

Words That Convince? The Inverted U-Shaped Effect of Sensory Language on the Effectiveness of Product Reviews

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Cite as:

Eckel Nadine, Krafft Manfred, van Heerde Harald (2026), Words That Convince? The Inverted U-Shaped Effect of Sensory Language on the Effectiveness of Product Reviews. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133922)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



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Abstract

As consumers heavily rely on reviews to inform purchase decisions, managers can leverage the most helpful ones as marketing tools. This research examines sensory language, i.e., words that engage the five senses, in driving helpfulness. Prior studies find that sensory language can enhance helpfulness by providing more diagnostic and authentic information, yet it can also reduce helpfulness by undermining objectivity. We argue that these opposing effects create an inverted U-shaped relationship. By analyzing 400k Amazon reviews and conducting an RCT, we show that sensory language indeed generates this pattern, moderated by star rating and product type. In high-star reviews, sensory language increases helpfulness, especially for experiential products, up to a point, afterwards reduces it. In low-star reviews, the relationship becomes linear. These findings contribute to literature and offer crucial insights for managers: use reviews with context-appropriate levels of sensory language.

Track: Methods, Modelling & Marketing Analytics