

Electronic word-of-mouth Significantly Influences UK and Chinese Consumers

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Exposure to positive and negative online reviews significantly affects the purchase intentions of UK and Chinese consumers, according to research at the University of Birmingham.

Dr. George Christodoulides, from the University's Business School ran an experiment with a selection of UK and Chinese consumers to determine how electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) influences their buying behaviour.

In marketing, electronic word-of-mouth is a channel of online communication, where consumers share their brand experiences in order to help others make more informed purchasing decisions.

Dr. Christodoulides' study reveals differences on purchase intention between UK and Chinese consumers following the order of exposure to consumer reviews, suggesting that UK respondents are more cynical toward a positive review that follows a negative review than their Chinese counterparts.

The research involved collection of data from a sample of 103 UK and 106 Chinese consumers using a self-completion questionnaire randomly distributed in terms of product type and order of comments.

Respondents were first presented with a scenario pertaining to either the digital camera or hotel (for example: "imagine that you are considering buying a digital camera. . . You find one which is within your budget") and a description of the relevant attributes. Descriptions of the digital camera and hotel reflected real information available in the marketplace.

People were then asked to indicate their purchase intention on a scale of 1 to 5. The sample consisted of 52.2% women and 47.8% men, with the largest portion of 52.6% falling between the ages of 18-24.

Neither Chinese nor UK respondents' initial purchase intentions improve when first exposed to a positive comment, while they drop significantly when first exposed to a negative comment.

"Marketers should not overlook consumer conversations about products and brands, but instead should continuously monitor comments on consumer review sites," Dr. Christodoulides advises. "Online marketers should also make sure they have mechanisms to promptly rectify a negative customer experience to deter negative e-WOM."

He therefore suggests that marketers should host blogs and discussion forums on their corporate site and engage in a conversation with consumers about their brands.

"It is well known that consumers are more likely to engage in negative than positive referrals. Marketers should then encourage more consumers to leave feedback when their product evaluation and overall experience is positive," Dr. Christodoulides says.

The reported differences between UK and Chinese respondents with regard to the impact of consumer reviews on their purchase intentions also have implications for segmentation strategies employed by online firms. For instance, a separate discussion board for UK and Chinese consumers may be more attractive as it allows firms to differentiate marketing initiatives based on how individualist and collectivist cultures respond to online reviews.

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