

Anonymity Effects on Review Generation and Consumption

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Abstract

There is evidence that online user evaluations impact product sales. Scholars also show that the impact of evaluations on sales becomes stronger when the reviewer's identity is disclosed. Even though reviewer identity disclosure is expected to increase the credibility of reviews (for those consuming reviews), it is not clear how it will impact review generation (specially when reviewer incentives are lacking). Evidence is mixed on how customers perceive the quality of the product when reviews are non-anonymous (distinguishing between high- and low-quality firms). It has been shown that it is the volume and not their valence that influences customer purchase decisions. But low-quality firms can send misleading signals by artificially boosting volume of reviews in the garb of anonymity. We address these questions by using lab experiments and secondary data. Interestingly, for review consumption and generation, lab experiments and secondary data provide contradictory results. We try to explain these paradoxes by considering the evolving nature of ratings and review content and how this time dependency impacts product and service businesses' survival.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media