The Impact of Online Additional Reviews on Consumer’s Purchase Process

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ABSTRACT

As the supplement of buyers’ original reviews on products, online additional reviews were supported by some B2C websites recently. That is to say, consumers could post their recommendations or comments again in several months. This paper attempts to measure the impacts of additional reviews on consumers, as well as to investigate whether they are different from those of original ones. The authors results not only indicate that purchasing intention, attitude certainty and after-sales service have significant relationship with additional reviews, but also show that additional reviews have greater influence on consumers than original ones. But contrary to the authors expectations, as for the impacts of additional reviews on consumer’s attitude certainty, no significant difference can be found between different product types, as well as between consumers with different involvement levels. Their research fills the online reviews gap, and the empirical implication of additional review provides a reference to B2C ecommerce practice.

Keywords: Additional Reviews, After-Sales Service, Attitude Certainty, Original Reviews, Purchase Intention,

INTRODUCTION

Taobao.com is established by Alibaba conglomerates in May 10, 2003, which is the largest B2C site in China. To ensure a safe online shopping environment, Taobao.com establishes a series of credit system, a remarkable one of which is its online review platform. In the online review platform, not only buyers and sellers could rate each other after their transactions, but also that all the past ratings are public to the entire community. In fact, online reviews provided by customers who previously purchased the products are a major feedback information source for consumers (Dellarocas, 2003). Prior customers gave some information or their recommendations in a written form. These reviews then existed

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in the online platform and could be utilized as decision aids when potential consumers search and choose the products.

Although online reviews platform is a good feedback mechanism, it may fail sometimes. For example, consumers are satisfied with the products/services and give the sellers positive reviews at the beginning. After a while, consumers may find that the products/services are imperfect and failed to meet their expectations after they experience or use the products for some time. However, these consumers are not allowed to change their reviews. To fix up such a default, Taobao.com extends its online review platform by allowing consumers to post their recommendations or comments again, after they experience the product. Additional reviews can be considered as a supplement of original reviews.

The differences between the online additional reviews and original reviews include the following. First, the original reviews are given before the additional reviews. Consumers post their original reviews soon after they received the products, whereas additional reviews are given after consumers’ experiences. Second, the quantity of additional reviews is far less than that of original reviews. In our pretests, only about 20% of the total consumers would like to give additional reviews. Third, additional reviews are relatively more “truthful” and “honest” than original reviews. Because consumers have experienced the products/services for a longer time, they know more on the products when they write their additional reviews. Finally, instead of just describing the products or providing pricing information in original reviews, consumers are more likely to give their recommendations directly in additional reviews.

While numerous academic researchers have emphasized and extensively studied the importance and/or effect of original reviews (Lee & Youn, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2010), to our knowledge, there are few studies focusing on additional reviews. In this paper, we make an initial attempt by investigating the impact of additional reviews on consumers. In particular, we identify several similarities and differences between original reviews and additional reviews firstly. Then, we use them as the underlying framework to develop our hypotheses and experimental methodology. Finally, using the data from survey, we test these hypotheses.

The remaining parts of this paper are organized as follows. A review of related literature and hypotheses are presented in next section. We introduce the research design and measures in this study in the method section. In the result section we report the empirical results and discussed their managerial implication. Conclusions are in the last section.

LITERATURE REVIEWS AND HYPOTHESES

Online Reviews as a New Type of WOM

As a strong force in the marketing, word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is defined as informal and interpersonal communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, etc. (Anderson, 1998). Traditionally, such informal information passing is mainly based on oral communication, but this situation has been changed totally by the Internet technology revolution.

Along with the commercialization process of Internet which began in 1991, not only the Internet-based electronic commerce increases rapidly, but also various kinds of communication platforms such as BBS, forum, online review, Blog, facebook, twitter, etc, come forth sequentially. With those various platforms, Internet users can transfer a myriad of messages and information to others quickly and conveniently. A brand new online WOM appears.

Among various forms of online WOM, online reviews have been widely used in online trading and marketing. Basically, they can be classified into positive and negative ones (Buttle, 1998). Positive online reviews represent consumer’s favorable attitude toward the products or services, and are usually evaluated
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