

The Effect of Inconsistent Reviews on Consumer Memory and Decisions

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The Effect of Inconsistent Reviews on Consumer Memory and Decisions

Abstract. Prior research typically treats summary statistics and individual reviews as independent elements. However, we propose that inconsistent individual reviews—those that diverge significantly from the overall product rating—receive heightened attention, biasing the recall of the overall rating. Across five studies, including an eye-tracking experiment, we demonstrate that consumers systematically misremember the overall rating as closer to the inconsistent review, which subsequently affects their product evaluations and choices. We extend theories of visual attention, accessibility, and memory, showing that inconsistent reviews not only capture attention but also distort recall, ultimately shaping consumer decisions. The practical implications suggest that online retailers and platforms should consider adjusting their review display algorithms to minimize the impact of inconsistent reviews on consumer judgments.

Keywords: *Online reviews, memory, attention.*

Track: *Consumer Behavior.*