Mimicry of Negative Valence in online WOM: A Cognitive Approach

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Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025

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We document the linguistic mimicry of negative valence in online WOM as a diagnostic component of review value and its persuasive influence on consumers' decision-making toward the WOM target. Two experiments in two different consumption settings (study areas, work experiences) demonstrate that consumers, when writing reviews, mimic the negative valence of proximate posts. Using a decompositional technique, we also provide evidence that online linguistic mimicry is part conscious and part nonconscious. Our results suggest that the nonconscious component of review mimicry is six times that of the conscious element. Our findings have critical implications for the industry. Given that consumers intensively rely on online reviews to make their purchase decisions, it is important for managers and webmasters to understand that consumers are likely to impart negative opinions about the product if that is what is proximate when they write their review. Further research might explore potential interventions to curb this negativity, especially when it is induced via mimicry.

Keywords: Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Linguistic Mimicry, Valence.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media