

THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER PRODUCT EXPERIENCES

AUTHORS

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Product reviews influence consumers' decisions and product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Accordingly, so far, the interest in reviews has more or less stopped at checkout. Yet it is common for consumers to be accidentally exposed to reviews for products after purchasing them (Rosario, Valck, and Sotgiu 2020) and even to intentionally seek out reviews after acquiring products (Liang 2016), for a variety of reasons. Given the prevalence of exposure to reviews after the point of acquisition and the amount of information they provide consumers, it seems plausible that reviews also have an afterlife. In this research, we investigate how exposure to reviews can shape the consumption experience itself.

METHODOLOGY

Across eight studies, we investigated how and why exposure to consumer-generated reviews before consumption affects consumers' experience with the reviewed product.

RESULTS

We found that consumers who read reviews experience the reviewed products differently than consumers who interact with the products without having read reviews. Specifically, reading negative reviews leads consumers to experience the product more negatively—that is, in a manner consistent with the reviews they have read. Consumers who read positive reviews, however, have similar experiences to consumers without prior exposure to reviews. In study 1, we showed that the effects of negative reviews occur regardless of product quality (Figure 1).

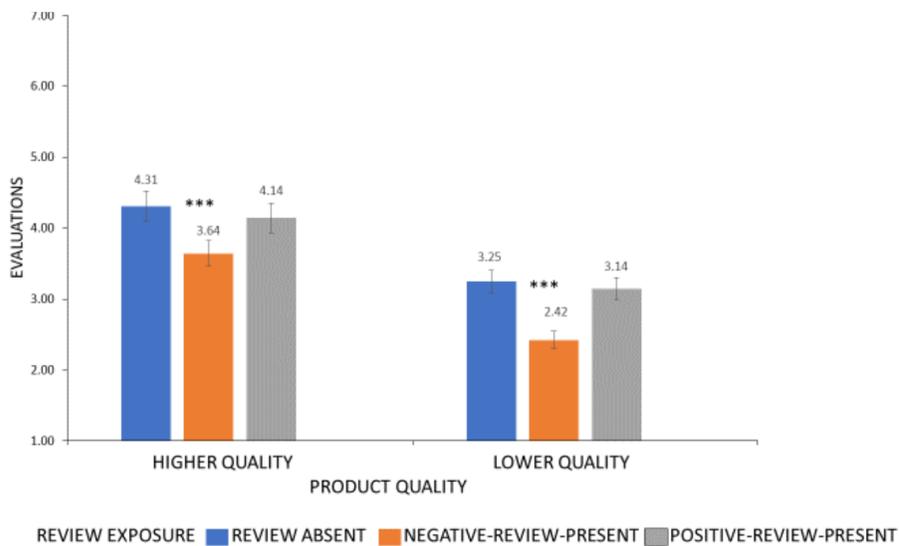


FIGURE 1: EFFECTS OF REVIEW EXPOSURE WITH LOWER-QUALITY AND HIGHER-QUALITY PRODUCTS ON PRODUCT EVALUATIONS IN STUDY 1

We further found that the effect occurs whether consumers choose the product they consume or are given the product to experience (study 2), and they can be attributable to the review's valence (study 3). We also confirmed that reviews affect the consumption experience itself, rather than merely consumers' reports of those experiences (study 4). We further identified a mechanism for the differential influence of positive and negative reviews. Specifically, we showed that negative reviews (versus positive reviews or no reviews) elicit a stronger focus on negative product attributes (as reflected in recall of these attributes), which, in turn, is associated with a more negative product experience (studies 5a and 5b).

In study 6, we show that the effects of product reviews are contingent upon consumers' tendencies to focus on positive and negative attributes, such that a high positivity orientation can buffer the detrimental effects of negative reviews on the consumption experience, and that it can bring positive reviews "into play," so that they can enhance the consumption experience (Figure 2).

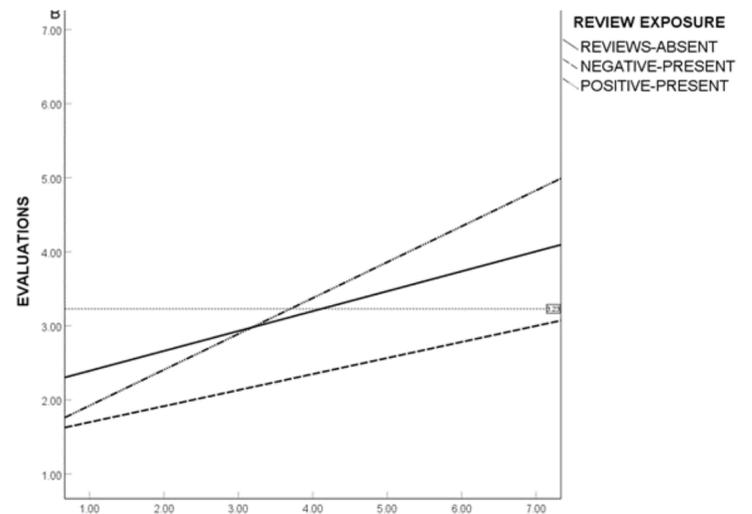


FIGURE 2: EFFECTS OF REVIEW EXPOSURE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CONSUMER POSITIVITY ORIENTATION ON PRODUCT EVALUATIONS IN STUDY 6

In study 7, review perceived trustworthiness was found to play a role in the review effects: Whereas both positive and negative reviews influence consumption experiences when reviews are perceived to be reliable, negative reviews, but not positive reviews, are "sticky" enough to influence consumption experience also when they are perceived to be unreliable (Figure 3).

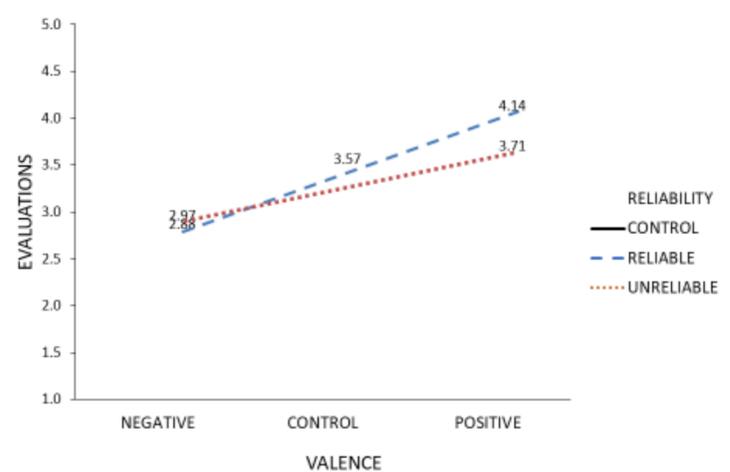


FIGURE 3: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INFORMATION VALENCE BY RELIABILITY ON PRODUCT EVALUATIONS IN STUDY 7

Finally, In study 8, we show that when it comes to negative information, previous consumers have a stronger impact on subsequent experiences than a marketer (Figure 4).

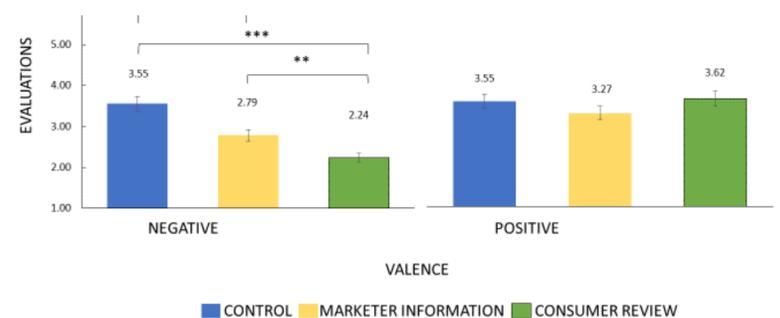


FIGURE 4: EFFECTS OF INFORMATION SOURCE BY INFORMATION VALENCE ON PRODUCT EVALUATIONS IN STUDY 8

CONCLUSION

Reviews not only have an impact on purchasing and consumption decisions, but they also have striking effects on product experience

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