

PAPER

THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE ONLINE REVIEWS AND RATING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Online shopping has become very popular, so it is now important to study online consumer behavior since some factors influencing consumers while involved in traditional shopping are irrelevant to online shopping. In Uzbekistan, even though online shopping and ecommerce websites and applications are relatively new, many people have partially switched to shopping from online markets. However, research on the impact of online reviews, which are very crucial for producers and retailers, is scarce.

This paper investigates the effect of online reviews on consumer purchase behavior at Uzum, an online market that sells a wide range of products, such as clothes, technology, and drinks. The research chooses a clothing cap as a research target, and it relies on information from 7 online retailers to deduce a conclusion. The research finds that positive reviews per se do not result in more purchases of a product, yet the high number of positive reviews does so. This suggests that retailers should learn how to motivate their customers to post comments and reviews past the purchase to maximize their sales.

Key words: Online market, consumer, Uzum, consumer behavior, marketing.

Introduction

Many factors can influence consumer behavior, ranging from product placement to pricing. Therefore, this field has been extensively researched to understand better why and how humans behave in one or another way when making purchase decisions. So far, scientists have studied consumer behavior from diverse perspectives: psychology, economics, marketing, and many more. In fact,

they devised a whole new field called Behavioral Economics. Despite the fact that it is a relatively modern area of expertise, many books and studies have been dedicated to it, proving many prevailing economic ideas wrong. For instance, in his book called *Predictably Irrational*, Dan Ariely (1) demonstrates that the idea that price reduction is not supposed to change consumer choice if a price difference between options doesn't change is faulty: when one of the items drops to \$0, it

Compiled on: December 24, 2025.

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sways consumer behavior, attracting the majority to opt for it. This shows that the idea of consumer behavior is still very complex and mysterious, and economists and psychologists have many more new features to discover. Indeed, the investigation in this field can be considered ever-lasting, as it is closely connected with human psychology, which constantly changes in response to the everchanging world: the pace of the change is even faster in today's modern world.

With the advent of online shopping, the number of the factors influencing purchase decisions has increased by a great margin. To make shopping decisions distantly – without firsthand experience of goods or services – is different from traditional shopping in many ways. This means that some comparatively new concepts, such as ratings, reviews, and etc., began to play an important role in purchase decisions. In traditional shopping, the physical appearance of a product, the interaction with a salesperson, instant gratification, and venue atmosphere are some of the most important factors; however, most of them lose their impact, or have a relatively less important role, in online shopping. Online shopping has grown to be as common and important as traditional shopping, meaning that it has to be studied equally thoroughly to learn online consumer behavior. Although the concept of online shopping has already been investigated, there is a sufficient amount of confusion experts are trying to shed light on. In addition, developing countries have been introduced to online markets, yet the amount of research done to understand local consumer behavior is extremely scarce.

This paper aims to rely on existing research and analyze the impact of online reviews on purchase decisions in Uzum, an online market that sells an extensive range of goods from clothes to technology, in developing nation Uzbekistan. Online reviews can offer much valuable information to both potential customers and businesses about their product or service on sale. However, it has been largely neglected in Uzbekistan, depriving many enterprises of the valuable source of information about reactions of purchasers to their goods and services. This paper serves as an introductory work to study online reviews and help producers benefit from them by improving the quality of their products and services in response to them, learning

how to respond to negative reviews, and developing marketing strategies that expand their customer base and breed customer loyalty. As an introductory work, its main purpose is to direct the focus of local scientists and researchers into this untapped field of expertise. There is conventional wisdom that positive online reviews increase the sales of a product or a service. In detail, if the mean rate of a product is high (4.5+ out of 5 stars), it results in the increased number of sold items. However, this research sets out to challenge the conventional wisdom, hypothesizing that the high quantity of positive reviews, not merely positive reviews, is a factor that contributes to an increase in the number of sales. In other words, the more people review a product positively, the more of the product will be sold. A new piece of research was conducted to provide support to the hypothesis.

Literature review

In this section, the study on the effect of online reviews on consumer purchase by Zan Mo, Yan-Fei, and Peng Fan, School of Management, Guandong University of Technology, Guandzhou, China (2) is selected to be briefly summarized and evaluated. This case study was published in the *Journal of Service Science and Management* in 2015. The reason why this study was chosen is that it is one of the recent studies run on the topic of the influence of online reviews on consumer behavior: most research focuses on irrelevant concepts and covers broad areas, targeting many more specifications superficially.

The first paper studied the impact of online reviews on consumer purchase behavior by analyzing reviews from more than 400 Taobao's shops in China. The researchers focused on the review rating – positive, moderate, and negative – as well as review content – the quantity of reviews and shop reputation. Shop reputation is identified through evaluation of description ratings, logistics ratings, and service ratings, while the quantity of reviews stands for the quantity of picture reviews, the quantity of additional reviews, and the quantity of cumulative reviews. Pictures can come in the form of the first reviews or additional reviews. The reviews containing pictures can be a source of valuable information such as color problems, specifications, inconsistent problems, and the

quality. These reviews can minimize the risk during the purchasing process. Additional reviews are considered the second round of reviews (reviews posted after 180 days of the purchase). These reviews reflect on the durability of the product. Additionally, since the quality of some commodities cannot be adequately assessed in a short term, additional reviews provide a better understanding of the quality of the product reviewed.

Cumulative reviews are reviews that are posted within a month of the purchase. They can offer information on color, quality, specifications, logistics, and service. They are considered as an important channel of information, which is of extreme value for a consumer purchase decision. The author of the paper provided Nelson's view on types of commodities and, therefore, divides them into two: search and experience goods. Mobile phones, computers, cameras, printers, and etc. are some examples of search goods – goods that consumers can find a sufficient amount of accurate information about, whereas food, cosmetics, and etc. are experience goods – goods that consumers can acquire accurate information about only after purchasing them. Citing foreign research results as proof, the researcher decides to focus on experience goods, as, he claimed, consumers rely on reviews more when purchasing experience goods (3)(4). A cleanser is chosen as a target product for two reasons. First, a cleanser is an experience product – a consumer buys it for personal use or for others as a gift. Secondly, it is used on a daily basis, excluding the impact of consumer's personal feelings towards one or another brand. **The researcher hypothesizes that:**

- H1a; Positive reviews have a positive effect on consumer buying behavior.
- H1b: Moderate reviews have no effect on consumer buying behavior.
- H1c: Negative reviews have a negative effect on consumer buying behavior.
- H2a: Description star rating positively affects consumer buying behavior.
- H2b: Service star rating positively affects consumer buying behavior.
- H2c: Logistics star rating positively affects consumer buying behavior.
- H3a: The additional reviews have a positive impact on consumer buying behavior.

- H3b: The picture reviews have a positive impact on consumer buying behavior.

- H3c: The cumulative reviews have a positive impact on consumer buying behavior.

The research findings provide strong support for H1a, H1b, but not for H1c. Also, the findings suggest that H2a has an opposite effect, while H2b and H2c receives no support. As for H3, H3a and H3b are supported by the research findings, yet H3c is found to have an opposite impact.

This paper effectively studied the impact of online reviews by researching a high number of reviews from many shops, which minimizes the margin of error, adds to the validity of the research findings, and increases the scope of applicability. In fact, the researchers analyzed 218,954 reviews from 434 shops, after removing invalid evaluations. Additionally, they were able to provide recommendations for sellers on how to increase the number of additional and picture reviews, as they positively affect consumer decision. They suggested that cash, coupons, and member points are appropriate incentives for customers to post more detailed pictures and comments. However, the research has some limitations.

One of them is that it is run over a short period of time – 1 month – which is not long enough to study longitudinal effects of online reviews. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledged this limitation in the conclusion section and leave this gap for future research to fill. Secondly, this study cannot be considered suitable to identify the impact of online reviews in e-commerce market Uzum since it does not focus on Uzbekistani, or at least Central Asian, customers.

Research Design, Findings, and Analysis

The research selected a cloth cap as a research object mainly because the only source of information consumers have access to is online reviews. Unlike search goods like mobile phones, cameras, or other products with multiple sources of information from their producer companies, a cloth cap is one of the products with limited information provided to customers prior to the purchase. This ensures that apart from feedback by other, if any, acquainted buyers, consumers predominantly rely on online reviews to make a purchase decision. In effect, this eliminates other potential influences on consumer

behavior, narrowing it down to online reviews.

Clothing caps were chosen from seven randomly selected retailers with satisfactory ratings to demonstrate that positive reviews do not account for the difference in the number of products purchased. Lify and ANAKI were the relatively lowly rated retailers (4.7 and 4.6) among 7 retailers, yet the figures for their sold products stood at 660 and 390, respectively. By contrast, AGL Men's Clothes and EVA Home were the most highly rated retailers (4.9 and 5.0) in the list of investigated retailers. However, the quantities of caps sold by them were 72 and 17, far lower than Lify and ANAKI – the counterparts with comparatively lower rates. This proves that high ratings do not necessarily lead to the higher number of purchases. The gap between ANAKI's and Octavia Mia's sold items also supports this theory: even though they have the identical ratings (5.0), ANAKI sold virtually four times as many caps as Octavia Mia did (90). What was the factor that accounted for the difference in the number of caps sold by these retailers then?

The answer is simple: the difference in the number of positive reviews. Octavia Mia, which sold 99 caps, had only 7 reviews, while ANAKI, which sold 360 caps, had three times as many reviews (21). Likewise, the margin between the quantities of reviews can be considered responsible for the disparity in the number of caps Lify and AVEX sold. Although the difference between AVEX's ratings (4.7) and Lify's (4.6) was negligible 0.1, Lify had 6 times as many reviews as AVEX did, and, therefore, it sold far more caps (516 caps more than AVEX sold). This fully demonstrates that the increased number of positive reviews, instead of high ratings per se, was found to be a factor behind more sales.

Table 1. The data was collected from a mobile phone application of Uzum market.

Retailer Name	Rating (1-5)	The number of reviews	The number of pieces sold
ANAKI	4.7	21	390
AVEX	4.7	12	144
AGL Men's Clothes	4.9	5	72
AGL Accessories	4.8	7	104
EVA Home	5.0	2	17
Octavia Mia	4.7	7	99
Lify	4.6	30	660

Conclusion

The research studied the influence of online reviews on the product sales at Uzum, an online market in Uzbekistan. It selected a clothing cap as a target object for research. The findings suggested that what leads to more sales is the high number of positive reviews, not positive reviews themselves. This implies that the higher number of reviews may be seen more valid than merely a few top rates. Thus, customers are better convinced by the bigger quantity of positive reviews and are more likely to purchase a product. Therefore, producers and retailers should focus on the ways of encouraging their customers to post comments and rate their product online much more frequently, for example, by offering discounts or free gifts upon the accomplishment of rating a product. Nevertheless, this research paper has a number of limitations. First, it only focused on 7 retailers, which might not be considered adequate to apply the findings to a broader range of products. The research had to confine its targets of investigation to 7 retailers since Uzum is a relatively new e-commerce application, and, therefore, most of the products still lack ratings. Second, investigating ratings from 4.5 to 5.0, the research was not able to study ratings with higher differences because during the search for product reviews, relatively lower ratings were not found. This can be attributed to the fact that since Uzum does not follow an anonymous rating policy, people might hesitate to post negative comments and rate lowly. Future researchers can address these limitations when the popularity of online shopping and e-commerce applications grows in Uzbekistan.

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