The Reviewer Matters: A Study of Online Pictorial Reviews

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

With the emergence of online pictorial reviews, reviewer's image becomes available information for later-buyers. But whether and how reviewer's image would influence consumers' product evaluation still remains unclear. In this study, we investigate how reviewer attractiveness, a newly available reviewer attribute enabled by pictorial reviews, would interact with two existing attributes of textual reviews (i.e., review valence and review depth) in influencing consumers' purchase intention. In particular, drawing on the Source Effect Models, we hypothesize that reviewer attractiveness would only influence consumers' purchase intention when review valence is positive, and propose that review depth would moderate the image attractiveness effect. Lab experiments are designed to test our hypotheses. This study contributes to the online review literature by investigating reviewer attractiveness effect in online pictorial reviews. It also extends the source effect literature to the user-generated online review context. It provides important practical implications for online retailers and online review participants.

Keywords: Online Pictorial Reviews, Reviewer Attractiveness, Source Effect, Review Valence, Review Depth

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Introduction

User-generated online product reviews have long proliferated dramatically on the Internet, and have been complementing and substituting other forms of product information such as retailer-generated product information and offline word-of-mouth communication (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Forman et al. 2008). They have become an indispensable information source for consumers seeking to discover product quality and have taken a more important role in consumer decision process (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Moe and Trusov 2011; Zhu and Zhang 2010). With them, consumers can gain more reliable product information, so as to make better-informed shopping decision (Chatterjee 2001; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Forman et al. 2008; Liu 2006). Ample research has shown that online product reviews can significantly affect product sales (Berger and Milkman 2012; Berger et al. 2010; Dellarocas 2006; Duan et al. 2008; Li and Hitt 2008; Liu 2006; Sun 2012; Zhu and Zhang 2010).

Recently, due to the increasing popularity of smart devices, which makes taking and uploading pictures become much easier, a new kind of user-generated online product reviews, online pictorial reviews, has been emerging in online shopping environments and becoming more and more popular (Yang et al. 2014). In online pictorial reviews, reviewers provide photos in which they were using the product (e.g., wearing a piece of dress) and share the consumption experience with later-buyers.

Online pictorial reviews are distinct from, and might have advantages over traditional online textual reviews in two important aspects. Firstly, traditional textual reviews are purely plain texts of consumers’ product experience (e.g., a quantitative evaluation and/or a qualitative assessment), and later-buyers need to digest the plain information and reconstruct the product consumption experience by imagination (Sridhar and Srinivasan 2012). In contrast, pictorial reviews present the product consumption experience in a more vivid and direct way, whereby later-buyers could see how the product looks and performs in a real consumption environment.

Secondly and more importantly, in traditional textual reviews, little information is provided about who are the reviewers, except for bogus user names. According to Naylor et al. (2011), the reviewers are “ambiguous”. In contrast, in pictorial reviews, more personal information about reviewers, e.g., physical image, are disclosed. With pictorial reviews, later-buyers could know more about who were the previous buyers. To some extent, online pictorial reviews make the reviewers not “ambiguous” any more. The image information of reviewers in online pictorial reviews may impact how later-buyers digest other information contained in the textual reviews as prior studies in offline environment suggest that the attributes of communicators (e.g., sex, attractiveness) do affect consumers’ attitude towards message perception (DeBono and Harnish 1988; Naylor et al. 2011; Pornpitakpan 2004).

However, in online customer review context, most prior studies focused on the attributes of textual reviews (e.g., review valence, review volume, review variance or qualitative assessments). Very few of them have looked into how reviewer image information might affect consumers’ shopping behavior. Some embarking studies (e.g., Forman et al. 2008) have noticed the salient impact of reviewers’ personal information (e.g., descriptive identity) on product sales, albeit not the effect of reviewer image information. Forman et al. (2008, pg. 292) suggested, “It is critical to examine the effect of reviewer disclosure of identity-descriptive information for both theoretical and practical reasons”. However, due to the newness of online pictorial reviews, very little research has been conducted to investigate how the newly available reviewer image information within in pictorial reviews would influence consumers’ decision-making and shopping behavior so far.

Acknowledging this important gap, this study is aimed to examine how reviewer image information within online pictorial reviews would interact with existing textual review attributes in influencing consumers’ purchase behavior. We consider reviewer image information as communicator’s information (i.e., source) and draw on Source Effect Models (Byrne 1971; Chaiken 1979; DeBono and Harnish 1988; Hovland et al. 1953; Hovland and Weiss 1951) in the communication literature as our theoretical lens. Specifically, we examine how an important attribute of reviewer’s image (i.e., physical attractiveness) would wield its persuasive effect on consumers’ product evaluation and purchase behavior by interacting with two other important attributes of previous existing textual reviews (i.e., review valence and review depth).
In particular, we choose clothing and clothing accessories as our research context for several reasons. Firstly, they are leading merchandise category ($33 billion) for e-sales within United States in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014) as well as in China (CNNIC 2013) in recent years, which are the leading online shopping regions worldwide. More importantly, they are highly body-involving products (Rosa et al. 2006). For such experiential products, the quality of the consumption experience is largely and directly determined by how the product interacts with the consumer’s body. Thus, the visual information within pictorial reviews might highly influence consumers’ product evaluation.

Additionally, as clothing and clothing accessories are highly body-involving products, they are highly image-relevant by nature (Belk 1988; Berger and Heath 2007). Consumers may care not only the product itself, but also who purchased the same product they are interested in (Childers and Rao 1992; Escalas and Bettman 2005). In other words, the reviewer's image becomes very important information for consumers’ evaluation. Last but not least, from a practical view, as clothing and clothing accessories are highly body interactive products, compared to other products (e.g., computers), the best way for reviewers to share the consumption experience is to put it on and share the overall look through photos, which makes the reviewer image shown in the reviews. In other words, this product category actually is the most popular category with available reviewer image information. Hence, we believe that online apparel shopping context is a quite appropriate and relevant context for us to explore the reviewer image effect.

This study will advance the existing literature in several ways. First, it highlights an interesting new IT artifact, i.e., pictorial reviews in online shopping context, and gives rise to new variable (i.e., reviewer attractiveness) and new relationships which have not been well investigated before. Specifically, by examining how reviewer attribute (i.e., reviewer attractiveness) would interact with textual review attributes (i.e., review valence and review depth), we comprehensively examine pictorial reviews by looking into the interaction effect among the three primary components of a typical pictorial review (i.e., review rating, review commentary, and review picture), which would largely extend the theoretical body on user-generated online reviews to a new context where new review factor (i.e., reviewer attractiveness) emerges and becomes influential. Secondly, by drawing on the Source Effect Models, we explore how source image attractiveness would exert different source effects (e.g., similarity, trustworthiness or expertise) in different review conditions. In this way, we theoretically contributed to the source effect literature by having more understandings of source image effect. Last but not least, the results of our study can provide important practical implication for online retailers and online review participants.

**Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development**

In the context of online shopping, when consumers are exposed to user-generated online reviews, a communication process takes place. Reviewers become the communicators with whom consumers interact. Extant research has suggested that when people communicate with each other, not only what they are communicating, but also whom they are communicating with matters a lot. The information source does influence the persuasiveness of a message from the source (Chaiken 1979; DeBono and Harnish 1988; Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Kahle and Homer 1985; Pornpitakpan 2004; Sternthal et al. 1978; Till and Busler 2000). According to Gershoff, Broniarczyk, and West (2001), evaluating the source of a product recommendation is critical in determining its usefulness.

Prior studies have explored the source effect on message persuasion within interpersonal communication in offline communication settings and have developed the literature of Source Effect Models that emphasizes the roles of source attractiveness and source credibility (Chaiken 1980; DeBono and Harnish 1988; Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Kang and Herr 2006; ). However, those studies were conducted either in the context of traditionally interpersonal communication in which the source is not anonymous to message receivers, or in the context of celebrity endorsement in which the celebrities’ interests are aligned with the retailers’ rather than consumers’.

In the prior literature of user-generated online reviews, only two recent explorative studies have investigated the effect of source characteristics, i.e., reviewers’ identity information, on consumers' review evaluation and purchase behavior (see Table 1 for a summary). However, these two studies only focused on reviewers’ descriptive information (e.g., location, hobbies) rather than image as pictorial identity information was not available at that time. In sum, how reviewers’ image within online pictorial reviews would influence consumers’ product evaluation and purchase decision remains unclear.
Table1. Previous Research about Online Reviewer Information Effect

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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Reviewer Information</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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| Forman, Ghose, and Wiesenfeld (2008) | Fixed effects model using panel data | Books, 04.2005-01. 2006 | • Real name • Nickname • Location • Hobbies | • Reviews containing identity-descriptive information are evaluated as more positive.  
• The prevalence of reviewer disclosure of identity information is positively related to product sales.  
• Shared geographical location increases the relationship between disclosure and product sales. |
| Naylor, Lamberton, and Norton (2011) | Lab experiments          | Restaurants reviews   | • Gender • Age • Location • Affiliation | • Reviews written by ambiguous reviewers and similar reviewers are similarly persuasive.  
• Reviews written by ambiguous reviewers are more persuasive than reviews written by dissimilar reviewers. |

With the newly emerging online pictorial reviews, reviewer’s image becomes clear, though reviewer's real identity is still anonymous or ambiguous to later-buyers. Later-buyers now could rely on reviewer image information to conjecture reviewer’s identity and incentive, so as to judge message persuasiveness. Therefore, in this study, we highlight the role of reviewer’s image. The source effect literature provides us an appropriate theoretical lens to explore the effect of online reviewer image as it sheds lights on the role of source image in influencing receivers’ message perception.

In a typical pictorial review, photos are presented with some textual reviews as well. Thus we examine the joint effect of reviewers’ image and the textual reviews written by reviewers on consumers’ product evaluation and purchase intention. Prior literature has highlighted two important attributes of textual reviews: review rating (i.e., quantitative assessment) and review commentary (qualitative assessment). We follow this line of research and focus on the two corresponding review attributes: review valence and review depth. We examine how reviewer image (i.e., physical attractiveness) would wield its persuasive influence on consumers’ purchase intention by interacting with review valence and review depth.

It is indeed imperative to examine the joint effect of reviewer image and textual review attributes, rather than the direct effect of reviewer image on consumers’ product evaluation and purchase intention. This is because, without textual review information, the reviewer’s attitude towards the product could be unclear. For instance, a reviewer might upload a photo in which he/she puts the clothes on and shares the look with later-buyers, but later-buyers might not be able to exactly know whether the reviewer is satisfied with the product or not. In contrast, the textual review information could provide more straightforward product assessment from the reviewer. With the presence of explicit review ratings and descriptive/explanatory commentary, consumers can easily and accurately understand the reviewer’s opinion of product evaluation with less subjective perception bias (He and Bond 2013).

Following prior studies on online textual reviews (Basuroy et al. 2003; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; He and Bond 2013), we examine the main effect of review valence first because it is the fundamental attribute of textual reviews due to its diagnosticity in indicating reviewer’s product satisfaction attitude. Furthermore, we examine how reviewer attractiveness and review depth will moderate the effect of review valence in influencing consumers’ purchase intention.

**Review Valence**

Review valence, referring to the positiveness of reviewers' product experience, is typically reflected in numeric scores (e.g., usually ranging from one to five stars) and/or texts (Clemons et al. 2006; Mudambi and Schuff 2010). It is the most direct reflection of reviewer’s attitude towards product experience and serves as a useful proxy for product quality (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Forman et al. 2008).

Previous literature finds mixing understandings of the average effect of review ratings on product sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Dellarocas 2006; Duan et al. 2008). However, in general, we can conclude...
from prior studies that a positively valenced message or a high product rating increases consumers’ product preference, while a negatively valenced message or a low product rating reduces consumers’ product preference (Basu et al. 2003; Hu et al. 2008; Khare et al. 2011). Besides, generally, the information of no branded products could only be got from the reviews but no other places (e.g., online forums, online recommendation sites). We believe that review valence, the most direct and concise product evaluation from the reviewer, will works as an important cue that helps consumers ascertain product quality. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**H1**: Review valence will positively influence consumers’ perceived product quality.

**Negative Valence: Negatively Effect and Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model**

Negativity effect, or negativity bias, is known as the greater weighting of negative information in the formation of judgments and decision-making tasks, as compared with equally extreme positive information (Baumeister et al. 2001; Chen and Lurie 2013; Herr et al. 1991; Ito et al. 1998; Rozin and Royzman 2001; Skowronski and Carlston 1989).

One widely accepted explanation of negativity effect is accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman and Lynch 1988; Herr et al. 1991; Lynch Jr et al. 1988). It investigates the negativity effect from an information diagnosticity perspective and argues that accessible information is not used as an input for judgment or choice when more diagnostic or probative information is available. A piece of information is perceived as diagnostic if it helps the consumers assign a product to only one judgmental category. Contrarily, information that is ambiguous (i.e., one piece of information that has multiple interpretations) or that implies multiple possible categorization is nondiagnostic (Hoch and Deighton 1989). Therefore, diagnosticity refers to the extent to which a piece of information discriminates between alternative hypotheses, interpretations, or categorizations (Herr et al. 1991).

Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model contends that negative information is more diagnostic or useful than positive information for categorizing targets into evaluative categories (Feldman and Lynch 1988; Herr et al. 1991; Lynch Jr et al. 1988). When a piece of information is negative, the evaluation towards the focal object or event generally falls in to just one category (e.g., low quality, low integrity, or low performance) to the exclusion of others; but when a piece of information is neutral or positive, the evaluation result might fall into different categories, either positive, medium, or negative category. The previous research has shown that negative information is more diagnostic for people’s judgment towards a product as low in quality and consumers weight negative information more heavily than equally extreme positive information, in both judgment and decision-making tasks (Baumeister et al. 2001; Chen and Lurie 2013; Rozin and Royzman 2001; Skowronski and Carlston 1987).

Another explanation of negativity effect is from attribution perspective. It suggests that consumers make causal inferences about why product information is shared and use these inferences to judge the value of the information (Friestad and Wright 1994; Heider 1958; Kelley 1967). When consumers evaluate persuasive communications, they assess the extent to which the communication is due to internal (personal) causes versus external (product) causes (Folkes 1988). Prior literature has found that consumers find word of mouth as more persuasive when it is more attributed to the underlying product consumption experience than to the information provider (Chen and Lurie 2013). In traditionally environment, recommendations are more likely to be attributed to the recommender (vs. product experience) because there may be more personal reasons (e.g., personal traits, moods) for the recommender generating positive word of mouth (Gilbert and Malone 1995). Compared to positive information, there are fewer reasons other than unsatisfactory product experience for people to communicate negative information (Mizerski 1982). Thus, readers would find negative reviews as more persuasive than positive reviews. In online textual review context, research also shows that negative reviews have a stronger effect on purchase intention (Basu et al. 2003; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006).

Considering online shopping environment, the risks associated with buying products online are relatively high as there are high chances that the products are not satisfying because of the difficulty of evaluating products online, especially for experience products (e.g., clothes). Thus, when the review valence is negative (i.e., fairly diagnostic), we believe no matter who provides the review, or how does the reviewer look, would not matter. Because when a review is negative, on one hand, it sends out a strong signal of low product quality; on the other hand, consumers have less concern of reviewer’s motive of providing such a
review, compared to when it is positive. No matter who provides the review, or how the reviewer looks, the persuasiveness of the review message might not vary greatly across consumers. Consumers do not need to consider other information such as reviewers’ information to make decisions as the review valence itself is diagnostic enough for them to make decisions.

**Positive Valence: Source Effects Model and Review Depth**

However, when the review is positive, the review is less diagnostic for consumers to evaluate the product quality. Previous studies show that when online review is positive, consumers are more likely to attribute the positiveness to the reviewer (vs. product experience) than negative reviews (Chen and Lurie 2013; Sen and Lerman 2007). Thus, when the review is positive, consumers still need to take other relevant information (e.g., source characteristics) into consideration to evaluate the reliability of the review message. Prior research has identified two different models about source effect: source attractiveness model and source credibility model (McCracken 1989).

Source attractiveness model is built on social psychological research and it contends that message effectiveness depends on the “familiarity”, “likability”, and/or “similarity” of the source (Caballero et al. 1989; Chaiken 1979; Joseph 1982; McGuire 1985). Familiarity is defined as the knowledge of the source; likability is defined as the affection for the source as a result of the physical appearance and behavior of the source; and similarity is defined as the resemblance between the source and receiver of the message. To conclude, source attractiveness models suggest that sources that are known to, liked by, or similar to the consumers are perceived as more attractive, and the message from the source is more persuasive (Chaiken 1979; Langlois et al. 2000; Lemay et al. 2010).

Source credibility model also rests on research in social psychology. Different from source attractiveness model, it contends that message effectiveness largely depends on the “expertness” and/or “trustworthiness” of the source (Hovland et al. 1953; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Sternthal et al. 1978). Expertness is defined as the perceived ability of the source to make valid assertions, and trustworthiness is defined as the perceived trustworthy of the source to make valid assertions. When the source is more capable or trustworthy, the message from the source is more persuasive (Pornpitakpan 2004).

**Source Image: Similarity Effect and Expertise Effect**

Regarding the classic claim “what is beauty is good” (Dion et al. 1972; Eagly et al. 1991; Langlois et al. 2000), prior research on source attractiveness model shows that when the source is more physically attractive, the messages provided by the source are more persuasive (Caballero et al. 1989; Chaiken 1979; Joseph 1982). This liking hypothesis is widely applied in marketing and advertising settings where attractive celebrities and models are used in product presentation and promotions (Caballero et al. 1989). Prior literature has found that when the communicator is more attractive, receivers feel much closer to them, perceive higher similarity and they are more willing to associate with the communicator (Lemay et al. 2010). In this way, they may find the attractive communicator’s message more persuasive. Thus, in our research context, when the reviewer is more attractive, consumers might perceive more similarity with them. Consequently, consumers find a more attractive reviewer as more persuasive.

Besides, the expertise perspective of source credibility model contends that when a source is an expert, individuals are more likely to produce positive attitude change and accept the messages provided by the source than when the source is a non-expert (Hovland et al. 1953; Hovland and Weiss 1951). Previous studies show that physically attractive people are perceived as more competent (Feingold 1992; Langlois et al. 2000). In our study context, the product type is clothing and clothing accessories, which is highly relevant to individuals’ public image. When the reviewer is quite attractive, it is naturally for consumers to conjecture that one of the primary reasons why the reviewers look better than others would be that they are better at managing their images through the consumption of highly image-relevant products (e.g., clothing, accessories, and make ups). For this reason, we believe that regarding the expertise of providing valid product reviews about clothing and clothing accessories, physically attractive people should be perceived as even more competent in this domain.

In short, when a reviewer is perceived as more physically attractive, on one hand, he/she may be perceived as more similar to consumers, which increases the review persuasiveness; on the other hand, he/she may be perceived as having more expertise in terms of providing relevant product reviews, which also increases the review persuasiveness.
Source Image: Trustworthiness Effect

Despite the above arguments, regarding reviewers’ physical attractiveness, a competing effect might exist from the other theoretical perspective of source credibility model, i.e., trustworthiness perspective. This perspective is grounded in the Attribution Theory (Kelley 1967). It contends that the persuasive impact of a message is typically lessened when the recipient could infer that the message from the source can be attributed to personal or situational causes (e.g., commissions on sales). In other words, the recipient tends not to buy a message when he/she perceives lower trustworthiness of the communicator.

The trustworthiness issue of information source has become a long lasting problem in online shopping environment and it continues to influence consumers’ message perception (Bart et al. 2005; Hu et al. 2008; Senecal and Nantel 2004). In online review environment, reviewers are anonymous. There are enormous information asymmetries between online reviewers and later-buyers. Although from pictorial reviews, consumers can see the physical image of the reviewers, consumers still cannot tell whether the reviewers are real peer consumers or models hired by the retailers for promoting their products.

It is reasonable to conjecture that online reviewers with low physical attractiveness are more likely to be perceived as more trustworthy than highly attractive reviewers, because in traditional marketing practice, it is a typical routine for retailers to hire or use attractive models to present the product, so as to attract consumers (Joseph 1982). Online retailers may also tend to hire attractive people to pretend as peer consumers and provide favorable pictorial reviews. As such, consumers might have more concerns about the incentives of highly attractive reviewers (e.g., accepting sales commissions from retailers) to provide favorable reviews, and thus doubt the trustworthiness of these highly attractive reviewers. In this respect, the persuasive impact of positive reviews provided by highly attractive reviewers would be lessened.

However, which source effect (i.e., source attractiveness/expertise vs. source trustworthiness) would wield its influence depends on which mechanism is salient or dominant in different conditions. We posit that it might be affected by review depth attribute as review depth would influence review diagnosticity, so as to influence which source effect would take place.

Review Depth

Review depth refers to the extent to which textual review commentaries are detailed in terms of product experience. As prior literature suggested, review depth can greatly affect the overall persuasiveness of a review (He and Bond 2013). The depth of review commentaries could vary widely, from quite low (e.g., simple summary evaluation like “The suit is quite good”) to quite high (e.g., detailed explanatory comments like “The suit is quite good because the textile is quite comfortable, and the color doesn’t fade after washing...”) (He and Bond 2013).

When a positive review is with low depth (e.g., simple summary evaluation such as “good”), consumers can get quite minimal product experience information from the textual comments except an overall positive evaluation of product experience. On one hand, the diagnosticity of the review remains low. Consumers will heavily leverage on other additional information (i.e., reviewer information) to help them evaluate the review persuasiveness, so as to make their product evaluation and shopping decisions. On the other hand, the issue of reviewer trustworthiness would not be a concern here as there is no salient signal to ignite consumers’ concern of the reviewer’s motivation, since fake reviewers often try to increase the diagnosticity of their reviews as much as possible. Given the review depth is low, the suspicion toward reviewers’ motivation of providing such positive review might not work as the key mechanism in such conditions. Reviewer attractiveness might not influence consumers’ perceived reviewer trustworthiness.

Hence, we believe that in a positive review with low review depth, source trustworthiness is not an influential psychological mechanism. The source expertise effect and source similarity effect will work as the main mechanisms and influence consumers’ review persuasiveness perception. According to the source expertise effect and source similarity effect, the more attractive a reviewer is, the more similar and expertise he/she would be perceived by consumers, and consequently the more likely consumers would be persuaded to purchase the product. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H2: When the review is positive and review depth is low, if the reviewer is more attractive, consumers will have higher purchase intention.
When a positive review is with high review depth (e.g., detailed explanations of product experience), consumers are well informed. Prior research suggests that review depth can increase information diagnosticity (Johnson and Payne 1985). More relevant information provides a richer context, which facilitates consumers’ evaluation of focal object or event, decreases their perceived uncertainty towards the focal object or event and increases their decision confidence (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). Thus, high review depth helps in decision-making. However, according to source trustworthiness effect grounded in Attribution Theory (Kelley 1967), receivers are likely to attribute a positive message with high depth to the communicator, rather than to the focal event or object itself. They need to collect more information to judge the incentive of the communicator providing such positive information with high depth. Their concern can be escalated if the information provider is anonymous.

In online shopping contexts, consumers are making decisions under high uncertainties of products or services (Pavlou et al. 2006; Pavlou et al. 2007). As the reviewers’ identity is anonymous and their real motivation of providing the review is unknown, consumers need to collect additional information (e.g., source) to assist their decision-making. When the reviewer argues the product worth buying in a more detailed way, it might cause consumers to suspect the reviewer’s underlying motive of providing such a positive and detailed product review which costs notable editing efforts and time from the reviewer. Hence, a positive review with high review depth will trigger consumers’ concern about the trustworthiness of the reviewer. As such, the source trustworthiness effect overshadows either source attractiveness or expertise effects and becomes a salient issue which catches consumers’ cognition attention. According to the source trustworthiness effect, the more attractive a reviewer is, the less trustworthy he/she would be perceived by consumers, and consequently the less likely consumers would be persuaded to purchase the product. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H3:** *When the review is positive and review depth is high, if the reviewer is more attractive, consumers will have lower purchase intention.*

In sum, we present our research model in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Research Model](image)

### Methodology

For the three factors, we use pretests to get the acceptable manipulations. In particular, for review valence, we set different review rating stars (e.g., 1 vs. 4.9, 5 is the highest rating) to represent different levels of review valence, and use opposite adjectives in the commentaries. For review depth, we design two versions of reviews, of which one is just simple summary evaluation (e.g., Good/Bad) while the other includes more detailed explanatory comments (e.g., the product is good/bad because the textile is...
good/not good, the cut is quite fit/not fit at all, and etc.). In the pretest, participants will be asked to evaluate the perceived review valence and the perceived depth of the review commentary assigned to them.

For reviewer attractiveness, previous literature already indicated that there are indeed different levels of physical attractiveness shared by people’s attractiveness perception (Eagly et al. 1991; Lemay et al. 2010). To make our reviewer stimuli more generalized, for each gender we select two reviewers of high attractiveness and two of low attractiveness. Participants invited in pretest are asked to evaluate the reviewer attractiveness of their same gender (e.g., 20 per reviewer). Everything else will be kept constant (e.g., background, reviewers’ pose, and reviewers’ clothes collocations).

In the main lab experiment, participants are randomly assigned to within-gender treatment condition. They will be asked to imagine that they are doing online shopping for themselves and browsing through the assigned product webpage with no specific brand associated with the product. After that, they will be asked to answer the designed questionnaire and indicate how likely they are going to buy the product. For the relevant latent variables (e.g., perceived reviewer attractiveness, perceived reviewer similarity, perceived reviewer trustworthiness, perceived reviewer expertness, purchase intention), we adopt the measurement items from prior literature. We also do manipulation checks in the main experiment.

**Preliminary Results:** The results show that in both gender groups, review valence is positively related to consumers’ purchase intention. H1 is supported in both gender groups. Moreover, our prediction regarding review valence negativity effect is also supported in both gender groups. When the review is negative, no matter how the reviewer looks, consumers’ purchase intention will not change. However, regarding the interaction effect of reviewer attractiveness and review depth in positive review condition, there are interesting gender differences. In male groups, when the review is positive, reviewer attractiveness interacts with review depth on male consumers’ purchase intention. When the positive review is with low depth, reviewer attractiveness is positively related to male consumers’ purchase intention. When the positive review is with high depth, reviewer attractiveness is negatively related to male consumers’ purchase intention. Thus, H2 and H3 are all supported in male groups. However, in female groups, the results are different. There is no interaction effect of reviewer attractiveness and review depth on female consumers’ purchase intention in positive review condition. No matter the review depth is high or low, reviewer attractiveness is positively related to female consumers’ purchase intention.

**Discussion**

In this study, we investigate a new IT artifact - online pictorial reviews and examine how reviewer image, along with two textual review attributes (i.e., review valence and review depth), will influence consumers' purchase behavior. Our findings will unravel the underlying psychological mechanism of how reviewer image information would influence consumers’ purchase intention from the source effect perspective. Based on the source effect literature, we propose interesting psychological mechanisms in terms of reviewer image effect.

To our best knowledge, this study is the first one that looks into the effect of online pictorial reviews from the source effect perspective. It will extend the original source effect literature into online customer review context. Based on the source effect models (i.e., source attractiveness model, source credibility model), we examine the different reviewer attractiveness effects on consumers’ reviewer perception under different combinations of review valence and review depth. We explore how reviewer image would interact with two important textual review attributes (i.e., review valence and review depth) and jointly influence consumers’ purchase intention. In this way, this study contributes to online review research domain with taking new types of online review (i.e., pictorial review), new characteristic of pictorial review (i.e., reviewer attractiveness), and new relationships (the interactions between reviewer attractiveness and textual review attributes) into consideration. In such a way, it provides more nuanced understandings of user-generated online product reviews and opens new directions for future research.

In addition, our findings can also help online retailers better leverage pictorial reviews to attract consumers. For wearable products, the reviewer image within pictorial reviews could be an important factor that influences consumers’ product evaluation. Online retailers used to prefer using attractive models for product presentation. However, in the pictorial review contexts, according to our findings, attractive models do not always attract more sales. There might be other unexpected effect from those pictorial reviews provided by unattractive reviewers.
References


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