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Zhanfei Lei

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Positive or Negative Reviews? Consumers' Selective Exposure in Seeking and Evaluating Online Reviews

Zhanfei Lei¹, Dezhi Yin², Han Zhang³

¹Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts, USA, zlei@isenberg.umass.edu

²Muma College of Business, University of South Florida, USA, dezhiyin@usf.edu

³Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology, USA, han.zhang@scheller.gatech.edu

Abstract

How and why positive and negative reviews influence product sales differently has critical implications for both research and businesses. Although earlier online word-of-mouth research empirically documented negative reviews to influence product sales to a greater extent than positive reviews (i.e., a negativity bias), later research revealed positive reviews to be generally more helpful (i.e., a positivity bias). We propose an answer to this puzzle may be that negative reviews get more exposure than positive reviews. As consumers are often overwhelmed by an exploding number of online reviews, they need to be selective when searching for reviews. This research investigates consumers' preference for positive vs. negative reviews during both the information-seeking and information-evaluation stages of their decision-making process. Drawing on the motivated reasoning literature, we propose that consumers exhibit a negativity bias when they search for reviews to read, but they manifest a confirmation bias when they evaluate the helpfulness of reviews. We conducted three experiments and found consistent support for these hypotheses. Our findings expand the current understanding of consumers' processing of online reviews to the information-seeking stage, reveal differential biases in different stages, demonstrate a possible explanation for the negativity bias in product sales, and provide important practical implications.

Keywords: selective exposure, negativity bias, confirmation bias, information seeking, information evaluation.

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1 Introduction

The popularity of online reviews and their importance in driving product sales have attracted tremendous interest from researchers and practitioners (e.g., Jiang et al., 2021; Lin & Wang, 2018). A well-documented finding since the early days of online reviews is that negative reviews hurt product sales to a greater extent than positive reviews help sales (Basuroy et al., 2003; Cao et al., 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). This finding is in accordance with the phenomenon of negativity bias—a greater impact or stronger power of

negative (vs. positive) information or event (Baumeister et al., 2001). A commonly assumed explanation for its occurrence in online reviews is that negative reviews should be perceived as more helpful and thus weighted more heavily by consumers when they evaluate the reviews. However, later research exploring the helpfulness evaluation of positive vs. negative reviews revealed mixed findings (see Hong et al., 2017): some studies observed greater helpfulness of negative reviews in line with negativity bias (e.g., Sen & Lerman, 2007; Zhang et al., 2010), whereas other studies found positive reviews to be more helpful (e.g., Korfiatis et al., 2012; Pan & Zhang, 2011).

Some recent studies have started to explore possible reasons behind these mixed findings. Notably, Yin et al. (2016) attempted to reconcile the contradictory findings and provided empirical evidence for the possibility of confirmation bias in consumers' evaluation of reviews—they may evaluate confirmatory reviews that are consistent with their initial beliefs more favorably. Specifically, consumers usually form initial beliefs about a product based on its summary rating statistics (such as the average and number of ratings) before getting to a review. Such beliefs can, in turn, influence consumers' helpfulness evaluation of the review: they should perceive positive (negative) reviews as more helpful when they have positive (negative) initial beliefs because of their need to reduce cognitive dissonance. Given that the average rating of most products is positive (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), consumers should demonstrate an overall tendency of positivity bias—evaluating positive reviews confirming their positive initial beliefs as generally more helpful than negative reviews. This tendency is also in line with anecdotal experiences on review platforms such as Amazon, where a majority of the most helpful reviews prominently displayed on product pages are positive in valence.

However, a puzzle emerges from the repeatedly demonstrated negativity bias in the impact of online reviews on product sales (e.g., Basuroy et al., 2003) and the overall positivity bias in consumers' helpfulness evaluation of reviews (Yin et al., 2016): how could negative reviews exert a *greater* impact on product sales than positive reviews, but the former is generally considered *less* helpful than the latter? A possible answer to this puzzle is the way consumers look for reviews to read. The reason is that consumers' purchase decisions are determined not only by the helpfulness of reviews they read but also by the types of reviews they actively seek out. Before reading any reviews, consumers need to be selective in deciding which ones to read among a vast number of available reviews (Liu et al., 2019). The latest evidence suggests that consumers vary in the number of reviews they seek out before decision-making (Yin et al., forthcoming), and the reviews they end up reading can sway their purchase preferences (Lei et al., 2022). If consumers look for negative reviews more than positive ones, then negative reviews would get more exposure and be read by more consumers. Therefore, negative reviews may have a greater impact on product sales than positive reviews because of greater exposure.

In addition, a better understanding of the types of reviews consumers seek out can help review platforms incorporate the demand factor into the calculation of review ranking. The existing practice relies solely on readers' helpfulness votes to rank reviews and highlight the top ones, but helpful reviews may not be

the primary driver of purchase decisions (Yin et al., 2021), and consumers rarely stop after reading the top reviews (Yin et al., forthcoming). As such, the knowledge of consumers' information-seeking tendencies allows review platforms to bring the content most sought-after to the forefront, even if the content is relatively new or rated less helpful. Such knowledge can also help product manufacturers prioritize efforts in dealing with reviews based on their likely exposure to prospective consumers.

Despite the importance of information seeking in the context of online reviews, little research has explored this earlier stage of consumers' decision-making process, which is challenging to study with secondary data (Yin et al., forthcoming). In this paper, we use experimental methods to explore the types of reviews consumers prefer in both the information-seeking and information-evaluation stages. Building on and extending the concepts of accuracy and defense motivations from the motivated reasoning literature, we propose that consumers demonstrate a negativity bias when they look for reviews to read, but they tend to evaluate confirmatory reviews as more helpful (i.e., confirmation bias). We conducted three laboratory experiments to test these hypotheses.

Our paper makes three primary contributions to the online review literature. First, although we know a great deal about factors driving consumers' evaluation of review helpfulness, this research is among the first to examine how consumers seek out reviews to read in an earlier stage of their decision-making process (see also Yin et al., forthcoming). Second, our demonstration of consumers' preference for negative reviews in information seeking provides a plausible explanation for the negativity bias that has been reliably shown to influence product sales in the prior literature (You et al., 2015). Third, this paper expands our understanding of the role of consumers' initial beliefs (see also Yin et al., 2016) to coherently account for both negativity bias and confirmation bias at different stages of consumers' decision-making process. Our findings also offer important practical implications for product manufacturers and review platforms.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Consumers' Initial Beliefs

A premise of our investigation is that consumers' seeking and evaluation of online information are not context-free (Peng et al., 2020). They should have already formed initial beliefs about a product before seeking out or reading any of its reviews. Because online reviews play a critical role in consumers' purchase decisions, most review sites display summary

statistics of a product's ratings prominently, including the average and number of ratings. These rating profiles can facilitate the formation of consumers' initial beliefs about the product before they get to any reviews (Yin et al., 2016).

Once formed, consumers' initial beliefs can shape their subsequent judgment and decision-making (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009). Regarding the helpfulness judgment of a review, emerging evidence suggests that consumers prefer reviews consistent with their initial beliefs and evaluate such confirmatory reviews more favorably (Yin et al., 2016). However, the influence of consumers' initial beliefs may not be limited to the evaluation process, as consumers may be similarly selective when deciding on the kinds of reviews to read first. Consumers' preference among different kinds of information is labeled selective exposure in the social cognition literature, which we turn to next.

2.2 Selective Exposure

Selective exposure refers to individuals' systematic preference for attitude-congruent or attitude-incongruent information (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013). Substantial evidence from experimental studies showed that people tend to prefer information consistent with their initial beliefs over information that is inconsistent (Jonas et al., 2001; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). For instance, in a presidential election, voters prefer political messages that align with their political views and leanings (Chaffee et al., 2001; Stroud, 2008). In health communication, people actively avoid messages challenging their beliefs (Case et al., 2005; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013; Pease et al., 2006). In interpersonal relationships, people also tend to seek information consistent with their initial beliefs about a target individual (Snyder, 1981, 1984).

However, the evidence for people's preference for attitude-consistent information is not universal, with a number of studies revealing the opposite (Edwards & Smith, 1996; Taber & Lodge, 2006). For example, when participants are given synopses of criminal trials and then asked to read the defense or the prosecution summation, they prefer to seek out information that contradicts their own opinions (Sears, 1965). There was also evidence suggesting that the preference for attitude-consistent information could be attenuated or even reversed when the inconsistent information has higher informational utility (Hastall, 2009; Knobloch et al., 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005). Taken together, although preference for attitude-consistent information is largely ubiquitous, evidence from prior research conducted in diverse contexts is not conclusive. In the following, we introduce different motivations as a possible explanation for different patterns of selective exposure in which consumers may engage at different stages of their decision-making process.

2.3 Accuracy and Defense Motivations

The motivated reasoning literature from social psychology provides a theoretical foundation for explaining the divergent findings regarding selective exposure (Eagly et al., 1999; Johnson, 1994; Prislín & Wood, 2005). A basic premise of motivated reasoning is that people's motivations can affect their reasoning process—forming beliefs, evaluating evidence, and making decisions (Erdelyi, 1974; Festinger, 1957). Two fundamental motivations proposed in this literature are accuracy motivation and defense motivation (Kunda, 1990). Accuracy motivation refers to one's desire to uncover the truth and form accurate evaluations of stimuli, whereas defense motivation refers to one's desire to defend prior beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Chaiken et al., 1989; Kunda, 1990).

Accuracy and defense motivations have been found to influence how people process attitude-inconsistent and attitude-consistent information (Chaiken et al., 1996; Prislín & Wood, 2005; Wyer & Albarracín, 2005). On the one hand, when people are motivated to uncover the truth and make good decisions, they tend to prefer attitude-inconsistent information (Chaiken et al., 1989; Hart et al., 2009). Accuracy motivation also reorients people's attention to information utility (Hart et al., 2009), defined as the degree to which the information can be used to make successful decisions (Fischer et al., 2011). In our context, consumers' accuracy motivation may drive them to prefer information with greater utility because such information can better fulfill their goal of making a good purchase decision (Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012). Information inconsistent with people's existing beliefs generally has higher utility because it provides more evidence or opinions beyond their knowledge and thus has more informational value. Compared with attitude-consistent information, inconsistent information is also more salient and more likely to evoke their attention and interest (Berlyne, 1970; David, 1996). Therefore, in order to be accurate, consumers are more likely to prefer disconfirmatory information.

On the other hand, when people are motivated to defend their prior beliefs, they tend to prefer information that confirms their beliefs (Chaiken et al., 1989; Hart et al., 2009). Defense motivation is activated when people hold strong beliefs about a subject and are reluctant to change their opinions (Brechan, 2002). This motivation can also arise from people's general tendency to reduce inconsistency or conflict. Disconfirmatory information that is incompatible with consumers' prior beliefs provokes the negative arousal state of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), which arises from the discomfort caused by cognitive conflicts (Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Harmon-Jones, 2000). Because people generally dislike cognitive dissonance and its associated

discomfort, disconfirmatory information is more likely to be refuted and disregarded (Wyer & Frey, 1983) or subject to more extensive and critical scrutiny than confirmatory information (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Koehler, 1993; Kunda, 1990). As a result, when experiencing cognitive dissonance, people tend to prefer attitude-consistent information by assigning more weight to them (Fischer et al., 2011; Frey, 1986; Hart et al., 2009). Thus, consumers under defense motivation are more likely to favor confirmatory information.

Next, we posit that the activation of consumers' accuracy and defense motivations depends on the stage of their decision-making process and, under certain circumstances, the valence of their initial beliefs. We first introduce the two stages of consumers' decision-making process and then explain the probable activation of consumers' motivations in each stage.

2.4 Two Stages of Consumers' Decision-Making Process

When consumers decide whether to purchase certain products, their pre-purchase decision-making process involves two stages: information seeking and information evaluation.¹ During the information-seeking stage, consumers actively search for related information. During the information-evaluation stage, consumers evaluate and appraise available information to reform their beliefs and attitudes, which will impact their final decisions (Fischer et al., 2008a). According to several prominent models of consumers' decision-making process (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Woodside & MacDonald, 1994), the information-seeking stage is normally followed by the information-evaluation stage before consumers make a final decision.

Among prior studies examining selective exposure to information in diverse contexts, most focused on either information seeking or information evaluation. For example, some studies investigated how individual differences shape the way people seek out information about relationships (Brannon et al., 2007; Holton & Pyszczynski, 1989; Rholes et al., 2007; Sargent, 2007). Other studies explored selective exposure in the information-evaluation stage, such as different decision criteria people use to assess attitude-consistent and attitude-inconsistent information (Carlson & Russo, 2001; Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Greitemeyer & Schulz-Hardt, 2003; Russo et al., 1998).

However, very few studies have examined selective exposure in both stages simultaneously. In addition, as mentioned earlier, evidence for consumers' selective

exposure to information during their decision-making process is inconclusive. Next, building on the motivated reasoning literature and the unique context of online reviews, we propose that consumers are likely to reveal a negativity bias in the information-seeking stage but a confirmation bias in the information-evaluation stage.

2.4.1 Negativity Bias in Information Seeking

Given the abundance of product options and available information for any purchase decision, consumers often limit their attention and evaluation to a subset of available options (named "consideration set") to simplify their decisions (Roberts & Lattin, 1991; Wright & Barbour, 1977). Because consumers typically engage in in-depth information processing and make final purchase decisions among product options that fall into their consideration set, the determinants of consumers' consideration set play a fundamental role in their judgment and choice (Shocker et al., 1991). The likelihood of a product option being included in consumers' consideration set is determined by a largely rational cost-benefit analysis; a product is more likely to be included if the perceived benefit of evaluating it exceeds the perceived cost (Roberts & Lattin, 1991). To the extent that the costs of evaluating all products are the same, consumers should be more likely to include a product option in their consideration set if they have more positive beliefs about the option (i.e., expecting the option to have greater utility and bring more potential benefit to them).

In our context, consumers can readily form initial beliefs about product options before they get to any consumer reviews. Specifically, aggregated rating profiles of a product, such as the average and number of ratings, are often prominently displayed along with product options. These rating profiles have been found to help consumers form initial beliefs about the product (Yin et al., 2016). For instance, a product's average rating is perceived by consumers to reflect its quality (De Langhe et al., 2015), and the number of ratings reflects the product's popularity (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008). Thus, these salient cues can help consumers form a positive or negative initial belief about the product, which in turn facilitates their decision on whether to include the product in their consideration set. Because of the close association of the valence of consumers' initial beliefs toward a product option and the likely inclusion of the option in their consideration set, we argue in the following that consumers' initial beliefs could drive distinct motivations.

theorizing and predictions are applicable before consumers make purchase decisions but not after (see Ho et al., 2017).

¹ Both information seeking and evaluation are pre-purchase stages of consumers' decision-making process. Because the post-purchase stage is beyond the interest of this work, our

First, consumers with positive initial beliefs are more likely to be motivated by accuracy than defense when seeking reviews. When consumers form positive initial beliefs about a product with a high average rating or a large number of ratings, they are more likely to place the product in their consideration set and eventually purchase it. At the same time, such initial beliefs developed based on aggregated rating cues are typically not strong or validated because they cannot help consumers make a choice among similarly rated product options. To avoid making a poor decision under uncertainty, people tend to be more vigilant with a cautious mindset. Compelling evidence also supports that people are motivated more by accuracy in uncertain and ambiguous circumstances (Fischer et al., 2011; Fischer et al., 2008b; Greitemeyer & Schulz-Hardt, 2003). Thus, when consumers seek reviews to primarily reduce the uncertainty about a product that they are very likely to purchase (Dellarocas, 2003), they tend to be motivated by accuracy in order to increase the chance of a wiser and better decision. Combining this with earlier arguments that accuracy motivation prompts consumers to seek out disconfirmatory reviews, we predict that consumers with positive initial beliefs about a product are more likely to be motivated by accuracy, and this accuracy motivation should drive them to search more for negative reviews that have greater utility and informational value than positive reviews.

Next, we posit that consumers with negative initial beliefs are more likely to be motivated by defense when seeking out reviews. Consumers can form a negative initial belief about a product based on the product's rating profiles, such as when the product has a low average rating or very few reviews (Forman et al., 2008). After forming a negative impression about a product in such cases, consumers are less likely to put the product in their consideration set (Shocker et al., 1991). When consumers exclude a product from their consideration set, their likelihood of purchasing the product is low because final purchase decisions are typically made among the options in the consideration set. As a result, they would have a less vested interest in uncovering the product's true quality and thus have less motivation to be accurate. Instead, the largely strong and certain nature of consumers' negative initial beliefs should activate their defense motivation that typically accompanies strong beliefs and attitudes (Brehan, 2002). Combining this with earlier arguments that defense motivation leads consumers to prefer confirmatory information, we predict that consumers with negative initial beliefs about a product tend to be motivated to defend their existing impression of the product and that this defense motivation should drive them to search more for negative reviews and avoid positive reviews.

Taken together, our preceding predictions regarding consumers' preference in the information-seeking stage are in line with a general tendency of people to seek negative information (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). We posit that consumers would prefer to read negative reviews, and our accounts, based on differential motivations, provide a plausible explanation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1 (negativity bias in information seeking): Consumers would prefer to read negative reviews than positive reviews.

2.4.2 Confirmation Bias in Information Evaluation

After consumers read the actual review content, we posit that confirmation bias (i.e., preference for attitude-consistent information) is likely to occur. In this stage, consumers are exposed to the actual content of individual reviews. When they encounter information that is incongruent with and directly contradicting their initial beliefs and attitudes, such conflict can cause discomfort, a form of psychological stress that people generally dislike (Festinger, 1957). Such discomfort can trigger consumers' motivation to reduce it and defend their existing opinions (e.g., Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Harmon-Jones, 2000). The heightened likelihood of encountering actual conflict in information evaluation (as opposed to information seeking in which no conflict is experienced) should contribute to the dominance of consumers' defense motivation during this stage no matter whether their initial beliefs are positive or negative.

Integrating this and earlier arguments about the consequences of defense motivation, we predict that confirmation bias is likely to occur when consumers evaluate the helpfulness of reviews. Because of consumers' direct access to the substantive content of actual reviews, they are more likely to encounter cognitive conflict and discomfort when reading disconfirmatory reviews and activate their defense motivation as a result. Fueled by this motivation, consumers may refute or discount disconfirmatory information and evaluate confirmatory reviews more favorably. As such, we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 (confirmation bias in information evaluation): Confirmatory reviews are perceived to be more helpful than disconfirmatory reviews.

To test these hypotheses, we conducted three controlled experiments with different groups of participants. In the first two studies, we tested H1 and H2 when the valence of consumers' initial beliefs was positive. Study 1 was a hypothetical online decision-making task in which participants formed positive initial beliefs about a product before they were presented with a number of the product's reviews to

choose from and subsequently read. Study 2 utilized a more realistic scenario and replicated the first study's findings. In the final study, we manipulated the valence of participants' initial beliefs about the product to rule out alternative explanations and test whether the earlier findings still hold when consumers' initial beliefs are negative.

3 Study 1

In Study 1, we designed an experiment in which participants formed positive initial beliefs about a product before selecting and reading its reviews. Specifically, subjects were presented with the rating profiles of two wireless mouse products, and then they were asked to pick one that they were more likely to purchase. We varied the average ratings of the two product options so that one option would appear superior, and subjects would develop a positive impression of the superior option. After participants (presumably) picked the superior product for further investigation, they were asked to select 3 out of 6 reviews (3 positives and 3 negatives) of this product to read based on the reviews' titles, read the content of selected reviews, and then report their helpfulness evaluation of the reviews.

Following the classic paradigm of assessing selective exposure (e.g., Fischer et al., 2008a; Fischer et al., 2005; Jonas et al., 2006), this design allows us to capture consumers' biases in both pre-purchase stages. Because consumers need to select 3 out of 6 reviews to read, there are 4 possibilities: 3 positive reviews, 2 positive and 1 negative reviews, 1 positive and 2 negative reviews, and 3 negative reviews. Since participants cannot choose an equal number of positive and negative reviews, their choices should reflect their preference for positive information (i.e., the first two possibilities) or negative information (i.e., the last two possibilities) in information seeking. Moreover, we measured participants' selective exposure in the information-evaluation stage by comparing their helpfulness evaluation of the selected confirmatory and disconfirmatory reviews.

3.1 Stimulus Materials

In this experiment, we selected the compact and foldable wireless mouse because it is familiar and useful to the undergraduate participants. A wireless mouse is a computer mouse that needs no wires to send signals from the mouse to a computer. A compact and foldable wireless mouse allows people to easily take it anywhere they go.

We developed stimuli for this experiment in two steps. In the first step, we prepared 6 review titles that differ in valence but not in extremity. We began with 12 review titles (6 positives and 6 negatives) after consulting actual review titles of similar products from

Amazon.com. To identify positive and negative review titles that are equally extreme, we conducted a pretest and recruited 36 subjects from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Each pretest subject was asked to read the 12 review titles, one at a time, and rate the extremity of each title along a 9-point scale (ranging from "not at all negative/positive" to "very negative/positive") adapted from Lee et al. (2009) (see Appendix A for the titles and the measure). Based on the results of paired-samples t-tests, we selected 3 positive review titles ("Attractive," "Terrific," and "Wise choice") and 3 negative ones ("It's worthless," "Depressing purchase," and "Disturbing"); comparisons in all pairs of positive versus negative titles yielded a t-value of at most 1.650 with a p-value of at least .108. Therefore, the 6 review titles used in this experiment are not significantly different in their extremity.

In the second step, we prepared 3 sets of text reviews, with a positive version and a negative version in each set, so that the two versions within each set are equivalent in extremity, and different review sets are equivalent in terms of information quantity, quality, and realism. We started with 6 sets of text reviews by again consulting real reviews of similar products from Amazon.com. Within each set, we first created a positive review and then constructed a corresponding negative review by changing its valence (e.g., using antonyms and adding negations) while holding the substantial content identical. We also kept constant the number of words between the two versions in each review set to reduce the likelihood of possible confounds; the only difference between the two versions is valence (see Appendix B for the reviews). Then we conducted another pretest, recruited 72 subjects from MTurk, and asked them to read and evaluate 6 reviews chosen from different sets, one review at a time. Each subject was randomly assigned to read one version (positive or negative) of the reviews in each set. After reading each review, subjects were asked to report their evaluation of its 1) extremity using the same item as in the pretest of review titles, 2) information quantity using two items adapted from Gao et al. (2012), 3) quality using three items adapted from McKinney et al. (2002), and 4) realism using two items adapted from Mafael et al. (2016). All items were presented along 9-point scales (see Appendix B for all the measures). Based on the results of independent-samples t-tests of extremity and paired-samples t-tests of all other variables (e.g., information quantity), we selected 3 sets of reviews that satisfy our criteria (see Table 1): comparisons in extremity of two review versions within each set yielded a t-value of at most 1.380 with a p-value of at least .172; comparisons in all other relevant variables across different sets of reviews yielded a t-value of at most 1.587 with a p-value of at least .117. Therefore, the 3 sets of chosen reviews used in this experiment are not significantly

different either in their extremity between positive and negative versions of the same review set or in the other

relevant aspects (e.g., information quantity, quality, etc.) across review sets.

Table 1. Content of Reviews in the 3 Sets

Set #	Positive version	Negative version
1	This is a great mouse and it works well. The mouse has the curved left side for the thumb, so it's very comfortable. Moreover, it allows me to change how quickly the cursor moves across my screen.	This is a worthless mouse and it doesn't work well. The mouse doesn't have the curved left side for the thumb, so it's very uncomfortable. Moreover, it doesn't allow me to change how quickly the cursor moves across my screen.
2	The mouse functions well. One feature that I found useful for saving battery life is the mouse turns off automatically after a long time of non-use. It is convenient for someone who walks away from their computer often.	The mouse functions poorly. One feature that I found harmful for saving battery life is the mouse doesn't turn off automatically after a long time of non-use. It isn't convenient for someone who walks away from their computer often.
3	Good value for the price. It includes a battery with the product, so you can use it immediately. It connects to my laptop very quickly. And it is responsive without any lag when I move it.	Poor value for the price. It doesn't include a battery with the product, so you cannot use it immediately. It connects to my laptop very slowly. And it isn't responsive with lags when I move it.

3.2 Procedure

Thirty-six undergraduate students (13 male) from a U.S. university participated in this experiment in exchange for extra credit.² Among them, 94 percent were originally from the U.S., 86 percent were juniors or above, and the average age of the students was 20. In the cover story, participants were asked to imagine that they were planning to purchase a compact and foldable wireless mouse from Amazon.com, and their

search returned two different wireless mice with the same price of \$23.99. Then they were asked to read the rating profiles of the two options. The two options had both accumulated hundreds of reviews, but their average ratings were 2 and 4 stars, respectively, with the latter being the superior option. To mitigate location effects, we counterbalanced whether the superior option appeared on the left or right of the screen. An example of rating profiles is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. An Example of Rating Profile Stimuli Used in Study 1

After observing the rating profiles of the two product options side by side, participants were asked about their initial beliefs toward each option to facilitate the formation of their initial impressions of the products. Afterward, they were asked to imagine they were in a hurry and only had time to read reviews from one of the two product options. Thus, they were asked to choose one between the two options along an 8-point scale (ranging from “definitely choose Mouse A” to “definitely choose Mouse B”). Among 36 participants,

35 preferred the wireless mouse with the 4-star average rating. We retained only these 35 participants in our main analyses to ensure that they had developed positive initial beliefs about the selected wireless mouse before they were exposed to the titles and content of the reviews.

Next, in the information-seeking stage, participants were asked to select reviews they preferred to read. They were shown the titles of 6 most recent reviews of their selected product option.³ The participants were

² Because we measured the selective exposure in both information-seeking and information-evaluation stages through a within-subjects design (i.e., participants were exposed to both positive information and negative information), a sample size of 35-40 (i.e., 36 in Study 1, 39 in Study 2, and 51-52 per condition in Study 3) is sufficient

to capture a repeated-measure effect of at least moderate size ($f = 0.25$) with 80% power (Faul et al., 2007).

³ We presented 6 “most recent” reviews for two reasons. First, the most recent reviews are typically prominently displayed in most review platforms such as eBay and Amazon. Second and more importantly, our emphasis on the “most recent” reviews can resolve a potential inconsistency

told that they did not have enough time to read all the reviews and that they needed to choose the 3 reviews that they were most interested in reading based on the review titles. The 6 review titles differ in valence (3 positives and 3 negatives) but not in extremity based on our pretest results. The order of the 6 review titles was randomized.

Finally, in the information-evaluation stage, participants read the 3 text reviews corresponding to the titles they selected in the previous stage and reported their evaluations of each review. These 3 text reviews were selected from the 3 sets of text reviews we pretested earlier, one version from each set. The valence version (positive or negative) in each review set was determined by the valence of the selected review titles. For example, if participants chose 2 negative and 1 positive review titles, they would see 2

negative and 1 positive text reviews, one from each review set. To strengthen the valence manipulation, we also displayed the review rating (5 stars for the positive review and 1 star for the negative review) and review title to go along with each text review. An example of 3 reviews is illustrated in Figure 2. Participants were then asked to report their perceived helpfulness of each review. Perceived review helpfulness was measured using a 9-point scale with two items adapted from Sen and Lerman (2007) and Chen and Lurie (2013): “Assuming that you were thinking about purchasing Mouse A/B in real life, how likely would you be to use this review in your decision-making? (very unlikely / very likely)” and “How much influence would this review have on your decision? (very little influence / a great deal of influence).” See Appendix C for all the measures.

Below are the **3 reviews** of Mouse B that you have picked. Please read them carefully before answering any questions.

★☆☆☆☆ **It's worthless**

This is a worthless mouse and it doesn't work well. The mouse doesn't have the curved left side for the thumb, so it's very uncomfortable. Moreover, it doesn't allow me to change how quickly the cursor moves across my screen.

★☆☆☆☆ **Depressing purchase**

The mouse functions poorly. One feature that I found harmful for saving battery life is the mouse doesn't turn off automatically after a long time of non-use. It isn't convenient for someone who walks away from their computer often.

★★★★★ **Terrific**

Good value for the price. It includes a battery with the product, so you can use it immediately. It connects to my laptop very quickly. And it is responsive without any lag when I move it.

Figure 2. An Example of Review Stimuli Used in Study 1

3.3 Results

First, we investigated consumers' selective exposure when they seek more information. We measured selective exposure in information seeking by comparing the number of selected positive review titles with the number of selected negative review titles. A repeated-measures ANOVA analysis showed that participants preferred to read negative reviews rather than positive reviews ($M = 1.83$ vs. 1.17 , $F(1,$

$34) = 7.570$, $p = .009$) (see the bar chart in Figure 3). In addition, since the number of negative (or positive) review titles a participant could select ranged from 0 to 3, we did a paired-samples t-test between the number of selected negative review titles with its medium value (1.5) as a robustness check. The results were consistent with the above ($M = 1.83$ vs. 1.5 , $t(34) = 2.751$, $p = .009$).⁴ These results provide evidence for negativity bias in the information-seeking stage as

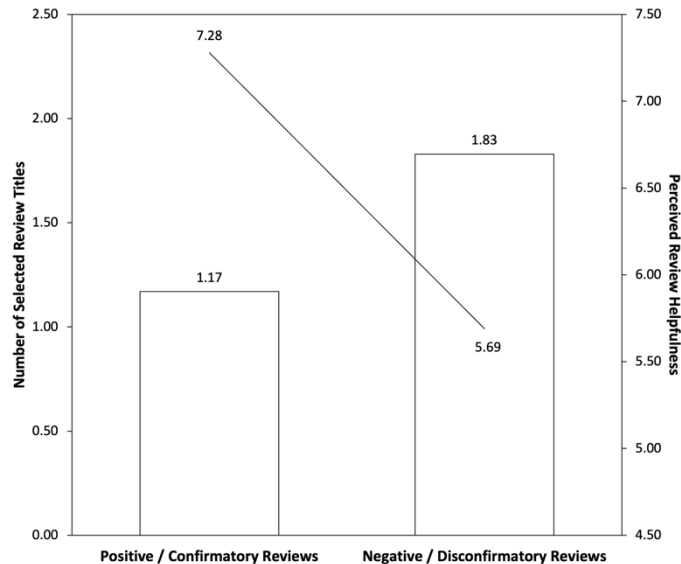
between the average rating of 4 stars and an equal number of positive versus negative reviews shown to the subjects because the most recent reviews are not a representative sample of all the reviews that are the basis for calculating the overall average rating.

⁴ We also did the paired-samples t-test in information seeking stage for the following studies. The results were consistent with ANOVA analyses and thus omitted for succinctness.

hypothesized in H1 when consumers' initial beliefs are positive.

Next, we examined consumers' selective exposure when they evaluate the helpfulness of reviews after reading their content. For this analysis, we retained 29 (out of 35) participants who read both positive and negative reviews (i.e., 2 positive and 1 negative reviews, or 1 positive and 2 negative reviews) because

a within-subject comparison is only plausible in such cases. A repeated-measures ANOVA analysis showed that positive (i.e., confirmatory) reviews were perceived to be more helpful than negative (i.e., disconfirmatory) reviews ($M = 7.28$ vs. 5.69 , $F(1, 28) = 17.004$, $p < .001$) (see the solid line in Figure 3). This result provides evidence for confirmation bias in the information-evaluation stage, as hypothesized in H2 when consumers' initial beliefs are positive.



Notes: the bar indicates the number of selected titles; the solid line indicates perceived review helpfulness

Figure 3. Results of Negativity and Confirmation Biases in Study 1

3.4 Discussion

In this study, we conducted an experiment to test consumers' selective exposure in the two stages of information seeking and evaluation when they have positive initial beliefs about a product. We found evidence suggesting that consumers seek and prefer to read negative reviews, but after reading the review content, they evaluate confirmatory (i.e., positive) reviews more favorably. These results provide initial evidence for H1 and H2.

One notable limitation of this study is its artificiality: participants were asked to select from two product options, with one being clearly superior to the other (4-star vs. 2-star on average). Because it is not common for a product to have a 2-star average rating, participants would almost certainly purchase the option with the 4-star average rating (if no other options are available) and develop very strong positive beliefs toward this superior option. In the next study, we explore whether the biases observed in Study 1 could be replicated in a more realistic scenario where the positive initial beliefs of participants were manipulated more subtly.

4 Study 2

The primary purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the main findings of Study 1 in a more realistic scenario. This study followed a similar procedure as in Study 1, except that we kept the average rating identical between the two product options but varied the number of reviews. Multiple products with similar average ratings but a different number of reviews are more likely to happen in real-life shopping scenarios.

4.1 Procedure

Thirty-nine undergraduate students (11 male) from a U.S. university took part in this study for extra credit. Among them, 92 percent were originally from the U.S., 90 percent were juniors or above, and the average age of the students was 20. The cover story and procedure were similar to those in Study 1, with one major exception. We constructed the rating profiles of the two product options to have the same (4-star) average rating and the same price, but they differed in the number of reviews—one has 15 reviews, and the other has 1730 reviews. After observing the rating profiles of both options side by side, subjects were asked about their initial beliefs and then asked to select 3 out of 6

review titles of the somewhat superior product option (with 1730 reviews). An example of rating profiles is

presented in Figure 4. The rest of the procedure was identical to that of Study 1.

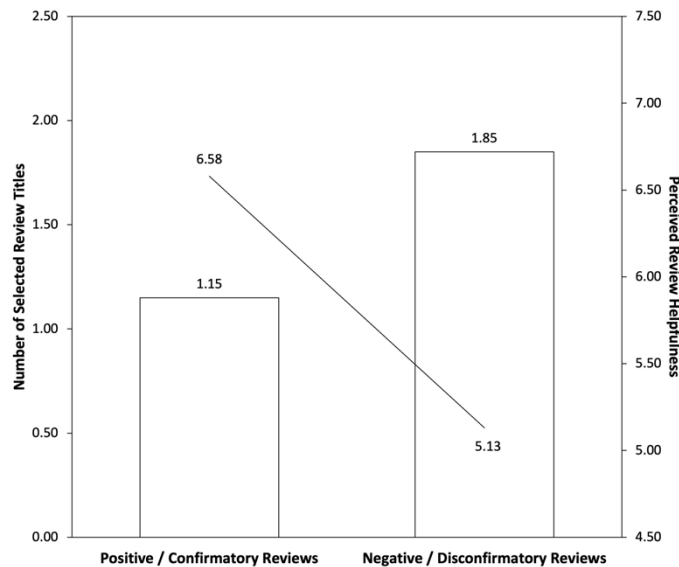


Figure 4. An Example of Rating Profile Stimuli Used in Study 2

4.2 Results

First, we investigated consumers’ selective exposure when they seek more information about the superior product option. We compared the number of selected

positive review titles with the number of selected negative review titles in a repeated-measures ANOVA analysis. Results showed that subjects preferred to read negative reviews rather than positive reviews ($M = 1.85$ vs. 1.15 , $F(1, 38) = 9.308$, $p = .004$), providing evidence for H1 (see the bar charts in Figure 5).



Notes: the bar indicates the number of selected titles; the solid line indicates perceived review helpfulness

Figure 5. Results of Negativity and Confirmation Biases in Study 2

Next, we explored selective exposure during the consumers’ information-evaluation stage. As in Study 1, we used only 32 (out of 39) subjects who selected both positive and negative review titles. A repeated-measures ANOVA analysis revealed that positive (i.e., confirmatory) reviews were perceived to be more helpful than negative (i.e., disconfirmatory) reviews ($M = 6.58$ vs. 5.13 , $F(1, 31) = 7.591$, $p = .010$), providing support for H2 (see the solid line in Figure 5).

4.3 Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated the findings of the first study by utilizing a more realistic scenario and more subtle manipulation of consumers’ positive initial beliefs. In line with H1 and H2, we found consistent evidence that

with positive initial beliefs, consumers prefer to read negative reviews in the information-seeking stage, but they perceive confirmatory reviews to be more helpful in the information-evaluation stage.

In both studies, we fixed consumers’ initial beliefs toward a product at a positive level because consumers are more likely to consult reviews of products that are in their consideration set and, thus, more likely to be purchased. However, such a design precludes us from testing H1 and H2 when consumers have negative initial impressions of a product, a theoretically important condition. For example, we cannot rule out the role of initial beliefs in the observation of negativity bias in the information-seeking stage or the role of valence in the observation of confirmation bias in the information-evaluation stage. Therefore, we

designed the final study to address this limitation and extend previous findings.

5 Study 3

In Study 3, we manipulated consumers' initial beliefs at two levels (positive and negative) and examined their selective exposure during both the information-seeking and information-evaluation stages.

5.1 Procedure

One hundred three undergraduate students (45 male) from a U.S. university participated in this study for extra credit. Among them, 88 percent were originally from the U.S., 63 percent were juniors or above, and the average age of the students was 21. The cover story and procedure were similar to those of Study 1, with one major exception: after observing the rating profiles of two product options (2-star and 4-star on average) side by side and answering questions about their initial belief toward each product, subjects were told that the product on the left appeared first in their search result and caught their attention first, prompting them to check out its reviews first. This step is designed to simulate real-world situations and, more importantly, to justify consumers' choice of either product, even if the product has a negative average rating. Because we randomized the location of 2-star vs. 4-star product options, half of the subjects were assigned to the negative valence condition (i.e., asked to seek out and evaluate reviews of the 2-star product), whereas the other half were assigned to the positive valence condition. The rest of the procedure was identical to that of Study 1.

5.2 Results

Before further analyses, we conducted a manipulation check for initial beliefs. The initial belief was

measured using a 9-point scale with three items adapted from Darke and Ritchie (2007) (see Appendix C for the measure). Results of an ANOVA analysis showed that subjects' initial belief toward the 2-star product was significantly lower than that toward the 4-star product ($M = 2.68$ vs. 7.61 , $F(1, 101) = 616.544$, $p < .001$). Thus, our manipulation of the valence of initial beliefs was successful.

We then examined whether consumers' selective exposure depends on the valence of their initial beliefs toward a product when they seek more information about the product. We conducted a mixed ANOVA analysis, with the valence of selected review titles (positive vs. negative) entered as a within-subjects factor and the valence of initial beliefs as a between-subjects factor. Results revealed that the interaction between the two factors did not reach significance ($F(1, 101) = 0.739$, $p = .392$). Participants preferred to read negative reviews rather than positive reviews ($M = 1.92$ vs. 1.08 , $F(1, 101) = 37.746$, $p < .001$), regardless of the valence of their initial beliefs. This result provides more conclusive evidence for negativity bias in the information-seeking stage, as hypothesized in H1.

As a supplementary analysis, we used the confirmatory (vs. disconfirmatory) nature of the review title instead of its valence as a within-subject factor and found that the interaction of this factor and initial belief valence was significant ($F(1, 101) = 37.746$, $p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons showed that participants in the positive initial beliefs condition preferred to read disconfirmatory reviews ($M = 1.86$ vs. 1.14 , $F(1, 101) = 13.837$, $p < .001$), while those in the negative initial beliefs condition preferred to read confirmatory reviews ($M = 1.98$ vs. 1.02 , $F(1, 101) = 24.764$, $p < .001$) (see Figure 6). These results suggest that distinct motivations are a possible explanation for the presence of negativity bias in information seeking.

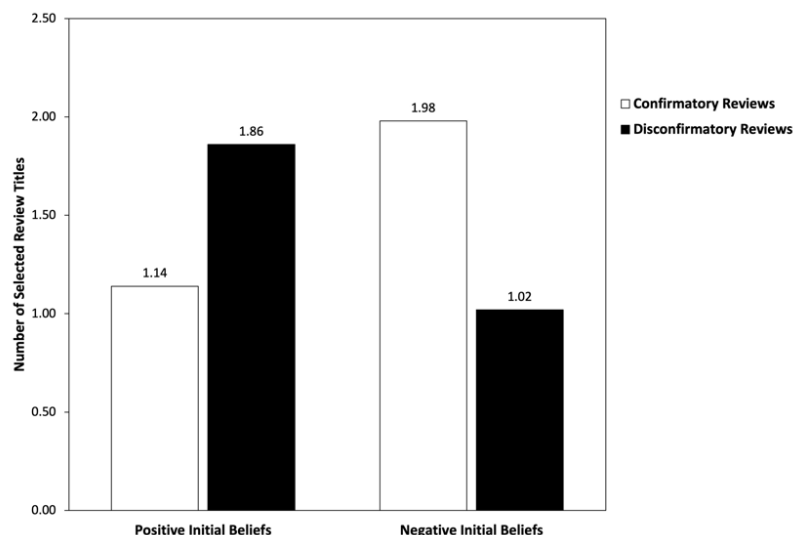


Figure 6. Results of Confirmatory and Disconfirmatory Preferences During Information Seeking in Study 3

Next, we investigated the direction of selective exposure during consumers' information-evaluation stage and whether it depends on the valence of their initial beliefs. As in Study 1, we used only subjects who read both positive and negative reviews ($N = 82$; 43 out of 51 subjects in the positive initial beliefs condition, and 39 out of 52 subjects in the negative initial beliefs condition). Results from a mixed ANOVA revealed that the interaction between consumers' initial belief valence and the confirmatory (vs. disconfirmatory) nature of reviews did not reach significance ($F(1, 80) = 2.299, p = .133$). Moreover, confirmatory reviews were rated significantly more helpful than disconfirmatory reviews ($M = 6.59$ vs. $5.41, F(1, 80) = 12.955, p = .001$), providing more conclusive evidence for confirmation bias in the information-evaluation stage as hypothesized in H2.

5.3 Discussion

In Study 3, we provided more conclusive evidence for the two hypotheses by varying the valence of consumers' initial beliefs. In line with H1 and a motivational account, this study revealed a consistent tendency of consumers to look for negative reviews (negativity bias) in the information-seeking stage regardless of the valence of their initial beliefs. In the information-evaluation stage, however, consumers perceive confirmatory reviews to be more helpful than disconfirmatory reviews regardless of the valence of their initial beliefs, supporting H2.

6 General Discussion

Drawing on the motivated reasoning literature, we hypothesize that consumers would demonstrate a negativity bias in the information-seeking stage of their decision-making process, but they would evaluate confirmatory reviews more favorably. Three experimental studies provided support for these hypotheses.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Our paper makes several unique contributions to the online review literature. First, whereas prior research has focused mostly on factors that influence consumers' evaluation of review helpfulness *after* they read the review content, this paper is likely the first to explore how consumers seek reviews *before* they read any of them. Information seeking is a critical initial step before consumers read and evaluate any particular piece of information (Fischer et al., 2005; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). The helpfulness of a review will be meaningless if consumers are not paying attention to it in the first place. Despite the importance of information seeking, little research has examined this earlier stage, possibly due to a lack of secondary data about consumers' review-seeking tendencies. Our

research not only advanced a hypothesis regarding consumers' selective exposure to information in this stage but also utilized experimental methods and carefully pretested stimuli to capture consumers' information-seeking tendencies. Thus, our examination of consumers' selective exposure *before* they read any particular reviews extends our understanding of their decision-making process beyond merely review evaluation and opens up exciting opportunities for future research to examine consumers' information-seeking behavior (Yin et al., forthcoming).

Second, our results provide a possible explanation for the well-established negativity bias in product sales and help reconcile its contradiction with a recently demonstrated confirmation bias in review helpfulness evaluation. Negative reviews have been found to have a greater influence on product sales than positive reviews (Basuroy et al., 2003; Cao et al., 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). A commonly assumed explanation for this negativity bias is that negative reviews are perceived by consumers as more helpful than positive reviews. However, Yin et al. (2016) provided empirical evidence for a confirmation bias in review evaluation; because the average rating of most products is positive, consumers tend to evaluate positive reviews (that confirm their positive initial beliefs) more favorably in most cases. Our proposed theoretical framework and findings provide a possible answer to this puzzle. Essentially, consumers engage in both information seeking and information evaluation before they make a purchase decision; thus, the negativity bias universally observed at the product level could be caused by a greater value assigned to negative reviews or a greater exposure of negative reviews than positive reviews. While the former possibility has been disconfirmed by recent empirical evidence (e.g., Yin et al., 2016), our examination revealed a consistent tendency of consumers to search for negative reviews, no matter whether they have formed a positive or negative initial impression of the product. Therefore, negativity bias at the product level might arise because negative reviews get more exposure and are consulted by more consumers when they seek out information, not because negative reviews are perceived as more diagnostic by consumers. Although the relative impact of exposure versus helpfulness/diagnosticity on consumers' purchase decisions is beyond the scope of the current paper, it is worthy of future explorations. In addition, we extend the application of the general negativity bias (defined as a greater impact or stronger power of negative vs. positive information or events; see Baumeister et al., 2001) into the information-seeking stage of consumers' decision-making, expanding our understanding of the negativity bias.

Third, this paper provides additional evidence suggesting the important role of consumers' initial beliefs and different motivations in influencing their decision-making process. Most relevant to our research, Yin et al. (2016) empirically demonstrated that consumers' initial beliefs influence their judgment of review helpfulness and that they evaluate confirmatory reviews more favorably than disconfirmatory reviews (i.e., confirmation bias). Complementing and extending this work, we not only provided experimental evidence and replicated their findings for confirmation bias in information evaluation, but we also revealed a different bias—negativity bias—that occurs in information seeking within the *same* study. Our findings imply that consumers' initial beliefs can also influence their review-seeking tendencies and that confirmation bias found in the review-evaluation stage cannot be generalized to the review-seeking stage. Instead, consumers prefer to seek negative reviews regardless of the valence of their initial beliefs. We offered one possible explanation for this negativity bias based on consumers' distinct motivations that give rise to preferences for confirmatory or disconfirmatory information under different situations. Our results suggest that a negativity bias can occur as consumers look for more information, and such a bias is guided by the valence of consumers' initial beliefs and the possible corresponding motivation activated at the time. These findings reveal the potential importance and value of tapping into consumers' fundamental motivations to understand their behavior of navigating the vast amount of information available from online reviews.

6.2 Practical Implications

Our findings also offer practical implications for product manufacturers and review platforms. First, when product manufacturers establish their priorities and strategies for dealing with a rapidly increasing number of online reviews (e.g., responding to reviewer comments), they should take into account the number of consumers who are likely to be exposed to a review (and thus influenced by the review) in addition to the review's helpfulness. If a product's average rating is positive, then negative reviews of the product would be discounted as unhelpful because negative information contradicts consumers' initial beliefs formed on the basis of the average rating. As a result, such negative reviews are less likely than positive reviews to get into the list of "most helpful" reviews or be prominently displayed on the product page. A rational product manufacturer may disregard such reviews and focus their attention and resources on the most helpful ones. However, our findings suggest that this strategy might be misguided, because negative reviews, in this case, contradict consumers' positive initial beliefs and would get more exposure (i.e., being

sought after and read by more consumers; see H1). In addition, dealing with negative reviews proactively is an unequivocally superior strategy only when a product's average rating is negative because negative reviews are both sought after (see H1) and rated more helpful (confirming their negative initial beliefs; see H2) in this situation. Therefore, when product manufacturers prioritize their efforts in dealing with distinct types of reviews, they should take a more balanced view, considering both the perceived value of a review and its likely exposure to prospective consumers.

Second, review platforms such as Amazon may need to reconsider the effectiveness of highlighting the most helpful reviews and balance consumers' diverse interests at different stages of their decision-making process. Highlighting the reviews rated by others as helpful might bring more confirmatory reviews to the forefront, as one reason behind such helpful reviews is that they align with consumers' initial beliefs formed based on the product's average rating and other rating statistics. However, our findings suggest that the review helpfulness metric might not be the only factor that review platforms should incorporate to highlight and sort product reviews. Instead, negative reviews are what consumers actively look for regardless of the valence of their initial beliefs. Although listing the most helpful reviews by default is an intuitive and efficient strategy for review platforms to implement, this strategy neglects the potential of negative reviews to be sought after by more consumers and exerts a greater impact on product sales. Note that Amazon does provide one "top positive review" and one "top critical review" after consumers click on "see all verified purchase reviews" at the end of the most helpful reviews on the product page. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that displaying negative reviews more prominently, along with the most helpful reviews, may help consumers the most as they navigate the complex process of making a purchase decision.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Our paper has a few limitations for future examination. First, we fixed the average rating of the treatment product to be 2 or 4 stars in all our studies because our interest is the (positive or negative) valence of consumers' initial beliefs. However, this design precludes us from examining situations where consumers have neutral or mixed initial beliefs about a product, such as when the product's average rating is 3 stars or if reviewers have wildly divergent opinions (characterized by high dispersion of ratings). It would be interesting to investigate whether consumers are still selective in seeking and judging positive versus negative information when they have neutral or mixed initial impressions of a product. In addition, consumers' confidence in their initial beliefs may

influence the strength of their accuracy versus defense motivation when searching for and evaluating reviews. Future research is needed to answer these intriguing questions.

Second, although our theoretical framework built on the differential motivations in the two-stage decision-making process of consumers provides a plausible explanation for the negativity bias at the product level, the existence of other possibilities warrants further investigation. For example, one possibility is that helpful reviews may not always be persuasive and that consumers' attitudes toward a product might be "swayed" by particular characteristics of the reviews even when those reviews are deemed unhelpful (see Liu & Karahanna, 2017). Given the lack of research exploring the association of review helpfulness with consumer attitude and decision-making, this is a fertile area worth pursuing.

Finally, our findings provided evidence for the presence of differential biases during consumers' decision-making process in the context of product reviews. It would be interesting to investigate the potential mechanisms underlying selective exposure in both stages. In addition to the linear sequence of the two stages examined in this paper, future research can also explore the dynamic, complex process of consumers' seeking and evaluating information during their decision-making. Although our theoretical

framework could apply to the general decision-making process of consumers, future work is also necessary to test the external validity of our findings in other contexts, such as other types of online reviews (e.g., retailer reviews) and other product categories.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we tackle the puzzle of a prevalent negativity bias in product sales and an overall positivity bias in review helpfulness evaluation revealed in the prior literature. We propose that consumers' tendency to seek out positive or negative information may hold the key to addressing this puzzle and that we need to take into account both review-seeking and review-evaluation stages of consumers' decision-making process. Drawing on the motivated reasoning literature, we argue that consumers demonstrate a negativity bias in the information-seeking stage and that they generally evaluate confirmatory reviews to be more helpful in the information-evaluation stage. Through three experiments, we find converging evidence for these hypotheses. These findings provide a possible explanation for the negativity bias in product sales and also highlight the critical role of consumers' initial beliefs and corresponding motivations in the two stages of their decision-making process.

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Appendix A: Variable Measured and Titles Used in the Pretest of Review Titles

// Extremity: (Lee et al., 2009)

In your opinion, how negative are these titles?

- not at all very negative / very negative

In your opinion, how positive are these titles?

- not at all positive / very positive

// 12 review titles:

Positive titles: great product, fabulous, joyful experience, attractive product, terrific, and wise choice.

Negative titles: it's worthless, disturbing, depressing purchase, useless one, undesirable, and terrible product.

Appendix B: Variables Measured and Reviews Used in the Pretest of Reviews

// *Extremity*: (Lee et al., 2009)

In your opinion, how negative is this review above?

- not at all very negative / very negative

In your opinion, how positive is this review above?

- not at all positive / very positive

// *Information quantity*: (Gao et al., 2012)

In your opinion, how much information was presented in this review above?

- very little information / a great deal of information

- very few details / very many details

// *Information quality*: (McKinney et al., 2002)

Using the scales below, how would you describe this review above?

- very poor quality / very good quality

- very poor content / very good content

- very incomplete / very complete

// *Information realism*: (Mafael et al., 2016)

- not at all realistic / very realistic

- not at all real / very real

// *Content of reviews in the 6 sets.*

Set #	Positive version	Negative version
1	This is a great mouse and it works well. The mouse has the curved left side for the thumb, so it's very comfortable. Moreover, it allows me to change how quickly the cursor moves across my screen.	This is a worthless mouse and it doesn't work well. The mouse doesn't have the curved left side for the thumb, so it's very uncomfortable. Moreover, it doesn't allow me to change how quickly the cursor moves across my screen.
2	Very good wireless mouse. I like the side buttons, which are programmed to go back or forward on web browsers by default. The mouse has a setup software, so there is an easy way to reprogram the buttons.	Very bad wireless mouse. I don't like the side buttons, which are programmed to go back or forward on web browsers by default. The mouse has no setup software, so there is no easy way to reprogram the buttons.
3	It's easy to use. I purchased this item a few months ago and I am pleased with its performance. The tracking on this mouse is good. It's a desirable mouse for the price. I would definitely recommend it.	It's difficult to use. I purchased this item a few months ago and I am not pleased with its performance. The tracking on this mouse is poor. It's an undesirable mouse for the price. I would definitely not recommend it.
4	High quality. It is comfortable to use, especially if it's being used for over an hour in one sitting. Also, it is durable as the mouse was knocked off my desk and shown no clear sign of damage.	Poor quality. It isn't comfortable to use, especially if it's being used for over an hour in one sitting. Also, it isn't durable as the mouse was knocked off my desk and shown a clear sign of damage.
5	The mouse functions well. One feature that I found useful for saving battery life is the mouse turns off automatically after a long time of non-use. It is convenient for someone who walks away from their computer often.	The mouse functions poorly. One feature that I found harmful for saving battery life is the mouse doesn't turn off automatically after a long time of non-use. It isn't convenient for someone who walks away from their computer often.

6	Good value for the price. It includes a battery with the product, so you can use it immediately. It connects to my laptop very quickly. And it is responsive without any lag when I move it.	Poor value for the price. It doesn't include a battery with the product, so you cannot use it immediately. It connects to my laptop very slowly. And it isn't responsive with lags when I move it.
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Appendix C: Variables Measured in Studies 1, 2, and 3

// *Initial beliefs*: (Darke & Ritchie, 2007) (used in Studies 1-3)

What is your overall opinion of Mouse A/B based on its rating profile on the top left/right of this page?

- very bad / very good
- very negative / very positive
- very unfavorable / very favorable

// *Product choice*: (used in Study 1)

Assume you are in a hurry and only have time to read reviews from one of the two mice. Based on their rating profiles above, which mouse would you choose to find out more information about it?

- definitely choose Mouse A / definitely choose Mouse B

// *Review helpfulness*: (Chen & Lurie, 2013; Sen & Lerman, 2007) (used in Studies 1-3)

Assuming that you were thinking about purchasing Mouse A/B in real life, how likely would you be to use this review in your decision-making?

- very unlikely / very likely

How much influence would this review have on your decision?

- very little influence / a great deal of influence

About the Authors

Zhanfei Lei is an assistant professor of Operations and Information Management at the Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts Amherst. She received her Ph.D. in Information Technology Management from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2019. Her research interests focus on user-generated content, biases and heuristics, and electronic commerce. She has published in *Information Systems Research* and *Production and Operations Management*.

Dezhi Yin is an associate professor of Information Systems and Muma Fellow at the Muma College of Business, University of South Florida. He received his Ph.D. in Information Technology Management from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2012. His research interests include expressed and experienced emotions in online environments, user-generated content and crowds (e.g., online reviews, Q&A sites, crowdfunding), and AI technologies (e.g., virtual AI agents such as chatbots). His research has appeared in *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Production and Operations Management*.

Han Zhang is a professor of Information Technology Management at the Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology. He received his Ph.D. in Information Systems from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000. His research focuses on online trust and reputation, user-generated content, online healthcare, and human-AI interaction. He has published in *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Production and Operations Management*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, and other academic journals.

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