The Research on the Impact of Network Negative Comments’ Remedial Measures on the Chinese Consumers’ Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

With the popularization of network technology and online shopping, the influence of internet word-of-mouth is gradually increased. When customers buy products online, they often like to post comments. In recent years, with the prospect theory and information availability and diagnosis theory are gradually recognized, network negative comments have got more and more attention. The study of Park & Lee (2009)[6] shows that compared with the positive comments, the negative comments have greater influence on consumers’ purchase intention. Negative comments are both crucial for customers and enterprises. For customers, they can easily get enough information about the shortage of goods or service by reading negative comments. For enterprises, the negative comments are inevitable and have great harm to their interests. Therefore, enterprises should take some measures to deal with them. This study is based on the theory of consumer behavior, psychology and related literatures. By using scenario simulative experiment and questionnaire, this study will explore the impact of different network negative comments on consumers’ purchase intention. This study will also explore the best remedial measures to deal with different types of negative comments which can mostly reduce the negative effects of negative comments and provide some scientific basis to enterprises.
INTRODUCTION

Background

In recent years, with the increasing popularity of the Internet technology, online shopping is favored by more and more users because of its convenience, multiple choice and cheapness. Figure 1 describes the growth trend of the number of Internet users and online shopping users in China from 2010 to 2014. The figure shows that until June 2014, the number of Internet users reached 632 million and the size of the online shopping users reached 332 million. This demonstrates that with the increase of Internet users in China, the scale of online shopping users is also increasing and the Internet shopping market in China has enormous development space.

![Figure 1. The number of Internet users and online shopping users in China from 2010 to 2014.](image)

The traditional definition of word-of-mouth refers to the individuals’ comment about the products, service and the companies. It usually spreads among the relatives and friends and has enormous influence. With the progress of the network technology and the popularization of the online shopping, the concept of network word-of-mouth is correspondingly generated. Network word-of-mouth refers to online communication which exchanges the information and experience about products, service and companies by using modern network tools. Nowadays, word-of-mouth is essential for enterprises. High social reputation is good for the enterprises’ image building, and it is a powerful tool for winning. The form of network word-of-mouth is various, including online comments, Internet forums, personal email, chat room, instant messaging and so on. The online comments are the main form of network word-of-mouth. The online comment refers to the evaluation and experience of products which is released on the website by consumers.

AC Nielsen had a survey of 7063 customers in the Asia-Pacific region in 2010. The survey shows that the network product comments is the most trusted sources of information which is only second to friends and family members, reaching 41%. At the same time, about 62% of the mainland network users say that they like to post
negative product comments on the Internet. The 2013 China online shopping market research report shows that when purchasing unfamiliar products, customers’ comments is in the dominant position, reaching 37.5%. The impact of negative comments often harms the interests of the enterprises. Some enterprises usually employ professional company to delete negative comments. But this is not the proper measures. Service recovery first was proposed by Hart in 1990. Service recovery refers to the remedial response to the consumers’ complaints. Some studies have found that if the remedial measures use appropriately, it can make up for the previous service errors and even get unexpected results such as customer loyalty and so on. Therefore, in the case of the negative comments, what kind of remedial measures can take to minimize the negative effect is the urgent to study.

The study of word-of-mouth originated in 1950s. The traditional concept of word-of-mouth refers to the product, service and company's comments which are released by customers. Arndt (1967) first formally proposed the concept of word-of-mouth. He thought that reputation is the informal communication about the products, service, and companies among no real stake individuals. However, the domestic word-of-mouth research is late. Chen (2003) considered that word-of-mouth is the product, service, the company's information such as the characteristics, the use of experience and so on which is exchange and share by customers. Yang et al. (2009) considered word-of-mouth as two-way informal communication between sender and communicator in the non-commercial case. Liang (2014) considered word-of-mouth as an informal dissemination of consumer attitudes to the products or service. In summary, although the concepts of word-of-mouth given by scholars are different, its essence is same. In this study, word-of-mouth refers to the non-commercial transmission that consumers express their views or share the experience of using products or service.

Object

With the development of network technology and the popularization of online shopping, the concept of word-of-mouth is correspondingly generated. Network word-of-mouth refers to online communication which exchanges the information and experience about products, service and companies by using modern network tools. Due to the popularity of the network, customers are usually willing to share the experience and look through the relevant experience when they make the purchase decision. Therefore, the influence of network word-of-mouth is constantly spreading, and it also gets the attention of people. Yang et al. (2006) considered network word-of-mouth as a communicating process about the products or service among individuals with certain relationship. Jiang et al. (2010) studied the factors about the influence of network word-of-mouth on consumer purchase intention. The dissemination of network reputation has the characteristics of timeliness, anonymity and diversity. The forms of network word-of-mouth are online comments, forums, personal email, instant messaging and so on.

The online comments are the main form of network word-of-mouth. The online comment refers to the evaluation and experience of products which is released on the website by consumers. The online comments can be divided into positive online comments and negative online comments. A positive comment is a good evaluation of products or service. In the initial stage of network reviews research, scholars have carried out a lot of research to demonstrate that positive comments have
positive effect on sales. Until the prospect theory, information availability and diagnosis theory are recognized, scholars began to study the negative effect of negative comments. Prospect theory considered people's differences in the sensitivity of perceived loss and profit were significant and the happiness generated by profit was much less than the pain caused by loss. Information availability means the information is easily remembered and the information diagnosis is the ability to judge products' quality. Availability is determined by the diagnosis. If the diagnosis is higher, the availability is higher too. Cui et al. (2012) shows that in the sales of electronic products and video games, negative comments have greater influence than positive comments. The negative online comments can be classified into perceptual negative online comments and rational negative online comments according to their properties. Perceptual negative online comments are starting from the perspective of emotion and mainly express the feeling of products or service. Perceptual negative comments always full of subjective color. And the rational negative comments are more objective. It usually contains the physical attributes of products or service.

The concept of service recovery was generated in the 1990s. Service recovery refers to the series of remedial measures when the enterprises occur errors in providing the service to the consumer. In recent years, the service recovery has been concerned by scholars, and a lot of research is carried out. Zhang et al. (2011) indicated that the service recovery has significant impact on consumers’ sentiment and purchase intention. If enterprises use service recovery correctly, it may change consumers who have complaint into loyal supporters. And if enterprises use service recovery incorrectly, it may deepen the extent of consumer dissatisfaction, resulting in more serious negative impact. Therefore, service recovery is extraordinarily important for the enterprises.

At present, the related research on service recovery includes the following two aspects: the importance of service recovery, the influence of service recovery on consumers’ perception and decision making; the influential factors of service recovery such as culture. An (2004) considered that when hotels deal with service failure, take no action will lead to customers’ great dissatisfaction, but using mental compensation and material compensation will reduce customers’ complaints. Zhu (2012) chose commercial banks as an example, proved that gender and age have effects on the service recovery. These studies mostly focused on the traditional service industry, less on network service industry.

This study will inquiry how the enterprises to adopt different network negative comments remedial measures when faced different types of negative comments, which will deepen the study of service recovery theory.

**METHOD**

The methods of this research are the scenario simulative experiment and questionnaire. Two scenario simulative experiments were carried out in this research. Experiment 1 is a rational negative comments group; the experiment 2 is a perceptual negative comments group. Experiments were conducted in the form of questionnaires. The questionnaires consist of introduction, the basic information of the respondents, the description of experimental situation and some questions. The content of the questionnaire in experiment 1 or 2 was same, and the only difference is the description of experimental situation. The experimental situation is that
customers want to buy watches and they see five product reviews. In order to exclude the influence of the order of comments, negative comment is in the second position. The negative comment of experiment 1 is described as: “To give bad review after wearing half a month, the watch is defective. First of all, there’s a color difference between the true product and sellers’ pictures. In the pictures, the watch is red, but actually the watch is rose red. Second, the dial has a scratch when just received. Third, the leather bracelet started break off only after two days. Fourth, when I was looking for customer service, nobody deal with the problem and the attitude is very poor. I will not come again!” The negative comment was well organized, and the emphasis was placed on the physical features of the watch, the emotional color is not heavy. So we chose it as a rational negative comment. The negative comment of experiment 2 is: "I do not want to say anything, the product is too bad!!!! Please do not buy it, too bad!!!" This comment strongly expressed customer’s dissatisfaction with the commodity by using the punctuation mark. So we chose it as a perceptual negative comment.

PARTICIPANT

In China, students are the largest group of the Internet users, for about 25.1%. And students are also the main force of online shopping. Therefore, this study will choose the students as the main experimental samples and the social personages as the auxiliary experimental samples. The number of participants is 268 which were divided into two groups to carry on the experiments. Each of experiment 1 and experiment 2 is 134 individuals. The total 268 questionnaires were released and all the questionnaires were recovered. According to the integrity and the validity of questionnaires, there were 252 valid questionnaires. So the effective rate was 94%. Each experiment has 126 questionnaires, which is accorded with the basic requirements of statistical analysis.

According to the statistical results, the experimenter is slightly more women than men and most of them are university students whose age are 18-25. And the results also indicate that the college students are the backbone of the online shopping which contributes to improve the effectiveness of the research. At the same time, the proportion of respondents who browse product reviews reached 96.83%, which is sufficient to show the importance of online reviews.

STUDY 1

Hypothesis

Scholars have carried out a lot of research about the influence of network word-of-mouth. Jin (2007)[12] explores the influence of network word-of-mouth on consumer purchase intention from the perspective of the propagation direction, types of network word-of-mouth, and product involvement degree. Lao (2014)[15] shows that the quality of the network word-of-mouth source has a positive effect on consumer decision-making and consumers’ loyalty. With the prospect theory and information availability and diagnosis theory are gradually recognized, scholars have carried a lot of research about negative comments. Lu (2009) [19] used the public comment as an example, which showed that the negative comments rate has a significant impact on the product sales. The negative online comments can be
classified into perceptual negative online comments and rational negative online comments according to their properties. Perceptual negative comments are generally subjective. The rational negative comments are objective. At present, the study of negative online comments is less. In general, the impact of the rational information on consumers is greater, so the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: The impact of rational negative online comments on the consumers’ purchase intention is greater than the perceptual negative online comments.

Figure 2 is the theoretical model of study 1.

![Figure 2. Figure 2 is the theoretical model of study 1.](image)

**Results**

This study used independent sample T test to study the influence of the two types of questionnaire on the consumers’ purchase intention. The results are shown in Table 1. From table 1, we can see that the T value is 7.203, P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that the difference of consumer purchase intention is significant in the background of rational negative comments and perceptual negative comments. In the context of rational negative comments, the mean value of consumers’ purchase intention is 1.53. And in the perceptual negative comments, the mean value of consumers’ purchase intention is 2.30. This shows that the types of negative online comments have the influence on the consumers’ purchase intention, and the impact of rational negative online comments on the consumers’ purchase intention is greater than the perceptual negative online comments. Thus, H1 is established.

| Types of negative comments | Rational | Perceptual |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| consumers’ purchase intention | 1.53     | 2.30       |
| N                          | 126      | 126        |

$t=7.203$  $p=0.000$

**Figure 3.** Table 1 The impact of Rational VS. Perceptual online comments.
STUDY 2

Hypothesis

When enterprises provide service to the consumers, sometimes occurring mistakes is inevitable. Companies usually tend to take some remedial measures. Some the dissatisfied consumers may have higher satisfaction than simple customers if the remedial measures are used correctly. Yang (2007) [27] showed that service recovery measures are conducive to improve the quality of service and increase customer satisfaction. Yang (2014) [28] considered that if you want to let customer delete negative comments, you should carry out remedial measures. As can be seen, service recovery is a very effective method for the enterprise to deal with the negative online comments. So the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2: Compared with no remedial measures, remedial measures can enhance the purchase intention of consumers.

H2a: In the case of the perceptual negative online comments, the remedial measures can enhance more consumers’ purchase intention than the no remedial measures.

H2b: In the case of the rational negative online comments, the remedial measures can enhance more consumers’ purchase intention than the no remedial measures.

Figure 3 is the theoretical model of study 2.

Results

First, this study used independent sample T test to study the influence of the remedial measures on the consumers’ purchase intention. The test results are shown in Table 2. From table 2, the T value is 13.606 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which shows that there is a significant difference between the effect of the remedial measures and no remedial measures on the purchase intention of consumers. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.90 when using remedial measures. And the mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 1.92 with no remedial measures. This suggests that compared with no remedial measures, remedial measures can enhance the purchase intention of consumers. Thus, H2 is established.
Secondly, this study used independent sample T test to study the influence of the remedial measures on the consumers’ purchase intention in the background of perceptual negative comments. The test results are shown in Table 3. From table 3, the T value is 6.104 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is no significant difference between the effect of the remedial measures and no remedial measures on the purchase intention of consumers. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 3.01 when using remedial measures. And the mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.30 with no remedial measures. This shows that in the case of the perceptual negative online comments, the remedial measures can enhance more consumers’ purchase intention than the no remedial measures. Thus, H2a is established.

Finally, this study used independent sample T test to study the influence of the remedial measures on the consumers’ purchase intention in the background of rational negative comments. The test results as shown in Table 4. From table 4, the T value is 15.375 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the effect of the remedial measures and no remedial measures on the purchase intention of consumers. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.80 when using remedial measures. And the mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 1.53 with no remedial measures. This shows that in the case of the rational negative online comments, the remedial measures can enhance more consumers’ purchase intention than the no remedial measures. Thus, H2b is established.
STUDY 3

Hypothesis

The existing literatures have studied the dimensions of the traditional service remedial measures. Bitner et al. (1990)\cite{3} divided the remedial measures into the recognition, interpretation, apology and compensation. Boshoff (2005)\cite{4} considers remedial measures including interpretation, authorization, reply, compensation and so on. On the basis of dimensions of the traditional service remedial measures, this study divided services remedial measures into apology, apology and explanation, apology explanation and material compensation which also combines with feedback of negative online comments. Yang (2014)\cite{28} shows that in service recovery, the material remedial measures will effectively reduce the customer complaint, both material and emotional compensation remedial measures will significantly reduce consumer complaint. Therefore, it can be concluded that the material and emotional compensation is better than only emotional compensation and the measure of apology and explanation is better than just apology. So the following hypotheses are proposed.

H3: The ability of remedial measures to increase the consumers' purchase intention is apology, explanation, material compensation > apology, explanation>apology.

H3a: In the case of the perceptual negative online comments, the ability of remedial measures to increase the consumers' purchase intention is apology, explanation, material compensation > apology, explanation>apology.

H3b: In the case of the rational negative online comments, the ability of remedial measures to increase the consumers' purchase intention is apology, explanation, material compensation > apology, explanation>apology.

Figure4 is the theoretical model of study 3.

Measure1: apology
Measure2: apology, explanation
Measure3: apology, explanation, material compensation

Results

Firstly, we studied the different remedial measures’ ability to increase the consumers’ purchase intention in the context of the perceptual negative online comments. This study used independent sample T test to test hypotheses. The test results are shown in Table 5,6 and 7 respectively.
From table 5, we can see that the T value is 5.474 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the measure 1 and measure 2 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of perceptual negative online comments. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.49 when using remedial measure 1. And the mean value of the consumers’ purchase intention is 3.21 when using remedial measure 2. This shows that in the context of the perceptual negative comments, measure 2 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1.

From table 6, we can see that the T value is 0.792 and the P values is 0.429>0.05, which indicates that there is no significant difference between the measure 2 and measure 3 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of perceptual negative online comments. This shows that in the context of the perceptual negative comments, measure 2 and measure 3 are no differences in the purchase intention of the consumers.

Similarly, from table 7, we can see that the T value is 5.783 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the measure 1 and measure 3 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of perceptual negative online comments. This shows that in the context of the perceptual negative comments, measure 3 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1.

In summary, measure 2 and measure 3 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1. Thus, H3a is not established.

| Table 5. Perceptual group: the impact of remedial measure 1 VS. measure 2. |
|--------------------------------------------------|
| Measure 1 | Measure 2 |
| consumers’ purchase intention | 2.49 | 3.21 |
| N | 126 | 126 |
| t=5.474 p=0.000 |

| Table 6. Perceptual group: the impact of remedial measure 2 VS. measure 3. |
|--------------------------------------------------|
| Measure 2 | Measure 3 |
| consumers’ purchase intention | 3.21 | 3.32 |
| N | 126 | 126 |
| t=0.792 p=0.429 |

| Table 7. Perceptual group: the impact of remedial measure 1 VS. measure 3. |
|--------------------------------------------------|
| Measure 1 | Measure 3 |
| consumers’ purchase intention | 2.49 | 3.32 |
| N | 126 | 126 |
| t=5.783 p=0.000 |
Secondly, we studied the different remedial measures’ ability to increase the consumers’ purchase intention in the context of the rational negative online comments. This study used independent sample T test to test hypotheses. The test results are shown in Table 8, 9 and 10 respectively.

From Table 8, we can see that the T value is 4.588 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the measure 1 and measure 2 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of rational negative online comments. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.17 when using remedial measure 1. And the mean value of the consumers’ purchase intention is 2.79 when using remedial measure 2. This shows that in the context of the rational negative comments, measure 2 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1.

From Table 9, we can see that the T value is 4.627 and the P values is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the measure 2 and measure 3 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of rational negative online comments. The mean value of the consumer purchase intention is 2.79 when using remedial measure 2. And the mean value of the consumers’ purchase intention is 3.43 when using remedial measure 3. This shows that in the context of the rational negative comments, measure 3 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 2.

Similarly, from Table 10, we can see that the T value is 9.894 and the P value is 0.000<0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference between the measure 1 and measure 3 on the purchase intention of consumers in the case of rational negative online comments. This shows that in the context of the rational negative comments, measure 3 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1. In summary, measure 3 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 2 and measure 2 can more enhance consumers’ purchase intention than measure 1. Thus, H3b is established. All in all, H3 is partly established.

Table 8. Rational group: the impact of remedial measure 1 VS. measure 2.

| Measure 1 | Measure 2 |
|-----------|-----------|
| consumers’ purchase intention | 2.17 | 2.79 |
| N | 126 | 126 |
| t=4.588 p=0.000 |

Table 9. Rational group: the impact of remedial measure 2 VS. measure 3.

| Measure 2 | Measure 3 |
|-----------|-----------|
| consumers’ purchase intention | 2.79 | 3.43 |
| N | 126 | 126 |
| t=4.627 p=0.000 |
Table10. Rational group: the impact of remedial measure 1 VS. measure 3.

|                         | Measure 1 | Measure 3 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| consumers' purchase intention | 2.17      | 3.43      |
| N                       | 126       | 126       |

\[t=9.894 \ p=0.000\]

CONCLUSION

This study is based on the theory of consumer behavior, psychology and related literatures. By using scenario simulative experiment and questionnaire, this study will explore the impact of different network negative comments on consumers’ purchase intention. This study will also explore the best remedial measures to deal with different types of negative comments which can mostly reduce the negative effects of negative comments and provide some scientific basis to enterprises.

1. This study mainly draws the conclusions as following.
(1) Different types of negative comments will affect the purchase intention of consumers

In this research, two groups of situational experiments were conducted: the rational negative comments group and the perceptual negative comments group. Through the analysis of the two groups of experimental questionnaires, this study draws the conclusion that different types of negative comments will affect the purchase intention of consumers. And the impact of rational negative online comments on the consumers’ purchase intention is greater than the perceptual negative online comments.

(2) The impact of remedial measures on the purchase intention of consumers

Through the analysis of the questionnaire, we concluded that: enterprises using remedial measures will increase consumers’ purchase intention. In the case of different negative comments, the effect of remedial measures is different.

When in the case of rational negative online comments, the remedy effect of “apology, explanation, and material compensation” measure is best, the remedy effect of “apology, and explanation” measure is middle and the remedy effect of “apology” measure is worst. When in the case of perceptual negative online comments, the remedy effect of “apology” measure is worst and the effect of the other two remedial measures has no difference.

2. This study also provides some scientific basis to enterprises when faced negative comments.
(1) The enterprise should pay attention to the rational negative online comments

Some companies tend to think that the emotional negative comments will greatly affect their interests. But this study indicates that the impact of rational negative online comments on the consumers’ purchase intention is greater than the
perceptual negative online comments. Therefore, when there is a rational negative comment, the enterprise must pay attention to it and well handle it, otherwise it will greatly damage the enterprises’ interests.

(2) When faced with a negative comment, the enterprises should actively adopt remedial measures

The results of this research show that remedial measures can greatly reduce the negative effect of negative comments. When faced with a negative comment, the enterprises should actively adopt remedial measures. Enterprises should try their best to minimize the negative effect.

(3) When faced different negative comments, companies should adopt different remedies flexibly

This study shows that the effect of different remedial measures is different in the case of different negative comments.

When faced a rational negative comments, “apology, explanation, and material compensation” measure is the most effective. So what the enterprises need to do is that "convincing people with reason, apology and appropriate compensation”. While coping with perceptual negative comments, the enterprise just need to “convincing people with reason and emotional compensation”.

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