

Seeing Stars or Seeking Crowds: How Cultural Orientation Shapes Comparisons of Ratings and Reviews

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Abstract

Consumers increasingly rely on average ratings and review volume when evaluating products and services, yet cultures differ in how these cues are interpreted. Drawing on cultural psychology, we examine whether consumers from an independent cultural context (Americans), who prioritize self-directed judgment, and those from an interdependent context (Japanese), who attend more to collective input, rely on these numerical indicators differently. Using nationally representative samples, we find that Americans place greater emphasis on average ratings, whereas Japanese give relatively more weight to review volume. These differences are moderated by the size of the rating gap such that they are modest when rating differences are small but pronounced when gaps are large. The findings show that numerical cues commonly treated as universal carry different meaning across cultures, offering important implications for global digital marketplaces.

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