

# Can Negative Online Reviews Be Perceived Differently on Different Websites?

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## Abstract

Prior research has suggested that negative online reviews may have greater effect to the receiver of word-of-mouth communication than similar positive online reviews. This research investigates the impact negative online reviews may have when consumers post them on different types of websites. Specifically, boundary conditions such as review types and review characteristics were considered as they interacted with website types to affect reviewer source credibility, specifically, reviewer expertise, trustworthiness, and ultimately, information usefulness. Study 1 results demonstrated that negative informative online reviews influence consumer's perceptions of reviewer expertise on a knowledge-centric website compared to that on a social-centric website. However, this effect did not operate for negative online recommender reviews. Readers on knowledge-centric websites may want information to make decisions about reviewer expertise to determine whether a review was trustworthy and therefore, useful. Study 2 results demonstrated that high review reads had similar impact on both social-centric and knowledge-centric websites in terms of perceived reviewer expertise. However, when reviews had low reads, individuals on knowledge-centric websites may ignore such cues. Theoretical and managerial implications were discussed.

**Keywords:** negative online reviews, social-centric websites, knowledge-centric websites, informative reviews, recommender reviews, reviewer expertise

## 1. Introduction

Online consumer reviews have become an essential tool in the interactive marketing environment (Ho-Dac et al., 2013; Grewal & Levy, 2007). Past research has underscored the importance of consumer generated word-of-mouth owing to its credibility and influence (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Moore, 2015). However, not all online reviews have similar effects on consumers. While positive reviews are more prevalent (Fowler & De Avila, 2009), research has demonstrated the impact of negative reviews on information usefulness (Willemsen et al., 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007), product sales (Basuroy et al., 2003; Park & Lee, 2009) and consumer attitude (Lis & Fischer, 2020). There is strong evidence that negative information has more value to the receiver of word-of-mouth communication than positive information (Rose & Blodgett, 2016; Ulrich & Brunner, 2016). This research investigates the impact negative online reviews may have when consumers post them on different types of websites.

Recognizing the substantial weightage given to online reviews as source of information, marketers tend to encourage consumers to post their evaluations of products and services in the form of reviews. Such reviews are not only posted on e-retail sites (such as Amazon.com), but also published on consumer opinion websites such as epinions.com, ConsumerReview.com, consumersearch.com, among others (Sen & Lerman, 2007). In recent years, marketers are promoting their products across a host of product review platforms as well, such as social media websites (e.g., Facebook) and user-generated online knowledge platforms (such as Yahoo Answers, Quora.com). Additionally, there are numerous specific online platforms for B-to-B users (such as GetApp), financial services (e.g., FinancesOnline), general services (such as Angies' list and HomeAdvisor.com) that are all trying to persuade potential customers by being the primary opinion website for specialized product and service categories.

While different aspects of online reviews have been investigated, an interesting question relates to the impact

online reviews may have across different websites. In other words, can negative online reviews be perceived differently on different websites? Extant research has studied the extent to which various website information has been used by consumers (Kwak et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2021; Chatterjee, 2001; Dholakia et al., 2002). While there are different types of websites (Wolters, 2022; Qualati et al., 2021), this research focuses on social networking websites since they are familiar to most online users. Social networking websites are web applications where consumers build social networks or relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections. Two specific social networking website types are considered in this research, namely, *socializing* social network websites such as Facebook (hereafter social-centric) and *knowledge-centric* social network websites such as Quora (hereafter knowledge-centric). Even though both websites run on user-generated content, they are fundamentally different in their purpose. Social-centric network websites are primarily used for socializing with existing friends and/or family members, whereas, knowledge-centric social network websites are used for helping users find specific information or gain knowledge on specific resources/topics.

Although past research has studied the impact of various social network websites (Jagiripu et al., 2022; Edosomwan et al., 2011), to the best of my knowledge, no research exists that tries to understand whether reviewer credibility and therefore, review usefulness is impacted when the *same* negative online review is posted on different social networking websites. Understanding the differential impact of reviews on website types is important at theoretical and managerial levels. Theoretically, this research contributes by suggesting that: 1) Reviews on different websites differently impact source credibility, specifically, reviewer expertise, and ultimately, information usefulness. Across two studies, participants consider knowledge-centric websites having a greater impact on reviewer expertise compared to social-centric networking websites. 2) This research also extends by determining the boundary conditions that impact the effect of website types. The main effects of website types on reviewer expertise, trustworthiness and ultimately, information usefulness are moderated by two different types of contextual variables, such as, review type (such as whether the review is informational or recommending a product), and review characteristics (number of people who read the review).

Managerially, this research is important for firms as they spend marketing resources in posting their product features on different types of websites to elicit consumer interaction in the form of product feedback. Companies, by encouraging consumer-to-consumer exchanges in online communities, not only cut the costs of servicing customers but also obtain innovative ideas for improving company offerings and building customer equity (Yu et al., 2021; King et al., 2014). While positive reviews are worthwhile, negative reviews are harmful (Kwak et al., 2023). This research contributes by suggesting that managers should pay increased attention to targeted websites that generate negative feedback. This research demonstrates the importance of focusing specifically on knowledge-centric websites whenever consumers post negative reviews on them. By addressing product and service oriented negative feedback on these websites, managers may be better equipped at reducing negative customer experience and the exponential impact negative reviews may have on potential future customers.

## 2. Literature Review

According to PWC Global Consumer Insights Survey report (2023), more than half surveyed (54%) ranked search engines as the top source of pre-purchase information, E-commerce aggregator Amazon came in second (35%), followed closely by individual retailers' websites (33%), which are also used by 31% of respondents to pore over customer reviews. As online buying and selling is becoming the dominant method of business transactions, it is becoming important for marketers to collect information about consumer buying experiences. Most e-commerce websites attach significant emphasis on gathering customer feedback in the form of online reviews. Such data has been analyzed not only for understanding customers' perceptions and experiences but also for exploring customer characteristics and traits for more nuanced product offerings. Other than analyzing positive customer online reviews, negative ones are especially scrutinized more since electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) effect is greater for negative than positive ones (Rose and Blodgett, 2016; Ulrich and Brunner, 2016). This research extends previous investigations related to negative online reviews by exploring the roles that consumers play in apprising the social community at large about their product/service consumption experiences.

Negative information has been considered more diagnostic and informative than positive ones for product decision making purposes. Past research has also demonstrated that when the decision-making process is focused on the content of the message, such as the quality of information, negative framing is more effective than positive framing (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). A negative WOM message could have a stronger influence on a customer's brand evaluations (Ulrich & Brunner, 2015) and purchase intentions than positive message (Tata, Prashar, & Gupta, 2020). Negative online reviews have been found to have an increased effect on the perceived riskiness of the product in consumers' minds in terms of both quality and quantity (Lee et al.,

2008), a negative effect on the attitude toward the product and helpfulness of the review (Folse et al., 2016).

Even though researchers have studied the effect of negative online reviews in many ways, there exist gaps in the literature that have remained unexplored. One aspect that requires further investigation relates to the ability of negative online reviews to elicit different reactions from potential review readers when they are read on different types of websites. Since marketers want to maximize their marketing resources, they may promote or discuss their products across many different websites. Consumers, likewise, discuss their interactions with brands across multiple websites such as e-retail, consumer opinion, social networking websites, to name a few. This research focuses on social network centric websites that are interactive, Internet-based applications. Such websites run on user-generated content such as user-submitted digital photos, text posts, “tagging”, online comments, and blogs. Such networking websites facilitate the formation of online social networks by connecting user’s profile with those of other individuals or groups. Two specific types of social networks are discussed in this research, namely, social-centric networking website and knowledge-centric networking website.

### *2.1 Website Types*

Social-centric networking websites are those that carry consumer-generated content which encompass “media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers” (Blackshaw, 2006). Such sites allow registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. The contents generated by these social media include a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers, known to one another in the form of friends and issues (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Such consumer-generated content supported through social-centric networking websites is “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006, p. 4). Facebook would be an example of such a website.

On the other hand, knowledge-centric websites are those where consumers provide information, opinion and recommendations based on their knowledge and expertise on certain subject matters. In such websites, questions are asked, answered, edited and organized by its community of users (Peng & Zhou, 2021). Consumers tend to have experience, knowledge, and judgment concerning questions posed by other consumers. Since answers are evaluated by other members of the community, the consumers tend to present their information when they are sure that they are aware of the answers or when they are experts on the topic. Thus, these websites become knowledge repositories of community generated questions and answers. Such networks are loosely held together based on interest in common knowledge amongst its members. Quora.com and Yahoo! Answers would be examples of such websites.

There are many similarities between social-centric and knowledge-centric networking websites: Both website types are similar in allowing consumers to view the profiles of reviewers and the opportunity to ‘like’ or ‘upvote’ comments, that may have an effect on consumer perception (Tseng et al., 2023). Both are useful sites for information gathering and sharing that help individuals harness the latent resources of their personal connections by asking questions and requesting other kinds of assistance, such as social and instrumental support, termed as social capital (Bourdieu, 1983). Morris, Teevan, and Panovich (2010) suggest that consumers prefer social-centric websites to pose questions because of two major motivations: a) trust in their online contacts and b) the expectation of subjective relevance regarding the answers provided by their contacts. Specifically, these websites are important for certain information needs, such as those revolving around everyday occurrences, entertainment related news and information are more commonly sought from individuals consumers already know (Vermeer et al., 2020; Gra et al., 2013).

Prior research demonstrates an important relationship between social centric networking and the enhancement of social capital, a sociological concept that captures the perceived and actual resources individuals accrue through interactions with their social network (Burke et al., 2011; Ellison et al., 2011; Ellison & Vitak, 2015). Consumers gain social and emotional support, advice and information from such websites (Sundararaj & Rejeesh, 2021). Knowledge-centric sites have also been successful at generating social capital. For example, artists associated with major industry labels get most of the attention when imparting knowledge and tend to link to each other (Jean-Samuel & Thomas, 2009), thus finding support and information both online and offline.

While both types of websites share several similarities, there are differences that stand out. Social-centric networking sites are primarily associated with activities individuals engage in (such as creating profiles, uploading photos and videos and sending messages) with friends and family members. Individuals also engage in social QandA behavior, that is, people asking questions to their friends via their status updates on such sites

(Banerjee et al., 2021). When searching for information online, people combine online sources with social sources of information (Evans & Chi, 2008). Morris et al. (2010) found that people asked subjective questions to their friends whom they trusted to provide tailored responses. They found that the majority of the questions were asking for recommendations and opinions, and pertained to technology and entertainment. Interestingly, participants were uncomfortable asking questions about health, religion, and dating as they were too personal.

Two consumer characteristics are the hallmark of knowledge-centric websites: a). individuals with self-professed expertise on specific topics tend to voice themselves and, b). distant social connections. Besides, maintaining of real identities, ability to upvote and follow, building reputation as a motivator for participation, judging other users' reputation and ranking answers to a question help maintain quality of information circulation (Banerjee et al., 2021; Paul, Hong, & Chi, 2012). Therefore, individuals feel comfortable interacting with strangers to elicit answers to questions. Because of consumers' ease of using the different social networking websites, companies are now tapping these sites for various marketing efforts: posting advertisements and videos and eliciting product reviews from consumers, to name a few. Consumers are also eager to reciprocate by posting reviews of products and services. Not all reviews are positive, consumers post negative reviews as well, which is the focus of this research. How are negative reviews perceived on different social networking websites? Are consumer perceptions of source credibility (in terms of reviewer expertise and trustworthiness) and information usefulness affected when the same negative online review is posted on different networking sites?

In social-centric networking websites, ties or levels of intensity of social relationships between consumers are stronger (Cheung et al., 2011). Past research has supported that consumers tend to actively seek information amongst strong-tie networks (where the strength of relationships is robust) rather than weak-tie networks (where the strength of relationships is not strong) such as knowledge-centric networks. Brown and Reingen (1987) even suggested that information from strong-tie networks is perceived as more influential in potential consumers' decision-making process than is information received from weak-tie sources. If this is so, would a negative online review be perceived to be more influential when posted on a social-centric networking website compared to that posted on a knowledge-centric networking site? It is believed that there are specific situations where knowledge-centric websites are considered to generate a greater sense of perceived reviewer credibility, leading to information usefulness, compared to social-centric websites. Next, a review of the literature on online review types will provide a boundary condition that might interact with website types to influence reviewer expertise and ultimately, review helpfulness.

## *2.2 Review Types—Informative and Recommender Reviews*

Consumers situate their experiences and thoughts about the products in their online consumer reviews and use them as an informant and a recommender to help other consumers (Park et al., 2007). Thus, online consumer reviews have two roles: that of an informant and a recommender. As an informant, online consumer reviews provide the type of product information that is similar to the information provided by sellers. However, online consumer reviews offer more consumer-oriented information, whereas sellers offer more product-oriented information such as product attributes, technical specifications, and performance results in relation to technical standards. On the other hand, online consumer reviews describe product attributes in terms of usage situations and measure the product performance from a user's perspective. Online consumer reviews also provide additional attribute-value information that sellers are unwilling to mention or explain because of some limitation such as the limited space for a description (Lee et al., 2008). An example of an informant review would be: "I bought this so that I could use and charge my Tab at the same time. My tab does not recognize the high-power port and will either charge while off or use power while on, it will not charge while powered on."

On the other hand, as a recommender, online consumer reviews make recommendations about a product or a seller in a manner similar to traditional WOM communications. This relates to providing a clear signal or cue related to the liking for and recommending the product (Lee et al., 2007). An example of a recommender review would be: "Be careful when ordering these cases. Not all Galaxy II's are the same. Mine was a Sprint and this one did not fit my phone. It went into the trash can as it wasn't worth sending back. I would not suggest buying this at all."

Hsu, Lin, and Chiang (2013) investigated the effect of WOM on consumers' buying intentions in the context of blogger recommendations. Using data from online survey of 327 blog users, the results showed that the informant and recommender roles positively affected consumers' purchase intentions. Park and Lee (2009) found that online reviews involving experiences, evaluations and opinions on products from previous consumers played two roles as an informant and recommender. However, there is a conflict between the two roles when a large number of reviews are offered. From the perspective of the recommender role, consumers had a more

favorable attitude towards the product as a greater number of positive reviews were offered while consumers were confronted with too much information, which resulted in information overload. Yoon (2008) studied the effect of information quality on EWOMS recommendation acceptance. The study also found that information diagnosticity and informant trustworthiness are critical factors for consumers' acceptance of recommendation. Previous research has discussed online review elaborateness in terms of providing information to consumers (Liu & Park, 2015) but has failed to discuss the differences informant review can generate understanding of review helpfulness compared to recommendation reviews. Past research has provided evidence for recommendation reviews to have greater impact on source credibility when such reviews provide diagnostic information rather than just a recommendation. However, we believe that the relationship may be attenuated when different types of social media websites come into play.

It is hypothesized that there may be situations where informative reviews may be considered as good as recommendation reviews. In social-centric websites, consumers tend to be amongst known friends or acquaintances and therefore, the information provided may not be viewed with seriousness or the consumer may be regarded as an expert such that the source is regarded as credible. However, in a knowledge-centric website, consumers providing information may be regarded as a peer and an expert. Besides, the discussions are considered to be serious in nature and therefore, more heeded. Thus, it is believed that the effect of informant reviews on source credibility will be higher for a knowledge-centric website than for a social media centric website. Since the two major aspects of source credibility are perceived reviewer expertise and trustworthiness (Belch & Belch, 1994, pp. 189–190), this study suggests that negative informant reviews on knowledge-centric networking sites have a greater impact on reviewer expertise than those on social-centric networking websites.

**H1:** The effect of website type on reviewer expertise will be moderated by review type such that informative reviews compared to recommender reviews will generate higher perceived reviewer expertise on knowledge-centric website than on social-centric websites.

It is important to understand the role of negative online reviews on different networking websites beyond its effect on reviewer expertise. We propose a conceptual model that entails reviewer expertise and trustworthiness as facets of reviewer credibility, and their ultimate impact on information usefulness. Past research has already established that expertise to competently facilitate an activity establishes trust formation (Ventre & Colbe, 2020). Wood, Boles and Babin (2008) supported the idea that someone who has more expertise is at least capable of performing the required task and thus expertise contributes to trust. Thus, perceived expertise has a positive effect on trustworthiness.

**H2:** There is a positive relation between perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness.

Finally, in the online environment, there are unlimited opportunities to express consumer thoughts and feelings towards products and service experiences. It is up to the readers to determine the usefulness of such information. If the consumer thinks that the online reviews are published by expert and trustworthy reviewers, then the chances of acceptance of the review would be higher (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Thus,

**H3:** There is a positive relationship between perceived reviewer trustworthiness and information usefulness.

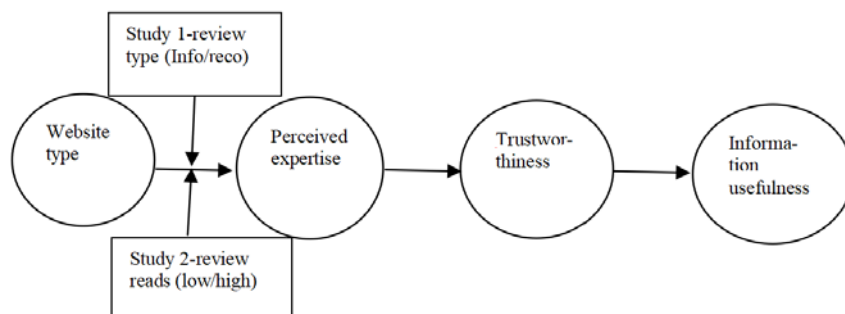


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

### 3. Study 1 Methodology

This study involved a 2 (website type: social media centric vs. knowledge centric website) x 2 (review type: informant vs. recommender reviews) between-subjects experiment. The study was conducted online using

MTurk data comprising of a sample size of 233.

### 3.1 Pretests

Before collecting data for the main study, two sets of pretests were conducted. The first set of pretests were conducted to understand how consumers perceived website types. Participants were asked about their understanding of the terms social-centric and knowledge-centric networking websites. The pretest results demonstrated that social-centric networking websites were considered to be for friends and family ( $M = 3.92$ ) and less for accumulating knowledge ( $M = 2.63$ ); similarly, knowledge-centric networking websites were considered to be for knowledge gathering ( $M = 4.23$ ) and less for socializing for friends and family ( $M = 3.02$ );  $t = 27.78$  ( $df 37$ ),  $p < .01$ .

The second set of pretests related to understanding participants' perception of review types. To this end, informative and recommender negative online reviews were pretested. Participants were shown an image of a smartphone with its features and were told to read the online reviews for the smartphone. 39 students from an undergraduate class in a university were used to conduct the pretests. The results showed success in using informative and recommendation reviews ( $M_{\text{Informant}} = 4.32$ ,  $M_{\text{Recommender}} = 5.36$ ;  $t$  ( $df 37$ ) = 2.55,  $p < .05$ ).

In the main experiment, all respondents were told to imagine that they were intending to purchase a smart phone. A picture and description of a recent smart phone was provided to participants to create the context for subsequent manipulations. Participants were next provided with a review (review type manipulation: informative vs. recommender review) for the smartphone and were requested to read it. The informative review was: "I bought this smart phone in September 2015. First, the phone does not work well. The screen resolution is visibly inferior because of less dense pixels. Second, the battery does not support the 33 hours of usage time that is promoted. Third, the smart phone heats up very quickly when you use the camera." The recommendation review was similar to the informative review except that the sentence, "I do not recommend this smart phone at all" was also added. For website type manipulation, participants were asked to imagine that they were reading the above review either on a social-centric versus knowledge-centric website. Along with the review, the details of the reviewer were also posted, such as: Savvy smart phone user, member since: September, 2015, total number of reviews: 102, number of friends (followers) on a popular social-centric (knowledge-centric) site: 150. Following this, manipulation check questions, demand effect questions and statements to gauge the dependent variables (perceived reviewer expertise, perceived reviewer trustworthiness and information usefulness) were asked, followed by demographic questions. All dependent variables were measured using pre-existing scales.

For the manipulation check for website type, the participants were asked to indicate the networking website that the reviewer posted reviews on. The website type manipulation check was also successful ( $M_{\text{Social-centric}} = 1.64$ ,  $M_{\text{Knowledge-centric}} = 1.85$ ;  $t$  ( $df 231$ ) = 2.32,  $p < .05$ ). The review type manipulation check was successful ( $M_{\text{Informant}} = 4.09$ ,  $M_{\text{Recommender}} = 4.98$ ;  $t$  ( $df 231$ ) = 2.57,  $p < .05$ ). Additionally, the reliability for perceived reviewer expertise, perceived reviewer trustworthiness and information usefulness as dependent variables were above .85, suggesting reliable items were used to measure the constructs.

### 3.2 Results

This study was conducted to understand whether review type moderated the relation between website type and perceived reviewer expertise. To analyze the moderation of website type and review type on perceived reviewer expertise, a two-way ANOVA was run. The results demonstrated that the two-way interaction was significant ( $F_{(1, 229)} = 4.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Planned contrasts revealed that the mean perceived expertise for informant reviews were higher on knowledge-centric websites ( $M=5.69$ ) compared to that on social-centric websites ( $M=4.89$ ;  $t$  ( $df 231$ ) = 4.02,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, informant reviews moderated the relation between website-types and perceived expertise (Figure 2); H1 supported. The main effect of website type was also significant ( $F_{(1, 231)} = 4.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while that for review type was not significant ( $F_{(1, 231)} = .05$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

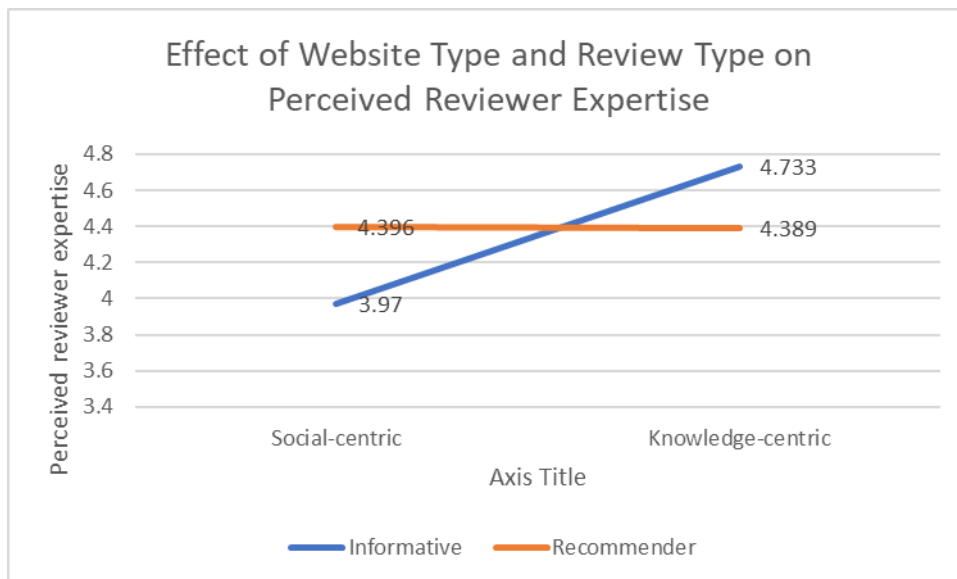


Figure 2. The effect of website type and review type on perceived reviewer expertise

Study 1 also investigated the interaction of review type and website type on perceived reviewer expertise, leading to perceived reviewer trustworthiness and ultimately, information usefulness. To this end, multigroup structural equations modeling using AMOS was conducted with all variables in question. First, exploratory factor analysis was conducted with varimax rotation. Out of the three variables representing expertise, one was used, five variables represented trustworthiness and three variables representing information usefulness, resulting in a total of nine variables that were used to subsequently run the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). All variables were reliable (Cronbach’s alpha > .70). Next, CFA was conducted; results ensured good fit ( $\chi^2_{(df\ 68)} = 136.15, p < .05, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .96$ ). The model showed that all variables loaded significantly on their latent constructs, thus ensuring convergent validity. Discriminant validity was demonstrated by finding whether the correlations between latent variables were lesser than the squared factor loadings. All constructs demonstrated discriminant validity (Table 1). Next, structural model with multigroups of website type and review type was undertaken. The structural model demonstrated good fit, ( $\chi^2_{(df\ 64)} = 145.20, p < .05, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .96$ ). For informative reviews, the path from website type to expertise was significant ( $\beta = .28, p < .05$ ), however, the path was not significant for recommender reviews ( $\beta = -.00, p > .05$ ), demonstrating moderation. For both informative and recommender reviews, the paths from perceived expertise to perceived trustworthiness were significant ( $\beta_{informative} = .50, p < .05; \beta_{recommender} = .68, p < .05$ ), supporting H2. Similarly, for both review types, the paths from trustworthiness to information usefulness were also significant ( $\beta_{informative} = .70, p < .05; \beta_{recommender} = .69, p < .05$ ), supporting H3 (Figure 1).

Table 1. Study 1 Measurement Model

Constructs/Items	SL	t-val	CR	AVE
<b>Trustworthiness</b>			0.86 (.83)	0.55 (.50)
The reviewer is dependable	0.79 (.73)			
The reviewer is honest	0.74 (.59)	7.88 (5.49)*		
The reviewer is reliable	0.81 (.70)	8.8 (6.51)*		
The reviewer is trustworthy	0.66 (.77)	6.94 (7.11)*		
The reviewer is qualified	0.71 (.72)	7.57 (6.63)*		
<b>Information usefulness</b>			0.88 (.88)	0.7 (.71)
In found the review to be useful	0.82 (.83)			
In found the review to be valuable	0.82 (.82)	9.37 (9.13)*		
In found the review to be worthwhile	0.87 (.88)	9.98 (9.76)*		

Note. \* p value <.001; SL Standardized loadings; t-val t value; CR Composite reliability; AVE Average variance extracted.

### 3.3 Study 1 Discussion

The aim of Study 1 was to understand the moderating effect of review type and website type on information

usefulness, via perceived reviewer expertise and trustworthiness. Specifically, the results suggested that website types and review types interacted such that perceived reviewer expertise was higher for the same negative review on a knowledge-centric website than when posted on a social-centric website. However, that was not the case with recommender reviews. Because of the perception of the reviewer was different in the two different websites, the relationship of reviewer expertise, trustworthiness and information usefulness was different in different websites with all pathways significant for informative reviews but not for recommender reviews. However, one wonders whether these results would be tenable when a different moderator is introduced in terms of review characteristics. In Study 2, a boundary condition of the number of reads for a particular negative online review was introduced and its effect on the conceptual model studied.

#### 4. Study 2

Knowing that individuals treat negative online reviews differently on different websites, it is important to find various boundary conditions that may affect this relationship. Zhu and Zhang (2010) have suggested that firms' online strategies should be contingent on product and consumer characteristics. However, recent research has suggested the importance of understanding reviewer *and* review characteristics as equally important in the effort to develop firms' online strategies (Luo et al., 2021). Study 2 deals with finding *review* characteristic in terms of the number of reads for a particular negative online review as a boundary condition that may interact with website types to influence perceived reviewer expertise and trustworthiness, leading to information usefulness. In recent research, Baek et al., (2012) found that peripheral cues such as information sources shape effectiveness of reviews. Using online consumer reviews from Amazon.com, they found that review ratings influence the helpfulness of reviews. There exists research that discusses the importance of the volume of reviews affecting product/service sales (Liu, 2006; Dellarocas et al., 2007). Dellarocas et al. (2007) have discussed that early volume of online reviews can help in forecasting revenue of movie tickets. This is especially important in industries where sales data are not publicly available. By studying the quantity of online reviews, one can gauge the success of a competitor's offerings. Fogel and Zachariah (2017) have demonstrated that increased number of reviews read increased purchase intentions and behavior. However, their research was related to a single website (Yelp.com) and did not delve into the interactive effect of website types on reviewer expertise.

Although research demonstrates the importance of the quantity of reviews generates for a product, there is little research that discusses factors such as the number of consumers that have read a particular review posted. Would such information be important to potential or future review readers? How would firms benefit when such information is posted? Such factors become important when hundreds of reviews related to a particular product/service get posted on different consumer websites. Owing to lack of time and interests, not all reviews would be read and therefore, the number of reads for a particular review may become an important cue for potential customers. It is important to highlight that some firms do indicate the popularity of reviews. However, little research exists that hints at how popular negative online reviews may impact reviewer credibility and information usefulness when posted across different websites. Managers may gain important information in terms of directing potential readers to most/least popular reviews rather than losing customers who get frustrated wading through myriad reviews to make informed product/service decisions.

Prior studies suggested that customers rarely view online comments beyond the first two web pages (Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006). To prevent information overload, many a times, consumers use peripheral cues to decide on their future online behaviors (Zhu et al., 2014). When a review is read by many potential consumers, it is perceived to be a popular review and the vice versa applies for reviews that are hardly read. Intuitively, when a review is read by a large number of people, it is considered to have a greater impact. Conversely, reviews that are read by few people would have less impact. However, would this logic be tenable across different website types? We predict that website types would interact with the number of review reads to influence perceived reviewer expertise, which in turn, would affect perceived reviewer trustworthiness and information usefulness. On a social-centric networking website, potential consumers may have a more casual frame of mind and may use a peripheral cue such as low number of reads for a review as a sign that the review may not be worth reading and the reviewer expertise may be questioned. However, when the same review is posted on a knowledge-centric networking website, potential consumers may be more tuned to careful evaluation of information. Therefore, they may tend to ignore peripheral cues such as lower number of review reads and may be systemically evaluating the information provided to generate their ultimate evaluation of the review. Therefore, even though there may be a smaller number of reads for a review, the perceived reviewer trust may not be considered low on knowledge-centric website. Thus,

**H4:** The effect of website types on perceived reviewer expertise will be moderated by the total number of review reads such that low number of reads compared to high number of reads will generate greater perception of



reviewer expertise on knowledge-centric website than that generated on social-centric website.

#### 4.1 Study 2 Methodology

A 2 (website type: social media centric vs. knowledge centric website) x2 (low vs. high review reads) between subjects' experiment was conducted using MTurk data comprising of a sample size of 204 respondents. The stimuli (smart phone) used for this study was similar to that used in Study 1. The two manipulations were provided after the smart phone information was presented: website type was manipulated similar to that in Study 1; while providing information about the reviewer, the respondent was asked to imagine that there was low (100) / high (100,000) number of reads for that particular review. The procedure followed for this study was the same as that of Study 2.

#### 4.2 Results

Study 2 was conducted to understand whether low/high number of review reads moderated the relation between website type and perceived reviewer expertise such that even a smaller number of review reads had greater impact on knowledge-centric websites than on social-centric websites. The manipulation checks for the two independent variables were successful. For the manipulation check for website type, consumers who saw social-centric/knowledge-centric website agreed to the website type they saw as the manipulation ( $M_{\text{Social-centric}} = 3.56$ ,  $M_{\text{Knowledge-centric}} = 4.13$ ,  $F_{(1, 202)} = 15.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For the second manipulation check, respondents were asked to estimate the number of people who had seen the smartphone review presented by the reviewer. 84% of the respondents answered correctly (96/106 correctly identified low number of review reads while 75/97 correctly identified high number of review reads,  $\chi^2_{(df 2)} = 4.7$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

As observed in Study 1, Study 2 also demonstrated the moderating effect of number of review reads on the relationship between website type and perceived expertise. To understand the moderating effect, a two-way ANOVA was run; the results demonstrated that the overall model was significant ( $F_{(1, 200)} = 3.88$ ,  $p < .05$ ); the two-way interaction was also significant ( $F_{(1, 200)} = 4.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Planned contrasts revealed that the mean perceived expertise for low number of reads on knowledge-centric networking website was higher ( $M=5.30$ ) compared to that on social-centric website ( $M=4.74$ ;  $t_{(df 202)} = 3.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the difference in means of perceived expertise for low review reads ( $M = 5.30$ ) vs. high review reads ( $M = 5.28$ ) on knowledge-centric networking website was not significant ( $.72$ ,  $p > .05$ ); H4 supported. Thus, the effect of website types on perceived reviewer expertise was moderated by low/high number of review reads such that low reads on knowledge-centric website will create a higher perception of reviewer expertise than that on social-centric website. This finding does not undermine the ability of higher number of reads. In general, they do generate high perception of reviewer expertise (Figure 3). As seen in Study 1, the main effect of website type was significant ( $F_{(1, 200)} = 4.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ); reviewer expertise was perceived to be higher on knowledge-centric networking websites ( $M=5.01$ ) compared to social-centric networking websites (4.69). The main effect of low/high review reads was partially significant ( $F_{(1, 200)} = 3.57$ ,  $p < .10$ ).

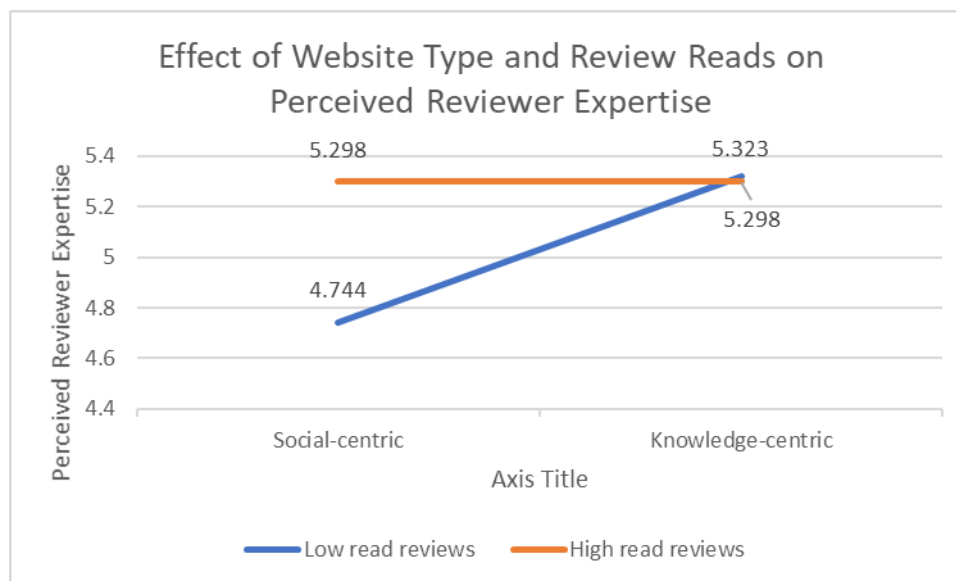


Figure 3. The effect of website type and review reads on perceive reviewer expertise

Just like Study 1, this study also explored the effect of the interaction of website type and review reads on perceived reviewer expertise, leading to perceived trustworthiness and information usefulness. Structural equations modeling was used to run the model; EFA and CFA were run before the structural model was tested. All variables loaded on their respective constructs, demonstrating unidimensionality. CFA demonstrated good fit:  $\chi^2_{(df\ 64)} = 160.08, p < .07, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .91$ ). Next, reliability and discriminant validity of the model was assessed; both demonstrated that the models were reliable and valid, as in Study 1 (Table 2).

Table 2. Study 2 Measurement Model

Constructs/Items	SL	t-val	CR	AVE
<b>Trustworthiness</b>			0.92 (.94)	0.7 (.76)
The reviewer is dependable	0.74 (.83)			
The reviewer is honest	0.7 (.80)	7.99 (9.80)		
The reviewer is reliable	0.97 (.94)	11.6 (12.68)		
The reviewer is trustworthy	0.92 (.90)	10.93 (11.72)		
The reviewer is qualified	0.82 (.76)	9.58 (9.13)		
<b>Information usefulness</b>				
In found the review to be useful	0.95 (.94)		0.95 (.94)	0.87 (.85)
In found the review to be valuable	0.95 (.88)	21.86 (15.01)		
In found the review to be worthwhile	0.9 (.94)	18.3 (18.5)		

Note. \* p value < .001; SL Standardized loadings; t-val t value; CR Composite reliability; AVE Average variance extracted.

Finally, the structural model was assessed using multiple sample analysis with number of reads as the two groups. The structural model demonstrated good fit:  $\chi^2_{(df\ 68)} = 133.71, p < .05, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .94$ . The effect of website type on perceived expertise when respondents saw low number of review reads was significant ( $\beta = .31, p < .05$ ), however, the result was not significant for high review reads ( $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ), thus, supporting H4. As in Study 1, the paths from perceived expertise to trustworthiness was significant for both website types ( $\beta_{informant} = .49, p < .05; \beta_{recommender} = .73, p < .05$ ). Similarly, the paths from trustworthiness to information usefulness were also significant ( $\beta_{informant} = .71, p < .05, \beta_{recommender} = .75, p < .05$ ); H2 and H3 supported.

#### 4.3 Study 2 Discussion

The aim of Study 2 was to understand the moderating effect of consumer online review reads and website type on information usefulness, via perceived reviewer expertise, leading to reviewer trustworthiness. Specifically, the results suggested that both website type and review reads interacted such that perceived reviewer expertise was higher for the same negative review on a knowledge-centric website for low review reads than when posted in a social-centric website. However, that was not the case for high review reads. Because of the perception about this review cue was different in the two different websites, the relationship of reviewer expertise, trustworthiness and information usefulness was different in different websites with all pathways significant for low review reads but not for high review reads.

### 5. General Discussion

This research explored the role different online review websites types can play in impacting reviewer expertise, leading to trustworthiness, ultimately, information usefulness. The results suggest theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, first, this research extends previous ones on the impact negative online reviews can have by determining the boundary conditions that impact the effect of website types on information usefulness. The main effects of website types are moderated by two different types of contextual variables, such as, review type (such as whether the review is informational or recommending a product), and review characteristic (number of people who read the review). As suggested in Study 1, negative informative online reviews influence consumer's perceptions of reviewer expertise on a knowledge-centric website compared to that on a social-centric website. However, this effect does not operate for negative online recommender reviews. Readers on knowledge-centric website may want information to make decisions about the reviewer expertise to determine whether a review is trustworthy and therefore, useful.

Study 2 also demonstrated an interactive effect of website type and the number of times a review has been read. The results demonstrated that high review reads have similar impact on both social-centric and knowledge-centric websites in terms of perceived reviewer expertise. This explains why reviewers may want as many of their reviews read by online readers. On the other hand, when reviews have low reads, individuals on

knowledge-centric websites may ignore the cue. Such readers may be more interested in the content of the online review and that may drive their perceived reviewer expertise, trustworthiness and information usefulness. Across both studies, the main effect of website type was significant, suggesting that negative online reviews posted on knowledge-centric websites have a greater effect on perceived reviewer expertise, which influences other dependent variables. The main effect of review type was nonsignificant, suggesting that online review readers' perception of reviewer expertise does not change when they read recommender type of reviews. Finally, the main effect of review reads was partially significant; further research is required to replicate the result and understand the reason behind the observation.

Managerially, this research suggests that businesses which depend on online reviews need to pay attention especially when negative reviews are posted. They should especially be focused when such reviews are posted on knowledge-centric websites as readers on such websites tend to perceive the reviewer to be having greater expertise, which may have an effect on the usefulness of the negative review. Further, one needs to be especially aware when informative reviews are posted on knowledge-centric website. Such reviews may have a greater damaging effect on the perception on the business that recommender reviews. A close watch on such negative reviews and responding to the individual posting the review may help limit the damage negative reviews may cause.

## **6. Limitations and Future Research**

While this research provided interesting insights on the role negative online reviews may play across different websites, there are several limitations that need to be recognized. One, only two different website types were considered here. Yet, there are many other types of websites such as manufacturer's, retailer's, independent websites and others where consumers provide online reviews. Second, only two review types were considered here. Other types of reviews based on reviewer motivation (Mathwick and Mosteller, 2016) may produce different results. Future research should consider such possibilities for greater depth in analysis. Third, this research used MTurk for data collection. While psychological processes work fairly generally across different individuals, one may question a broader application of the results of this study. Therefore, for purposes of generalizability, one should consider a wider audience for data collection and analysis. Finally, there are numerous contextual and personal variables that may alter the results. Such variables need to be considered in future research for better insights into factors influencing consumer perceptions of negative reviews. While negative reviews can influence consumer perceptions, there are many aspects that may alter such perceptions. Researchers are called to continue exploration in this area to help demystify factors that affect consumer perceptions.

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### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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