

How Helpful Are Emoticons? The Moderating Roles of Review Valence and Review Format

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Abstract

Evidence shows that visual cues accompanying verbal descriptions can affect how consumers perceive and process information. This study argues that visually attractive emoticons which convey emotions will facilitate or interfere with online review readers' information processing strategy, depending on review valence (positive and negative) and review format (narrative-based vs. list-based). Two laboratory experiments, one eye-tracking analysis and one real-life field data are employed to test the proposed predictions. The findings show that emoticons in positive narrative-based reviews increase review helpfulness, but emoticons shown in positive listed-based reviews decrease review helpfulness. However, emoticons in negative narrative-based reviews decrease review helpfulness, but they become more helpful in negative list-based reviews. This research offers theoretical contributions to the eWOM studies and information processing literature. Practical implications are also provided.

Keywords: *emoticon; electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM); online review*

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