

A new strategy for counteracting the impact of negative online brand reviews

February 17 2022, by Marilyn Stone



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Researchers from Boston College and University of British Columbia published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that examines when and why negative reviews can be beneficial to companies.

The study is titled "The Upside of Negative: Social Distance in Negative Reviews of Identity-Relevant Brands" and is authored by Nailya Ordabayeva, Lisa Cavanaugh, and Darren Dahl.

Managing [online reviews](#) is critical for businesses. Most consumers consult online reviews before making purchase decisions and seeing just a few [negative reviews](#) can damage sales and other business outcomes. Negative reviews are particularly influential because consumers view them as more authentic and informative than brand advertising copy. Thus, managers understandably worry about negative reviews and attempt to downplay or minimize them to avoid [negative effects](#). In fact, type "negative online reviews" into a browser search and top results will include: "Bury Negative Reviews Online," "How to Remove Negative Online Reviews," and "Delete Negative Content Fast." Such practices are prominently promoted as a marketing solution.

However, this new research challenges the assumption that negative reviews are necessarily bad for business. In fact, it suggests that such reviews might even yield [positive outcomes](#) when consumers personally identify with a brand and see facets of their personality or identity in the brand. Ordabayeva explains that "When consumers identify with a brand, they are more likely to scrutinize negative reviews, seeking to protect the brand and by extension themselves, from negative feedback. In particular, consumers scrutinize the [social distance](#) of reviewers to themselves using various demographic, social, and group dimensions to justify dismissing negative feedback from socially distant reviewers. This ultimately protects identity-relevant brands from negative reviews."

Dahl adds that "Negative reviews sometimes even yield upsides for brands relative to positive reviews. Notably, consumers do not similarly scrutinize reviewer social distance, or similarity, following positive reviews. They heed such reviews regardless of social distance because positive feedback about identity-relevant brands, and self, is always

welcomed."

Data collected and analyzed in controlled lab settings, as well as hundreds of thousands of real consumer reviews posted online, provide support for this phenomenon. In one study, the researchers examine the extent to which real consumers listen to actual reviews posted online about popular restaurants that they consider to be identity-relevant. Consumers downplay the usefulness of negative reviews by socially distant reviewers. In contrast, consumers do not scrutinize the social distance of reviewers who write positive reviews. A different study surveyed NFL fans, who have a strong personal connection to the NFL brand, about their reactions to a negative or a positive online [review](#) of an NFL-branded sweatshirt.

These fans responded to a negative review quite differently depending on the social distance that they perceived with the reviewer. In fact, a negative review by a socially distant reviewer boosted participants' interest in purchasing the NFL sweatshirt by up to 27 percent relative to a positive review by such a reviewer. This occurred because a negative review from a distant reviewer prompted participants to strengthen their relationship with the NFL brand as a way to protect it from negative feedback. A similar upside of negative emerges in another study when Canadian respondents read either a negative review or no review of President's Choice, a beloved packaged coffee brand in Canada. Seeing a negative review by a distant user who expressed consistent negativity in prior reviews bolstered consumers' interest in the brand by six to 12 percent compared to seeing no review.

Thus, managers of identity-relevant brands may be better off keeping and perhaps even emphasizing negative online reviews (relative to positive or no reviews) among brand fans and when faced with consistent negativity from socially distant reviewers. These findings have useful implications for marketers who wish to effectively

manage negative online reviews. Displaying reviewers' profiles and review histories on online platforms to highlight reviewers' social distance and consistency may protect and even benefit identity-relevant brands following negative reviews.

As Cavanaugh says, "Our findings emphasize the importance of cultivating consumers' brand relationships as a strategy for protecting identity-relevant brands and benefiting from negative reviews. Thus, it is critical for managers to understand their brands' relevance and strengthen their connection to consumers' identities to move more consumers into the strong-brand-relationship segments." These insights are especially actionable in the age of big data when companies can quickly and accurately analyze [consumers' brand](#) relationships and identify strong-relationship segments.

More information: Nailya Ordabayeva et al, EXPRESS: The Upside of Negative: Social Distance in Online Reviews of Identity-Relevant Brands, *Journal of Marketing* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429221074704](#)

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: A new strategy for counteracting the impact of negative online brand reviews (2022, February 17) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-strategy-counteracting-impact-negative-online.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--