

Betrayed by reviewers: Positive consumer responses to unfair negative word-of-mouth

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Abstract

Negative electronic word-of-mouth (NeWOM) has typically been considered to trigger solely unfavorable consumer reactions. However, we empirically show with two experiments that NeWOM that is perceived as unfair leads to positive brand attitude and increased purchase intention by observing consumers: When NeWOM is perceived to break the normative rule of honesty, feelings of unfairness arise which ultimately translate into favorable reactions towards the criticized firm. We show that marketers can increase perceptions of NeWOM unfairness by doubting the reviewer's credibility. Furthermore, our work confirms that perceived betrayal is a major mediator between perceived NeWOM unfairness and observers' consumption-related reactions. Overall, our work provides sound evidence that considering perceived unfairness and betrayal is a fruitful strategy for better understanding consumers' favorable reactions to negative online reviews.

Keywords: *negative word of mouth; unfairness; betrayal*

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