

Journal of Fashion Business
Vol.22, No.3

ISSN 1229-3350(Print)
ISSN 2288-1867(Online)

J. fash. bus. Vol. 22,
No. 3:89-108, July. 2018
[https://doi.org/
10.12940/jfb.2018.22.3.89](https://doi.org/10.12940/jfb.2018.22.3.89)

Exploring the Phenomenon of Consumers' Experiences of Reading Online Consumer Reviews

Jee-Sun Park[†]

Dept. of Fashion Industry, Incheon National University, Korea

Corresponding author

Jee-Sun Park
Tel : +82-32-835-8259
Fax : +82-32-835-0765
E-mail: jpark@inu.ac.kr

Keywords

online consumer reviews,
confidence,
negative reviews,
vicarious experience,
searchability

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the analysis of the meanings and processes of reading online consumer reviews and to construct a substantive theory that explains the process involved with the phenomenon of reading consumer reviews. In order to explore the phenomenon, this study employs a qualitative methodology. Following the grounded theory perspective, the researcher conducted interviews with 17 participants, who have subsequently shopped online and utilized online consumer reviews for shopping, and decidedly employed in-depth interviews with those participants. Through coding and making constant comparison, several themes emerged: improving confidence, trusting reviews, getting a sense of who reviewers are, seeking balance, processing and handling negative reviews, experiencing vicariously, increasing searchability, getting a sense of who they are in terms of similarity, and seeking benefits and the usage situations from consumer based reviews. Among the emerging themes, improving confidence can be considered a core category, which is influenced by the analysis of trusting reviews and the consumer vicarious experiences with a product. Moreover, this study discusses the relationships among the themes. This study concludes with a discussion of the results, implications, and limitations.

I. Introduction

With the proliferation of the Internet, online consumer reviews have become one of the key non-marketer-dominated sources for consumer information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). An online consumer review is defined as "any positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about their experiences, evaluations, and opinions on products and services" (Park & Park, 2008, p.744). Through such reviews, consumers share product- and consumption-related information with other consumers (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Online consumer reviews are considered a more credible and relevant source than seller-created information (Chatterjee, 2001), which lead consumers read the online consumer reviews ("Majority of e-shoppers read customer reviews," 2008). Thus, e-tailers utilize the consumer reviews at their websites (Cenfetelli, Benbasat, & Al-Natour, 2008; "REI.com launches power reviews solution," 2008). Through online consumer reviews, consumers build trust with the reviewed brands ("Online consumers place trust in user reviews," 2008; Online shoppers trust brand with customer reviews," 2007).

Previous research on online consumer reviews has found that online consumer reviews serve as a source of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencing consumers' product evaluations and consumer behavior (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008a, Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park & Lee, 2008; Park, Lee, & Han, 2008; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2016; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Although some argue that the mere presence of online consumer reviews leads to higher product sales regardless of the valence of the reviews (Mitchell & Khazanchi, 2010), others contend that negative reviews have a greater impact on decreasing sales than positive reviews have on increasing sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Park & Lee, 2009). While most of the previous studies on online consumer reviews have attempted to delineate quantitative aspects of reviews (e.g., volume, star ratings, valence, length)

that affect the effectiveness of the reviews (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2008; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010), little research has been conducted on how consumers use online consumer reviews and what online consumer reviews mean to consumers. Therefore, the current study aims to explore consumers' experiences of reading online consumer reviews. The results will fill gaps in the research about how consumers process these reviews and what they mean to consumers. In addition, contributions will be made to practice by providing insight into how consumers process the reviews and their effects on their decision making process. The specific objective for this research is to understand the phenomenon of consumers' reading of consumer reviews.

II. Literature Review

1. Online Consumer Reviews as a Type of eWOM

An online consumer review is a type of eWOM, which is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p.39). As traditional WOM has been acknowledged as being more powerful in consumers' decision making process than advertising (Day, 1971; Herr et al., 1991), eWOM has been found to affect consumers' information processing, their attitudes, behavioral intentions, and sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Liu, 2006; Hung & Li, 2007). Several types of eWOM include discussion forums, UseNet groups, blogs, social networking sites, and product reviews (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). Among the various types of eWOM, an online consumer review is considered easily accessible and dominant form of eWOM because it is available for a considerable period of time on the website alongside products that consumers are interested in (Chatterjee, 2001; Schindler & Bickart, 2005).

Consumers share their opinions about products that they have purchased and/or consumed on e-tail websites (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008; Kim, 2010a), web-based consumer opinion platforms (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004), Internet forums (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004), company websites, and various social networking sites such as blogs, microblogs, Facebook, and YouTube. Acknowledging that an online consumer review is the significant form of consumer-generated product information, numerous research has been conducted on the phenomenon of consumers' sending and/or receiving product reviews, showing its role in affecting consumers' decision making process (King et al., 2014). Specifically, previous literature has shown that consumers are more likely to be influenced by these reviews when they are longer (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan et al., 2008a; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010); greater in number (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2008); and of higher quality (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2008). While a significant portion of the previous studies on online consumer reviews focuses on identifying quantitative aspects of reviews (e.g., dimensions of the online consumer reviews), little research has explored how consumers use online consumer reviews and what online consumer reviews mean to consumers.

Online consumer reviews have two parties involved: senders and receivers of communications (King et al., 2014). From the receivers' side, previous research has shown that consumers seek reviews for various reasons before or after their purchase (Bailey, 2005; King et al., 2014). For example, King et al. (2014) surveys the literature on eWOM and presents the framework of eWOM, which explains that consumers seek eWOM to reduce search and evaluation efforts, to reduce risk, to find social assurance/reassurance, and to enact negativity bias. According to the framework, reading eWOM

enhances consumers' trust, loyalty, willingness to pay, and product ROI (King et al., 2014). Previous research has focused on key motivations and quantitative aspects of eWOM characteristics employing quantitative research approach under the assumption that consumers are rational and goal-directed. Since there may be latent or counterintuitive motivations to reviews seeking (King et al., 2014), and since different individuals seek and experience online consumers differently, it is necessary to understand the experiences of individual consumers' reading online consumer reviews.

Although there is a wealth of research on online consumer research, little is known about how individual consumers read reviews and evaluate the quality of reviews from the perspective of the readers of online consumer reviews. Besides, most of the previous studies on online consumer reviews have been conducted under the positivism paradigm reviews (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2008; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010), assuming that the true nature of consumers' experiences with and responses toward online consumer reviews is 'out there' and attempting to understand the 'true' nature as unobtrusively as possible by compartmentalizing, controlling, and manipulating the online consumer reviews. Thus, the literature review leads to the following research questions: What do online consumer reviews mean to online shoppers? What do consumers act in response to the reviews?

III. Methodology

1. Qualitative Methodology

In order to explore the phenomenon of consumers' reading online consumer reviews, a qualitative, inductive theory-building methodology is adopted. This study follows a relativism/interpretivism paradigm for the following reasons. First, no true inherent nature is assumed to exist for the phenomenon of interest. The

phenomenon of consumers' reading online consumer reviews is assumed to exist in the form of multiple social realities constructed by participants. Thus, it is assumed that the nature of the phenomenon lies in context-based and individually experienced multiple realities. In this case, qualitative naturalistic inquiry is more effective for understanding the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher is herself value-laden, a subjective epistemology guides the qualitative methodology, allowing interactions between researchers and the phenomenon. Second, the nature of the research objectives is to obtain an understanding of the personal meanings of consumer experiences of reading online consumer reviews. The qualitative methodology is effective for inquiring the meaning or nature of personal experiences since human beings are understood as *gestalts* (Hirschman, 1986). Third, since little research has explored this phenomenon of interest, a theory-building, qualitative design is appropriate to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through in-depth interviews (McCracken, 1988).

Grounded theory, initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was adopted as the methodology for this study. Grounded theory is "toward the development of theory, without any particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interest" (Strauss, 1982, p.5). Since grounded theory is used in the early stages of exploring phenomena and has been considered useful particularly in studying the process of social phenomenon and in building theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Golicic, Davis, McCarthy, & Mentzer, 2002; Strauss, 1982), it is considered most appropriate to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this study. Grounded theory research differs from other qualitative research, such as phenomenology and ethnography, in which "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) is a main form of presentation necessary to describe the essence of lived experience of individuals about a phenomenon or a phenomenon as experienced by a cultural or social group (in ethnography). In contrast,

grounded theory departs from "thick description" to a higher level of abstraction and theoretical categories through a constant comparative method (Suddaby, 2006). Thus, this study employs grounded theory approach in order to present theoretical categories about the phenomenon.

2. Research Process and Data Collection

In order to select participants for this study, online consumers who have experience in reading online consumer reviews were identified. The participants were chosen based on the following additional criteria: They should also be accessible, willing to share their experiences, and be able to articulate the experiences. Since most young consumers shop online and/or mobile and since online consumer reviews are easily accessible, it is relatively easy to recruit possible participants for this study. To select appropriate participants, purposive sampling was firstly used for the first phase of the data collection. For this first phase, participants having extensive experiences of the phenomenon were recruited on campus. In order to recruit participants, announcement about searching for research participants was made to students after classes. A couple of participants who have the extensive experience of shopping online and reading online reviews were selected using purposive sampling. After analyzing the interviews during the first phase, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The final sample consisted of 17 participants who have shopped online and utilized online consumer reviews for shopping (Table 1).

As a data collection method, this study mainly employed in-depth interviews. The interview approach was unstructured, flexible, and open to change based on the direction that the participants lead the conversations. McCracken (1988) provides a protocol for such interviews, which opens with biographical questions and small talk, grand-tour questions followed by floating prompts and planned prompts (contrast, category, special incident, and auto-driving questions). Each interview started with casual ground tour questions about personal

Table 1. Study Sample

Name	Participant Details
Amelia	Graduate student; age 27; female; experienced working as a merchandiser a year ago, shopping for apparel and cosmetics online frequently; Internet use 2-3 hours per day
Bella	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; shopping for apparel, books, and furniture online; Internet use 10 hours per week
Chloe	Undergraduate student; age 23; female; shopping for apparel, shoes, and accessories online; Internet use 3 hours per week
Daisy	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; shopping mostly for apparel, bags, and shoes online; Internet use 10 hours per week
Eva	Undergraduate student; age 24; female; shopping for apparel, books, and electronic devices online; Internet use 5-6 hours per week
Freya	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; shopping mostly for apparel online; Internet use 5 hours per week
Georgia	Undergraduate student; age 25; female; purchased apparel and cosmetics online; Internet use 2-3 hours per day
Hannah	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; purchased apparel online; Internet use 3 hours per day
Jessica	Undergraduate student; age 23; female; purchased apparel, shoes, and electronics online
Alan	Undergraduate student; age 25; male; purchased apparel, bags, and foods online; Internet use 30-40 hours per week
Lily	Undergraduate student; age 23; female; purchased apparel and furniture online; Internet use 7 hours per week
Mia	Undergraduate student; female; purchased apparel and hair products online; Internet use 20 hours per week
Olivia	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; purchased apparel and general merchandise online; Internet use 2 hours a day
Phoebe	Undergraduate student; age 22; female, purchased apparel online; Internet use more than 5 hours per week
Rosie	Undergraduate student; age 22; female; purchased apparel online; Internet use 20 hours per week
Sophia	University staff; female; shopping for casual clothes; shoes and books online; Internet use frequently and buying a lot online
Bob	Graduate student; age 39; male; shopping for sportswear, outdoor gear, and camera equipment online; Internet use 5 hours per day

Notes: Names are pseudonyms. Some ages are not provided by the participants.

experiences of shopping online. Since reading online consumer reviews is commonly a part of online shopping experiences and since it was the researcher's intention to have the participants feel flexible and not to be forced

to express particular perspectives on reading online reviews, the researcher used follow-up questions to probe their experiences rather than asking leading questions. The ground tour questions used for this study

were: 1) tell me about a time when you shop online; and 2) tell me about a time when you read online consumer reviews. The probes that were used include: 1) tell me about the background of this experience; 2) How were you involved?; 3) How was the issue resolved?; 4) What online reviews (online shopping) means to you?; 5) How it fit into your online shopping experiences and special experiences?; and 6) What are the tools you used to learn about information in online reviews?

An informal coding scheme was developed after the first interview, and this coding scheme then guided the second interview. For example, the researcher added a question regarding trusting reviews after the first interviewee identified trusting/distrusting reviews and sellers as an issue of interest. Each interview took from 30 minutes to an hour.

3. Data Analysis

The method used for the initial data analyses was to code the interviews as openly as possible (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Open coding was conducted with some questions in mind (e.g., "What category does this incident indicate," "What is actually happening in the data," "What is the basic social psychological problem(s) faced by the participants in the action scene?") (Glaser, 1978, p.57). Open coding and axial coding allowed a few categories to emerge that may be possibly used in the theory-building process. Then, selective coding was conducted throughout the whole data. During the process of coding, constant comparison was made by comparing incidents to one another and categories.

IV. Results

Several themes were emerged and related themes were used to explain the findings. In general, the interviews found that online shopping processes from browsing to purchasing vary by how the participants start searching (e.g., starting searching with a specific product, a particular product category), where they shop (e.g., auction sites, or retail websites), and what kinds of

products they were searching for (e.g., product category). The participants tend to be loyal to a few websites for some reasons including free shipping, trust from past experiences, habits, and good consumer reviews. The analysis of the interviews revealed that consumers read online consume reviews before making decisions to be sure of the purchase. They read reviews to narrow down their choices, to double-check whether they are aware of all necessary information, or to confirm and justify their purchases. Although they use reviews for different purposes, the meanings and processes of reading online consumer reviews to individual consumers could be categorized.

Among the emerging themes, improving confidence can be considered a core category since the participants expressed that their level of confidence in a purchase is influenced by whether or not they have read reviews or not. However, whether they read reviews or not was not directly correlated with their level of confidence or lack thereof. During the interviews, the participants expressed that they sometimes would believe the online consumer reviews and sometimes not. This indicates that categories of trusting reviews and vicarious experiences also influence levels of confidence.

1. Improving Confidence in Online Shopping

Paragraphs below remark on how the reviews affected their level of confidence. These opinions of participants about online consumer reviews indicate that online consumer reviews help improve their confidence in shopping online and in trusting the information about the product. With only the seller-provided product description on the website, consumers tend to feel some uncertainty about the performance of a product or suspicion of the seller's honesty. However, based on the participants' comments, this study proposes that consumers' experience of reading online consumer reviews may help them gain or improve confidence.

"Before reviews you just tried to do your best reading all the descriptions and crossed your

fingers and hope it would work, but I probably did less of it, *I think the reviews have made me more confident to shop online.*" (Sophia)

"You know those product information is in most cases *manufacturer or the seller provides it, so I don't really expect neutral opinions about a product.* I believe most of the things are something like strings attached so before I buy anything *I need to see what real people are saying about the product.* So I read the reviews and if time allows I try to read as many reviews as I can do." (Bob)

Confidence has been defined as "a cognitive (nonvalenced) component that reflects the degree of conviction or certainty with which a belief or attitude is held" (Krishnan & Smith, 1998, p.276). Conviction or confidence describes "the phenomenology of having a strong attitude and might often be used by the subject himself or herself to describe that state" (Abelson, 1988, p. 268). The sense of conviction toward a decision plays a crucial role in affecting consequences of the decision (Abelson, 1988). Previous studies have shown that consumer confidence in the prepurchase stage moderates the attitude-behavior relationships (Bennett & Harrell, 1975; Bergkvist, 2009; Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Gross, Holtz, & Miller, 1995; Tormala & Petty, 2004), which suggests that a consumer's lack of confidence may keep the consumer from purchasing a product even if s/he has a favorable attitude toward the product.

In consumer behavior research, confidence has been understood as two ways: (1) a buyer's confidence in evaluating a brand and (2) the extent to which the buyer believes s/he can estimate the benefit derived from the consumption of the brand (Bennett & Harrell, 1975). Since both evaluating a brand and estimating benefits from the consumption are limited in online store environments because of the inability to physically examine products, online shopping involves multiple consumer uncertainties such as performance-, symbolic-, benefit-, affective-cost, and switching-uncertainties

(Castaño, Suján, Kacker, & Suján, 2008), which increases perceived transaction costs and consequently reduces consumers' willingness to buying online (Teo & Yu, 2005).

Given the disrupting role of consumer uncertainty in online shopping, previous research has explored possible factors that reduce consumer uncertainty in online environments, which include product diagnosticity, trust, website informativeness, social presence, vivid pictures, the information from third party sources, and ability to control information (Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007; Weathers, Sharma, & Wood, 2007). Specifically in the context of online consumer reviews, Hu, Liu, and Zhang (2008) reveals that consumer uncertainty is reduced by more helpful reviews, reviews written by higher exposure reviewers, products with more number of reviews, and more newly released products. Consumer uncertainty decreases when consumers read online consumer reviews as can be seen in the follow comments:

"If I see the purchase stage as 100 percent, when I consider buying an item with about 70 percent, I read the consumer reviews and the *reviews make me to feel that this is really the right thing to buy.*" (Amelia)

"I tend to read a lot of reviews *when I'm not sure.* What the customer sees is not what the seller sees." (Chloe)

"I don't think I can make a purchase *without a review.*" (Eva)

"I look for reviews when *I am not certain about whether to purchase or not.*" (Olivia)

Consumers' pre-purchase uncertainty increases during the process of information-search activities (Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie, 1989). In online store environments where social and physical interactions lack, consumers actively search information including online consumer reviews. Sophia explained that "What you're trying to do

is *anticipate what it's going to be like before it gets here.*" Georgia articulated that "The biggest disadvantage online stores is that you cannot wear clothes, and I think *online consumer reviews can take the place of that defect.*" Especially for apparel, the fit is important which can be obtained when you wear. In online stores where you cannot wear products, consumers attempt to obtain the information regarding the fit from online consumer reviews as can be seen in the Bella's comment, "Since there's a lot of difference between when you wear clothes and when models wear them, I see reviews *to see if an ordinary person wears it and looks good.*" Thus, with limited information available in online stores, consumers feel that reviews serve as additional information about products, which make them to feel they make decisions based on much information as stated by Mia, "Even if you don't buy them personally, I think consumer reviews make feel that you buy with *as much information as possible,* rather than buying them without knowing."

During pre-purchase stage, when consumers are deciding whether to make a purchase or not, online consumer reviews play a role in deciding with conviction. Rosie stated that "I don't buy things without reviews since I don't know what is going on. If there is no review available, I wait until reviews are posted. It seems that *reviews determine about 70% in deciding* whether to buy it or not." In addition to the role of online consumer reviews reducing consumers' pre-purchase uncertainty, they also provide consumers with justifications on they make a good decision as Lily expressed that "*After I make purchase, I am not worried if I have made decisions after reading reviews;* but I am concerned about whether I mad a good choice or not if there is no review"

Consumers aim to anticipate the performance of a product before they actually try and consume the product through assistance of reviewers. The previous literature implies that consumers' perceived uncertainty is manageable by the presence of website factors including online consumer reviews (Hu et al., 2008). However, some questions remain: *how do activities of consumers'*

reading online reviews lead to reduced uncertainty and increased confidence? What are the individual consumers' processes of increasing confidence by reading online consumer reviews? Other categories and codes from the interview, such as trusting reviews and vicarious experiences, may provide some explanations to the questions.

2. Trusting/Distrusting Reviews

As Sophia describes below, the participants tend to trust online consumer reviews (Ahn, 2017) because they are what "real people are saying about the product" (Bob's comment in the previous section). Similarly, most participants articulated that they trust consumer reviews in general.

"The online consumer reviews are *more realistic* to me than product information provided by sellers. Since consumers are not in the position of sellers, and they are not going to get paid back whether the product sells well or not. I feel that *consumers' giving information on products feels like honest information.*" (Daisy)

"I am aware that people have various reasons for writing reviews but if there is a fair number, I tend to *trust* them. I figure there will be a few people on there that lie *but most people are trying to tell the truth* as they see it so I try to look at that... If all the reviews were negative I think it would be somewhat unusual for me to say oh well I think my experience is going to be different from everybody else's." (Sophia)

"If you go shopping with your friends, there's a difference between what the salesperson says and what they say. When that happens I think it's *more accurate to look at it from the friends' perspective.* So if I look at the reviews online, I

feel like *my friend is talking*" (Chloe)

"I think the photos on websites look good because the models look good. If a real consumer buys it and says it's really okay, I feel like it's really okay. I buy by the look of ordinary people." (Hannah)

"I search for reviews since *they are more objective* than seller-provided information" (Phoebe)

Trust, defined as a "willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992, p.315), is closely related to confidence (Deutsch, 1958; Morgan & Shelby, 1994). A significant portion of literature has studied the role of trust in business-to-consumer relationships (See Kim & Tadisina, 2007 for review). Although consumers place their trust more on other consumers' reviews than seller-provided information, they do not always trust the reviews as illustrated in the comments below.

"You know 8 people could say you know this thing is 100% guaranteed, fantastic quality and everything, *but I don't really believe all that.*" (Bob)

"I prefer pictures of unrepresented situations. Dressed roughly and photographed in the mirror. The background is just a picture of the house room, of the room in which the clothes look more like." (Daisy)

"I saw that consumer reviews on online stores were also *written by part timers employed by sellers*. It is said that they *write their own reviews* so that they can sell a lot of things." (Mia)

Thus, the participants seek balance in reviews by reading negative reviews, comparing them to

the participants' previous knowledge and experiences, and evaluating reviewers' qualities. Through the process of trusting reviews, this paper presents two sub-processes emerging from the data: 1) seeking balance, and 2) getting sense of reviewers' expertise.

1) Seeking Balance

The participants expressed that they try to get some balance between the reviews. They define balance as "some way of where's the truth here without making it into a major investigative project" (Sophia) or optimizing or trading off good and bad side of a product since there is no 100% guaranteed quality things in this world as illustrated below.

"I usually *try to find some kind of balance* in there. If I see among 10 reviews let's say 3 or 4 reviews are only about good things about the product, I try to find some negative things about the product and try to see if I can the negative things." (Bob)

"I just *read some of the good ones, some of the bad ones*, who sounds more like they're telling the truth, you know, do they have enough detail to make me sort of get a sense of which one is right or wrong." (Sophia)

"I just pass on the praise. On the other hand, I tend to read the review, which points out what is to be pointed out and says good things are good, is reliable. When someone makes honest criticism, it will have a big impact." (Amelia)

"When the negative reviews are about 20 percent, it is fine. If they approach 50 %, it means more people don't fit in, and I think the more people don't fit, the more you will become one of them." (Georgia)

Participants may possess slightly different views on the definition of balance. For example, seeking balance for Sophia is close to finding the truth about a product through reading multiple reviews while that for Bob is optimizing the features of the product after considering positive and negative benefits/costs. Regardless of such difference, the participants seek negative reviews and in their process of seeking balance, they sit back to see if they can handle the negative side of the product.

Seeking negative reviews. According to the paragraphs below, sometimes, negative reviews convey some valuable information that they can use. Negative reviews may sometimes influence consumers to abort the consumption if they are too many (Kim, 2010b). However, in more cases, the participants expressed that they are more likely to see if they can deal with the negative reviews. This finding may explain the inconsistent relationship between the valence of reviews and sales in the previous studies conducted from the positivist perspectives (Duan et al., 2008a, 2008b; Liu, 2006). Previous studies attempted to explain the inconsistency by adding possible moderators such as brand image and product types (Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Doh and Hwang (2009), in their study testing the varying effect of a proportion of negative reviews on consumer perceptions and attitudes, reveal that a few negative messages mixed in positive messages enhance consumers' perception of the source credibility and their attitude toward the website. But, a question remains regarding how consumers process the negative reviews.

(If there is no negative review) "*Then I don't trust it, because there is no need to trust that whole 100% better reviews or good reviews because not a thing in this world is perfect. If 10 people are saying that this is fantastic I don't really need to believe that the product is perfect. There must be some kind of downside I expect or I could find at the end of the day. Why do I have to need to believe all the positive side of the products.*" (Bob)

"For products that are a little hesitant, I am more likely *to see negative reviews.*" (Chloe)

"I usually *look at the title and read what I think is slightly negative.* I'm sure it's a good review that critically evaluate and get out more on the product." (Bella)

"I think I'm going to see *some negative titles.* Even if a man may say only the good things about his purchase, he just could not find it. But, the person who say negative ones, he's catching up on the shortcomings and telling us. And, I think we should consider it. The negative review makes me feel that I'm not going to lose anything from the purchase." (Daisy)

"The sellers only post the prettiest photos taken from most desired angle. Since They wouldn't post it unless they are pretty, I usually look for flaws. You know, the seller expresses his or her strengths enough, so I usually *read reviews saying about his shortcomings.*" (Alan)

Dealing with negative reviews. As illustrated by comments below, consumers seem to care more about whether what the reviewers complaining about is an important aspect of my consumption or not. Sen and Lerman (2007) suggest that readers' attributions of reviewer's motivations in reviews vary by product type when they process negative reviews. They attribute negative evaluation of a product to a reviewer's fault if the negative evaluation is about a hedonic product, while they attribute it to product-related errors if the negative evaluation is about a utilitarian product. Although the findings from the interviews in the current study support the notion that readers attribute negative reviews to different reasons, they do not do so by product type. Rather, their attributions depend more on whether the negative evaluation is personally important to them or not.

"In general see what they're complaining about and *then try to look back and compare it to the other reviews*, if there's too many bad ones I'll just forget it you know, but if I'm thinking well *this may have just been a bad day or this guy is try to get some kind of balance between the terrible ones*. Or sometimes the owner can respond and see what they have to say about it." (Sophia)

"Since I choose a certain product, if a review complains about style or product design, I care less about the review." (Rosie)

"When I read negative reviews, even if most people do, I may have different ideas. So, I don't think the negative feedback affected my decisions so much." (Freya)

As can be seen in the comments below, participants emphasize that they hardly follow the opinions in negative reviews. While participants actively looked for negative reviews, in their views, the negative reviews merely show whether a product itself is acceptable or not. They do not just blame products given the negative reviews. The participants rather use the reviews to evaluate a product to assess whether the product has certain problems that they can handle.

"Because I anyway need to buy the product or the same type of product so what I'm measuring from the review before I buy anything is *to know whether I can handle the downside of the products*." (Bob)

"In general see what they were complaining about, if they were complaining about *something that I felt would bother me I would take it seriously*." (Sophia)

"The negative one doesn't really matter to me. For example, someone says "buttons are very

loose." Then, I can put it back on. So, whether it is negative or not doesn't really affect my decision. I read *what's negative about it, what I can pass over*." (Daisy)

"I have wide shoulders. When someone bought it and said "it made my shoulders stand out". Then I exclude it because I don't think it would look good on me." (Georgia)

2) Getting Sense of Who They Are : Reviewers' Expertise
While the participants actively use online consumer reviews, they try to get a sense of who the reviewers are in terms of their expertise, personal goals with the product on the webpage, and personal description. Consumer confidence becomes higher for the information from credible and expert sources than that from casual conversations and marketer-provided messages (Spreng & Page, 2001). Although online consumer reviews are not from highly credible and expert sources, the participants commented that they would try to assess the level of reviewer's expertise by visiting well-known websites for expert reviews or by judging from their style of evaluating products. From the comments below, the way of assessing reviewer's expertise is related to the effort to find negative reviews. Participants, claiming that reviewers who just agree to sellers' claims cannot be considered experts, cherishes negative reviews or the balance between positive and negative reviews.

"When they explain why they liked a book or something like that or why they didn't it's like *well do they sound like an intelligent, discerning reader of books*, or do they sound like they're just looking at pop or something like that, I mean some people just come across maybe not fairly but *some people just come across as better readers than others and so you can sort of get a feel for that so I trust their reviews more* whether they are positive or negative which side do the people who are better readers seem to be on here." (Sophia)

"I look for a fastidious and thorough observer. The reviews by such a person are reliable *because I think the reviewer knows it because she has thoroughly studied the product.*" (Bella)

"Positive reviews to my understanding and to my impression is that people are just simply agreeing with the manufacturers specifications... if 10 people are saying that I would say that 10 people are idiots because they don't know what they're looking for... *there are 10 reviews and they are only the good side of a product I really doubt the expertise of the reviews. They are not thoroughly looking at the products.*" (Bob)

Using readers' product knowledge/experiences to evaluate reviews. Convictions affecting individuals' decision are related with, but distinct to, other concepts such as affective-cognitive consistency, certainty, direct experience, extremity, importance, knowledge, latitude of rejection, and strength (see Raden, 1985 for review). As can be seen in the comments below, participants used his knowledge and prior direct experiences to evaluate reviewer's expertise.

"So I would judge whether professional or not but I would say that whether they come to my expectation or not. *I have a certain type of expectation when I read reviews if that comes up to me then I'll buy the review*, if that doesn't come up to me then there is no reason to believe it or trust it or whatever. Like 20 people are saying stupid things and 7 people are saying smart, clever things that are making sense, which one do you prefer to believe? Definitely the ones with the 7 reviews right, the same goes for me. Or still there is the question there, *how I can judge these reviews as stupid and those reviews are smart, like I said I go with my own experience and product knowledge*

and I certainly research before I jump into reading reviews and buy products." (Bob)

Bob's knowledge and experiences enhances his expectations toward the reviews. Moreover, he showed his confidence in deciding which reviews to believe. This may lead him to search for negative reviews. Confronted with negative reviews, Bob, guided by his knowledge and prior experiences, sometimes attributes the negative evaluation to reviewers themselves and see if he can use a product by fixing problems noted by reviewers as can be seen in Bob's comments below.

"In many cases bike parts or photo equipment they need users caution and regular maintenance to keep its functionality going. People usually forget about it and start complaining about the product quality or reliability, that's not a right judgment about a product, if I could do regular maintenance or if I could care about the products good then there is no need to ask, I probably would know how to fix all the problems the product is supposed to be having. In that case *the negative side could be compensated by my prior knowledge of the product or the product experience.*" (Bob)

3. Vicarious Experience

When consumers cannot try experience products, they often rely on vicarious experience (Mittal, 2004). According to the self-efficacy theory, individuals' efficacy expectations are derived from vicarious experience (Bandura, 1977). By relying on others' experiences, individuals formulate expectations about their confidence in performance (Bandura, 1977). The comments below illustrate that they experience the product vicariously through the reviews.

"I don't buy the same clothes every time. Every season, design, materials, and fashion changes. When I buy trendy products, I buy

designs that I don't wear. So *I wonder what other people think of similar products. Thus, I read reviews.*" (Amelia)

"I read the reviews and see if anybody makes any comments, you know try to read the description of the shoe, I mean to some extent it's appearance but it's also how it fits my feet and people will sometimes comment on that in reviews, *like this has a wide toe box, a narrow shoe, you know that kind of thing.*" (Sophia)

"The review tells me if the quality and clothing match what I imagined." (Phoebe)

"There's something I'm looking specifically for. To me, I've got thick thighs. So, someone says, "my thighs are tight in these pants. Then, I imagine whether my thighs are thicker than him and decide whether to buy or not." (Alan)

Seeing others using products or performing activities improves individuals' confidence in their expectation in the performances of the products or the activities (Bandura, 1977). It is considered that having vicarious experiences through reading online consumer reviews is related with other three categories emerged from the data: 1) increasing searchability, 2) getting sense of who they are—seeking similarity to consumers, and 3) seeking similarity in benefits pursued and usage situations.

1) Increasing Searchability

As can be seen in Amy's comments below, online consumer reviews help examine the attributes of products, especially experience attributes. In a prepurchase stage, attribute verifiability (Jain & Posavac, 2001) or searchability (Mittal, 2004) matters. Especially for apparel items, the five most important attributes for selecting apparel items (i.e., fit, comfort, style, color, and workmanship) (Zhang, Li, Gong, & Wu, 2002) are considered as experience attributes, which consumers can verify their quality after trying a product physically.

"They can give some tips like this is a very long shirt or this is quite narrow, I mean they talk about the fit or something like that, or maybe some other comments *that might help me decide which would be the best one for me*, but finally with anything you have to try it on I guess so I don't know. But mostly things about fit or the fabric or if they washed it once and it came out terrible after they washed it, you know I'll take that kind of seriously" (Sophia)

"If I see the picture, I imagine she'll be about the size of her body and around her chest, so if she's about tall, that'll fit me in. That kind of information can be inferred from the picture. I can also see how the color on the wall actually feels when people wear when I see photo reviews. I can learn about the product from such reviews saying material is good because it is soft and does not spread or break when washing". (Amelia)

"I evaluate products from the reviews saying, "Actually, the color is darker than the screen. The color in the certain order is most similar to the real thing." Those reviews help" (Bella)

According to the economics perspective of information search (e.g., Nelson, 1970, 1974; Stigler, 1961), individuals use different search strategies depending on the type of products. For example, consumers easily search for the information about a product before purchasing the product if it possesses a higher portion of search attributes. However, they prefer try a product after using the product (e.g., purchasing or sampling) if the product possesses a higher portion of experience attributes because it costs more to search than to experience the product (Nelson, 1970, 1974; Wright & Lynch Jr, 1995).

Due to the inability to use products in online environments, experience products (i.e., products with

a high portion of haptic information, tangible- and experience-dominant products) has been expected to have some limitation compared to the products with less experience- and tangible attributes (Yadav & Varadarajan, 2005). However, thanks to technology advancement such as interactive media, the distinction between search and experience attributes have become fuzzier than before (Klein, 1998). From the comments above confirmed that experience attributes can be searchable in online environment through online consumer reviews. When consumers feel that a website or product trial is useful in evaluating the attributes of a product, their expectation about the product is increased (Kempf & Smith, 1998) and their perceived uncertainty is reduced (Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007). Consistent with the previous literature, searchability enhanced by online consumer reviews will improve expectations about how they look through vicarious experiences and consequently reduce uncertainty about their choices.

2) Getting Sense of Who the Reviewers Are: Are They Like Me?

As can be seen below, participants expressed that they tried to get a sense of who the reviewers were. This concept is different from assessing the reviewers' expertise as discussed in the previous section. In here, knowing if a reviewer is similar in a reader's background or personal characteristics can help experiencing the product vicariously.

As Sophia stated in the comments below, consumers want to get approval from people like them or from people with similar tastes.

"You're just trying to get things that if you were there in person you could do yourself, so I guess *try to find somebody who is sort of like me* and what would they say and what have they said... You want to know *what kind of person likes this book*, what kind of person does not like this book" (Sophia)

If someone reviewed a product in a critical way, I guess she's also a picky person, which makes me to look at it. Since I'm a picky person, *I think that she's like me and has similar taste.*"(Bella)

As Chloe expressed, "Online consumer reviews seem like friends are talking to me since people with a similar age buy these products" people with different tastes evaluate the same product differently. Thus, consumers tend to see reviewers if they have similar tastes and opinions about products. Besides, since one of the important attributes for selecting an apparel product is size and fit, consumers tend to search for reviewers' body sizes as can be seen in the comments below. For example, it is often observed that reviewers reveal their body size and type in the reviews in apparel online websites. It might be because such information in reviews helps readers picture themselves in the apparel product items in their mind while they are reading the information.

"Some reviews say, "How tall I am, how big I am, how much weight, and the product is how long..." If anyone's like me in real body size, I think that product will be about it when I wear it." (Amelia)

"When someone says how tall and heavy she is, so when I see someone like me and she says the clothes looks good on her, then I think it would fit me. Thus, I think I'm buying something based on the reviewer's body size no matter how much I like it. I see not only the size, but also the look of his clothes according to the body type. I think they look at the review to see how their clothes feel." (Daisy)

"When women are over 170 cm, they get worried when buying clothes on the Internet. These consumers tend to put up good reviews. They say how tall they are, how heavy they

weigh, and the clothes was short when you were wearing... that kind of reviews helps. I think that's why I'm looking for more of the reviews." (Freya)

"From the review with a specific body size, and a photo, based on reviewers like me, I see if I fit in or not. I am in the early 160cm range, so wearing over 170cm is different. So if it's the same size as me, I expect it to fit me, and to look good on me." (Georgia)

It may be possible such information generates a higher sense of cognitive personalization (Xia & Bechwati, 2008). Reviewer's personal information is perceived more credible (Munzel, 2016) and helpful (Forman et al., 2008). Thus, it is expected that reviewers' personal information not only allow readers to have vicarious experiences but also enhances effectiveness of reviews.

3) Seeking Similarity in Benefits and Usage Situations

Similar to the previous theme, consumers are seeking reviews containing similar benefits pursued and usage situations as can be seen in the comments below.

"I'm thinking of a pair of boots I bought to take my dogs to the park and some woman said these are great boots I wear them out in barn and in the snow and the mud. So I thought okay so her *description of where she wore those boots* and they never leaked, and I thought okay." (Sophia)

"It was clear she was using them to keep out the mud and the water *which is what I wanted them for as well*... So it's like *how much are they like me in whatever it is I am buying this for*, whether it's wanting a comfortable she or a pair of waterproof boots or a camera that does this or a book that's gonna interest me, so I guess that's right. I mean I'm thinking this through as you say you know are they like me

in a way that's important and related to this item." (Sophia)

"I tend to read reviews saying that people are wearing something and they look pretty, but some jackets don't go well with, they seem *to fit in a certain situation*. And there are reviews saying that, even if you wear the same jacket, casual clothes, skirts and jeans *all look good and you can wear them all*. I tend to read that kind of reviews because I want more than just one use." (Georgia)

Individual consumers have various goals to achieve from a product. Although it may be impossible for an advertisement to address each consumer's benefits and values, consumers may be able to select a few reviews out of accumulated numerous online consume reviews on a product that meet their pursuing benefits and similar consumption situations that they try to achieve. This finding partially supports the studies of cognitive representation of structure (e.g., Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003) in that consumers evaluate products by comparing similar benefits and consumption experiences.

Based on the discussion above, emerging themes are categorized and presented in Figure 1.

V. Discussion

This paper explores the meanings and processes of reading online consumer reviews through narratives articulated by participants. Findings of the analyses indicate that consumers read online consumer reviews to become more confident in their online decision-making process. Increasing confidence and reducing uncertainty have been shown to affect consumers' online shopping. Accordingly, previous research has investigated antecedent factors that affect this relationship. While previous studies have merely identified the factors, this study shows how the factors are possibly correlated in the consumers' decision-making processes: consumer reviews play a role in increasing confidence firstly because consumers trust

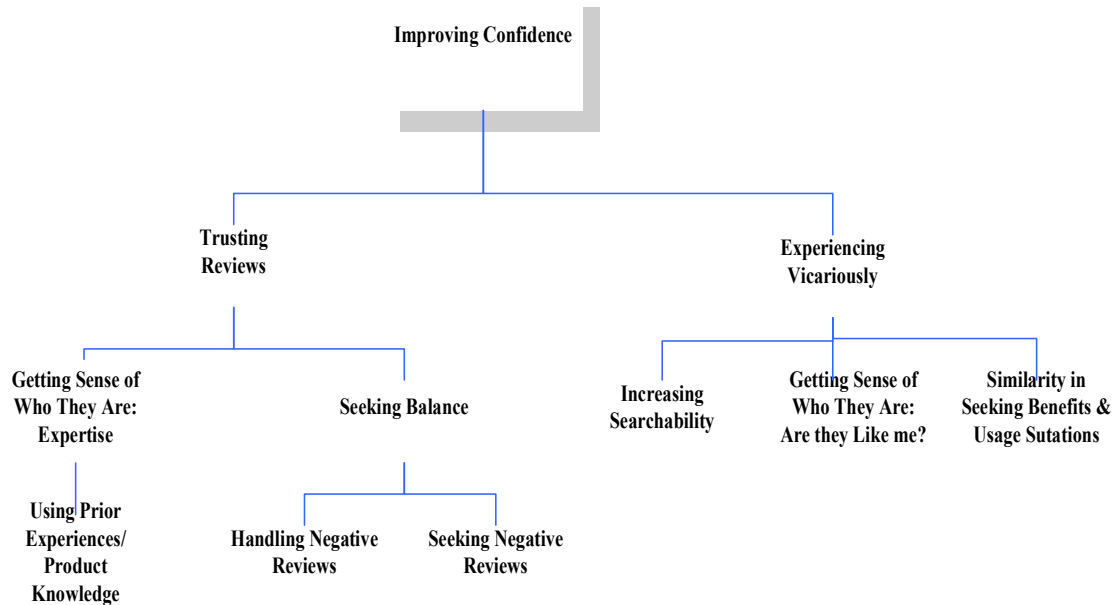


Figure 1. Categories from the Data

reviews and secondly because the reviews allow consumers to have vicarious experiences in products through other consumers' narratives. The current study also notes that consumer trusting reviews does not affect them in a direct linear fashion but rather is contingent on several factors such as characteristics of a set of reviews (balancing, degree of negativity in reviews), their assessments of reviewers' expertise, and their own prior knowledge and experiences.

The findings of the study contribute to the body of knowledge on online consumer reviews. First, the current study expands the literature on online consumer reviews. Perhaps most important, the study describes how consumers utilize reviews and what the reviews mean to them. Specifically, this study articulates that consumers have their own strategies to skim and evaluate reviews, which lead them to conveniently select personally-relevant information from numerous reviews. The findings also demonstrate how negative reviews serve as the important source of product information. In addition, how consumer reviews enhance product

searchability and allow reviewers to have vicarious experiences through the experience of reading online consumer reviews will expand the theory of attribute searchability (Mittal, 2004), especially for experience products. Furthermore, the results support the role of confidence in consumer's decision making process (Bennett & Harrell, 1975), and provide evidence that online consumer reviews play a role in enhancing consumers' confidence in the process.

Practical implications from the current study are to encourage reviewers by designing review formats or by using promotion, incentives, or reputation system to leave a product review. For example, marketers may encourage reviewers to write detailed and specific narratives of their consumption experiences including specific experiences with experience attributes in order to allow readers to have vicarious experiences. It is also recommended for marketers to encourage readers to share some information about themselves or to post photos of themselves in order to allow readers to get a sense of who they are. It is also recommended to encourage

reviewers to state both positive and negative aspects of products since negative reviews do not always have negative impact on sales and since readers tend to search for negative reviews to evaluate the reviews and the product.

The current study has a few limitations to note. First, the current study relies on participants who are mostly in their 20s, which limits the generalizability of our interpretations. Second, current studies tend to focus on non-perishable products such as apparel and books. Future studies may be conducted on consumers who shop for perishable products such as foods and services since there may be some differences due to different product categories.

References

- Abelson, R. P. (1988). Conviction. *American Psychologist*, 43(4), 267–275.
- Ahn, S.-K. (2017). Exploring interpersonal trust online. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 21(6), 31–46. doi: 10.12940/jfb.2017.21.6.31
- Bailey, A. A. (2005). Consumer awareness and use of product review websites. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6, 68–81. doi:10.1080/15252019.2005.10722109
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191
- Bennett, P. D., & Harrell, G. D. (1975). The role of confidence in understanding and predicting buyers' attitudes and purchase intentions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2(2), 110–117. doi:10.1086/208622
- Bergkvist, L. (2009). The role of confidence in attitude-intention and beliefs-attitude relationships. *International Journal of Advertising*, 28(5), 863–880. doi:10.2501/S026504870920093X
- Bickart, B., & Schindler, R. M. (2001). Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 15(3), 31–40. doi:10.1002/dir.1014
- Castaño, R., Sujan, M., Kacker, M., & Sujan, H. (2008). Managing consumer uncertainty in the adoption of new products: Temporal distance and mental simulation. *Journal of Marketing Research* 45(3), 320–336. doi:10.1509/jmkr.45.3.320
- Cenfetelli, R. T., Benbasat, I., & Al-Natour, S. (2008). Addressing the what and how of online services: Positioning supporting-services functionality and service quality for business-to-consumer success. *Information Systems Research*, 19(2), 161–181. doi:10.1287/isre.1070.0163
- Chatterjee, P. (2001). Online reviews: Do consumers use them? *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28(1), 129–133.
- Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research* 43(3), 345–354. doi:10.1509/jmkr.43.3.345
- Chiou, J.-S., & Cheng, C. (2003). Should a company have message boards on its web sites? *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 17(3), 50–61. doi:10.1002/dir.10059
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Day, G. S. (1971). Attitude change, media and word of mouth. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1(6), 31–40.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). *Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 1–34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Deutsch, M. (1958). Trust and suspicion. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(4), 265–279. doi:10.1177/002200275800200401
- Doh, S.-J., & Hwang, J.-S. (2009). How consumers evaluate eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) messages. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(2), 193–197. doi:10.1089/cpb.2008.0109
- Duan, W., Gu, B., & Whinston, A. B. (2008a). Do online reviews matter? — An empirical investigation of panel data. *Decision Support Systems*, 45(4),

- 1007–1016. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2008.04.001
- Duan, W., Gu, B., & Whinston, A. B. (2008b). The dynamics of online word-of-mouth and product sales—An empirical investigation of the movie industry. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(2), 233–242. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2008.04.005
- Fazio, R. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1981). Direct experience and attitude-behavior consistency. In B. Leonard (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 161–202). Academic Press.
- Flint, D. J., Woodruff, R. B., & Gardial, S. F. (2002). Exploring the phenomenon of customers' desired value change in a business-to-business context. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(4), 102–117. doi:10.1509/jmkg.66.4.102.18517
- Forman, C., Ghose, A., & Wiesenfeld, B. (2008). Examining the relationship between reviews and sales: The role of reviewer identity disclosure in electronic markets. *Information Systems Research*, 19(3), 291–313. doi:10.1287/isre.1080.0193
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: The Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.
- Godes, D. & Mayzlin, D. (2004) Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communication. *Marketing Science*, 23, 545–560. doi:10.1287/mksc.1040.0071
- Golicic, S. L., Davis, D. F., McCarthy, T. M., & Mentzer, J. T. (2002). The impact of e-commerce on supply chain relationships. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management* 32(10), 851–871. doi:10.1108/09600030210455447
- Gross, S. R., Holtz, R., & Miller, N. (1995). Attitude certainty In R. E. Petty & J. A. Krosnick (Eds.), *Attitude strength: Antecedents and consequences* (pp. 215–245). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38–52. doi:10.1002/dir.10073
- Herr, P. M., Kardes, F. R. & Kim, J. (1991) Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: An accessibility-diagnostics perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17, 454–462.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1986). Humanistic inquiry in marketing research: Philosophy, methods, and criteria. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23, 237–249. doi:10.1086/208570
- Hoffman, D., Kumar, P., & Novak, T. (2003). How processing modes influence consumers' cognitive representations of product perceptions formed from similarity judgements. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 30(1), 177–178.
- Hu, N., Liu, L., & Zhang, J. (2008). Do online reviews affect product sales? The role of reviewer characteristics and temporal effects. *Information Technology and Management*, 9(3), 201–214. doi:10.1007/s10799-008-0041-2
- Hung, K. H., & Li, S. Y. (2007). The influence of eWOM on virtual consumer communities: Social capital, consumer learning, and behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 485–495. doi: 10.2501/S002184990707050X
- Jain, S. P., & Posavac, S. S. (2001). Prepurchase attribute verifiability, source credibility, and persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 11(3), 169–180. doi:10.1207/S15327663JCP1103_03
- Jiménez, F. R. & Mendoza, N. A. (2013) Too popular to ignore: The influence of online reviews on purchase intentions of search and experience products. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27, 226–235. doi:10.1016/j.intmar.2013.04.004
- Kempf, D. S., & Smith, R. E. (1998). Consumer processing of product trial and the influence of prior advertising: A structural modeling approach. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 325–338. doi:10.2307/3152031
- Kim, S. (2010a). Online word-of-mouth: Motivation for

- writing product reviews on Internet shopping sites. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 14(2), 81–94.
- Kim, S. (2010b). Negative e-WOM based consumer reviews of clothing on Internet open market site. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 14(5), 49–55.
- Kim, E., & Tadisina, S. (2007). A model of customers' trust in e-businesses: Micro-level inter-party trust formation. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 88–104.
- King, R. A., Racherla, P., & Bush, V. D. (2014). What we know and don't know about online word-of-mouth: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(3), 167–183. doi:10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.001
- Klein, L. R. (1998). Evaluating the potential of interactive media through a new lens: Search versus experience goods. *Journal of Business Research*, 41(3), 195–203. doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(97)00062-3
- Krishnan, H. S., & Smith, R. E. (1998). The relative endurance of attitudes, confidence, and attitude-behavior consistency: The role of information source and delay. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 7(3), 273–298. doi:10.1207/s15327663jcp0703_03
- Lee, S., Lee, C., & Lee, M. (2016). The effect of online supporter's review directions on consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention: The role of brand awareness. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 20(6), 135–147. doi: 10.12940/jfb.2016.20.6.135
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Liu, Y. (2006). Word of mouth for movies: Its dynamics and impact on box office revenue. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 74–89. doi: 10.1509/jmkg.70.3.74
- Majority of e-shoppers read customer reviews. (2008). *New Media Age*, 13.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The Long Interview*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Mitchell, A., & Khazanchi, D. (2010). The importance of BUZZ. *Marketing Research*, 22(2), 20–25.
- Mittal, B. (2004). Lack of attribute searchability: Some thoughts. *Psychology & Marketing*, 21(6), 443–462. doi: 10.1002/mar.20013
- Moorman, C., Zaltman, G., & Deshpande, R. (1992). Relationships between providers and users of market research: The dynamics of trust within and between organizations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29(3), 314–328.
- Morgan, R. M., & Shelby, D. H. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20–38. doi:10.2307/1252308
- Mudambi, S. M., & Schuff, D. (2010). What makes a helpful online review? A study of customer reviews on Amazon.com. *MIS Quarterly*, 34(1), 185–200.
- Munzel, A. (2016) Assisting consumers in detecting fake reviews: The role of identity information disclosure and consensus. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32, 96–108. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.06.002
- Nelson, P. (1970). Information and consumer behavior. *Journal of Political Economy*, 78(2), 311.
- Nelson, P. (1974). Advertising as information. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 82(4), 729–754.
- Online consumers place trust in user reviews. (2008). *New Media Age*, 11.
- Online shoppers trust brand with customer reviews. (2007). *New Media Age*, 11.
- Park, C.-H., & Kim, Y.-G. (2006). The effect of information satisfaction and relational benefit on consumers' online shopping site commitment. *Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations* 4(1), 70–90. doi:10.4018/jeco.2006010105
- Park, C., & Lee, T. M. (2009). Information direction, website reputation and eWOM effect: A moderating role of product type. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(1), 61–67. 10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.11.017
- Park, D.-H., & Kim, S. (2008). The effects of consumer knowledge on message processing of electronic word-of-mouth via online consumer reviews. *Electronic Commerce Research & Applications*, 7(4), 399–410. doi:10.1016/j.eleap.2007.12.001
- Park, D.-H., & Lee, J. (2008). eWOM overload and its effect on consumer behavioral intention depending on consumer involvement. *Electronic Commerce Research*

- & Applications, 7(4), 386–398. doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2007.11.004
- Park, D.-H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2008). The effect of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: The moderating role of involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11(4), 125–148. doi:10.2753/JEC1086-4415110405
- Park, D.-H., & Park, S.-B. (2008). The multipl source effect of online consumer reviews on brand evaluations: Test of the risk diversification hypothesis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 35, 744–745.
- Pavlou, P. A., Liang, H., & Xue, Y. (2007). Understanding and mitigating uncertainty in online exchange relationships: A principal-agent perspective. *MIS Quarterly*, 31(1), 105–136. doi:10.2307/25148783
- Raden, D. (1985). Strength-related attitude dimensions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 48(4), 312–330. doi:10.2307/2786693
- REI.com launches powerreviews solution. (2008). *Apparel Magazine*, 49, 16.
- Schindler, R. M., & Bickart, B. (2005). Published word of mouth: Referable, consider-generated information on the Internet. In Haugtvedt, C. P., Machleit, K. A., & R. F. Yalch (Eds.), *Online consumer psychology: Understanding and influencing consumer behavior in the virtual world* (pp.35–61). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sen, S., & Lerman, D. (2007). Why are you telling me this? An examination into negative consumer reviews on the Web. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 21(4), 76–94. doi:10.1002/dir.20090
- Spreng, R. A., & Page, J. T. J. (2001). The impact of confidence in expectations on consumer satisfaction. *Psychology & Marketing*, 18(11), 1187–1204. doi:10.1002/mar.1049
- Stigler, G. J. (1961). The economics of information. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 69(3), 213–225.
- Strauss, A. L. (1982). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633–642. doi:10.5465/amj.2006.22083020
- Teo, T. S. H., & Yu, Y. (2005). Online buying behavior: A transaction cost economics perspective. *Omega*, 33(5), 451–465. doi:10.1016/j.omega.2004.06.002
- Tormala, Z. L., & Petty, R. E. (2004). Source credibility and attitude certainty: A metacognitive analysis of resistance to persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(4), 427–442. doi:10.1207/s15327663jcp1404_11
- Urbany, J. E., Dickson, P. R., & Wilkie, W. L. (1989). Buyer uncertainty and information search. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(2), 208–215. doi:10.1086/209209
- Weathers, D., Sharma, S., & Wood, S. L. (2007). Effects of online communication practices on consumer perceptions of performance uncertainty for search and experience goods. *Journal of Retailing*, 83(4), 393–401. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2007.03.009
- Wright, A. A., & Lynch Jr, J. G. (1995). Communication effects of advertising versus direct experience when both search and experience attributes are present. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(4), 708–718. doi:10.1086/209429
- Xia, L., & Bechwati, N. N. (2008). Word of mouse: The role of cognitive personalization in online consumer reviews. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 9(1), 3–13. doi:10.1080/15252019.2008.10722143
- Yadav, M. S., & Varadarajan, P. R. (2005). Understanding product migration to the electronic marketplace: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Retailing*, 81(2), 125–140. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2005.03.006
- Zhang, Z., Li, Y., Gong, C., & Wu, H. (2002). Casual wear product attributes: A Chinese consumers' perspective. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 6(1), 53–62. doi:10.1108/13612020210422464

Received (June 11, 2018)

Revised (June 25, 2018)

Accepted (June 29, 2018)