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The Impact of the Perceived Attractiveness and Review Valence on Consumers' Purchase Intention in Online Reviews

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Abstract: With the rapid development of internet technology and online shopping, pictures are widely used in online reviews. This study based on the elaboration likelihood model, cognitive dissonance theory and cue consistency theory focuses on effects of the perceived attractiveness of pictures and review valence in online reviews on consumers' purchase intention. Two studies will be conducted to test the framework and relevant hypotheses, the pictures in online reviews affect perceived usefulness of the reviews, and the online reviews with pictures make consumers feel more useful than without pictures. The perceived attractiveness of pictures moderates the effect of review valence on purchase intention and perceived fluency. The study also found the perceived attractiveness of pictures as a moderator, and the mediating effects of perceived fluency.

Keywords: online reviews, perceived attractiveness, review valence, purchase intention, perceived fluency

1. INTRODUCTION

The forms of presenting online reviews are more abundant, with rapid development of internet technology and online shopping. In addition to traditional text form, pictures, videos, blogs and other forms have been widely used to share product or service information and consumption experience[1]. Visual information is the largest in five senses in the human, which has the most obvious impact on consumers[2]. Moreover, it is very easy to shoot pictures and upload them, so pictures have gradually become a mainstream form of online reviews second only to text form, commonly known as "buyers' show". The influence of "buyers' show" in online shopping should not be underestimated. More and more consumers will choose to post their photos in online reviews, and online sellers will encourage buyers to upload "buyers' show" to promote sales. At the same time, the uglified "buyers' show" is also popular on the internet. At this point, the uglified "buyers' show" can also promote product sales?

Few researchers have delved deeply into how images ("buyers' show") in online reviews influence consumers' purchase decision. The existing studies on the presenting forms of online reviews are mostly focused on the traditional text forms[3,4]. However, the researches on images in online reviews are limited, and the only researches are to compare images with words[1,5]. For example, Lin et al. (2012) verified that compared with online reviews without pictures, online reviews with pictures have a more significant impact on consumers' purchase intention[1]. Yang and Zhu (2016) found that the purchase feasibility regulates the degree to which consumers are affected by pictures or words[5].

Both text information and picture information in online reviews may have an impact on consumers' purchase intention[1,5], but they did not be studied at the same time. Therefore, based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, cognitive dissonance and cue consistency theory, this study focuses on the image information and text information in online reviews. Picture information can be divided into pictures with high perceived attractiveness and pictures with low perceived attractiveness according to perceived attractiveness, and text information can be divided into positive reviews and negative reviews according to the direction of reviews.

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Specifically, this study mainly discusses four questions: (1) Does the online reviews with pictures have higher perceived usefulness than the online reviews without pictures? (2) Does the perceived attractiveness of pictures adjust the influence of reviews direction on consumers' purchase intention? (3) Does the perceived attractiveness of pictures adjust the influence of reviews direction on the perceived fluency of consumers? (4) Whether the interaction between reviews direction and perceived attractiveness of pictures can exert an influence on consumers' purchase intention through the mediating effect of perceived fluency? This study is an application and extension of cognitive dissonance theory and cue consistency theory in the field of consumer behavior research, and also provides a new idea for researches of picture information in online reviews in practice. The theoretical framework is shown in figure 1.
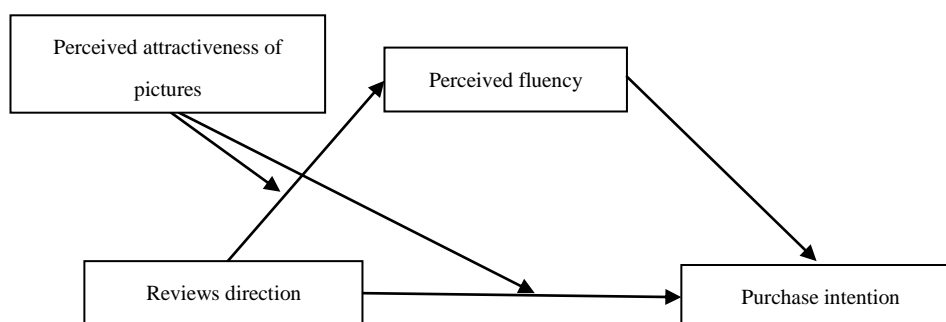

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The forms of online reviews

Online reviews are an important form of online word-of-mouth. Online reviews generally refer to the positive or negative views of potential or actual consumers on products or services published on shopping or third-party review websites[6]. In recent years, with the rapid development of e-commerce and internet technology, consumers have taken online comments as an important source of information in shopping[7], and can evaluate product information and share their shopping experience anytime and anywhere[8].

The present forms of online reviews can be divided into visual form and verbal form[9]. Traditional online reviews mainly use verbal form. Nowadays, consumers can either use verbal form, visual form of a combination of the two forms to express their online reviews. The current attention paid to the study of pictures in online reviews is not consistent with its increasingly important role and status, and the previous research focus is to compare pictures and words in online reviews. Lin et al. (2012) found that compared with blogs with plain text information, consumers believe that blogs with pictures have higher information quality and higher credibility, and are more conducive to promoting consumers' purchase intention[1].

2.2 The pictures in online reviews and usefulness

Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is an important tool for the internet users to process information and make decisions[10]. The ELM model expresses that individuals will choose different paths (marginal path or central path) to process information due to their different capabilities and motivations of information processing[11]. Marginal path refers to the fact that individuals are unwilling or do not have the ability to think carefully about the arguments in persuasive communication information, but are influenced by peripheral clues to form attitudes. Central path refers to when individuals have the motivation and ability to focus on information,

to think in detail about persuasive communication information and generate an attitude of approval or disapproval[12].

Under the environment of online shopping, although online sellers have display in rich product information as much as possible now[13], but the lack of feeling experience such as direct tactile feedback, the product information available to consumers is still limited[14], consumers will be more affected by surrounding clues. At this point, the information quality and information source as key surrounding information will have the important influence on consumer's decision. From the perspective of information quality, consumers believe that blogs with pictures have higher information quality than those with plain text information and are more conducive to promoting consumers' purchase intention[1]. From the perspective of information source, the more credible the information source is, the higher the perceived usefulness is[15], and the pictures in online reviews are more reliable because they more directly and clearly reflect the usage situation of buyers. Information quality and source in ELM model are important basis for individuals to process information and make decisions[10], we believe that pictures in online reviews have higher information quality and more reliable sources, so the higher the usefulness, the greater the impact on consumers.

H1: the pictures in the online reviews affect the usefulness of the online reviews perceived by consumers, and the reviews with pictures make them perceived by consumers more useful.

2.3   The perceived attractiveness of pictures and reviews direction

In the field of marketing communication, information is usually transmitted through the combination of words and pictures. Previous studies on word-picture matching in advertisements have verified that the degree of word-picture matching will have an impact on consumers' memory[16], and the persuasion effect of advertisements[17]. Nowadays, with the rapid development of digital communication technology, online reviews and advertisements are basically the same in the form of presentation, and both pictures and words can be used[9].

However, the most of existing researches on online reviews focus on the reviews in the form of words, and a few researches on pictures in online reviews focus on the comparison between pictures and words[1,9,18]. Therefore, the study of pictures and words in online reviews in this paper can draw lessons from its research in the field of advertising. The direction of online reviews can be divided into positive direction, negative direction and neutral direction according to the directivity of text content. Positive reviews refer to the positive text content of products and services, negative reviews refer to the negative content, neutral reviews refer to the content is not clearly directed. Purnawirawan et al. (2012) found that consumers' perceived usefulness of positive and negative reviews was higher than that of neutral reviews, because consumers had more preference for directional content[19]. Existing studies have found that negative reviews have a greater impact on consumers and are more likely to cause risk perception and uncertainty[20-22]. However, some studies believed that negative reviews did not always have a greater impact than positive reviews[23], and that trust in product quality was moderated[22]. In addition, some studies have found that reviews containing both positive and negative aspects have higher perceived usefulness[24,25]. Similar to the text information in online reviews, picture information should also contain directivity. In the research in the field of advertising, models can be divided into high attractive models with low attractive models[26], and high attractive models refer to those who look is the combination of reality and ideal, haunting perfect image, usually has a beautiful appearance and slim figure[27]; Low attractive models are people who look normal, who are average in weight, height and appearance. Aydinoglu and Cian (2014) take perceived attractiveness as an indicator to evaluate pictures and measure the perceived attractiveness of pictures with a scale[28]. To sum up, we believe that according to the directivity of picture information, pictures can be divided into images with high perceived attractiveness and images with low

perceived attractiveness. Images with high perceived attractiveness were matched with positive reviews, while images with low perceived attractiveness were matched with negative reviews. According to cognitive dissonance theory, when an individual is confronted with two kinds of inconsistent information about a certain thing, cognitive dissonance will occur, and then the individual will take actions based on thoughts, values and perceptions, so as to maintain consistency[29]. Cue consistency theory also proposed that, compared with inconsistent information, Consistency information is more conducive to the perception and judgment of product quality and has stronger persuasion effect, thus influencing consumers' purchase intention[30]. Therefore, when online reviews contain pictures with high perceived attractiveness, positive reviews have a significantly higher impact on consumers' purchase intention than negative reviews because they are consistent with pictures with high perceived attractiveness. When online reviews contain low perceived attractive pictures, although the pictures of low perceived attractiveness is consistent with the negative reviews, make consumers purchase intention low, because of the high feasibility in buying situation, however, compared with the text reviews, consumers are influenced by pictures more[5], consumers are more influenced by pictures with low perceived attractiveness than text reviews, therefore, no matter positive or negative direction, consumers' purchase intention will be significantly reduced, there would be no significant difference. In summary, we propose:

H2: Perceived attractiveness of pictures moderates the influence of reviews direction on purchase intention. When the perceived attractiveness of pictures is high, positive reviews make consumers significantly higher purchase intention than negative reviews. When the perceived attractiveness of pictures is low, there is no significant difference between positive and negative reviews on consumers' purchase intention.

2.4 The mediating effect of perceived fluency

Perceived Fluency refers to a subjective experience of how easily it is for an individual to recognize and process characteristic information of a target object (such as color, size, hardness, shape, etc.) [31,32], and is directly related to the degree of effort and processing speed[33]. Existing studies have found that perceived fluency has an important impact on individual preferences and decision-making[34,35]. For example, Alter and Oppenheimer (2006) have verified that perceived fluency drives investors to make purchase decisions[34]. Novemsky et al. (2007) also found that when product information could not be processed smoothly, consumers would choose to postpone purchase[35].

Existing studies think inconsistent information needs individual to pay more effort or information processing[36], if the information about the cognitive object is ambiguous, then people will be difficult to handle[33], and if online reviews about the perceived attractiveness of product pictures and the reviews direction don't match, it will negatively affect the efficiency and ease of consumers' processing information. When online reviews contain pictures with high perceived attractiveness, positive reviews make consumers' perceived fluency significantly higher than negative reviews because they are consistent with pictures with high perceived attractiveness. When online reviews contain pictures with low perceived attractiveness, negative reviews make consumers' perceived fluency significantly higher than positive comments because they are consistent with pictures with low perceived attractiveness. In summary, we propose:

H3: The perceived attractiveness of pictures regulates the influence of reviews direction on perceived fluency. When the perceived attractiveness of pictures is high, positive reviews make consumers' perceived fluency significantly higher than negative reviews. When the perceived attractiveness of pictures is low, negative reviews make consumers' perceived fluency significantly higher than positive reviews.

Since the perceived attractiveness of pictures regulates the influence of reviews direction on consumers' purchase intention and perceived fluency, which in turn affects consumers' purchase intention[35], we propose:

H4: There is a moderating model with mediator: the interaction between perceived attractiveness of pictures

and reviews direction in online reviews influences consumers' purchase intention through the mediating effect of perceived fluency.

3. METHODOLOGY AND CONCLUSION

This study adopts the empirical method, including two experimental studies. In study 1, it was found that the pictures in online reviews affected the perceived usefulness of online reviews, online reviews with pictures made it perceived by consumers more useful. At the same time, it is found that the effect of perceived attractiveness of pictures on purchase intention is regulated by reviews direction. In the case of high perceived attractiveness of pictures, positive online reviews made consumers significantly more willing to purchase than negative online reviews. In the case of low perceived attractiveness of pictures, there was no significant difference between positive and negative online reviews on consumers' purchase intention. In study 2, it was repeated verifying the regulation effect of perceived attractiveness of pictures in different situation, then it was found a mediated moderator models, that is, the interaction between perceived attractiveness of pictures and reviews direction influences consumers' purchase intention through the mediated effect of perceived fluency.

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