

To tell, not to yell: The effect of speech acts on the helpfulness of online product reviews

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Abstract

Speech acts, or utterances in a message that evokes specific behavior in the message recipient, widely exist in online product reviews. However, the effect of these different speech acts on online reviews' helpfulness is still an unexplored territory. This study tests how assertive (describing a product without emotions, "what is it"), expressive (conveying emotions about the product, "I like it"), and directive acts (suggesting future actions, "you should buy it") influence online reviews' helpfulness about consumer purchases. Moreover, it explores how these effects are moderated by the nature of the reviewed purchases, that is, whether the purchase is more experiential (events to live through) versus material (possessions to keep). We found that assertive and directive acts positively impact online reviews' helpfulness, and experiential purchases enhance such impact, while expressive acts negatively affect the helpfulness, and material purchases strengthen this negative effect.

Keywords: *speech act; online reviews; experiential purchase*

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