 2 or more online shopping behaviors per month, and 85.7% of the respondents says that when shopping online, they will always read relevant reviews first.

In order to be more in line with the real scene, the subjects of the questionnaire used the method of scenario simulation questions to answer questions.

## 4 Data Analysis and Research Results

### 4.1 H1: The Quality of Online Reviews is Positively Correlated with College Students' Purchase Intention

For hypothesis 1, the articles set up a scenario simulation question: considering you need to buy a laptop, you search for relevant information on the Internet, browse relevant user reviews (as shown in the Table 1) and then answer the questions about the measurement of each variable.

**Table 1.** Example of user review information: computer products.

Review quality	Comments
High	Overall, very pleasantly surprised. The fuselage is ultra-thin, the tuning speed is very fast, the boot speed is maintained in about 10 seconds, and the battery life is more than 5 hours! The screen resolution is high, and the sound effects are stunning.
Low	The computer is nice and good value for money! At first, I felt that buying a computer online was a bit contradictory, but now that I think about it, this online shopping is so right! All aspects of the computer are very good, overall, very satisfied. Will recommend to classmates and friends.

**Reliability test.** The paper measures the quality of reviews involved independent variables and the purchase intention of dependent variables. Regarding the measurement of quality, refer to the scale of Park et al., and use 5 items to measure from five aspects of "well-founded, objective, reliable, clear, and useful" ( $\alpha = 0.905$ ); purchase intentions refer to Dodds et al. The scale is measured with five grades ( $\alpha = 0.914$ ) with three levels of "probability to consider buying, high possibility of buying, and high willingness to buy".

**Manipulation test.** In order to test whether the variables are manipulated successfully, the independent sample T test method is used to conduct the manipulation test. The results shows that the mean value of the review quality of the high-quality review group is 4.829, and the mean value of the review quality of the low-quality review group is

2.830, with a significant difference between the two ( $t=27.895$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). There is no significant difference in the above variables among respondents of different gender, age and online shopping frequency. It can be seen that the manipulation of the involved variables is successful.

**Result analysis.** This paper uses SPSS22.0 to test the influence of review quality on consumers' purchase intention. The analysis of variance results shows that the quality of reviews has a significant main effect on consumers' purchase intention. The R values are all close to 50%, indicating that there is a large correlation between the two independent variables and the dependent variable; through the adjusted R square, it can be seen that the acceptance of the independent variable to the dependent variable is higher than 10%, indicating the result of the dependent variable. It can be explained by the independent variable; the P values are all less than 0.001, indicating that the relationship is significant, and the standard coefficients are all large, that is, there is a positive correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable. As shown in Table 2, the mean purchase intention of the high-quality review group for the review product is 4.96, and the mean value of the low-quality review group's purchase intention for the review product is 3.76. There is a significant difference in the subjects' purchase intention between the high-quality and low-quality review groups ( $F = 170.535$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (as shown in Table 3), indicating that the high-quality review group has a higher purchase intention than the low-quality review group, and the hypothesis H1 of this study is verified.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of purchase intention

	Review quality	
	High quality reviews	Low quality reviews
Purchase intention	4.96(0.92)	3.76(1.03)

**Table 3.** Analysis of variance results of consumers' purchase intention.

	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	MS	F-value	Sig.
Review quality	114.791	1	114.791	170.535	0

**H1 hypothetical corroboration.** Compared with other forms of IWOM, online consumer reviews are more targeted in reflecting consumers' experience and perception of products. Decker and Trusov's research shows that for potential consumers, online consumer reviews are more instructive and referential, and are the most effective and typical form of online word of reputation. S.A. Gottschalk and A. Mafael showed through research that compared with oral communication, consumers have more trust in consumers' online comments, and many online comments make consumers process and process selectively. In order to further support the two hypotheses above, this paper selects the data set of comments written by customers around women's clothing e-commerce for data analysis. The data comes from kaggle, which is a women's clothing e-commerce data set revolving around customer reviews, containing a total of 23486\*10

data. The dataset mainly consists of 10 fields, including: Clothing ID, Age, Title, Review Text, Rating, Recommended IND, Positive Feedback Count, Division Name, Department Name, Class Name. The rating in this dataset is classified in five levels: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The higher the level of consumer satisfaction was, the higher the rating was given. Among them, 55.90% of the clothing received 5 points, and 3.59% of the clothing received 1 point. In terms of product recommendations, 83.24% of products were recommended by users. In general, most clothing products are loved by users.

*More informative reviews are more likely to motivate consumers to buy.* The dataset contains two types of reviews: reviews that contain only ratings and reviews that contain both ratings and text. As can be seen from the above, the measurement of review quality is divided into five dimensions: "well-reasoned, objective, reliable, clear, and useful". Reviews with both ratings and text are rated higher on all five dimensions because they provide more information than reviews that only show ratings, and are therefore of higher quality.

This report considers reviews with both textual content and numerical ratings to be high-quality reviews because they provide additional information to other buyers while reviews that contain only numerical ratings are normal reviews. At the same time, this report uses the number of likes received from reviews to measure consumers' purchase intentions. The report believes that the more likes a comment gets, the more potential consumers pay attention to the product, and the stronger the impact on the purchase intention is; the less likes a comment gets, the less potential consumers pay attention to the product, and the weaker the impact on the purchase intention is.

The report analyses both types of reviews and finds that high-quality reviews tend to get more likes than regular reviews. The average number of likes received by ordinary comments is 2.3, and the average number of likes received by high-quality comment groups is 3.5.

This report uses SPSS to examine the impact of comment quality on the number of likes received. In Table 4, the results of ANOVA shows that the level of detail of comments have a significant main effect on the number of likes. The t value is 13.545, and the P value is less than 0.001, indicating that the relationship is significant and the standard coefficients are large, that is, there is a positive correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable. It supports the above analysis: high-quality reviews can arouse consumers' purchase intention.

**Table 4.** Paired samples test.

	Paired difference				t	Degrees of freedom	Sig.
	Average value	Standard deviation	Standard error	95% confidence interval for the difference			
(high-quality)Positive feedback Count				Lower limit	Upper limit		
(normal)Positive feedback count	2.815	6.042	0.2079	2.4074	3.223	13.545	844
				4			0

*Credible reviews are more likely to influence consumers' purchase intentions.* The dataset has five grades: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The higher the buyer's satisfaction with the product is, the higher the rating is given. From the perspective of other buyers, the higher the rating a product receives, the more worthwhile the product is to buy. At the same time, this report still uses the number of likes received from reviews to measure consumers' purchase intentions. The report believes that the more likes a comment gets, the higher the level of trust for potential consumers to this comment is, and the stronger the impact on purchase intention is; the less likes a comment gets, the lower level of trust for potential consumers to this comment is, the weaker the impact on purchase intention is. The research, conducted jointly by Alpine-Adria University and Auckland University of Technology, shows that the public has a high degree of trust in online reviews, and generally believes that negative reviews are more reliable than positive reviews.

The report analyzes the average number of likes for different ratings: a comment with a rating of 1 gets an average of 3.5 likes; a comment with a rating of 2 gets an average of 3.3 likes; a comment with a rating of 3 gets an average of 3.1 likes; reviews with a rating of 4 get an average of 2.4 likes; reviews with a rating of 5 get an average of 2.3 likes. This report uses SPSS to examine the impact of comment ratings on the number of likes received. As shown in Table 5 and 6, the results of ANOVA shows that the rating of comments has a significant main effect on the number of likes. The T value is 43.27, and the P value is less than 0.001, indicating that the relationship is significant and the standard coefficients are all large, which means there is a negative correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The lower the rating of the review is, the higher the number of likes on average it will get, which is because that the more credible the evaluation is, the more influence the consumer's purchase intention is.

**Table 5.** Paired sample correlation.

	Number of cases	correlation	salience
Pair 1 Rating & Positive Feedback Count	23486	-.065	0.000

**Table 6.** Paired samples test.

	Paired difference				t	Degrees
Rating- Positive feedback Count	Aver- age value	Standard devia- tion	Standard error mean	95% confidence interval for the difference Lower limit	Upper limit	of free- dom
	1.662	5.879	0.038	1.584	1.735	23485

*The quality of online reviews is positively correlated with college students' purchase intention.* It can be seen from the above that reviews that provide more information and reviews are more credible in the eyes of consumers and have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intentions. More information and higher credibility both improve the quality of reviews. Two findings further support the positive correlation between the quality of online reviews and the purchase intention of college students.



**4.2 H2: Moderating Effects Between Social Distance and Different Types of Online Reviews**

When studying the influence of functional online reviews and emotional online reviews on purchase intention, the concept of social distance in psychology is introduced to examine the purchase of other consumers in the context of social distance and functional/emotional reviews influence of will.

As shown in Table 7, in order to achieve the above purpose, the article designs this question in the questionnaire as a scenario simulation question. Specifically, suppose that you want to buy a sports watch, and then you browse an online comment on the sports watch by a close friend/stranger, and the content of the comment is functional/emotional.

**Table 7.** Examples of social distance and online review.

Social distance	Comments are from close friends or strangers
Online review	Functional value review; feature-rich; long battery life; good water resistance; responsive; clear display Emotional value comments; comfortable to wear; exquisite packaging; fashionable white egg; good-looking strap

At this time, a total of four scenarios are involved, namely, functional comments from close friends; emotional comments from close friends; functional comments from strangers; and emotional comments from strangers. The scenario simulation questions of each questionnaire only involve one of the above scenarios, and the paper will distribute the questionnaires involving different scenarios in equal amounts.

The question consists of three variables: social distance, online comments and purchase intention. They are measured using the Likert five-point scale to measure the degree of agreement with the question item (strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, very much agree).

**Social distance manipulation test.** The data collection ends up with 80 valid questionnaires, among which 42 and 38 are manipulated by near ties and 38 by far ties. It can be seen from the table 8 that the respondents' perception of the distance (near relationship and far relationship) of the relationship occurring in this online shopping is significantly different ( $M_{near} < M_{far}$ ,  $F=328.011$   $p<0.05$ ). The results indicate that social distance manipulation is effective.

**Table 8.** Social distancing manipulation descriptive statistics.

Social distance	Sample size	Mean	Standard deviation	Sig.
Close	42	1.41	0.693	0
Far	38	4.11	0.714	0

**Manipulation Tests for Online Review Types.** In order to test whether the described functional and emotional comments can manipulate respondents' perceptions of online comment types, respondents are asked in the questionnaire how they felt about two types of related attributes in the provided sports watch comments, and participants participated in functional value comments. There are 40 subjects each for the information manipulation test and the emotional value comment information manipulation test. The results are tested for significance using a one-way ANOVA (as shown in the Table 9), which shows that the construal level manipulation was feasible.

**Table 9.** Review type variance test

	Sum of square	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	114.709	114.709	275.759	0
Intragroup	36.19	0.416		
Total	150.899			

**Result analysis.** The reliability statistics of consumers' perception of purchase intention under different social distances show that the Cronbach's coefficient value is  $0.741 > 0.7$ , the reliability is high, indicating that the results of the dependent variable have a high degree of internal consistency, which proves that this research The scale of the dependent variable used is valid. The four experiments are: close social distance + comments reflecting functional value; close social distance + comments reflecting emotional value; long social distance + comments reflecting functional value; and long social distance + comments reflecting emotional value. The specific results are shown in the Table 10 below.

**Table 10.** Description of results.

Online review	Social distance	Mean	Stand deviation
Emotional view	re- Close	1.667	0.393
	Far	3.492	0.417
Functional view	re- Close	3.492	0.417
	Far	1.667	0.521

It can be seen from Table10 that under the adjustment of close social distance, consumers are more willing to purchase products with reviews that reflect functional value than that with reviews that reflect emotional value. However, under the adjustment of long social distance, consumers are more willing to buy products with reviews that reflect emotional value than that with reviews that reflect functional value.

After conducting reliability analysis on the influence of different types of review attributes on consumers' purchase intention under different social distances, the main effects and interaction effects of independent variables are further tested.

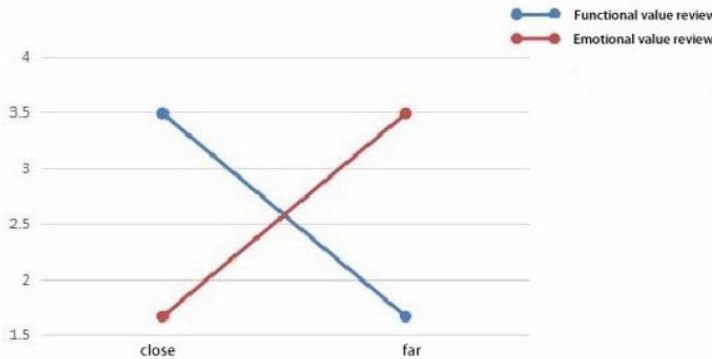
The univariate analysis method in general linear analysis is still used to perform the variance analysis test using SPSS22.0, and the results are shown in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Analysis of variance for purchase intention.

Purchase intention		df	F	Sig.
	Social distance	1	3.579	0.062
	Different types of comments	1	265.472	0
	Social distancing different types of comments	1	329.672	0

(Note: the horizontal axis is social distance, and the vertical axis is purchase intention)

The results of variance analysis shows that the main effect of social distance is significant ( $F=3.579$ ,  $P>0.05$ ), which indicates that online reviews have no significant effect on consumers' purchase intention under different social distances (far social distance and near social distance) difference. The influence of different types of online reviews on consumers' purchase intention is significantly different ( $F=265.472$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), indicating that the purchase intention of consumers who shop for others is affected by online reviews. Finally, the interaction between social distance and different types of online review keywords is significant ( $F=329.672$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), which indicates that under the adjustment of social distance, consumers' purchase intention will be affected by different types of reviews. In the case of close social distance, reviews reflecting functional value have a higher impact on purchase intention than comments reflecting emotional value, while in the case of far social distance, comments reflecting emotional value have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intention than that comments embodying functional value (see Figure 1 below). Hypothesis 2 has since been validated.



**Fig. 1.** The interaction between social distance and different types of online review.

## 5 Conclusion

This study explores the influence of online reviews on other consumers' purchase intentions by means of questionnaire survey and database analysis. The higher the quality of online reviews are, the more comprehensive the description of the product is, the more information and better understanding of products consumers will get, and the higher the perceived value will be. The higher the quality of reviews are, the higher purchase intention of consumers will be, which means the quality of online reviews is

positively correlated with the purchase intention of college students. When the credibility of reviews increases, the quality of reviews increases accordingly, and the impact on consumers' purchase intentions also increases. In addition, starting from the theory of construal level and social distance in psychological distance, the study explores the moderating role of social distance in the influence of online reviews on the purchase intention of consumers who shop for others. In close social distance, reviews reflecting functional value have a higher impact on purchase intention than that reflecting emotional value; in far social distance, comments reflecting emotional value have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intention than that reflecting functional value.

This study still has the following shortcomings, which need to be improved in the future. First of all, the research mainly considers the influence of positive reviews on consumers' purchase intention, and the research on negative reviews is not sufficiently. In fact, consumers may place more importance on negative reviews than positive reviews. Future research can further explore the impact of the content quality of negative reviews and review publisher ratings on consumers' purchasing decisions. Secondly, this study takes user reviews on shopping websites as the research object. Compared with user reviews on third-party review websites, consumers are more likely to think that they are dominated by corporate marketing. Then user reviews on different online platforms are more likely to have a higher content quality. Are there differences in the influence of reviewer and reviewer ratings on consumers' purchasing decisions? This is also worthy of further exploration in future research. Fourth, the sample selected in this paper is small, and only the data of electronic products and clothing industries are collected and used, which is one-sided. Finally, the variables considered in this study are relatively limited. In fact, consumer expertise and consumer attribution will moderate the impact of user reviews on consumers' purchasing decisions. Therefore, future research can further use consumer expertise or consumer attribution as moderator variables to explore the impact of user review quality and reviewer rating on consumers' purchasing decisions. The study has following implications: First, the quality of online reviews has a very significant impact on consumers' purchase intention, especially for products with high involvement, the impact of review quality is even more significant. Therefore, companies should pay attention to the positive impact of user review quality on consumers' purchase intention, and take effective incentive measures to encourage existing buyers to publish more detailed and persuasive high-quality reviews, especially positive reviews. At the same time, the paper must always pay attention to and track user comments, especially negative comments with sufficient arguments, the paper must respond and deal with them in a timely manner, establish an honest corporate image, and win the trust of consumers.

Furthermore, for enterprises or businesses, in this Internet age, they must correctly understand the significance of online reviews to consumers, give more attention to online reviews, and pay attention to collecting and managing online reviews of different content types. Based on this, merchants and enterprises can set up corresponding comment systems according to the type of products, and control the types of consumer online comments. According to consumers' social distance and product category, enterprises could guide reviewers to leave significant review types, thereby increasing sales.

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