

Online consumers want emotional reviews—just not too emotional

October 25 2017, by Liz Mccune

Online reviews play an increasingly important role in consumer behavior as more Americans opt to purchase items online. Previously, studies examining the influence of reviews focused on the length of the reviews and whether they were positive or negative. New research from the University of Missouri is among the first to examine how expressions of emotion impact the helpfulness of a review. Among the findings, researchers observed that although some emotion was important to be persuasive, reviews perceived as being overly emotional often were ignored.

"Ranting about a bad experience may be cathartic for the author, but it is counterproductive for reviewers seeking to influence potential buyers," said Dezhi Yin, assistant professor of management in the MU Trulaske College of Business. "Overly emotional reviews appear to be discounted by readers due to their embedded emotion, even when they are providing objectively useful information."

The findings have implications for both consumers who want to craft impactful reviews and for online sellers who depend on reviews to spur sales. For reviewers, the research shows that feedback with a more balanced tone tends to be more influential—as long as some emotion is expressed.

"Our theory is that readers use emotion to infer how much effort and thought went into a review," Yin said. "When someone writes a flaming, angry review or a gushing, fawning review they are perceived as

responding emotionally and not logically. At the same time, reviewers who are overly flat in expressing themselves may be perceived as unhelpful."

Yin recommends that retailers monitor online reviews, as they can provide early indications of product and service issues. However, he also said it's wise to not fret over a handful of searing reviews, as their impact is likely limited. In addition, he noted that retail sites should consider review guidelines that encourage a moderate level of emotion to illicit narratives that are most valued.

The study is based on an examination of 400,000 reviews at Apple's App store. The researchers measured the emotional intensity of each review with linguistic analysis tools, then examined the relationship between [emotional intensity](#) and "helpful" votes received. Additionally, the researchers conducted a follow-up survey and two laboratory experiments in which respondents evaluated fictional mobile app reviews that contained the same objective content but different levels of emotion.

"Results from all four studies provided evidence for 'diminishing returns to emotion,' " Yin said. "Readers were much more likely to view a review as helpful when it contained a moderate amount of emotional words and exclamations, but not when it was full of such emotional markers."

The study builds on prior work done by Yin. His 2014 study titled "Anxious or Angry? Effects of Discrete Emotions on the Perceived Helpfulness of Online Reviews" was published in *MIS Quarterly*.

"Keep Your Cool or Let It Out: Nonlinear Effects of Expressed Arousal on Perceptions of Consumer Reviews" recently was published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

More information: Dezhi Yin et al. Keep Your Cool or Let It Out: Nonlinear Effects of Expressed Arousal on Perceptions of Consumer Reviews, *Journal of Marketing Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1509/jmr.13.0379](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.13.0379)

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