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Research in Progress

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Abstract
It is widely accepted that online reviews represent a valuable resource for sellers, buyers, and e-commerce platforms in B2C environments. Studies from this field highlight the beneficial impact of self-disclosure of reviewer characteristics for the benefit of firms and review readers. Despite the rich body of literature on online reviews, little is known about the role of online reviews in B2B markets. In particular, it is unclear whether and to what extent self-disclosure of reviewer characteristics is systematically related to a reviewer’s rating. Using a comprehensive dataset from a large B2B online review platform, we test a hypothesis derived from privacy risk calculus theory and relationship management. Our preliminary results suggest that higher ratings are associated with an increased likelihood of reviewers to disclose personal and employer-related information, whereas low ratings are more often posted anonymously – albeit officially verified by the platform. As low ratings are usually more informative, our results highlight a trade-off between reviewer candor and self-disclosure. While future customers benefit from truthful/informative reviews and from reviewer self-disclosure, these factors seem to be traded off for one another on B2B online review platforms. These results carry substantial managerial implications for B2B review platforms, sellers, and customers.

Keywords: Online Reviews, B2B Markets, Self-Disclosure, Privacy Risk Calculus.

1 Introduction

There are only two ways of telling the complete truth - anonymously and posthumously.
- Thomas Sowell

Social media in the form of online reviews represent crucial information in business-to-consumer (B2C) environments as they help erode the information asymmetry between buyer and seller prior to purchase. The literature has, by and large, reached a broad consensus that several metrics of online reviews, such as the valence or the volume of online ratings (Babic Rosario et al., 2016), are beneficial to sales, irrespective of whether the sale is online (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) or offline (e.g., Anderson and Magruder, 2012). Consequently, scholars have been keen to investigate the factors that drive the generation of online reviews by reviewers. This literature finds that a main driver of reviewing behavior in B2C environments is a reviewer’s desire to express themselves and their disposition towards a product (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Shen et al., 2015), and that reviewing behavior is substantially influenced by the attention that reviewers receive from others (Shen et al., 2015, Goes et al., 2014). In turn, the disclosure of personal information, such as the geographic location of the reviewer, has been found to play an important role in the interpretation of reviews by prospective customers (e.g., Forman et al., 2008, Chen and Lurie, 2013).

1 This work has been partially supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) within the Collaborative Research Center 901 “On-The-Fly Computing” under the project number 160364472-SFB901.
A few studies have started to recognize the beneficial effects of online reviews for business-to-business (B2B) environments (e.g., Pavlou, 2002). However, as of now, it is unclear whether and to what extent the self-expression of reviewers is a driver or inhibitor of reviewing behavior in B2B environments. In B2C environments, for example, scholars have found that the expression of a reviewer’s emotion, their product expertise, or their power over the seller can motivate reviewers to give a review (e.g., Florack et al., 2013, Hennig-Thurauf et al., 2004, Shen et al., 2015). In contrast to B2C contexts, reviewers in a B2B environment arguably have to be a lot more careful as to what to disclose when posting content on social media – and in particular online reviews. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employees disclosing confidential firm information about a client or the nature of a transaction can lose their job as a result (Doyle, 2018). This turns the disclosure of negative experiences with a business partner into a rather delicate affair. From a scholarly perspective, the literature on relationship marketing informs us that both parties in B2B relationships strive to maintain a positive relationship and that deviation from this norm can be costly (Palmatier et al., 2006a, Palmatier et al., 2006b). Thus, giving an online review to a business seller that is below the average can create costs for the reviewing client and harm their relationship with that seller. In fact, B2B reviewing platforms actually acknowledge this and therefore enable reviewers to remain anonymous (while verifying their credentials) in order to encourage candid among reviewers (TrustRadius, 2018). This notwithstanding, there is no empirical scientific evidence so far to assess the implications of this for reviews and reviewing behavior.

This study therefore aims to empirically analyze whether reviewers in online B2B environments choose to stay anonymous or to disclose personal information when they give low reviews. Thus, we pose the following research question:

**What is the relationship between the magnitude of online ratings and a reviewer’s decision to disclose personal and employer-related information on B2B reviewing platforms?**

Based on relationship marketing (Palmatier et al., 2006a, Palmatier et al., 2006b) and privacy cost theory (Culnan and Armstrong, 1999), we derive a hypothesis stating that reviewers choose to self-disclose information when they give high ratings and, vice versa, to stay anonymous when giving low ratings. To empirically test this hypothesis, we collected a large dataset of online reviews from a popular third-party B2B online review platform that allows reviewers to choose whether or not to reveal personal information and their business affiliation. On this platform, business customers can review software such as Skype for Business. Our preliminary results suggest that a 1-unit increase in a reviewer’s rating is associated with a 13%-points increase in the likelihood of self-disclosure. Second, we find that this association persists when we restrict our sample to reviewers employed at information technology-focused companies that might be more software-savvy. Third, we find that when software vendors elicit reviews from their customers by sending out gift cards, the association between ratings and the decision to self-disclose is less dependent on the rating. On the other hand, when the rating platform elicits reviews, our findings are similar to our baseline results.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to empirically scrutinize the association between reviewing behavior and the disclosure of reviewer-related information in a B2B environment. Our preliminary results provide substantial implications for researchers and practitioners. First, in contrast to B2C environments, the disclosure of reviewer-related information seems to be an inhibitor of reviewing behavior, with reviewers tending to remain anonymous when publishing low ratings. This highlights an important trade-off in the decision to provide B2B reviews. Whereas reviewer-related information enhances the informational value of reviews (e.g., Forman et al., 2008, Chen and Lurie, 2013), withholding personal information allows reviewers to speak up more openly when making negative evaluations. Second, in order to encourage candor among reviewers, third-party B2B reviewing platforms should support anonymous online reviewing. Review platforms could not just enable the option of anonymous reviewing, but also encourage it by emphasizing that they would rather receive anonymous reviews than none. Third, sellers of business software might focus on anonymous reviews to improve their software and service performance. Screening all the reviews a seller collects over time for valuable information can be quite costly (Yin et al., 2014). Hence, focusing on anonymous reviews could alleviate these costs by serving as a starting point when looking for valuable information on how to improve the software.
2 Related Literature

Our study is related to two streams of literature. Firstly, literature investigating self-disclosure in online reviews in B2C environments, secondly, studies of self-disclosure in e-commerce environments in general.

One fundamental question with regards to the literature on online reviews is what factors drive the online reviewing behavior of customers. These studies report that amongst others, self-expression of the reviewers, i.e., self-disclosure of reviewer-related aspects, is an important driver of online reviewing behavior (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Shen et al., 2015). The primary tenet of these studies is that besides publicly voicing objective quality aspects of the product or service consumed, reviewing is to a large extent driven by disclosing reviewer-related aspects. One study shows how reviewers are inclined to post reviews to protect others from negative product experiences, whether to exert power over the seller or to display their consumption expertise (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This study also finds that the expression of positive emotions or the venting of negative emotions about their experience motivates customers to post reviews in order to regulate their emotional balance (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Another study finds that the level of attention that reviewers can get plays a crucial role in reviewing behavior (Shen et al., 2015). This study finds that reviewers are more inclined to post reviews for products where their review is likely to get a higher public visibility, e.g., because the products in question only has garnered few other reviews. The reviewers that long for public visibility also tend to disagree more with the online ratings given by prior reviewers. Another sub-stream of literature has found that, in turn, self-disclosure of reviewer aspects can be beneficial to sellers and at the same time helpful to readers of reviews. For instance, when reviewers disclose their geographical location in Amazon product reviews, people from the same geographical location find this helpful, which increases the sales of the focal product (Forman et al., 2008). Other studies document that reviewers disclosing their emotional state in online reviews has a systematic bearing on whether review readers will find their reviews helpful or not (e.g., Yin et al., 2014, Yin et al., 2016). Finally, disclosing information about the time of consumption relative to review posting, i.e., posting a review of a restaurant visited on the same day, helps review readers evaluate the information contained in a review (Chen and Lurie, 2013).

Besides self-disclosure in online reviews, there is a broad literature on self-disclosure in e-commerce environments in general. Much of this literature draws on privacy calculus theory (Culnan and Armstrong, 1999) and states that self-disclosure, defined as “any message about the self that a person communicates to another” (Wheelees and Grotz, 1976, p. 338), happens based on an evaluation between the returns for disclosure on the one hand and the risk of privacy being compromised on the other. In e-commerce environments, a user’s self-disclosure is negatively correlated with her perceptions of privacy risks, hence e-commerce websites should, in their website design, accommodate trust building features (McKnight et al. 2002). Scholars have shown that when privacy risk perceptions are outweighed by Internet trust and personal interest, users are inclined to self-disclose personal information in e-commerce transactions (e.g., Dinev and Hart, 2006, Pavlou, 2003). Self-disclosure has also resonated with scholars studying online social networks. In this specific domain, one study has found that perceptions of privacy risks tend to act as an inhibitor of self-disclosure and that users mainly share information due to the positive returns gained from maintaining social relationships (Krasnova et al., 2010).

Our study adds to these two streams of literature in two ways. First, studies on self-disclosure in online reviews have largely neglected B2B environments altogether. Hence, following the call for research in this direction (e.g., Gutt et al., 2019), we provide a novel angle on the drivers of information provision in this environment. Second, we add to the literature on self-disclosure and privacy risk calculus theory by investigating the behavior of individuals embedded in a dyadic B2B relationship.

3 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

To explain when reviewers in a B2B online review environment disclose personal information, we build on the extended privacy calculus model for e-commerce transactions (Dinev and Hart, 2006). The model explains how different factors influence the willingness to provide information for transactions on the
internet (i.e., self-disclosure). Many studies have employed the privacy calculus as a theoretical framework to study self-disclosure on the internet in various contexts such as general e-commerce environments (Dinev and Hart, 2006) and online social networks (Krasnova et al., 2010). This literature posits that self-disclosure is driven by privacy concerns, trusting beliefs, and personal interest. Privacy concerns stem from the perceived risk associated with loss of privacy and the possibility of opportunistic behavior. For instance, reviewers revealing their geographical location and their name could fear that other community members could use this information to hurt them. Consequently, growing privacy concerns affect self-disclosure negatively. In direct contrast to privacy concerns, trusting beliefs have a positive impact on self-disclosure and describe the perceived confidence in the community and the website. For example, reviewers need to believe that the platform handles their data reliably and confidentially. Finally, self-disclosure is positively affected by an individual’s personal interest in the benefits associated with self-disclosure. As presented in Section 2, self-disclosure in an online reviewing environment increases the perceived helpfulness of one’s reviews, which in turn results in greater recognition by the platform and by other community members (e.g., Forman et al., 2008, Shen et al., 2015). For instance, writing helpful reviews forms a central part in climbing ranks in Amazon’s Top Reviewer Ranking system. The theory posits that individuals consciously evaluate privacy concerns, trusting beliefs, and personal interests when deciding whether or not to self-disclose.

While self-disclosure seems to be prevalent in both a B2C or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) reviewing context (e.g., Forman et al., 2008), reviewing in a B2B context might be different due to the nature of B2B relationships and aspects such as purchase objectives or decision complexity (e.g., McKnight et al., 2017). Trust in the B2B context can also be perceived differently (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). A central difference between reviewing in a B2C context as opposed to in a B2B context is the additional information that is provided in the latter context. B2B review platforms present information on the reviewer’s industry, company size, job position and, if allowed to, the actual company name. As the identity of the company producing the reviewed product is public knowledge, every review could affect a business relationship and even reveal confidential business information.

We argue that the different nature of B2B reviewing could raise privacy concerns if the reviewer plans to write a negative review. Privacy calculus theory states that individuals weigh up the returns of disclosing information and the costs associated with opportunistic behavior of others based on that information. On the other hand, when reviewers make negative comments on product and service experience, balance theory (e.g., Heider, 1946, Newcomb, 1953) suggests that reviewers feel a strong need to voice their negative experience in order to return to a balanced state of mind (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Hence, voicing negative experience can represent a positive return for the individual. On the cost side, as reviewers also represent company employees, they could fear that negative feedback hurts the business relationship. Relationship marketing in B2B contexts (Palmatier et al., 2006a) postulates that usually both parties invest efforts into maintaining a business relationship and that unilateral negative deviations can be costly. In line with this, the reviewers’ superiors might not want them to publish negative feedback either. We acknowledge that reviewers might also have privacy concerns when giving positive feedback, because they might unintentionally reveal sensitive business information. Yet, this paper aims to investigate intentionally given negative feedback that might potentially harm the business relationship between the seller and the reviewer, which leads reviewers to decide to remain anonymous.

Thus, we conclude that reviewers should rather disclose information if their reviews are positive and stay anonymous if their reviews are negative. Therefore, we formulate our hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis:** The rating magnitude of a review has a positive effect on a reviewer’s decision to self-disclose in a B2B reviewing environment.
4 Empirical Analysis

4.1 Data

We collected a comprehensive dataset from a large publicly available B2B online review platform using a customized web crawler we developed for this purpose. On this platform, users of B2B software such as Skype for Business can publish reviews consisting of a rating of the product on a scale from 1 to 10, and a textual component. The platform gives users two choices with regards to disclosing their personal information: they can either choose to disclose their full name (in combination with a photo, their job position, their company name, and information about the number of employees of their company) or they can choose not to disclose their name, photo, and company name – in which case only the company’s industry category and the number of employees are displayed. Additionally, the review platform itself as well as the software vendor (e.g., Skype) can engage in online review elicitation, for example by offering Amazon gift cards in return for obtaining reviews from employees of the firm who bought a particular software. The dataset consists of 34,721 reviews posted between October 2012 and August 2018. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the variables of our dataset on a review level. All of our variables have been computed on the basis of meta-data curated by the B2B online review platform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF_DISCLOSE</td>
<td>34,724</td>
<td>0.67 (67%)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATING</td>
<td>34,721</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW_LENGTH</td>
<td>34,724</td>
<td>2.165.89</td>
<td>1.166.56</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>13,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT_EMPLOYER</td>
<td>34,724</td>
<td>0.26 (26%)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENDOR_ELICITED_REVIEW</td>
<td>34,724</td>
<td>0.05 (5%)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATFORM_ELICITED_REVIEW</td>
<td>34,724</td>
<td>0.65 (65%)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LN_NUMBER_OF_EMPLOYEES</td>
<td>33,170</td>
<td>1,605.47</td>
<td>3,074.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Our main variable of interest is SELF_DISCLOSE. When reviewers choose to disclose their full name (in combination with a photo, their job position, company name, and information on the number of employees of the company), this variable is set to 1. When reviewers withhold their name, photo, company name, and position, the variable is set to 0. Moreover, we count the number of characters in a review text to calculate a review’s REVIEW_LENGTH and we can observe each RATING, which is given on a scale from 1 to 10. We also obtained information on the industry categories of the reviewer’s employer provided by the platform. Based on this information, we can compute a dummy variable indicating whether the company of a reviewer is primarily active in the field information technology (IT_EMPLOYER), in which case IT_EMPLOYER is set to 1, otherwise it is 0. We identify IT employers as companies categorized as “Computer Software”, “Information Technology”, “Internet”, or “Telecommunications”. As noted above, both the platform and the software vendors can elicit reviews by sending out Amazon gift cards. Consequently, we create dummy variables that take the value of 1 if they have been elicited by the platform (PLATFORM_ELICITED_REVIEW) or by the software vendor (VENDOR_ELICITED_REVIEW). Finally, we also compute a variable for the number of employees a

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2 Three of the reviews in our data set did not have a rating, thus we only have 34,721 ratings in our data set instead of 34,724. Also, 1,554 of these reviews did not contain information on the number of employees of the reviewer’s company. Thus, we only have 33,170 observations for this variable.

3 There are a total of 317 different industry classifications available on the platform that are comprised in the meta-data of a reviewer. Hence, we acknowledge that our operationalization of IT employers does not provide a comprehensive identification of all IT employers, but rather represents a lower bound identification.
reviewer’s employing company has and log-transform this variable \((LN_{\text{NUMBER\_OF\_EMPLOYEES}})\). Figure 1 depicts the distribution of all the ratings given by anonymous reviewers (black) in comparison with all the ratings given by reviewers who self-disclose their and their employing firm’s identity (grey). From this figure, one can already glean that the lower the ratings are, the higher the likelihood that reviewers stay anonymous.

![Figure 1. Distribution of Anonymous vs. Disclosed Ratings](image)

### 4.2 Empirical Model and Preliminary Results

To test our hypothesis, we estimate the empirical model in Equation (1) expressed in latent variable form.

\[
Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RATING_{ij} + \beta_2 y_{ij} + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{ij}
\]  

(1)

We estimate a logistic regression with software-level fixed effects where \(Y_{ijt}\) represents the dichotomous outcome variable \(SELF\_DISCLOSE\) for the review written by reviewer \(i\) for software \(j\). Our focal explanatory variable is \(RATING\), thus, the coefficient \(\beta_1\) tests our hypothesis. \(y_{ij}\) is a vector that contains the control variables as presented in Table 1. \(\epsilon_{ij}\) denotes the random unobserved error term. Furthermore, when a reviewer gives a rating on our focal platform, this rating will almost certainly also depend on the software that is being rated. If reviewers rate a software with generally high quality and many likeable features, they will probably give higher ratings than for a low-performing software with limited capabilities. To control for these unobservable time-constant software characteristics that might influence the relationship between \(RATING\) and \(SELF\_DISCLOSE\), we introduce software-level fixed effects, denoted by \(\alpha_i\).

Table 2 presents our preliminary results. Column (1) presents estimation results for our full model as specified in equation (1). Column (2) presents results for a subsample of IT firms, Column (3) the results for a subsample of reviews elicited by the review platform, and Column (4) the results for a subsample of reviews elicited by software vendors. Yet, in logistic regressions, the coefficients cannot be directly interpreted as the strength of the correlation between two variables when variables increase by one unit. Instead, we need to calculate the marginal effects. However, estimating a consistent marginal effect that
generalizes the overall fixed effects has long posed a technical problem to statisticians (Kitazawa, 2012, Chernozhukov et al., 2009). Following Kitazawa (2012) and Silva and Kemp (2016), we estimate the semi-elasticity of the coefficients so that unit changes in RATING can be directly interpreted as percentage increases in the likelihood to SELF_DISCLOSE. The coefficients in Table 2 represent these semi-elasticities.

As depicted in Column (1), the coefficient $\beta_1$ is statistically significant and positive, suggesting that an increase in the RATING by one unit is associated with an increased likelihood that a reviewer chooses to self-disclose by approximately 13%, which is quite substantial. Vice versa, as a reviewer’s rating decreases by one unit, the probability that they decide to remain anonymous increases by 13%. Hence, we find support for our hypothesis.

![Table 2: Preliminary Results](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>(1) Full</th>
<th>(2) IT Firms</th>
<th>(3) Vendor Elicitation</th>
<th>(4) Platform Elicitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RATING</td>
<td>0.12943*** (0.00524)</td>
<td>0.13779*** (0.01101)</td>
<td>0.10309** (0.04219)</td>
<td>0.12125*** (0.00603)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIE_LENGTH</td>
<td>0.00012*** (0.00001)</td>
<td>0.00013*** (0.00002)</td>
<td>0.00024*** (0.00006)</td>
<td>0.00010*** (0.00001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT_EMPLOYER</td>
<td>-0.06476*** (0.02117)</td>
<td>-0.00156</td>
<td>-0.06679*** (0.13784)</td>
<td>(0.02373)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENDOR_ELICITED_REVIEW</td>
<td>0.00809 (0.05076)</td>
<td>0.08028</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATFORM_ELICITED_REVIEW</td>
<td>-0.30449*** (0.02545)</td>
<td>-0.28215*** (0.0497)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LN_NUMBER_OF_EMPLOYEES</td>
<td>-0.05363*** (0.00454)</td>
<td>-0.04636*** (0.00918)</td>
<td>-0.07515*** (0.02849)</td>
<td>-0.04719*** (0.00506)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software-level Fixed Effects</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>30,788</td>
<td>7,288</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>19,737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *<p.1; **<p.05; ***<p.01. Coefficients represent the semi-elasticities between the explanatory variables and SELF_DISCLOSE.

Table 2: Preliminary Results.

There are several factors that might influence the relationship between RATING and SELF_DISCLOSE. Even though they are not part of our hypothesis development, we would like to exploratively investigate these factors. For example, reviewers employed by IT firms might be better able to identify flaws in a software product. Thus, when giving a review, they might be more inclined to remain anonymous because of the potentially more negative feedback for the software seller. Therefore, we re-estimate our model on a subsample of reviews from employees of IT firms. Yet, our coefficient of interest only slightly increases to approximately 14%. Moreover, the fact that a review was actively elicited by a software vendor or the reviewing platform itself might have a systematic bearing on the relationship between RATING and SELF_DISCLOSE. For example, reviewers might be less inclined to give a negative rating and remain anonymous when they respond to review elicitation by a vendor. To investigate this, we run our analysis separately for reviews elicited by vendors and platforms. For reviews elicited by software vendors (Column (3)), the coefficient of RATING decreases to 10%. Thus, when software sellers ask for reviews, the correlation between rating magnitude and the decision to self-disclose is less pronounced. Finally, when we restrict our sample to reviews elicited by the platform, a unit increase in the rating of a reviewer is correlated with a 12% higher probability to self-disclose.
5 Conclusion and Further Steps

It is well-established that for B2C markets online reviews can positively affect sellers, customers, and overall market efficiency (e.g., Dellarocas, 2003, Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006, Bolton et al., 2013) since reviews reduce the information asymmetry between customers and sellers. Furthermore, research has found that it is beneficial to the readers of reviews if they know more about the reviewer. Reviewers, in turn, disclose private information about themselves to benefit from an increased trustworthiness of their reviews (e.g., Forman et al., 2008) and to gain attention and recognition (Shen et al., 2015). Surprisingly, only a few studies analyze the potential outcomes of online reviews in B2B markets (e.g., Pavlou, 2002) even though trust is very important in B2B relationships (e.g., McKnight et al., 2017). Furthermore, the literature remains silent about the determinants of self-disclosure in the B2B context. This research-in-progress paper is a first attempt to narrow this substantial gap in the body of knowledge by examining the role of a rating’s magnitude with regards to self-disclosure.

Building on the privacy calculus framework (Dinev and Hart, 2006), we argue that studying self-disclosure in the B2B context is particularly interesting as reviewers do not only represent their own opinion but also speak for their employers. This aspect clearly distinguishes our study from previous literature and reveals a new facet of self-disclosing behavior. Relying on this aspect, we hypothesize that reviewers publishing a negative review are less likely to disclose their identity because speaking negatively of another business raises privacy concerns. We test our hypothesis on a comprehensive data set from a B2B online review platform for business software. Estimating a logit regression with software-level fixed-effects, we conclude that an increase in the rating magnitude by one unit is associated with a 13% percentage increase in the likelihood to self-disclose. We find that this relationship is robust across different company sizes and industries. Interestingly, our results suggest that this relationship can be slightly softened – i.e., the decision to self-disclose is less dependent on the rating given by the reviewer when reviews are actively elicited by the vendor. Moreover, when reviews are elicited by the platform, our results remain, by and large, unchanged from our baseline results.

This study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to analyze self-disclosure in a B2B online review environment. Thus, we contribute valuable insights to the growing body on online review literature. Additionally, it presents a new perspective on self-disclosure in an e-commerce context. Our findings come with substantial managerial implications for B2B online review platforms and customers. In particular, our results indicate that enabling reviewers to stay anonymous is an important feature to ensure that reviews also contain negative information, which is considered to be particularly helpful for customers (e.g., Chen and Lurie, 2013, Sen and Lerman, 2007). Thus, in line with the statement by TrustRadius, “anonymity encourages candor among reviewers” (TrustRadius, 2018).

We plan to extend our research in several major ways. First, our current empirical analysis relies on observational data and does not allow for a causal interpretation. We plan to combine our data with data from a second B2B online review platform that features the same software. Employing the empirical strategy by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), this should allow a causal identification. Second, we plan to conduct a supplementary survey study to measure the theoretical constructs of the privacy calculus framework in the B2B context. Third, we aim to study the impact of review content (e.g., semantics, emotion) on self-disclosure to enhance our understanding of its determinants. Finally, we aim to obtain data for similar products from a B2C context. For example, Dropbox is a software product that is used in both a B2C and B2B context. Extending our data set in such a way would allow us to directly compare B2C and B2B reviewing behavior for comparable products. Finally, our study has some limitations. For instance, we have not analyzed unintentional disclosure of confidential business information. Theoretically, reviewers could also harm their business relationship with the seller by revealing confidential information in positive reviews in which sellers choose not to remain anonymous. This limitation also represents a natural next step to extend this study further.
References


