A Conceptual Model of Helpfulness of Online Reviews in a Blink

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Abstract

Online reviews have become the essence of information for consumers while making a purchase decision in online environments, though it is still critical to ascertain the quantum of influence it drives in making the purchase decision. Although the importance of online reviews has been examined, there are research gaps in studies on how to make online reviews helpful in a blink from the purchase intention point of view. This paper explored the aspects that influenced the formation of the title of online reviews. The study proposed a conceptual framework for the title of online reviews by adopting elements such as reviewers' identity, online recommendation, online review syndrome, age in online reviews, and law of closure and halo-effect that make each review helpful. The effect of the conceptual model could help enhance the formation of opinion of the consumers in a blink. The study integrated online review literature and presented a model of helpfulness for online reviews in a blink. Online companies should focus upon upgrading the online review system and enrich customer experience to maintain a positive relationship with their users.

Keywords : e-commerce, halo-effect, helpfulness, online review syndrome, online recommendations

Online customer reviews have endeavored to influence customers' purchase decisions when shopping online and have given modern emphasis to the concept of word-of-mouth. The enormous quantity, heterogeneity, and receptiveness of online reviews have contributed to their appeal and growing popularity. Voluminous information is available regarding products reviews online and reading all the reviews is laborious and time consuming for customers. Thus, most customers choose to read reviews selectively. According to the theory of selective attention, people react to messages selectively because individuals possess finite information processing capacity (Treisman, 1969). Similarly, people pay selective attention to online reviews. People look for instantaneous cues that enable them to decide whether to read a review or not. One such signal is the title of online reviews. Titles of online reviews grab the attention of customers. Salehan and Kim (2016) found that reviews receive more readerships with titles having higher levels of positive sentiments ; whereas, length of the title is negatively related to the readership.

Each review has a title and body text. However, despite prior investigations related to review of body - text in online reviews, we find that the title of online reviews component is mostly unexplored in this domain. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in a unique way. It provides a conceptual framework for the title of online reviews that makes each review helpful in a blink.

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Increase in Online Reviews

The outburst in consumer generated media over the years means consumers' credence on word of mouth in the decision-making process. According to a survey conducted by Nielson in 2009 of 25,000 Internet consumers from 50 countries, opinions posted online were trusted by 70% of the consumers. Each online review that endorses a business is an alluring form of marketing. Consumer reviews are knowingly more trustworthy, nearly twelve times more than explanations that come from manufacturers, according to a survey conducted by online video review website EXPO of U.S. Internet users (eMarketer, 2010).

Conversion rates can also be influenced by the number of reviews posted online. In a study, Reevoo (2013) found that there is a chance of 4.6% increase in conversion rates if the product has fifty or more reviews per product. Visitors are 105% more likely to purchase during a visit that connects with both customer questions and answers & reviews (Bazaar Voice, Conversation Index, 2011). A consumer review survey conducted in 2015 revealed that 92% of the consumers read online reviews. The survey was explicitly concerned with reviews for local business services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Consumers who Read Online Reviews for Local Businesses

Source: Bright Local (2015)
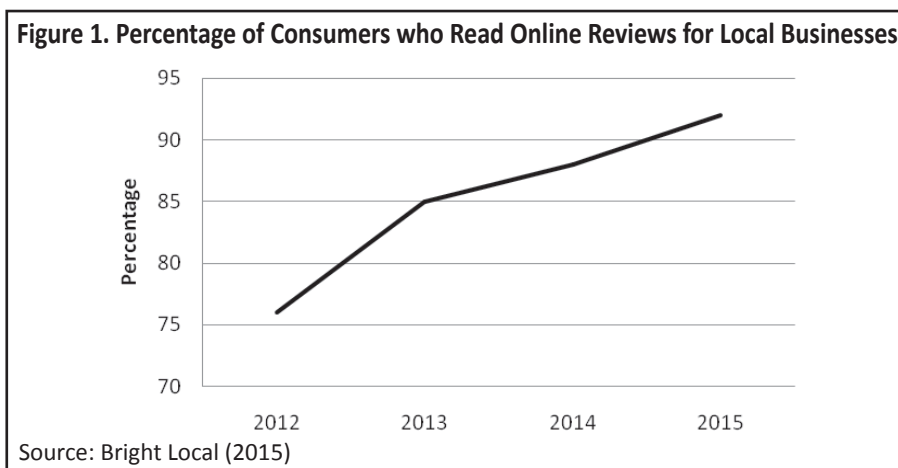
The reach of online reviews extends broadly to consumers of all ages. However, younger consumers especially are the more active readers (see Figure 2).
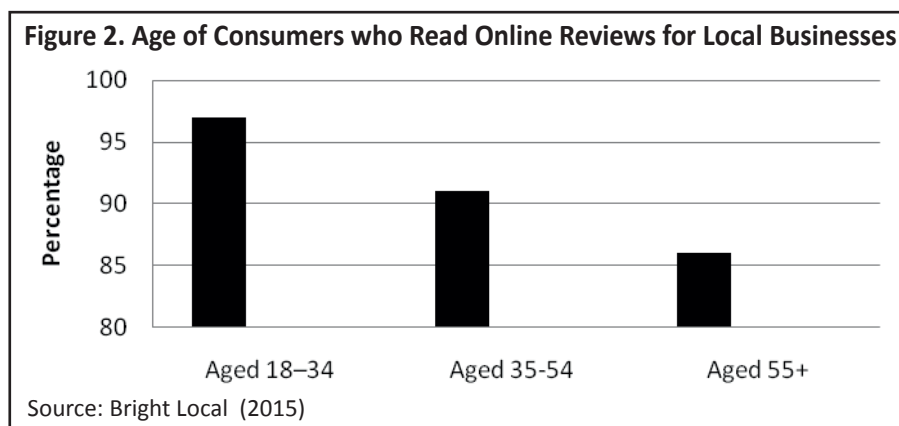
Figure 2. Age of Consumers who Read Online Reviews for Local Businesses

Source: Bright Local (2015)

Figure 3. Business Types for Which Consumers Read Online Reviews in Percentage

Source: Bright Local (2015)

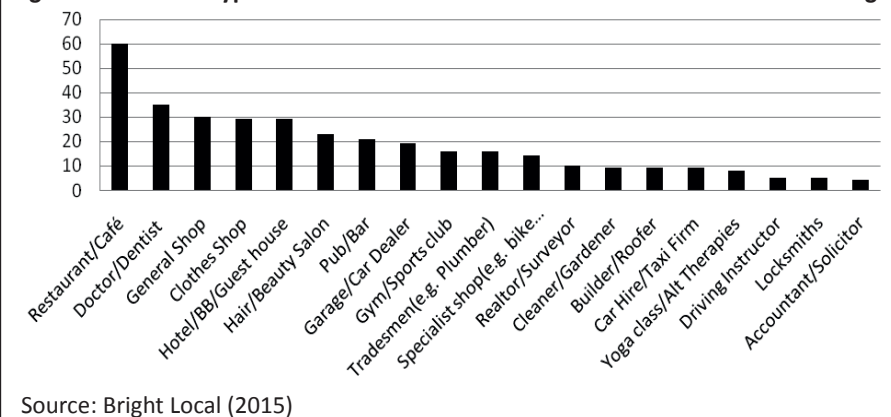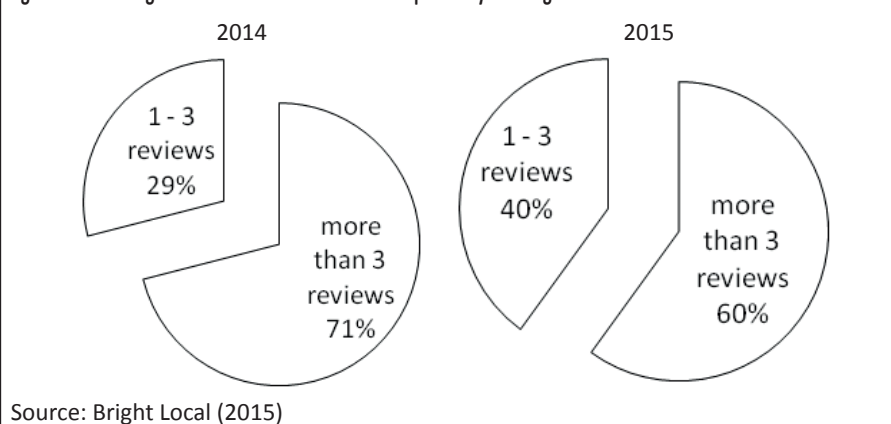**Figure 4. Percentage of Consumers who Formed an Opinion by Reading the Number of Reviews for Local Businesses**

Source: Bright Local (2015)

The consumers read online reviews for businesses such as restaurants, cafes, doctors, general shops, clothes shops, and hotels (see Figure 3). Although consumers read online reviews, but only 40% of the consumers formed an opinion by reading just one to three reviews. Consumers paid selective attention and formed an opinion by processing limited information (see Figure 4).
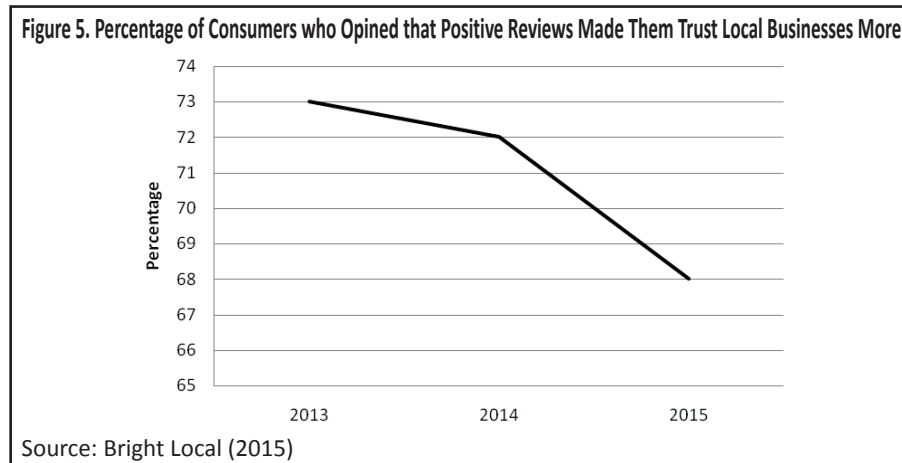
Risk Posed by Online Reviews

The rise in user - generated content has brought valuable content on the table that companies practice to market them. A web survey conducted by European Consumer Centres Network in 2013 found that 82% of the respondents read reviews before shopping. Another survey revealed that 88% of the consumers trust online reviews essentially as personal recommendations (Bright Local, 2014). The tools that focus to build consumer awareness and increase the trust in the market should not deceive consumers with fake reviews. Dellarocas (2006) noted that increasing the unit cost of manipulation by developing technologies can reduce the social cost of online manipulation and inspire higher participation of honest consumers.

With the rise in competition, online businesses aim to boost positive ratings. A study found that 95% of the consumers had uncertainty about reviews when they didn't view bad scores (Reevoo, 2013). Hu, Bose, Koh, and Liu (2012) examined the textual information available in online reviews and discovered that around 10.3% of the products were liable to online reviews' manipulation. Despite of the premeditated use of sentiments and ratings in

manipulated products, manipulation in ratings was detected by consumers, but not through sentiments. Mayzlin, Dover, and Chevalier (2014) examined that hotel reviews exploited the organizational distinctness between two travel websites: Expedia.com and TripAdvisor.com. They found more fraud on TripAdvisor than Expedia since the cost of manipulation on TripAdvisor was much lower than the cost of manipulation on Expedia.

Luca and Zervas's (2016) findings suggested that a restaurant with a weak reputation was more likely to commit review fraud, and the restaurants, which faced increased competition, were more likely to receive unfavorable fake reviews. Up to 16% of all its reviews on the Yelp review site were identified as suspicious, that is, potentially fake when the fraud was committed. A consumer review survey revealed that 68% of the consumers trusted local businesses more based on positive reviews. The consumers get doubts in their minds about positive reviews due to lack of negative reviews found online (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage of Consumers who Opined that Positive Reviews Made Them Trust Local Businesses More

Source: Bright Local (2015)

Related Literature

With the rise of online reviews, many people believe that online reviews could be a good alternative for complete word of mouth (WOM) and could also influence consumers' decisions. Previous empirical findings support the idea. Godes and Mayzlin (2004) found positive association between eWOM and TV shows viewership. Liu (2006) studied movie reviews and found that online movie reviews proposed important explanatory power for both cumulative and weekly box office revenues. This suggests that customers make offline purchase decisions established from online information, and some forms of eWOM are proxies for overall WOM.

Various studies attempted to determine the relation between online reviews and product sales, and they got mixed findings. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that online consumer ratings significantly influenced product sales in case of books. Zhang and Dellarocas (2006) obtained similar results in case of the movie industry. In contrast, Chen, Wu, and Yoon (2004) and Duan, Gu, and Whinston (2008) found that online reviews did not impact sales but served only as predictors.

A customer is always in search of quality information in an online environment. The quality of online reviews has a positive impact on consumers' purchasing plan, and purchasing intention increases with an increment in the number of reviews (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). The findings of Lee, Park, and Han (2011) showed that greater perceived credibility of online consumer reviews among potential consumers led to higher purchase intention.

Consumers presume online reviews to be more credible when the review contains detailed information in case of a search product ; whereas, for an experience product, consumers determine the credibility of the review by judging the level of reviewer agreement with a review (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). Xia and Bechwati's (2008) study suggested that the differential effect of online reviews was slightly due to readers' (information seekers)

cognitive personalization. When information seekers sense rapport with the reviewer, they perceive the review to be more trustworthy and useful and give more influence over their purchase intentions. In online word of mouth, reviews help notify future consumers and reduce doubts surrounding the shopping experience (Dellarocas, 2003). However, there are a large number of reviews available to be read. Consumers often require only a limited set of helpful reviews, and many online vendors enforce mechanisms to identify reviews that customers observe as most helpful (Cao, Duan, & Gan, 2011 ; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). However, a better understanding of perceived review helpfulness offers definite perks to online retailers and review providers (Chen, Dhanasobhon, & Smith, 2008).

   Several studies have been done on the helpfulness of a review (see Table 1). Schindler and Bickart (2012) found the length of a consumer review to be positively linked to its perceived value to other consumers, but only to a point. Combination of reviewer and review characteristics are significantly associated with the perceived usefulness of reviews (Racherla & Friske, 2012). Li, Huang, Tan, and Wei (2013) suggested that consumers perceive product reviews written by customers to be more helpful than written by experts. Moore's (2015) results showed that reviewers interpreted their actions more than their reactions for utilitarian products, and they described their reactions more than their actions for hedonic products. Schuckert, Liu, and Law's (2015) findings revealed that more attention was paid to the relationship between online buying and online reviews along with satisfaction and online management in recent trends.

   Cheng and Ho's (2015) results showed that the higher was the level of expertise of the reviewer, the larger were the number of followers ; also, larger image count and word count made readers feel the review is more practical and useful. Singh, Irani, Rana, Dwivedi, Saumya, and Kumar Roy (2017) developed models based on machine learning that could predict the helpfulness of the consumer reviews using several textual features such as entropy, polarity, subjectivity, and reading ease. The study helped buyers to write better reviews and assist other buyers in making their purchase decisions. Banerjee, Bhattacharyya, and Bose (2017) proposed a theoretical model with reviewer's characteristics such as positivity, involvement, reputation, competence, experience, and sociability that affected reviewer's trustworthiness, and it was found that all factors were significant. The analysis of Fang, Ye, Kucukusta, and Law (2016) indicated that both reviewer characteristics and text readability affected the perceived value of reviews. The findings had a direct indication in improving identification of potential valuable reviews for managers.

   Some of the earlier research done on online reviews in the Indian context exerted significant observations. Sinha and Singh 's (2014) findings revealed that delivery risk, product performance risk, and financial risk negatively impacted attitude towards online shopping. They also observed that consumers' perception towards sub - dimensions of risk varied with age. Rashmi and Nijhawan (2016) studied consumer perspectives separately as seller and buyer. The study revealed the needs and expectations of current and potential users of virtual marketplaces of used products. Joshi and Achuthan (2016) identified trends in B2C online buying in the Indian context. They found that using the Internet only as a medium to review and check products instead of buying, poor status of cyber laws in India, and challenge of reaching break-even point and making profits from that point continue to be the issues in the e-commerce sector. Prasad and Sharma (2016) found that socioeconomic factors relating to the respondent buyers did have a significant impact ; whereas, those pertaining to the chief wage earner in the household did not impact the online channel usage.

   Devedi, Sujatha, and Pathak (2017) studied the parameters of review content on which consumers checked online reviews before buying a product or service. They identified that consumers viewed online reviews for understanding quality of the product, cost benefit of the product, product usage information, information relevant to deals or discounts, and brand reputation among reviewers, product information on warranty or guarantee or replacement details, and sales service availability for making purchase decisions.

Table 1. Prior Studies on the Helpfulness of Online Reviews

Authors	Sample Size (N)	Method	Data	Findings
Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld (2008)	786	Econometrics	Amazon (book)	Sharing of geographical location of reviewer had a positive effect on product sales.
Mudambi & Schuff (2010)	1587 (reviews)	Econometrics	Amazon (search and experience goods)	Effect of review extremity on helpfulness of reviews was controlled by the product type.
Zhang, Craciun, & Shin (2010)	150	SEM	Survey (software program)	Potential customers were more responsive to reviews that were perceived more helpful.
Ghose & Ipeirotis (2011)	411	Econometrics	Amazon (electronic goods)	The study found that simple reviews were more helpful than the complicated ones.
Schlosser (2011)	201	Experiment	(movie, book)	One sided arguments were perceived to be more helpful than two sided arguments.
Korfiatis, García-Bariocanal, & Sánchez-Alonso (2012)	37,221 (reviews)	Econometrics	Amazon (book)	Review readability had more effect on helpfulness ratio of review than the length of review.
Cheung, Sia, & Kuan (2012)	99	SEM	Survey (not specified)	Customers relied on source credibility, review consistency, and review sidedness while evaluating online consumer reviews.
Baek, Ahn, & Choi (2012)	75,226 (reviews)	Econometrics	Amazon (search and experience goods)	Review rating, reviewer's credibility, and content of reviews influenced the helpfulness of reviews.
Yin, Bond, & Zhang (2013)	78	Experiment	Online stores	Anxious reviews were considered to be more helpful than angry reviews.
Zhu, Yin, & He (2014)	16,265(reviews)	Econometrics	Yelp(hotel)	Review written by an opinion leader (high expertise and more online friends) did not correspond to reception of helpfulness votes.

Research Methodology

The paper forms a conceptual framework of studying online reviews in a blink. The research consists of formulation of analysis and synthesis of the literature using comprehensive scope from journals of various disciplines, articles published online, and research reports. The concepts are evolved iteratively based on the reviewed content. We then come up with a proposed model by adopting reviewer identity, online recommendation, online review syndrome, and age in online reviews.

Conceptual Foundation for the Model

Online reviews are usually written by the person purchasing the product, using it, and making cognizance of her/his experience. The flow of information in this context mainly flows from a former consumer to a potential consumer through online reviews. The conceptual foundation for the model of title of online reviews was formed (see Figure 7) by adopting elements such as :

(1) Reviewers' identity,

(2) Online recommendations,

(3) Online review syndrome,

(4) Age in online reviews,

(5) Law of closure,

(6) Halo-effect.

(1) Reviewers' Identity : The element is the 'Name' referred to as the reviewers' identity. Forman et al. (2008) concluded that the combination of reviewers' identity with relevant information shaped the online community member's judgment about products and reviews. Xie, Miao, Kuo, and Lee (2011) indicated that the presence of personal identifying information positively affected the observed credibility of online reviews. Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, and Marchegiani (2012) suggested that positive online reviews lead to higher initial trust than negative reviews when the identity of the reviewer was disclosed. Racherla and Friske (2012) demonstrated that the significance of identity disclosure in online interaction enhanced the ability of customers' information procurement. Liu and Park (2015) revealed that reviewers' identity disclosure had a significant impact on review usefulness.

(2) Online Recommendations : The element '👍Like' is referred to as online recommendation made by the customer. The results obtained by Chen et al. (2004) indicated that more recommendations were positively associated with sales at Amazon.com. Senecal and Nantel (2004) found that participants selected products twice when exposed to product recommendations as often as those who were not exposed to recommendations. Fagerstrøm and Ghinea's **(**2011**)** study suggested that other online customer recommendations had more impact on novice online shoppers than those who shopped more frequently.

(3) Online Review Syndrome : The element online review syndrome (see Figure 6) are the cues that consumers select as to why they recommend a product. The cues are assigned with respective symbols. The consumers can select the type of cue according to the best fit to their review description. The symbols will be represented in the title of reviews (see Table 2).

Figure 6. Online Review Syndrome
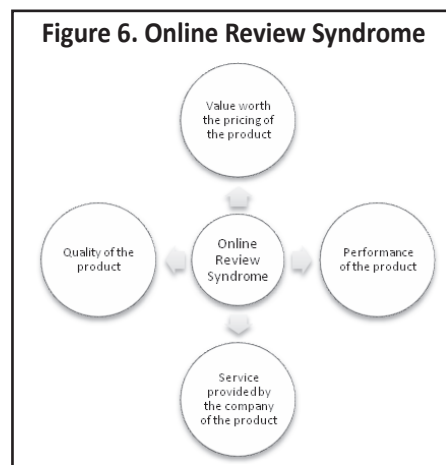
(i) Value Worth Pricing of the Product : It is the evaluation by a consumer of the value of a product with respect to the price. Though, it poses certain queries, like - does the price tag justify the value of the product to the consumer ? Do the benefits from the product during the life time usage of the product outweigh the price paid for the product by the consumer ?

(ii) Performance of the Product : It is the evaluation by the consumer that how reliable and efficient the product

Table 2. Symbols Assigned for Online Review Syndrome

$	•	**Value worth - the Pricing of the Product**
⚙	•	**Performance of the Product**
Q	•	**Quality of the Product**
🔧	•	**Service Provided by the Company for the Product**

is. The consumer who faces inconvenience in tweaking and modifying the product to get peak performance out the product will not prefer this cue.

(iii) Quality of the Product : It is the evaluation by the consumer about the quality of material used in making the product. The aesthetic features of the product that define the consumer in a social environment are also critical.

(iv) Service Provided by the Company of the Product : It is the evaluation by the consumer regarding the overall experience received in terms of service provided by the company of the product. The post purchase services provided by the company are also critical.

(4) Age of Review : The element 'Age' of the review denotes the time frame of review in hours, days, months, and years format. Cui, Lui, and Guo's (2012) findings showed that volume of reviews had a significant effect on new product sales and it decreased with time. Similarly, Hu, Liu, and Zhang (2008) demonstrated that impact of sales is a decreasing function of age of the product. Each review written by a customer reveals additional information to a new customer. Thus, the cumulative effect of impact of reviews due to a reviewer will be substantial when a product has fewer pre-existing reviews. Dellarocas, Zhang, and Awad (2007) showed that early volume of online reviews can be used as a proxy of early sales in case of movies. People talk more about movies immediately after watching them than as time goes by ; whereas, McAuley and Leskovec (2013) suggested that users' tastes and preferences change and evolve over time. As users consume additional products and gain experience, this may influence a change in their rating behavior.
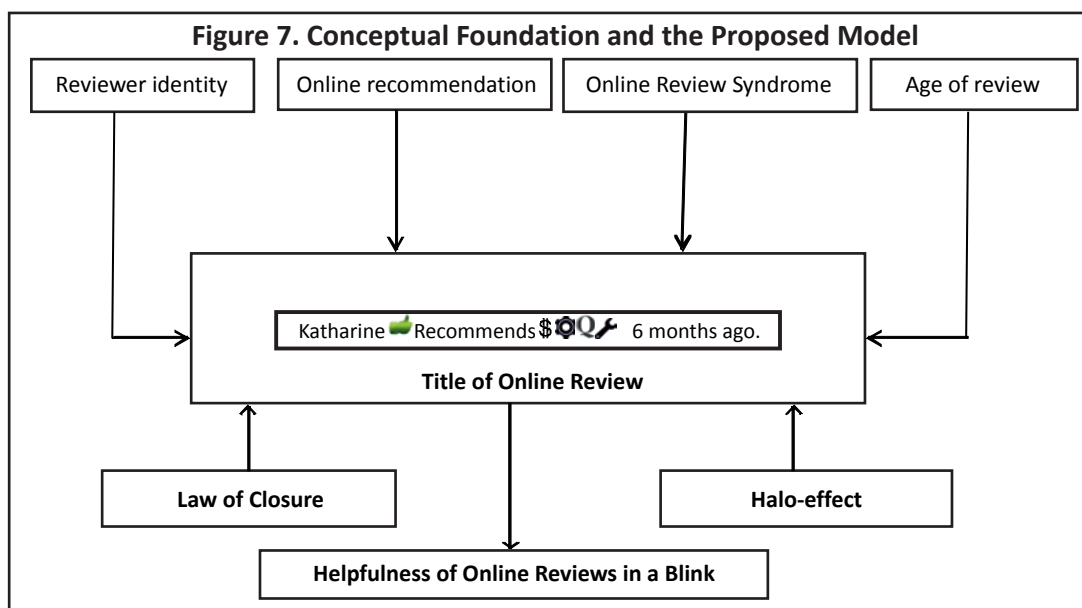
(5) Law of Closure : According to the Law of Closure, an individual perceives objects such as shapes, letters, pictures, etc., as being whole when they are not complete. Precisely, when parts of a whole picture are missing, an individual's perception fills in the visual gap.

The arrangement of the above elements is in an explicit way such that the all elements are not perceived as different elements, but as a whole. The elements are organized in the order as : name of the user, online recommendation, online review syndrome, and age of the review, respectively. The title of the review can be observed as *(Katharine 👍 Recommends* **$⚙** Q🔧 *6 months ago).*

(6) Halo - Effect : Halo-effect can be defined as the transfer of positive feelings or goodwill of one characteristic of a product or a person to another, possibly to unrelated characteristics. The transfer of positive feelings is generated from seeing a pleasing appearance of a person or product to an unrelated characteristic such as performance. The title of review induces halo-effect in a blink, implying helpfulness of reviews. The consumers connect positive feelings generated in their minds while viewing the title of reviews with the product, brand, or the company of service availed.

Discussion and Implications

The proposed conceptual model (Figure 7) suggests a proxy system for giving feedback in addition for rating and

Figure 7. Conceptual Foundation and the Proposed Model

Reviewer identity	Online recommendation	Online Review Syndrome	Age of review

Katharine 🍃 Recommends $ 🔍 🔧 6 months ago.

Title of Online Review

Law of Closure

Halo-effect

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writing depth reviews for products in online environments. Companies launching new exclusive products online could improve the information generation process by directing the attention of customers towards the purchase decision.

The concept could be implemented on review websites across various online review websites like Amazon.com, Expedia.com, IMDb.com, Google Play, Yelp.com, and TripAdvisor.com. In order to keep e-businesses ahead of the game persistently, online companies need to iterate the online review system and enhance customer experience in order to maintain a relationship with their users.

Here are the potent examples of the model as to how it can make an impact. The Figure 8 shows a review written by a consumer for a mobile. The consumer gave a one star rating. The consumer is more concerned with the price at which the mobile was sold. The consumer actually recommends the product to other consumers asking to go elsewhere to buy the mobile. Nevertheless, the consumer hasn't complained anything about the quality of the product.

The edited version (Figure 9) shows that the consumer can recommend the mobile to other consumers. The quality of the product is the apparent reason here for recommendation. The Figure 10 shows a review written by a
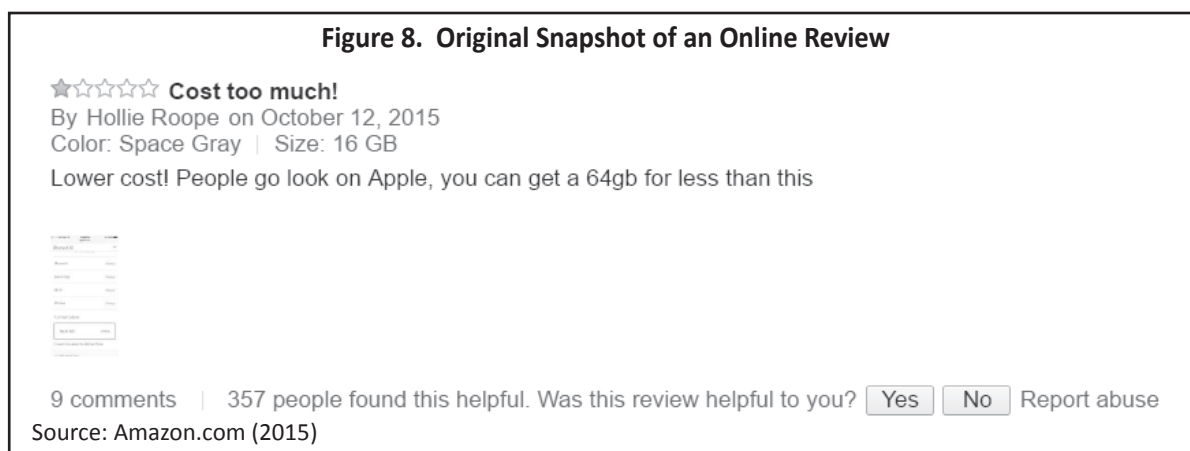
Figure 8. Original Snapshot of an Online Review

⭐️☆☆☆☆ **Cost too much!**
By Hollie Roope on October 12, 2015
Color: Space Gray │ Size: 16 GB

Lower cost! People go look on Apple, you can get a 64gb for less than this

9 comments │ 357 people found this helpful. Was this review helpful to you? [Yes] [No] Report abuse

Source: Amazon.com (2015)

Figure 9. Online Review After Implementation of the Proposed Model

Hollie Roope 👍 Recommends Q   12 days ago

Color: Space Gray | Size: 16 GB

Lower cost! People go look on Apple, you can get a 64gb for less than this

9 comments | 357 people found this helpful. Was this review helpful to you? Yes | No | Report abuse

Source: Amazon.com (2015)

Figure 10. Original Snapshot of an Online Review

5 out of 5

✔ Recommended for Everyone

by Robert from US

What a Surprise

Posted 24 Oct 2016

Location: Time Squire, Grand Central Madison and 5th Ave shopping

We did not know much about this hotel but found it to be a wonder classic old hotel in walking distance to Time Square without being in the crowd. The lobby and the adjacent bar were open and bright with beautiful architecture. The bar was lively with discussion at night making the experience a fun atmosphere. The rooms were spacious with very comfortable bed. Overall a great experience.

Was this review helpful to you? Yes: 1   No

⚑ Flag this review as inappropriate

Source: Expedia.com (2016)

Figure 11. Online Review After Implementation of the Proposed Model

5 out of 5

✔ Recommended for Everyone

by Robert from US

Robert 👍 Recommends Q 🔧   6 days ago

Location: Time Squire, Grand Central Madison and 5th Ave shopping

We did not know much about this hotel but found it to be a wonder classic old hotel in walking distance to Time Square without being in the crowd. The lobby and the adjacent bar were open and bright with beautiful architecture. The bar was lively with discussion at night making the experience a fun atmosphere. The rooms were spacious with very comfortable bed. Overall a great experience.

Was this review helpful to you? Yes: 1   No

⚑ Flag this review as inappropriate

Source: Expedia.com (2016)

consumer for a hotel in New York. The consumer describes the quality as beautiful architecture and good service provided, generating a great experience.

The edited version of the review (Figure 11) shows that the consumer can recommend the hotel to other consumers. The quality and service are the reasons here for the recommendation. The Figure 12 shows a review written by a consumer for a video game. The consumer describes the quality of the product as polished and smooth running with a good performance. The edited version of the review (Figure 13) shows that the consumer can
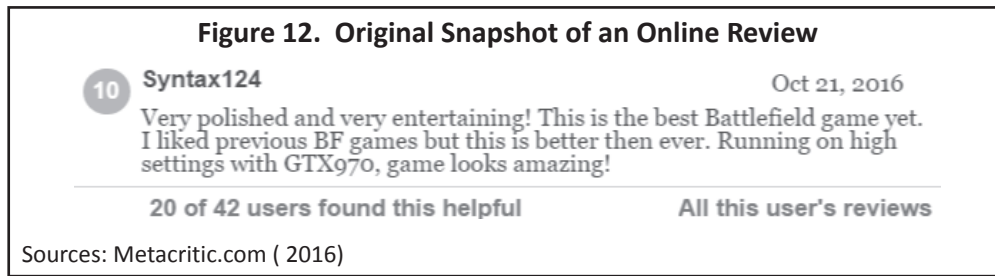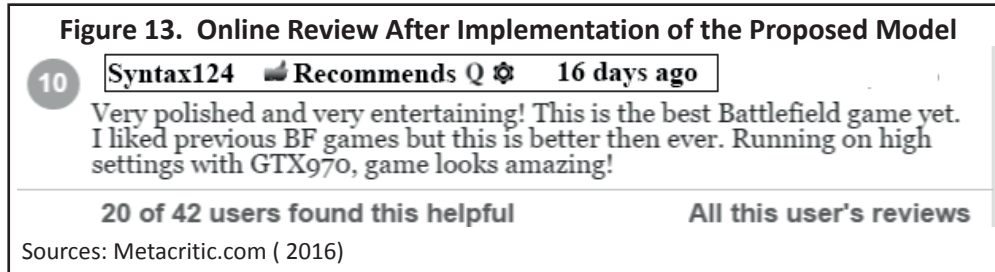
Figure 12. Original Snapshot of an Online Review

> **10** Syntax124   Oct 21, 2016
>
> Very polished and very entertaining! This is the best Battlefield game yet.
> I liked previous BF games but this is better then ever. Running on high
> settings with GTX970, game looks amazing!
>
> 20 of 42 users found this helpful   All this user's reviews

Sources: Metacritic.com (2016)

Figure 13. Online Review After Implementation of the Proposed Model

> **10** Syntax124   ☕ Recommends Q ⚙   16 days ago
>
> Very polished and very entertaining! This is the best Battlefield game yet.
> I liked previous BF games but this is better then ever. Running on high
> settings with GTX970, game looks amazing!
>
> 20 of 42 users found this helpful   All this user's reviews

Sources: Metacritic.com (2016)

recommend the video game to other consumers. The quality and performance are the reasons here for recommendation.

The key contribution of the study is the development of a conceptual framework that can be used for formation of the uniformity of title of reviews that may result in minimizing the bias created in consumers' mind. The bias could be due to two major factors ; first, the extreme ratings of the product. Secondly, a consumer having doubts about higher levels of positive sentiment title of reviews and consumer turning away from the product caused by higher levels of negative sentiment in title of reviews. Online recommendations viewed by the consumers in title of reviews for a product could augment the process of formation of opinion in the minds of consumers for a respective product.

Managerial Implications

Organizations' responses to online reviews are becoming gradually significant in management strategy. The study moves in the direction of making titles more rational and not emotion based titles. The managerial approach to consumer behavior is focused upon identifying such mechanisms that ease the consumer decision making process. The study provides improvement and would help consumers to select the appropriate reviews and ignore other reviews based on the title of reviews. Companies can use positive feedback as sources and negative feedback to modify their products while releasing the next update version of a product. The study provides a new approach for managers to monitor online reviews based on titles of reviews. Managers could develop a logical method for profiling of consumers at different stages of the product life cycle based on the titles of reviews that may be classified into four dimensions represented by symbols with the help of online review syndrome (performance, value, service, and quality).

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

This study provides an alternative perspective for understanding helpfulness of online reviews. Although, the intention of this study is to offer a new perspective, it is not without limitations. The first limitation of the study is that it does not take account the consumers' Internet experience. Zhu and Zhang (2010) found that there can be a

positive association between the reliance on online reviews and consumers' Internet experience. However, consumers not interested in rating the experience may not be included in calculating the implications of online reviews. The second limitation is the product type, in terms of search and experience products as Mudambi and Schuff (2010) suggested that product type mediates the effect of review extremity on the helpfulness of the review.

This study mainly focuses on the organization of title of online reviews and does not consider valence of ratings (i.e., positive and negative) ; further research would benefit from including the valence in ratings and number of online reviews to the theoretical framework offered by this study. We propose that the actual outcome of this method in an online context should be the augmentation to minimize search costs and ease the purchase intention. Future studies could investigate the study by measuring the portrayed aspects empirically and be applied accordingly for better viability.

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