

Online brand comments: How do they affect consumer decisions?

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Consumer reactions to online comments depend on the number of comments and the reader's orientation (whether it's positive or negative), according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"How individuals make decisions is influenced by their self-regulatory goals," write authors Yeosun Yoon (KAIST Graduate School of Management), Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, and Gülen Sarial-Abi (both Koc University). "According to regulatory focus theory, promotion-focused individuals are likely to be sensitive to gain-related information that involves the presence or absence of positive outcomes. On the other hand, prevention-focused individuals are likely to be sensitive to loss-related information that involves the presence or absence of negative outcomes."

In the authors' first two studies, participants read either two or six consumer commentaries responding to a news story about a newly introduced fictitious brand of MP3 player. The participants then responded with their overall attitude toward the brand, indicating the extent to which they relied on negative and positive commentaries.

When provided with a large number of mixed commentaries, promotion- and prevention-oriented individuals were biased in expected ways, positively or negatively. Under high information loads, individuals' processing capacity was limited so they relied on only a subset of available information to simplify the judgment process. But this changed when only a few commentaries were provided. "When information load

is low, individuals have higher cognitive capacity to process inconsistent information," the authors write.

The authors also found that brand names affect consumers' motivational orientation. Favorable brands, like Sony and Sylvania, activated promotion orientation, while less-favorable brands triggered prevention orientation.

"When individuals are provided with few commentaries, they are likelier to process information that is inconsistent with their motivational orientation," the authors write. "We suggest that when consumers read commentaries by others they pay attention to the extent to which they selectively focus on positive or negative information."

More information: Yeosun Yoon, Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, and Gülen Sarial-Abi. "Effect of Regulatory Focus on Selective Information Processing." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2012 (published online August 17, 2011).

Provided by University of Chicago

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