Stick to the Facts

The Impact of Online Reviews on Consumer Choice

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ABSTRACT

A growing number of consumers are consulting online reviews to obtain information about products they consider. As online reviews are becoming more important, their effects on consumer decision making is of interest for both marketers and researchers. To date, relatively little research has been conducted in the field of online reviews. Exploring how this information affects consumer behavior is therefore of great importance. The results of a 2 (Review valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (Review type: informational vs. transformational) x 2 (Reviewer similarity: similar vs. dissimilar) between-subject design (N = 206) showed that review valence and review type have a significant impact on participants’ attitude and consideration. Positive reviews and informational reviews yielded more positive attitudes and higher consideration than negative or transformational reviews. Reviewer similarity seemed to influence attitude only. Finally, the results showed that participants identified with reviewers not based on how similar they were to them, but on the content of their review.

KEY WORDS: online reviews, electronic word-of-mouth, consumer choice, consideration set
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet allows people to create new content and to share this with other (like-minded) people. A growing number of consumers are taking advantage of this possibility by writing and consulting online reviews to share and obtain product information. Review websites have arisen rapidly across a wide variety of product categories. When reading seller-created information, consumers might have doubts about the trustworthiness and credibility of the source. Seeking advice from unbiased online reviewers can reduce this uncertainty and lack of trust. Moreover, it can help people to evaluate product quality, which can be difficult to assess when buying a product online. Overall, online reviews can provide objective and understandable consumer information in a manner accessible for everyone.

Previous research has shown that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has an impact on consumers’ attitudes and behavior. More specific, they showed that review volume (Chevalier & Mazlin, 2006; Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008; Liu 2006), reviewer expertise and quality (Hu, Liu & Zhang, 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), brand familiarity (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2006), and valence (Chatterjee, 2001; Chevalier & Mazlin, 2006; Dellarocas et al. 2005; Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004) have significant impact on consumer choice. Based on previous research, it is expected that positive reviews lead to more positive attitudes and higher product consideration than negative reviews. Next, review type may play a moderation role; reviews focused on functional product aspects may have more persuasive power than transformational reviews. It is expected that informational reviews provide more understandable and reliable information compared with transformational reviews (Chen & Xie, 2008; Dahlén & Bergendahl, 2001; Park, Lee & Han, 2007). Finally, the role of reviewer similarity and identification will be taken into account. It is likely that positive reviews from a similar reviewer will elicit more positive responses than from a dissimilar reviewer (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger & Yale, 1998; Price, Feick & Higie, 1989). We expect this relation to be affected by identification.
The current study builds upon previous literature about eWOM by using the consideration set model of consumer choice (Roberts & Lattin, 1991) to find online review effects on consumer awareness, attitude and consideration (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Previous studies about eWOM were mostly conducted in a field setting and were thus not able to manipulate important factors. To my knowledge, the current study is the first that experimentally explores the effects of two key characteristics in online reviews: review type (informational vs. transformational) and reviewer similarity (similar vs. dissimilar). Moreover, it extends understanding of the effects of review valence by considering the interaction effects of valence and review type, and valence and reviewer similarity.

Besides the use of explicit measures, this study implicitly measures consumer choice by means of a word-reaction task. An advantage of implicit measures is the avoidance of social desirable answers and the tapping of underlying cognitive motivational processes (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). Therefore, I believe that the use of implicit measures can be a good way to provide solid understandings of online review effects.

Social media, and in particular online reviews have become an interesting topic of conversation for marketers. As there is little scientific research about this new phenomenon available, marketers can only make speculations about the impact online reviews might have. Previous studies did show that online reviews could benefit sellers by improving attitudes and sales. However, these findings are quite general and can therefore be ambiguous. For example the finding that negative reviews have a negative (or less positive) effect. This effect may turn around when valence is combined with reviewer similarity; negative reviews from a dissimilar reviewer may have a positive impact, as disliking a person may lead to having opposite opinions. This example illustrates and underlines the importance to provide more refined knowledge about eWOM. The current study will shed a light on more specific online review mechanisms, which might be of interest for marketers. They can apply these new online marketing insights when for example managing their corporate image online, and implementing online marketing strategies.
Research questions

Main research question:
What impact do online reviews have on consumer choice?

1. What impact does review valence has on consumer choice?
2. What impact does reviewer similarity has on consumer choice?
3. What impact does review type (informational vs. transformational) has on consumer choice?
4. What is the role of perceived identification in online reviews and consumer choice?
2. WORD-OF-MOUTH

2.1 Defining word-of-mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be defined as “oral person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the person perceives as non-commercial, regarding brand, product or a service” (Arndt, 1967, p. 3). This kind of communication has been shown to be one of the most effective marketing tools (Park, Roth & Jacques, 1988). When exposed to traditional marketing communication, like advertisements and flyers, people might have doubts about the trustworthiness and credibility of the source, as sellers usually tend to focus and lay stress on good product aspects only. Since WOM communicators are independent of the market, they are perceived as a more reliable source (Banerjee, 1992; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955).

Another advantage that distinguishes WOM from other types of communication is the immediate accessibility through social networks (Brown & Reingen 1987; Murray 1991). It is about sharing experiences with interpersonal relations, like friends and family. These kinds of experiences are more personal as they are characterized by anecdotal evidence, such as testimonials, personal stories and descriptions of individual experiences. Consequently, the information will be perceived as more understandable and familiar. For example, when a consumer reads about how many megapixels a video camera has, it will be difficult for a non-expert to evaluate the exact quality. However, when hearing concrete statements and seeing example pictures from other consumers, the information becomes more tangible. WOM can therefore be a good extension to seller-created information.

2.2 WOM impact

Several studies have demonstrated that WOM has a powerful impact on consumer attitude (Bone, 1995; Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991; Pincus & Waters, 1977), product consideration (Arndt, 1967; Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955; Richins,
1983), and purchase behavior (Arndt, 1967; Bone, 1995; Charlett, Garland & Marr, 1995). Day (1971) claimed that WOM is nine times as successful as advertising at changing neutral attitudes into positive ones. A study of Herr, Kardes and Kim (1991) underlined the importance of WOM as new communication medium as well. Their results suggested that WOM was more persuasive than printed anecdotal information. They explained this outcome by claiming that WOM information is more vivid and hence more accessible. Furthermore, Bone (1995) showed across three experiments, that WOM has more impact when presented by an expert and that this influence is greater when a consumer faces a disconfirmation experience. This influence was found for both short-term and long-term judgments. These examples make clear that offline WOM has an impact on different stages in the consumer decision making process.

2.3 Defining electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

As the Internet has become more social, forums, news groups, blogs, and other social network sites gained in popularity. These new social media tools allow people to create new content and to share this with other (like-minded) people. The trend of sharing information with others (Kroezen & Kroezen, 2009) brought a new form of online communication: electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Stauss (2000, p. 243) conceptualized eWOM as “internet customer communication that occurs when customers report or interact about consumption-relevant circumstances on the Internet”. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004, p. 39) describe eWOM in more detailed way: “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”.

2.4 Differences between WOM and eWOM

In a lot of ways, eWOM is comparable to traditional WOM. Recommendations are provided in an objective and understandable way. Yet, online and offline WOM also
differ in several ways. Firstly, WOM is oral; people exchange information face-to-face (Arndt, 1967), which makes this kind of communication more subjective (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). In contrast, eWOM has been characterized as “written oral” communication, which has some degree of permanence (Ferris & Wilder, 2006; Gelb & Sundaram, 2002; Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski, 2006). Griffin (2003) stated that written words are more logical than oral communication. On the contrary, Herr et al. (1991) claimed that face-to-face WOM is more persuasive than written recommendations.

Secondly, most eWOM communication is anonymous, while WOM communication is characterized by interpersonal influence; the communicator is a known person (Dellarocas, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). As a result of anonymity, online consumers show less social anxiety and fewer inhibitions. Moreover, they are willing to provide personal information and are more honest (Roed, 2003). On the other hand, not knowing the author of the review may also lead to a lack of trust. People might have doubts about the identity and intentions of the communicator (Mayzlin, 2006). Companies posting reviews about their own products have strengthened these uncertainties. For instance Lifestyle Lift, a plastic surgery company which told employees to pretend they were satisfied customers and post positive reviews about the company (NYTimes.com).

Thirdly, eWOM is easily accessible and broadly available since it only requires an internet connection. Computer-mediation allows a much larger number of persons to be reached, which makes the influence of eWOM comparable to mass media (Chen, Fay & Wang, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Hence, the effort in reaching people has decreased enormously (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003).

Fourthly, eWOM has often spatial proximity to the products that are being reviewed (Amblee & Bui, 2007). Most online reviews contain a link to a website of the (re)seller, who usually has an e-shop. Consumers are only a couple of clicks away from purchasing the product, which shortens the buying process. In contrast, when getting offline recommendations, people are usually not in a buying environment. This situation makes it more difficult to buy a product, as people have to remember the advice carefully for a long period of time.
Lastly, eWOM might have a higher relevance to customers compared to WOM, since online reviews are only read when someone searches for it. This might have a positive impact on consumers’ attitudes and purchase decisions, as Bansel and Voyer (2000) already demonstrated that WOM effectiveness is higher when the receiver is actively searching for it. Overall, eWOM can be seen as a promising extension of traditional WOM communication.

2.5 Online reviews

eWOM can take place in different forms, for instance discussion forums, weblogs, online review websites, and news groups. Online reviews are the most obvious form of eWOM, as the main aim on review websites is to give recommendations to other consumers. The other online communication tools are more general in that they can have other purposes besides giving advice. We therefore choose to take into account online reviews in the current study.

Next to general comparison websites (e.g. Amazon.com), review websites have arisen across a wide variety of product categories. For instance www.tripadvisor.com (2010), a famous hotel comparison website, which has more than 30 million reviews published by travelers and about 32 million unique visitors each month. This high ratio of posted reviews shows that consumers are motivated to write reviews. Research suggests that reviews can be written because of internal personal reasons of the reviewer (e.g. blowing off steam) or because of external product related reasons (e.g. warning other customers) (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Besides sharing information with others, lusting after detailed and relevant information is becoming more important too. This is particularly true for online buyers, because in an online environment people are less able to evaluate product quality, as this is done offline by looking, touching and feeling (Ba, 2001). Also for products that are difficult to evaluate prior to purchase (experience products) such as books, consumers might consult online reviews to get a more clear idea (Senecal & Nantel 2004). Furthermore, a lot of online sellers have not established a brand name and recognition, which may result in a lack of trust by consumers. To reduce this
uncertainty and lack of trust, consumers are using online reviews which provide them unbiased product information. They now can read about and compare quality, functionality, prices, experiences and much more. Concluding, online reviews have become a popular and important information source for consumers.

2.6 eWOM impact

Just like offline WOM, several studies have shown that eWOM has an impact on consumer behavior. A survey from Deloitte (2009) reported that 65% of U.S. consumers visit a website after getting recommended on the internet. Furthermore, it has been stated repeatedly that online reviews are used when making purchase decisions (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen, et al., 2004; Chen, Wu & Yoon, 2004; Chevalier & Mazlin, 2006; Duan, 2008; Forman, Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008). Liu (2006), for example, found that online WOM volume has a significant influence on both aggregate and weekly box office revenue, especially in the first weeks of a movie release. In line with this finding, Duan, Gu and Whinston (2008) found that WOM volume leads to higher box office performance. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2004) also studied online review impact on experience products, namely books. They made use of reviews and book sale data from Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com. Results of their study showed that an improvement in reviews for a book lead to a relative increase in sales of that book. Besides, they found that the impact of one-star reviews is greater than the impact of five-star reviews. This result can be explained by the fact that a lot of consumers think reviews are written by authors or other biased parties. Overall, these studies suggest that online reviews have a significant impact on consumer behavior.
3. THE CONSIDERATION SET

The current study will use the consideration set model of consumer choice to find online review effects on consumer awareness, attitude and consideration. This model has proved to be a good method when studying consumer choice, even in online review research (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Vermeulen, Das & Swager, 2008).

Consumer choice follows a multi-stage process in which several choice options are considered, “the consideration set model” (Roberts & Lattin, 1991). From the universal set, which consists of all possible product options, a selection of recalled products is chosen, which is “the awareness set”. Awareness can be created by making the brand or product more salient, for instance with an intensive marketing campaign (Alba & Chattopadhyay, 1986). A brand that is more salient will come to mind more easily when a consumer is trying to recall brands from the same product category. Consequently, the recall of others brand may be reduced. Awareness is a very important factor in consumer behavior, as people first have to know the product before even consider buying the product (Kardes, 2002; Lavidge & Steiner 1961). From this awareness set, the consumer selects the products that are considered to be purchased, also called “the consideration set”. Finally, the consumer makes a choice between the products included in the consideration set. This choice is based on several factors like previous product experiences (Hoeffler & Ariely, 1999), and the availability of retrieval cues, like category, brand and attribute information (Nedungadi, 1990).
4. ONLINE REVIEW CHARACTERISTICS

Previous studies have taken into account several online review characteristics. Review volume and review valence are probably the most studied elements in online review research. This research will study the effects of three important factors in online reviews: review valence, review type (informational vs. transformational) and reviewer similarity. Next to review content characteristics, this study will take into account the use of identity descriptive information as well.

4.1 Online review valence

Valence refers to a message being positive or negative. Positive reviews will include recommendations of a product. In contrast, authors writing negative reviews will discourage a product by making complaints and spreading rumors. Most people post a review because of disconfirmation; expectations are not met because of either a too low or too high performance of a product (Bone, 1995). As a result, online reviews are usually extremely positive or negative. We will explore the effects review valence might have on all stages of the consideration set model (awareness, attitude and consideration).

4.1.1 Awareness

Research has found strong evidence that negative information is more attention grabbing than positive information; a phenomenon called negativity bias (Cacioppo, Gardner & Berntson, 1999; Kanouse & Hanson, 1972; Mizerski, 1982; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). When evaluating a product, negative information is weighted more heavily (Fiske, 1980) and recalled more frequently (Pratto & John, 1991) than positive information. This can be explained by people’s social environment. In general, negative events are much rarer than positive ones. Therefore, negative messages are more likely to violate people’s expectancies and are given more attention (Kanouse & Hanson, 1972; Zajonc, 1968). The same holds true for online reviews: positive reviews
are written more often than negative reviews (East, Hammond & Lomax, 2008; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). To compensate for the high ratio of positive reviews, negative reviews are given more importance, which in turn may increase product awareness. In short, we expect that the negativitiy bias also exist in online evaluations; exposure to negative online reviews will yield higher product awareness than exposure to positive online reviews.

**H1a** Exposure to negative online reviews increases product awareness more than exposure to positive online reviews.

### 4.1.2 Attitude

Online reviews that are written in a positive way recommend a product and probably include several reasons why that product is better than others. It is very likely that such a persuasive message has a positive influence on consumers’ attitude about the reviewed product. In contrast, online reviews with a negative focus disapprove a product and consequently such a review will lead to less positive product attitudes. Another viewpoint is suggested by Park and Lee (2008), who stated that consumers also might just agree with the opinion provided in the review because disagreeing may cause psychological discomfort.

Several studies about offline WOM support this conjecture. Across two studies, Bone (1995) showed that positive WOM has a positive influence on short and long term product judgments, while a contrary effect was found for negative WOM. Herr, et al. (1991) and Buda and Zhang (2000) found that favorable brand attitudes were formed in the positive WOM condition, whereas less favorable brand attitudes were formed in the negative WOM condition. For online reviews similar results were found (Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2008). For example a study of Vermeulen and Seegers (2008) about online hotel reviews, which showed that positive online reviews yielded a positive attitude change, while negative online reviews yielded a negative attitude change. In line with previous research, we expect that positive reviews will yield more positive attitudes than negative reviews.
H1b Exposure to positive reviews yield more positive attitudes than exposure to negative reviews.

4.1.3 Consideration

Valence may have an influence on product consideration as people might use it as an indicator of product quality. The consideration set model states that both product awareness and product attitude predict product consideration (Roberts & Lattin, 1991). Before, we have stated that positive reviews will increase product awareness (however less than negative reviews) and that positive reviews will yield positive attitude changes. When occurring together, a positive impact on awareness and attitude should lead to a strong positive impact on product consideration.

This view is in agreement with previous research in eWOM (Arndt, 1967; East, et al., 2008; Priester, Nayakankuppam; Fleming & Godek, 2004; Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004). A pioneer study in the field of WOM carried out by Arndt (1967) demonstrated that positive WOM has a positive influence on purchase probability. Reinstein and Snyder (2000) showed that positive reviews had a large positive effect on box office revenue. This study used reviews (positive vs. negative) of two popular movie critics and measured the difference in revenue for movies reviewed during their opening weekend and movies reviewed after. More specific, they found a positive marginally significant effect associated with one thumbs up, and a positive significant effect related with two thumbs up. In line with this finding, Sorensen and Rasmussen (2004) found that positive reviews had a stronger impact on book sales than negative reviews. We can therefore conclude that not only positive reviews have positive effects on consumer choice, but even negative reviews can lead to a (small) increase of sales. It is therefore expected that positive reviews will yield higher product consideration than negative reviews.

H1c Exposure to positive reviews increases product consideration more than exposure to negative reviews.
4.2 Reviewer similarity

Traditionally, WOM communication consists of recommendations (or discouragements) by interpersonal relations, like close friends and colleagues. The rise of the internet made it possible to share opinions about products with the whole world. Online reviews can thus reach vast crowds of relative strangers. When online reviews first emerged they were usually posted anonymously or with a visible nickname only. This anonymity may have consequences for the way the review is perceived. Not knowing the author of the review may lead to a lack of trust in the objectivity or accuracy of his or her review. Moreover, readers may have doubts about the identity and intentions of the communicator (Mayzlin, 2006).

Nowadays, more and more online compare and review sites also show source information, as this can increase the perceived usefulness of a message (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti & De Grada, 2006). Amazon.com for instance, shows personal information of reviewers ranging from real name and location to more specific information like hobbies and names of pets (Forman, et al., 2008). Research has demonstrated that social information is used by message recipients as a decision rule to make judgments (Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990; Wood, 2000). Moreover, it has been suggested that online disclosure of personal information helps to the formation of relationships and common bonds (Ren, Kraut & Kiesler, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that identity descriptive information might be a relevant factor when studying online reviews.

The degree to which a communicator is similar to you and has overlapping personal characteristics may have an impact on message effectiveness. Homophily or source similarity may be defined as “the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes” (Rogers, 1983). Similarity may occur in terms of demographics as well as in appearance, opinions, education, values, traits and lifestyles. It has been shown that communication between homophilous individuals tends to be more efficient and effective (Rogers, 1983; Price & Feick, 1984). Furthermore, group relevance, closeness, and presence are greater when people know or feel that they are similar to others (Turner, 1987). Thus, people tend
to affiliate with people who are like them. Concluding, being similar or having the same opinions can be of importance when looking at communication impact.

4.2.1 Theories about similarity

There are several theories that explain why similarity may increase message influence. Firstly, the social identity theory (Farfel & Turner, 1979) which describes the classification of social categories. Through the social comparison process, similar people are categorized as the in-group, while people who are dissimilar are labeled as the out-group. This theory states that people tend to communicate with others who are like themselves to reduce uncertainty and create trust (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Rogers, 1983; Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2003).

Another theory that explains why reporting personal reviewer information may be important is the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). According to Festinger (1954), individuals tend to compare themselves with others, especially when these persons are similar to oneself because it is assumed that similar individuals have the same needs and preferences. Making the inference that one is similar to the reviewer can thus benefit review impact.

Finally, Heider’s balance theory (1958) is of importance, which claims that people always strive for balance with interpersonal relations. He introduced a pox model by which p is a person, o another person and x an object (Hummon & Doreian, 2003) (Figure 1). When person p has a positive attitude towards object x and person p has a positive relation with person o (e.g. they are similar), it is likely that person o also has a positive attitude towards object x. In contrast when person p has a negative attitude towards object x and person p has a negative relation with person o, it is plausible that person o has the opposite opinion, namely a positive attitude towards object x.

The given example can also be applied to reviews; person p is the reviewer, person o is a consumer who reads a review and object x is the reviewed product. When the reviewer writes a positive review and is similar to the reader of the review, the reader of the review will have a positive attitude towards the reviewed product.
(first situation in Figure 1). In contrast, when the reviewer posts a negative review and is similar to the reader of the review, the reader of the review will have a negative (or less positive) attitude towards the reviewed product (second situation in Figure 1). When the reviewer writes a negative review and is dissimilar to the reader of the review, the reader of the review will have a positive (or less negative) attitude about the reviewed product (third situation in Figure 1). It is for example likely that when a teenage male is exposed to a review from a 50-year old lady, he is not going to take the advice from her, but instead will have the opposite opinion. The last situation (third situation in Figure 1) illustrates when the reviewer writes a positive review and is dissimilar to the reader of the review. In this situation, the reader of the review will have a negative attitude towards the reviewed product. Overall, Heider’s balance theory shows that valence towards the product as well as valence towards a person can influence attitudes about a product. Moreover, this theory shows that people share attitudes when liking a person and have the opposite opinions when disliking someone.

**Figure 1.** Balance theory

![Balance theory diagram](image)

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**4.2.2 Effects of reviewer similarity**

Empirical studies about traditional WOM influence found that similar communicators are more influential than dissimilar ones (Brock, 1965; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger & Yale, 1998; Price, Feick & Higie, 1989). Brown and Reingen (1987) made a distinction between strong (e.g. close friends) and
weak ties (unknown people) in their study about word-of-mouth referral behavior. They found that homophilous strong ties were more influential, and used more often source of information than weak ties. In line with this finding, Feldman and Spencer (1965) examined the similarity between new residents seeking physicians and the sources they used in their search. They demonstrated that couples with children usually relied on advice from other couples with children, while childless couples relied on other childless couples for physician referral. Overall, these results indicate a high likelihood of turning to homophilous sources.

In online review research, little attention has been paid to the effects of reviewer similarity or the disclosure of personal information. Most eWOM studies are focused on content characteristic. This is quite surprising considering the evidence available in offline WOM effects. Moreover, the little research that has been conducted in the domain of online reviews pointed into the same direction as offline studies did. A study of Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld (2008) used online review and identity descriptive information (nick(name) and hobbies) from Amazon.com and showed that relevant information about the reviewer forms judgments of products and reviews. More specific, they found that reviews including personal information increased the helpfulness of the reviews and online product sales. In addition, they underline the importance of sharing geographical location information, as this can increase the relation between disclosure and product sales.

Based on prior research, it is expected that exposure to positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self will yield more positive attitudes and will increase product consideration more than positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self. Moreover, it is likely that negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self will yield more positive attitudes and will increase product consideration less than negative reviews from a reviewer similar to the self. As being dissimilar can result in having opposite opinions.

**H2a** Exposure to an online review from a reviewer similar to the self increases product awareness more than exposure to an online review from a reviewer dissimilar to the self.
H3a  Exposure to positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self yield more positive attitudes than positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self.

H3c  Exposure to negative reviews from a reviewer similar to the self yield more negative attitudes than negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self.

H3e  Exposure to positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self increases product consideration more than positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self.

H3g  Exposure to negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self increases product consideration more than negative reviews from a reviewer similar to the self.

4.2.4  Reviewer identification

Wollheim (1974) was one of the first authors who provided a clear idea about the concept of identification. He proposed that identification requires that people forget themselves and become the other person. Bettelheim (1943) thought identification was not about taking over another identity, but about sharing perspectives and world views. Identification can lead to adoption of an external point of view, which consequently can influence behavior. Social identification can fulfill several needs and can reduce uncertainties. It takes place when people agree with someone they like. Liking another person may be because that person is similar, while being dissimilar has the opposite effect (Eyal and Rubin 2003; Rosenbaum, 1986). Higher degrees of homophily have been linked before to more identification with a television character. For instance when a teenage girl watches a television show including a main character that is similar to her, it is likely that the girl can relate and identify with the character. The same effect is expected to appear in online reviews; reviewers similar to the reader will lead to higher perceived identification.
compared with dissimilar reviewers. Hence, it likely that (perceived) identification may mediate the relation between reviewer similarity and consumer choice.

**H2b** The effect as postulated in H2a is mediated by reviewer identification.

**H3b** The effect as postulated in H3a is mediated by reviewer identification.

**H3d** The effect as postulated in H3c is mediated by reviewer identification.

**H3f** The effect as postulated in H3e is mediated by reviewer identification.

**H3h** The effect as postulated in H3g is mediated by reviewer identification.

### 4.3 Informational and transformational reviews

Online reviews may be written in different formats; the main focus may lie on functional features (informational) or on affective aspects (transformational) of a product. Originally, this classification was made based on products; “think” products are bought because of practical motives, whereas “feel” products are bought because of transformational motives (Ratchford, 1987; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Reviews may also be written in one of those formats. Which format depends on product type and personal interests and motives of the reviewer. Cognitive information procession and evaluation are enhanced when reading informational reviews (Claeys, Swinnen & Vanden Abeele, 1995). This review type stresses utilitarian needs; evaluation on performance-related product dimensions (Ratchford, 1987). In addition, problem solving arguments may be brought up (Fennell, 1978; Percy & Rossiter, 1992). Transformational reviews on the other hand, emphasize on affective motives like ego gratification, social acceptance, and sensory stimulation (Claeys et al. 1995). Furthermore, this kind of review increases affective information processing (Dahlén, 2002).
Several studies have been carried out focusing on the informational-transformational distinction. However, most of these studies were based on the original classification and took product type instead of review type into account. Dahlén and Bergendahl (2001) claimed that banners of informational products receive more clicks than banners of transformational products, because the internet is more suitable for searching functional product information. More specific, they found that click-through rates for functional products were twice as high as banner advertisements for expressive products. In line with this finding, Park, Lee and Han (2007) stated that transformational reviews are perceived to have lower quality than informational reviews, because this type of review included no concrete information. Since informational product reviews are based on product facts, these reviews are perceived to have higher quality. Review quality has a positive effect on consumers’ purchase intention, especially for high-involvement consumers.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that objective information is more understandable than emotional content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Subsequently, consumers can better evaluate if the product matches their own usage situations (Chen & Xie, 2008). Also, because transformational information is more subjective, it is more likely to have opposite opinions when reading these kinds of reviews. It is harder to argue facts, so it is more probable that informational reviews have more persuasive power. Hence, it is expected that informational reviews lead to more positive attitudes and higher product consideration compared with transformational reviews.

H4a  The difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews on attitude is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews.

H4b  The difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews in product consideration is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews.
4.4 Combining review type, reviewer similarity and review valence

When combining review type and valence with the concept of reviewer similarity, different effects can be observed. In this situation informational reviews may not be merely the most persuasive review type. A reviewer similar to the self may be important for a review focusing on transformational aspects, as for this type of review social acceptance and ego gratification are main motives (Claeys, et al., 1995). For instance a youngster who reads a review about the expressive functions of a product may find it important whether the source is an old person or a similar, younger person.

In contrast, for informational reviews, reviewer similarity is of less importance. When discussing functional product information, for example “the battery lasts forever; I took 2500 pictures and only had to recharge it twice”, it does not matter if the reviewer is like you, because it is (quite) objective information. In line with this conjecture, Shavitt and Nelson (2000) founded that different factors can influence the meaning and goals of a product. They gave an example of an informational product (over-the-counter painkillers) and indicate that this product is less likely to engage in a social-identity function.

When participants will be exposed to a transformational review by a reviewer similar to the self, positive reviews will lead to more positive attitudes and increases product consideration more than negative reviews. When you like a person, it is likely to have the same opinions. However, the difference between positive and negative transformational reviews will not be that great. A transformational review with negative statements can be seen as complaining (even if it is written by a similar reviewer), as this type of review does not include functional information, but focuses more on affective motives. This can result in having the opposite opinion as the reviewer, when the review is negative, the reader might have positive opinions. In contrast, negative informational reviews include concrete discouragements. This information can be seen by consumers as more legitimate, as it is hard to argue against. These negative reviews will thus also lead to negative opinions. Moreover, positive informational reviews written by a similar communicator will lead to having
positive attitudes and increasing product considerations. It can be concluded that the difference between positive and negative transformational reviews will be smaller than the difference between positive and negative informational reviews (all written by a reviewer similar to the self).

In contrast, when a review is written by a reviewer dissimilar to the self, the difference between positive and negative reviews is expected to be smaller for informational reviews than for transformational reviews. Arguments from transformational reviews (either positive or negative) written by a reviewer dissimilar to the self will be taken less seriously than informational reviews. This again results in having opposite opinions than the reviewer; a positive review will elicit negative opinions, whereas a negative review will lead to more positive attitudes. For informational reviews, this opposite opinion effect may appear as well, however this effect it is expected to be less strong. The difference between positive and negative transformational reviews is therefore expected to be greater than the difference between positive and negative informational reviews (all written by a dissimilar reviewer).

**H5a** When exposed to an online review from a reviewer similar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews on attitude is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews.

**H5b** When exposed to an online review from a reviewer dissimilar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews on attitude is greater for transformational reviews than for informational reviews.

**H5c** When exposed to an online review from a reviewer similar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews in product consideration is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews.
**H5d** When exposed to an online review from a reviewer dissimilar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews in product consideration is greater for transformational reviews than for informational reviews.

### 4.5 Conceptual model

Figure 2 shows the relation between all theoretical constructs in this study.

**Figure 2.** Conceptual model
5. **METHOD**

5.1 **Research design and participants**

To test our hypotheses, a 2 (positive vs. negative) x 2 (transformational vs. informational) x 2 (similar vs. dissimilar) between-subjects experiment was created. Participants were recruited by e-mail to participate in this study. E-mail was chosen since this study is about online reviews, so showing the review online would be the most realistic setting. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire and send it to other people. Participation was stimulated by announcing that participants could win a video camera. The questionnaire was filled out by 234 people and a total of 206 valid cases were used for analyses (after deletion of incomplete and invalid cases). 81.1% were female, 18.9% male, and age ranged between 15 and 64 years ($M_{age} = 23.78$, $SD = 9.18$). The educational level of the participants was biased toward the upper range with 43.7% of the sample reporting university degree and 28.6% reporting college degree (HBO).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions. They were exposed to an online review about a video camera. Dependent variables consisted of measure of product awareness, attitude and consideration. An overview of descriptive statistics per condition is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Mage</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similar + positive + transformational</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19.97</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar + positive + informational</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24.89</td>
<td>9.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar + negative + transformational</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.92</td>
<td>9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar + negative + informational</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.53</td>
<td>7.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar + positive + transformational</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.59</td>
<td>12.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar + positive + informational</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.73</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar + negative + transformational</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22.92</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar + negative + informational</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Index*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Mage</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>23.78</td>
<td>9.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Procedure

Participants received a link to the experiment per e-mail. To disguise the real purpose of the experiment, participants were told that they were about to take part in a study about products on the internet. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, participants received some instructions about how to proceed, and they were informed that participation would be anonymous. First, participants reported gender, age, education and region. Then, they were randomly exposed to one of eight experimental reviews; a positive or negative review, in a transformational or informational format, written by a similar or dissimilar reviewer. Right after exposure, three word reaction tasks (using the programming tool Macromedia Flash) measured the dependent variables awareness, attitude and consideration. In the first task, participants had to classify ten camcorder brands as “known” versus “unknown” as fast as possible. The brand names randomly appeared on the screen. The second and third task measured “good” versus “bad” and “would consider to buy” versus “would not consider to buy”. After the implicit measure, attitude and consideration were also assessed explicitly. Subsequently, several control questions were asked as a manipulation check. On the final page of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation (see Appendix C for the questionnaire).

5.3 Materials

To create the eight experimental conditions, several online reviews were written (see Appendix A for an example and Appendix B for the content of all reviews). Word choice and writing style were mirrored of real reviews. The reviews were made to look like they had appeared on www.kieskeurig.nl. This is a well known and highly popular Dutch website where people can compare products and read and write reviews about them. The visual lay-out of the fictitious review was exactly the same as a real review including a picture of the reviewed product, grade-ratings, links, and an advertisement banner. A camcorder from the brand Samsung was chosen as
reviewed product since this product is affordable and of interest for different age
groups. The reviews were manipulated based on three variables:

5.3.1 Valence

The first manipulation, valence, consisted of two dimensions: positive vs. negative. One review was written in a very positive way including comments like “I am really satisfied with the product” and “it looks fashionable and innovative”. The other review was written in a very negative manner, focusing on disappointments and defects of the product. Also, a mark per product feature (like usability and design) as well as a total mark was showed to strengthen the manipulation. The negative review was marked (in total) with an average grade of four (out of ten), while the positive review was marked (in total) with an average grade of eight (out of ten). As manipulation check, participants had to rate perceived review valence (three items) on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “I do not agree at all” to “I totally agree”. These three items were compiled into a mean index (Cronbach’s Alpha = .97, \(M = 2.79, SD = 1.62\)).

5.3.2 Review type

Review type was manipulated by focusing the review on functional aspects (informational) or expressive aspects (transformational) of the product. The informational review included technical specifications with phrases like “It took long to charge the battery” and “Images were too dull and too bright”. In contrast, the transformational review included information about the look and feel (“The camera really stands out”) and the social acceptance function (“My friends liked it as well”). Also, this variable was controlled for successful manipulation. Participants had to rate seven items on a 5-point semantic differential scale. The items were selected based on previous research about informational and transformational products, for example “objective” versus “subjective” and “intuitive” versus “rational”. A mean index was created of all seven items (Cronbach’s Alpha = .85, \(M = 3.84, SD = 0.83\)).
5.3.3 Similarity

Lastly, similarity between reviewer and participant was manipulated. In this study, similarity was based on demographic aspects (gender, age, status and region) of the participants. The online questionnaire was programmed in such a way that the reviewer similarity characteristics were adjusted based on the demographic information participants filled out. In the similar condition, the author of the review had the same gender and status (e.g. student or full-time job). To cover up the manipulation, the reviewer was not exactly the same age as the participant but two years older (for participants younger than 35) or two years younger (for participants older than 34). Also, the region of the reviewer was not exactly similar. While participants reported their region, the author of the review lived in the capital of that same region. For instance, when the participant was a 22-year-old male student from Noord-Holland, the reviewer in the similar condition would be a 24-year-old male student from Haarlem (the capital of Noord-Holland).

In the dissimilar condition, the reviewer differed from the participant on all four demographic aspects. First of all, the reviewer had the opposite gender. Participants younger than 35 were shown a reviewer with an age of 50, while participants older than 34 were shown an eighteen-year-old reviewer. Moreover, participants were randomly assigned to a dissimilar work status and region category. The 22-year old male student from Noord-Holland, could receive a review from a 50-year-old woman, with a part time job living in Groningen in the dissimilar condition. The demographic information of the reviewer was situated above the manipulated review. The manipulation check for the concept similarity consisted of three items on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from “I do not agree at all” to “I totally agree”. A sample item: “I have a lot in common with the reviewer”. A mean index was compiled of these three items (Cronbach’s Alpha = .95, M = 1.94, SD = 0.94).
5.4. Implicit measures

All dependent variables – awareness, attitude and consideration – were measured implicitly by means of a word reaction task (Fazio & Olson, 2003). This test measured the strength of associations among concepts. These concepts appeared on the left and right side of the computer screen, so that participants could make a choice between the two concepts by using the keys on their keyboard. To make the measurement of the dependent variables more implicit, response latencies were determined as well. When respondents experience a high level of association between the attribute and a main concept, they will respond faster compared to a low level of association. By measuring the speed of association, attitude strength was measured implicitly. An advantage of implicit measures is the avoidance of social desirable answers. Moreover, this kind of measurement can tap several underlying cognitive motivational processes (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998).

5.4.1 Awareness

The first construct measured by the word reaction test was awareness. To familiarize participants with the implicit measures, an instruction screen and a few practice examples were included. After the practice, respondents were asked to classify ten video camera brands as “known” versus “unknown” as fast as possible. The classification along with the response latency was assessed as answer, where a fast positive reaction indicates high awareness, a fast negative reaction indicates low awareness, and a slow reaction indicates moderate awareness. The order of showing the brand names on the screen was randomized. All brands appeared two times to increase reliability. The overall measure of awareness was computed by taking the mean of the two individual scores (brand: Samsung). The correlation between the first and the second score was $r = .37, p < .001$. 
5.4.2 Attitude

Attitude was measured the same way as awareness, only the classification categories were adjusted. In this word reaction test, participants had to classify the same ten video camera brands as “good” versus “bad”. Again each brand was shown twice, and the order was randomized. The inter-score correlation for attitude was $r = .61, p < .001$ (brand: Samsung).

5.4.3 Consideration

Finally, consideration was measured implicitly to assess to what extent participants would consider to buy a video camera from a certain brand. Once more, the classification categories were changed and participants could choose between “would consider” versus “would not consider”. Just like the other two implicit tests, the ten brands (each shown twice) randomly appeared on the screen. The inter-score correlation for consideration was $r = .76, p < .001$ (brand: Samsung).

5.5 Explicit measures

5.5.1 Identification

Reviewer identification was measured using an item by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). Participants were shown a picture of eight different situations. In this picture, level of identification was illustrated with two circles; in the “far apart situation” there was a gap between the two circles and in the “complete overlap situation” the two circles overlapped (see Figure 3). Participants were asked to indicate which situation best illustrated the level of overlap between their own self-definition and the reviewer’s identity ($M = 2.73, SD = 1.72$).
5.5.2 Attitude

Two different measures were used to assess attitude explicitly. First, participants had to rate three items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “I do not agree at all” to “I totally agree”. Included items were: “I like the reviewed video camera”, “I got a positive impression from the reviewed video camera”, and “The reviewed video camera is good”. These three items were compiled into a mean index (Cronbach’s Alpha = .40, $M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.08$). One item (“the reviewed camera is good”) was excluded from this study, because of a low Cronbach’s Alpha. Probably the main reason for this low Cronbach’s Alpha is that the excluded item is an objective statement, while the other two items are more subjective statements. As a result, interpretation of the excluded item might have been more difficult for participants. Therefore, all analyses are conducted with two items ($r = .73$, $p < .001$, $M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.08$, see Table 2 for descriptive statistics of the attitude measure).

The second measurement consisted of ranking five video camera brands in order of preference. Participants could choose from ten different video camera brands. Points were assigned based on the ranking of the reviewed video camera brand; five points for rank 1, four points for rank 2 and so on. This measurement is based on a study by Priester et al. (2004), where participants were told that they could have a candy bar as a gift for participating. They had to list all brands that
were considered before choosing their favorite one. This way, candy bar choice and consideration was measured.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the attitude measure (N = 206)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like the reviewed video camera</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got a positive impression from the reviewed video camera</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.89</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.08</strong></td>
<td><strong>.73</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. 5-point scale, 1 = “I do not agree at all”, 5 = “I totally agree”; **p < .001

5.5.3 Consideration

Like attitude, product consideration was measured explicitly with two different measures. For the first measurement, participants had to indicate to what extent they would consider to buy the reviewed video camera on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “I do not agree at all” to “I totally agree”. The scale consisted of three items, which all focused on different use situations. For example: “If you had to buy a large gift, would you consider buying the reviewed video camera?” (a complete overview of all items is provided in Table 3). A mean index was created of all three items (Cronbach’s Alpha = .94, M = 2.61, SD = 1.10).

For the second explicit measurement of consideration, participants were told that they had a chance to win a video camera as a gesture of gratitude for participating. Participants were asked to create a top three of camera brands to indicate from which brands they would like to receive a video camera. They could choose from ten different video camera brands. Points were assigned based on the ranking of the reviewed video camera brand, just like the attitude ranking measure.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the consideration measure (N = 206)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you want to buy a video camera in three months, would you consider buying the reviewed video camera?</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you had to buy a large gift, would you consider buying the reviewed video camera?</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If your video camera got broke, would you consider buying the reviewed video camera?</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.61</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>.94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. 5-point scale, 1 = “I do not agree at all”, 5 = “I totally agree”. α = Cronbach’s Alpha .94.
6. RESULTS

6.1 Preliminary analysis

Before analyzing the hypotheses, a preliminary check was conducted between theoretical constructs. An inter-item correlation matrix (Table 4) showed that awareness was positively correlated with the explicit ranking attitude measure and the implicit measures of attitude and product consideration. However, the correlations with the explicit measures of attitude and product consideration and the explicit ranking measure of product consideration were not significant. Attitude (explicit) was highly correlated with product consideration (explicit), while the attitude ranking measure significantly correlates with the other attitude and consideration measures. Product consideration (implicit) showed a positive correlation with awareness, attitude (explicit ranking and implicit) and explicit ranking product consideration. Age was negatively correlated with all theoretical constructs except with product consideration (explicit). This indicates that the younger participants were, the higher the awareness, attitude (explicit, explicit ranking, and implicit) or product consideration (explicit ranking, and implicit). As age seemed to be an important factor, all hypotheses were also conducted with age as control factor. However, this did not significantly change the results. I therefore decided to leave age out in all further analyses.

Table 4. Inter-item correlation matrix (N = 206)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AW</th>
<th>AT1</th>
<th>AT2</th>
<th>AT3</th>
<th>CO1</th>
<th>CO2</th>
<th>CO3</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness (AW)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude expl. (AT1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude expl. rank (AT2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude impl. (AT3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration expl. (CO1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration expl. rank (CO2)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consideration impl (CO3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>.20**</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .001
6.2 Manipulation checks

An independent sample t-test was conducted to test the perceived valence of the reviews. As expected, positive reviews ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.09$) were rated as more positive than negative reviews ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.64$), $t(169.47) = 21.71$, $p < .001$. The manipulation of review type (informational/transformational) was successful as well, $t(204) = 9.54$, $p < .001$. Respondents exposed to transformational reviews perceived it as more transformational ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.71$) than respondents exposed to informational reviews ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.67$). The manipulation of similarity did not work out as expected, $t(204) = 1.32$, $p = .19$. No significant difference was found between the similar condition ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 0.91$) and the dissimilar condition ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.97$) for perceived similarity.

6.3 Main analysis

6.3.1 Awareness

Hypothesis 1a stated that exposure to negative reviews would yield higher product awareness than exposure to positive reviews. To test this hypothesis, an ANOVA analysis was conducted. Results showed no significant main effect of valence ($F < 1$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a can be rejected.

Hypothesis 2a stated that exposure to reviews from a reviewer similar to the self would yield higher product awareness than exposure to reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self. An ANOVA analysis showed no significant main effect of similarity ($F < 1$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2a can be rejected. Hypothesis 2b stated that the effect as postulated in Hypothesis 2a is mediated by reviewer identification. Since the main effect was not significant, no mediation analysis was conducted. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b can be rejected.
6.3.2 Attitude

All attitude analyses were measured in three different ways: the explicit measure, the explicit ranking measure and the implicit measure. Hypothesis 1b stated that exposure to positive reviews would yield more positive attitudes than exposure to negative reviews. ANOVA analysis revealed a significant main effect for valence \((F(1,198) = 105.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35)\) using the explicit measure. No further effects were found. Based on mixed findings, Hypothesis 1b can be partially accepted. Means are displayed in Table 5.

Hypothesis H3a stated that the difference of the effect between positive and negative reviews on attitude is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews. A significant interaction effect was found between valence and review type on the attitude \((F(1,198) = 6.92, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03)\) using the explicit measure. Simple effect analyses revealed a significant difference for both informational \((F(1,198) = 73.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27)\) and transformational reviews \((F(1,198) = 33.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15)\) between positive and negative reviews. Both effects are significant, however the effect size of the difference between positive and negative is greater for informational than for transformational reviews. No further effects were found. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a could be partially accepted. Means are displayed in Table 5, and the interaction effect is presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** Interaction effects of a positive vs. negative review and a transformational vs. informational review on attitude (explicit measure) (N = 206)
Hypothesis 4a stated that positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self would yield more positive attitudes than positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self. H4c stated that negative reviews from a reviewer similar to the self would yield more negative attitudes than negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self. A significant interaction effect was found between valence and similarity \((F(1,198) = 4.33, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02)\) using the implicit measure. Simple effects analyses revealed that exposure to positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self yielded more positive attitudes than exposure to positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self \((F(1,198) = 4.28, p = .05, \eta^2 = .02)\). Exposure to negative reviews had no significant impact \((F < 1)\). No further effects were found. Therefore, Hypotheses 4a could be partially accepted, while Hypothesis 4b could be rejected. Means are displayed in Table 5, and the interaction effect is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5.** Interaction effects of a positive vs. negative review and a similar vs. dissimilar reviewer on attitude (implicit measure) (N = 206)

Hypothesis 4b stated that the effect as postulated in Hypothesis 4a is mediated by reviewer identification. The mediating role of perceived identification was tested with a Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) using the bootstrap method of Preacher & Hayes (2004). This bootstrap method was used, as it has been argued that this non-parametric method is more suitable for smaller samples than the Sobel test. The interaction effect of valence and similarity on attitude (implicit measure) was not significant \((\beta = 0.07, t(206) = 0.62, p = .54)\). Then, the interaction effect of valence and similarity predicted the mediating variable of perceived identification \((\beta = -0.49, t(206) = -0.86, p = .06)\). The mediating variable did not predict attitude after
controlling for the effect of valence and similarity ($\beta = -0.01$, $t(206) = -0.19$, $p = .85$). Lastly, the interaction effect of valence and similarity on attitude was not significant when the mediating variable was included in the regression ($\beta = 0.07$, $t(206) = 0.59$, $p = .56$). Results suggest no mediation, therefore Hypothesis 4b could be rejected.

Hypothesis 4d stated that the effect as postulated in Hypothesis 4c is mediated by reviewer identification. Since the simple effect analysis is not significant, no mediation analysis was conducted. Therefore, Hypothesis 4d could be rejected.

A three way interaction between valence, review type and similarity on attitude was expected. Hypothesis 5a stated that when exposed to an online review from a reviewer similar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews on attitude would be greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews. Hypothesis 5b stated that when exposed to an online review from a reviewer dissimilar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews on attitude would be greater for transformational reviews than for informational reviews. ANOVA analyses showed no significant interaction effects on all three attitude measures (all $F < 1$). Therefore, Hypotheses 5a and 5b could be rejected.

The explicit ranking measure revealed a significant main effect for review type ($F(1,198) = 5.68$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Exposure to transformational reviews yielded more positive attitudes than exposure to informational reviews. No further effects were found. In addition, no significant main effects for similarity were found on all three attitude measures (all $F < 1$).
Table 5. Means (SDs) of attitude as a function of exposure to review valence, review type and reviewer similarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Attitude explicit</th>
<th>Attitude ranking</th>
<th>Attitude implicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2.22 (0.98)*</td>
<td>3.90 (1.52)</td>
<td>4.35 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>3.53 (0.91)*</td>
<td>3.70 (1.62)</td>
<td>4.35 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.92 (0.94)*</td>
<td>3.66 (1.68)</td>
<td>4.27 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>2.40 (0.97)*</td>
<td>4.05 (1.41)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>3.66 (0.73)*</td>
<td>3.37 (1.72)</td>
<td>4.33 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>3.42 (1.04)*</td>
<td>4.00 (1.48)</td>
<td>4.36 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2.19 (0.99)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.23)</td>
<td>4.28 (0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>2.25 (0.99)</td>
<td>3.66 (1.68)</td>
<td>4.40 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>3.56 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.51)</td>
<td>4.48 (0.45)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>2.50 (0.72)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.76)</td>
<td>4.16 (1.09)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Means differ significantly from each other (p < .05).

6.3.3 Consideration

All product consideration analyses were measured in three different ways: the explicit measure, the explicit ranking measure and the implicit measure. H1c stated that exposure to positive reviews would increase product consideration more than exposure to negative reviews. ANOVA analysis revealed a significant main effect for valence ($F(1,198) = 14.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$) using the explicit measure. No further effects were found. Based on mixed findings, Hypothesis 1c can be partially accepted. Means are displayed in Table 6.

Hypothesis H3b stated that the difference of the effect between positive and negative reviews in product consideration is greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews. A significant interaction effect was found between valence and review type in product consideration ($F(1,198) = 9.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$) using the explicit measure. Simple effect analyses revealed a significant difference for informational reviews ($F(1,198) = 20.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$) between positive and negative reviews, whereas transformational reviews had no significant impact ($F < 1$). No further effects were found. Therefore, Hypothesis 3b could be partially
accepted. Means are displayed in Table 6, and the interaction effect is presented in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** Interaction effects of a positive vs. negative review and a transformational vs. informational review on product consideration (explicit measure) (N = 206)

Hypothesis 4e stated that positive reviews from a reviewer similar to the self would increase product consideration more than positive reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self. H4g stated that negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self would increase product consideration more than negative reviews from a reviewer similar to the self. ANOVA analyses revealed that there were no significant interaction effects between valence and reviewer similarity on all three measures (all $F < 1$). Therefore, Hypotheses 4e and 4g can be rejected. Hypothesis 4f and Hypothesis 4h stated that the effect as postulated in Hypothesis 4e and 4g are mediated by reviewer identification. Since the interaction effects are not significant, no mediation analyses were conducted. Therefore, Hypothesis 4f and Hypothesis 4h could be rejected.

A three way interaction between valence, review type and similarity on product consideration was expected. Hypothesis 5c stated that when exposed to an online review from a reviewer similar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews in product consideration would be greater for informational reviews than for transformational reviews. Hypothesis 5d stated that when exposed to an online review from a reviewer dissimilar to the self, the difference of the effect between positive and negative online reviews in product consideration would be greater for transformational reviews than for informational
reviews. Results showed no significant interaction effects between valence, review type and similarity for product consideration on all three measures (all $F < 1$). Therefore, Hypotheses 5c and 5d can be rejected.

The explicit ranking measure revealed a significant main effect for message type ($F(1,198) = 5.25$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$), and the explicit measure revealed a marginal significant effect ($F(1,198) = 2.86$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Exposure to transformational reviews increased product consideration more than exposure to informational reviews. No significant main effect was found using the implicit measure ($F < 1$). No significant main effects for similarity were found on all three measures (all $F < 1$).

Table 6. Means (SDs) of product consideration as a function of exposure to review valence, review type and reviewer similarity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Consideration explicit</th>
<th>Consideration ranking</th>
<th>Consideration implicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2.36 (1.10)*</td>
<td>1.75 (1.29)</td>
<td>4.26 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2.84 (1.05)*</td>
<td>1.58 (1.37)</td>
<td>4.15 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>1.90 (0.85)*</td>
<td>1.58 (1.35)</td>
<td>4.27 (0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>2.64 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.86 (1.26)</td>
<td>4.25 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>2.94 (1.11)*</td>
<td>1.31 (1.39)</td>
<td>4.02 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>2.75 (1.00)</td>
<td>1.82 (1.32)</td>
<td>4.26 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Means differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$)

6.4 Exploratory results

Since most effects regarding reviewer similarity were not significant, mediation analyses including identification could not be carried out. Identification only mediated the relation between the interaction term of valence and review similarity on attitude, but this effect was not significant. A study of Sen and Lerman (2007) found that the readers’ attributions about the motivations of the reviewer mediate the effect of the moderation (product type) on attitude about the review. When reading a negative transformational review, readers were more likely to attribute the
negative beliefs to internal reviews. Consequently they found the negative review not that useful. In contrast, when reading an information review, opinions stated in the review were attributed to external motivations, and are therefore found more useful. Based on this study, exploratory analyses were carried out to investigate if valence and review type (informational vs. Transformational) might lead to perceived identification, and if perceived identification might mediate the effect between the interaction effect of valence and type and product consideration.

ANOVA analyses revealed a significant effect between type and perceived identification ($F(1,202) = 18.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$). Perceived identification was higher when exposed to informational online reviews ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.70$) than when exposed to transformational reviews ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.62$). No significant effect was found between valence and perceived identification ($F < 1$). Results showed a marginal significant interaction effect between valence and review type on perceived identification ($F(1,202) = 3.37, p = .07, \eta^2 = .02$). Simple effects analyses revealed that for negative reviews perceived identification was higher when exposed to informational reviews ($M = 3.42, SD = 1.72$) than when exposed to transformational reviews ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.52, F(1,202) = 18.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$). A marginal significant effect was found for positive reviews, perceived identification was higher when exposed to informational reviews ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.69$) than when exposed to transformational reviews ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.67, F(1,202) = 3.33, p = .07, \eta^2 = .02$).

**Figure 7.** Interaction effects of a positive vs. negative review and a transformational vs. informational review on perceived similarity ($N = 206$)
The mediating role of perceived identification was tested with a Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) using the bootstrap method of Preacher & Hayes (2004). First, there was a significant effect of the interaction of valence and review type (informational vs. transformational) on product consideration ($\beta = -1.19$, $t(206) = -6.26$, $p < .001$). Second, the interaction of valence and review type predicted the mediating variable of perceived identification ($\beta = .84$, $t(206) = 2.77$, $p < .05$). Third, the mediating variable predicted product consideration after controlling for the interaction effect of valence and review type ($\beta = .09$, $t(206) = 1.99$, $p < .05$). Fourth, the effect of valence and review type on product consideration was still significant when the mediating variable was included in the regression ($\beta = -1.26$, $t(206) = -6.57$, $p < .001$). The indirect Sobel test was not significant ($z = 1.55$, $p = .12$), and the bootstrap output showed that with 95% confidence the indirect effect does not significantly differ from zero (-0.0039 and 0.1892). Taken together, these results suggest a mediation, although they have to be treated with caution, as the indirect effect does not reach significance. No further effects were found.
7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Conclusion and implications

The current study was the first that experimentally explored the effects of two key characteristics in online reviews: review type (informational vs. transformational) and reviewer similarity (similar vs. dissimilar). Moreover, results of the present study extend understanding of the effects of review valence by considering the interaction effects of valence and review type, and valence and reviewer similarity.

The results make clear that review valence has a significant influence on consumers’ attitudes and product consideration. Online reviews written in a positive way yielded more positive attitudes and higher product consideration than negative online reviews. These results are in line with previous research, which stated repeatedly that positive reviews elicit more positive responses than negative reviews (Buda & Zhang, 2000; Herr et al., 1991, Reinstein & Snyder, 2000; Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

The present study replicates review valence findings of previous studies. However, it takes into account a product category that has not often been studied so far. Previous studies that included review valence have mostly focused on “experience” products, which are products that can only be evaluated after purchase, such as restaurant dinners and holidays. For example a study of Sorensen and Rasmussen (2004), which found that positive reviews had a stronger impact on book sales than negative reviews. Moreover, a study of Reinstein and Snyder (2000) showed that positive reviews had a large positive effect on box office revenue of movies. Studies comparing the eWOM effects of product type have shown that experience goods have a larger impact on consumer behavior compared with search products (Park & Lee, 2009). Results of the present study thus add to the body of research by showing that the effects of review valence also apply to “search” products; products including attributes that can be evaluated prior to purchase, like in this study video cameras.
Results furthermore make clear that review type (informational vs. transformational) affected the relation between review valence and attitude and product consideration. Informational, positive reviews yielded more positive attitudes and higher product consideration than transformational, positive reviews. In contrast, informational, negative reviews yielded more negative attitudes and lower product consideration than transformational, negative reviews. Thus, informational reviews appear to have more persuasive power than transformational reviews.

These results are in line with previous research focused on informational and transformational products (Chen & Xie, 2008; Dahlén & Bergendahl, 2001; Park, Lee & Han, 2007). Results can be explained by the fact that informational reviews are seen as objective, useful and understandable. Due to these and other factors, this type of review is perceived to have higher quality and is therefore more persuasive than transformational reviews (Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Different from most of the previous studies focused on product types, the current study uses the informational-transformational distinction for reviews. The present study will be one of the first studies who experimentally explores this important review characteristic. It can be concluded that people are looking for confirmation (from consumers) of already known functional information provided by sellers.

The effect of reviewer similarity on the relation between reviewer valence and persuasion turned out to be limited. Similarity only affected the relation between valence and attitude toward a product. Positive reviews written by a reviewer similar to the self yielded more positive attitudes than positive reviews written by a reviewer dissimilar to the self. Reviewer similarity did not affect the relation between negative reviews and attitude. However, the means were in the expected direction; negative reviews with a reviewer similar to the self yielded more negative attitudes than negative reviews from a reviewer dissimilar to the self.

These results consisted with previous research, which repeatedly found that similar communicators are more influential than dissimilar ones (Brock, 1965; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger & Yale, 1998; Price, et al., 1989). People want to communicate with, and compare themselves to similar persons to reduce
uncertainty and create trust. It has been suggested that similar individuals have the same needs and preferences (Brown & Reinigen, 1987; Festinger, 1954; Rogers, 1983; Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2003). It thus appears that individuals who seek product information online are more convinced by a review that comes from a person similar to them.

The few effects of similarity may be due to the unsuccessful manipulation of similarity; participants exposed to a review from a similar reviewer did not find the reviewer more similar than participants exposed to a dissimilar source. There are several reasons why the manipulation of similarity may have failed. In the current study, participants were only exposed to one review. Previous research has demonstrated that review volume has an influence on purchase intention; consumers like to rely on more than one opinion (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen & Xie, 2008; Duan et al. 2005; Liu, 2006). More specifically related to similarity research, Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld (2008) found that the disclosure of reviewer identity information significantly increased the helpfulness of a review and sales. In addition, they compared these effects for products that had numerous reviews and products that had only a few. Results showed that the disclosure of identity descriptive information is only significantly associated with sales when review volume is high. Apparently, information overload leads to a heuristic way of processing source characteristics. The authors did not find any effects for a single review from a single source.

The findings of Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld (2008) may explain the lack of effects found on reviewer similarity in the present study. The manipulation may have been too weak, as participants were exposure to only a single review. In normal life people generally consult more than one review to form an opinion. Another reason why the manipulation of similarity may have been unsuccessful is the fact that the current study only took into account demographic similarity. Maybe this kind of similarity is too general or too impersonal. In contrast, perceptual similarity regarding values, preferences, and lifestyles could have more impact, as this type of information is more vivid. Gilly et al. (1998) found, across two studies, that next to demographic similarity, perceptual similarity affects WOM influence processes too.
They showed that communicators with similar values and lifestyles had more persuasive power than dissimilar communicators.

Since most effects regarding reviewer similarity were not significant, mediation analyses including identification could not be carried out. Identification only mediated the relation between the interaction term of valence and review similarity on attitude, but this effect was not significant. Exploratory analyses were conducted to further investigate the role of similarity and the mediation of perceived identification. Firstly, results revealed that the interaction of valence and review type had a marginal significant influence on perceived identification. Exposure to negative informational reviews yielded higher perceived identification than exposure to negative transformational reviews. This effect was similar for positive reviews, however this results was only marginally significant.

Secondly, exploratory results pointed in the direction that perceived identification mediated the relation between valence and review type (informational vs. transformational) on product consideration. The review content characteristics, review valence and review type significantly influenced perceived identification. The degree to which a participant could identify with the reviewer had an impact on product consideration. These results can be explained by the attribution theory introduced by Folkes (1988). According to this theory, people make causal inferences about reviewer motivations. Reasons to post a review may be because of internal (reviewer) reasons or because of external (product) reasons. If consumers make attributions that the review is based on external reasons, they will perceive the review as useful and legitimate. On the contrary, reviews based on internal reasons are discounted by consumers.

The current study found that consumers believe that informational reviews are written because of external reasons by trustworthy identical individuals. Transformational reviews were perceived to be written because of personal reasons and lead hence to lower perceived identification. Results of the present study are in line with a research carried out by Sen and Lerman (2007). They found that the interaction of valence and product type (utilitarian vs. hedonic) influenced readers’ attributions regarding the motivations of the reviewer. Similarly, they showed that
negative utilitarian products were rated as more useful compared to negative hedonic products. It was found that these attributions mediate the relation between valence and product type on perceived usefulness of the review. As Sen and Lerman (2007) used the informational-transformational distinction for products, the current research adds understanding by showing similar results for review type.

Overall, these results suggest that participants identified with reviewers not based on how similar they were to them, but on the content of the review. Results made clear that the interaction between review valence and type (informational vs. transformational) had a significant effect on perceived identification. Findings furthermore indicate that perceived identification has an influence on product consideration. This outcome shows that identification is an important factor when studying online review effects.

This study used three different measurements: an explicit measure where participants had to rate several items on a Likert scale, an explicit ranking measure consisting of ranking video camera brands in order of preference, and an implicit measure assessed by means of a word reaction task. The implicit measure rendered only one significant result: the interaction effect of reviewer similarity and valence on attitude. It has been stated that implicit measures can tap underlying cognitive processes (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). Hence, it seems that similarity effects are processed unconsciously by the use of heuristics (Chaiken, 1980). Heuristic cue information about similarity is restored from memory and is used to form opinions, for instance that being similar leads to liking. Prior research confirms this conjecture and states that people use source information as a heuristic device to make judgments or to guide action.

Effects on review type (informational vs. transformational) are found using the explicit measure. This type of information involves deeper and careful systematic processing, as message content cannot be judged by a simple heuristic. Reviews include a lot of information, which might be more difficult to process. These findings emphasize the importance of using both implicit and explicit measures, as it has been found that different type of information require different kind of processing.
7.2 Limitations and future research

Clearly, results of this study are subject to significant limitations. This research was primarily limited by the manipulation of similarity. This manipulation may have been weakened because two reviewer characteristics (region and age) were not exactly similar to the characteristics of participants. This method was chosen to cover up the manipulation. It would have been too obvious for participants if they were exposed to a reviewer with the same gender, age, region and status. Therefore, the questionnaire was programmed in such a way that participants received a review from a reviewer who was two years older or two years younger. While participants filled out their region, the reviewer lived in the capital of that region. The differences may have been too large and lead to weaker manipulation of similarity. Future studies about similarity could make these reviewer characteristics more or exactly similar, but also has to keep in mind that the manipulation does not become too obvious.

Furthermore, the present study took into account all four similarity characteristics (gender, age, region, and status) together, while these reviewer characteristics could also be studied separately. It would be interesting to see which demographic characteristic has (the most) persuasive power and to determine the strength of persuasion per characteristic. In addition, this study only focused on demographic similarity. Perceptual similarity regarding values, preferences, and lifestyles could be studied as well. Gilly et al. (1998) found, across two studies that next to demographic similarity, perceptual similarity affects WOM influence processes too. They showed that communicators with similar values and lifestyles had more persuasive power than dissimilar communicators.

Previous research has stated that review quantity has an influence on purchase intention; consumers like to rely on more than one opinion (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen & Xie, 2008; Duan et al. 2005; Liu, 2006). The more reviews are written, the more important and popular the product is, and the more persuasive the reviews are. In the current research, participants were only exposed to one online review due
to time restraints. This method might have lead to less strong persuasive effects. Future research could increase review volume or compare review quantity effects.

Moreover, the current study distinguishes between informational and transformation reviews. It would be interesting to see which effects review type had on different types of products (also informational vs. transformational). If different product types are taken into account, the influence of review type could be measured more precise. Additionally, product type can be important when studying demographic similarity. In this study it was hypothesized that a reviewer with the same gender as the participants would have more persuasive power. However, this influence may differ across different products types. Reviews of products for which males are assumed to be more expert than females (e.g. cars and tools), will have more influence when the reviewer is a male than a female, also for female consumers. In contrast, female reviewers may be more persuasive when reviewing female expertise products, like gifts and household items. In sum, for gender-related products, gender similarity may be of less importance.

Moreover, pre-awareness, attitude, and product consideration were not measured. It was therefore not possible to determine the change in awareness, attitude, and product consideration after review exposure. Prior studies about online reviews did found significant changes in pre- and post-attitudes (Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004; Vermeulen, Das & Swager, 2008). Future studies could also include a pre-test.

The explicit ranking measures as well as the implicit measures did render only minor significant results. Since the questionnaire was distributed per e-mail, respondents filled out the questionnaire on different locations. This method might have lead to distractions and interruptions, for instance buzzing telephones or other people chatting. Especially the results of the word reaction task could have been biased, since the speed of reactions is important. Future research could study the effects of online reviews in a more controlled setting, like a media lab, where distractions are limited.

Finally, it might be interesting for future studied to explore the importance of age. We found that age was negatively correlated with all theoretical constructs
except with the explicit product consideration measure. This indicates that the younger participants were, the higher the awareness, attitude and product consideration. These results are in line with previous studies who have found that adolescents are more experienced with the internet than adults (Breazeale & Lueg, 2010), and that internet experienced consumers are more willing to buy on the internet than less internet experienced consumers (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Kulviwat, 2004; Ricci & Wietzma, 2006; Weber & Roehl, 1999). In addition, Ricci and Wietzma (2006) found that inexperienced internet consumers, where more skeptic about online review content than more experienced internet consumers.

7.3 **Final conclusion and practical implications**

The present experimental study delivers significant contributions to both marketing research and marketing practice. The results add to the understanding of E-WOM effects by taking into account three key online review characteristics and showing that these review features can have a significant impact on consumer behavior. Online reviews can benefit sellers, as positive reviews lead to more positive attitudes and increases product consideration more than negative reviews. Besides general findings of review valence, the present study shed a light on more specific online review mechanisms, like the interaction valence had with review type (informational vs. transformational) and reviewer similarity.

Results of this study along with previous studies (Reinstein & Snyder, 2000; Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2004), indicate that marketers should take advantage of effects of electronic word-of-mouth by giving the consumers an opportunity to express their opinion. Moreover, sellers might be interested in the effects of review type, as this research revealed that informational reviews have more persuasive power than transformational reviews. Thus, when writing a review: stick to the facts.

Additionally, results of the current study add to the offline (and online) body of research claiming that attributions of an information source can have powerful effects. Marketers could encourage consumers to provide personal information when writing a review, as this kind of information can lead to more positive attitudes
about the product being reviewed. Furthermore, this knowledge can be used when implementing online marketing strategies and managing online image.

In all, this study is the first that experimentally studied the effects of review valence, review type (informational vs. transformational) and reviewer similarity. Findings of the present study provide deeper understanding of the mechanisms and possibilities of different aspect of online reviews. As online reviews have become a more popular and important subject for marketers, gaining scientific knowledge about their effects is of great importance. Further studies are thus needed to determine whether effects found in the present study (and previous studies) can be generalized and to, of course, provide new understandings of eWOM impact.
8. REFERENCES


Appendix A Example of a positive transformational review

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleend gekregen en ben er enorm bevred met!

Meteen de dag naaf ik de mini-camera had gekregen, heb ik de camera geprobeerd op een feest van een vriend die aanstaat. Na mijn eerste filmje opnamen te hebben, kregen mijn vrienden hem in de galgen. Zij verdenken de camera geweldig! De camera bezorgde me echt een topavond!

Daarnaast ziet deze camera er erg hip en verleukend uit. Een design dat je niet snel in de winkels ziet, bij valt echt op tussen andere camera's. Hij is klein, en is daarom makkelijk mee te nemen. Erg handig! Met deze camera wil je echt gezien worden.

Kortom: een echte aanrader, het voldeed aan alle verwachtingen.

Totale: 8

gebrek kwaliteit: 7
beeldkwaliteit: 8
mogelijkheden: 9
gebruiksgemak: 5
vormgeving: 6
degelijkheid: 9
Appendix B Content of the four reviews

Positive transformational

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleden gekregen en ben er enorm tevreden over!

Meteen de dag nadat ik de mini camera had gekregen, heb ik de cam uitgeprobeerd op een feest van een vriend die jarig was. Na mijn eerste filmpje opgenomen te hebben, kregen mijn vrienden hem in de gaten. Zij vonden de camera geweldig! De camera bezorgde me echt een topavond!

Daarnaast ziet deze camcorder er erg hip en vernieuwend uit. Een design dat je niet snel in de winkels ziet, hij valt echt op tussen andere camera’s. Hij is klein, en is daarom makkelijk mee te nemen. Erg handig! Met deze camera wil je echt gezien worden.

Kortom: een echte aanrader, het voldeed aan alle verwachtingen.

Negative transformational

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleden gekregen en ben er helemaal niet tevreden over!

Meteen de dag nadat ik de mini camera had gekregen, heb ik de cam uitgeprobeerd op een feest van een vriend die jarig was. Na mijn eerste filmpje opgenomen te hebben, kregen mijn vrienden hem in de gaten. Zij vonden de camera driee keer niks! De camera bezorgde me echt een #$@!*avond!

Daarnaast ziet deze camcorder er erg saai en degelijk uit. Een design die ik vijf jaar geleden ook al in de winkels zag, hij valt absoluut niet op tussen andere camera’s. Hij is klein, en is daarom niet makkelijk vast te houden. Erg onhandig! Met deze camera wil je eigenlijk niet gezien worden.

Kortom: een grote teleurstelling, het voldeed niet aan mijn verwachtingen.
Positive informational

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleden gekregen en ben er enorm tevreden over!

Meteen de dag nadat ik de Samsung HMX-U10 had gekregen, heb ik de mini camera uitgeprobeerd. De full HD (breedbeeld) kwaliteit die was beloofd, kwam de camera duidelijk na. De kleuren zijn niet overdreven en ook bij mindere lichtomstandigheden functioneert hij geheel zonder ruis. Ook de beeldstabilisatie functie werkt prima, geen schokkerige beelden.

Bovendien lukte het makkelijk om via de USB mijn gemaakte video’s op de computer te zetten en af te spelen. De handleiding was erg duidelijk en bruikbaar. Ik hoefde niks meer zelf uit te zoeken. Ook was het fijn dat het opladen van de batterij via de pc erg snel was gebeurd!

Kortom: een echte aanrader, het voldeed aan alle verwachtingen.

Negative informational

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleden gekregen en ben er helemaal niet tevreden over!

Meteen de dag nadat ik de Samsung HMX-U10 had gekregen, heb ik de mini camera uitgeprobeerd. De full HD (breedbeeld) kwaliteit die was beloofd, kwam de camera duidelijk niet na. De kleuren zijn erg overdreven en bij mindere lichtomstandigheden geeft hij flinke ruis. Ook de beeldstabilisatie functie werkt niet goed, allemaal schokkerige beelden.

Bovendien lukte het niet om via de USB mijn gemaakte video’s op de computer te zetten en af te spelen. De handleiding was niet duidelijk en bruikbaar. Ik moest alles zelf uitzoeken. Ook was het irritant dat het opladen van de batterij via de pc een eeuw duurde!

Kortom: een grote teleurstelling, het voldeed niet aan mijn verwachtingen.
Appendix C  Questionnaire

Beste deelnemer,

Allereerst wil ik u graag bedanken dat u wilt meewerken aan dit onderzoek. Het betreft een onderzoek van de opleiding Communicatie aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam naar de bekendheid en kwaliteit van camera's.

Het onderzoek bestaat uit een aantal vragen en 3 woord reactie testen van elk ongeveer een halve minuut. Het is belangrijk dat u de vragenlijst helemaal invult.

Per vraag of opdracht wordt specifiek aangegeven op welke wijze u kunt antwoorden. Bij de beantwoording van de vragen gaat het steeds om uw mening, er zijn dus geen goede of foute antwoorden. In totaal zal de vragenlijst ongeveer 10 minuten van uw tijd kosten. Uiteraard worden alle antwoorden anoniem verwerkt.

Belangrijk: maak geen gebruik van de "terug"-knop ("back") in de internetbrowser, hierdoor loopt de vragenlijst vast.
Druk op volgende om met het onderzoek te beginnen!

De eerste vragen betreffen een aantal persoonlijke kenmerken. Als u alle vragen hebt beantwoord, klik dan op "VOLGENDE".

Vul alstublieft de volgende gegevens in:

Geslacht  
-  Man  -  Vrouw

Leeftijd

Status  
--Kies uw status--

Regio  
--Kies de provincie waarin u woont--

Op het volgende scherm krijg je een review te zien die geplaatst is op de review website Kieskeurig. Deze website publiceert ervaringen van gebruikers over allerlei producten.

Lees de review aandachtig door.

Klik op "VOLGENDE" om verder te gaan.
Lees hieronder de review geschreven door Bart (18), student, en woonachtig in Flevoland.

Scroll naar beneden om op "VOLGENDE" te klikken.

---

Ik heb deze Samsung camera twee weken geleend gekregen en ben er enorm tevreden over!

Meteen de dag nadat ik de mini camera had gekregen, heb ik de cam uitgeprobeerd op een feest van een vriend die naar was. Na mijn eerste中新网 opgenomen te hebben, trogen mijn vrienden hom in de gaten. Zij vonden de camera geweldig! Die camera bezorgde nie tje een topservies!

Daarnaast ziet deze camera er erg hip en vernieuwend uit. Een design dat je niet snel in de winkels ziet, niets echt op tussen andere camera's. Hi is Keen, en is daarom makkelijk mee te nemen. Erg handig! Met deze camera wil je echt gezeten worden.

Kortom: een echte aanrader, het voldeed aan alle verwachtingen.

---

U krijgt zo direct één voor één een aantal merken camera's te zien waarbij wij graag willen weten of u deze merken **kent** of **niet kent**. Het is de bedoeling dat u **zo snel en zo accuraat** mogelijk aangeeft of u de merken op het scherm kent of niet kent.

* Zijn de merken voor u **bekend**, druk dan op de "A-toets", links op het toetsenbord.
* Zijn de merken voor u **onbekend**, druk dan op de "L-toets", rechts op het toetsenbord.
Sommige merken kunnen meerdere keren voorkomen, soms zelfs vlak na elkaar. Laat u hierdoor niet verwarren!

Probeer de taak zo snel en zo goed mogelijk te doen. Laat daarom uw vingers gedurende de hele taak op de A-toets en de L-toets rusten om zo snel mogelijk te kunnen reageren.

**Het gaat om uw mening en er zijn dus ook geen goede of foute antwoorden.**

Voordat u met de echte taak gaat beginnen, krijgt u eerst 4 merken om te oefenen. Wanneer u het volgende scherm opent, begint de test direct. Zorg daarom dat u klaar bent om te beginnen!

Klik op "VOLGENDE" om naar het volgende scherm te gaan.

---

Om te beginnen krijg je een aantal voorbeelden.

Ken je de volgende merken pijnstillers?
Gebruik de A (bekend) en de L (onbekend) toetsen om te antwoorden.
Leg je vingers alvast op de knoppen! Probeer zo snel en accuraat mogelijk antwoord te geven!

Druk op de spatiebalk om te beginnen met het voorbeeld

---

Dat was het voorbeeld. Nu begint de eerste taak. Deze taak duurt ongeveer een minuut.

Ken je de volgende merken camera's?
Gebruik de A (bekend) en de L (onbekend) toetsen om te antwoorden.
Leg je vingers alvast op de knoppen! Probeer zo snel en accuraat mogelijk antwoord te geven!

Druk op de spatiebalk om te beginnen

U krijgt zo direct één voor één een aantal merken camera's te zien waarbij wij graag willen weten of u deze merken goed of slecht vindt. Het is de bedoeling dat u weer zo snel en zo accuraat mogelijk aangeeft of u de merken op het scherm goed of slecht vindt

* Zijn de merken voor u goed, druk dan op de "A-toets", links op het toetsenbord.
* Zijn de merken voor u slecht, druk dan op de "L-toets", rechts op het toetsenbord.

Sommige merken kunnen meerdere keren voorkomen, soms zelfs vlak na elkaar. Laat u hierdoor niet verwarren!

Probeer de taak zo snel en zo goed mogelijk te doen. Laat daarom uw vingers gedurende de hele taak op de A-toets en de L-toets rusten om zo snel mogelijk te kunnen reageren.

Wanneer u het volgende scherm opent, begint de test direct. Zorg daarom dat u klaar bent om te beginnen!

Klik op "VOLGENDE" om naar het volgende scherm te gaan.
Hoe vind je de volgende merken camera's?
Gebruik de A (goed) en de L (slecht) toetsen om te antwoorden.
Leg je vingers alvast op de knoppen! Probeer zo snel en accuraat mogelijk antwoord te geven!

Druk op de spatiebalk om te beginnen

U krijgt zo direct één voor één een aantal merken camera's te zien waarbij wij graag willen weten of u deze merken in overweging zou nemen om te kopen. Het is de bedoeling dat u weer zo snel en zo accuraat mogelijk aangeeft of u de merken op het scherm in overweging zou nemen

* Zou u de merken in overweging nemen, druk dan op de "A-toets", links op het toetsenbord.
* Zou u de merken niet in overweging nemen, druk dan op de "L-toets", rechts op het toetsenbord.

Sommige merken kunnen meerdere keren voorkomen, soms zelfs vlak na elkaar. Laat u hierdoor niet verwarren!

Probeer de taak zo snel en zo goed mogelijk te doen. Laat daarom uw vingers gedurende de hele taak op de A-toets en de L-toets rusten om zo snel mogelijk te kunnen reageren.

Wanneer u het volgende scherm opent, begint de test direct. Zorg daarom dat u klaar bent om te beginnen!

Klik op "VOLGENDE" om naar het volgende scherm te gaan.


LET OP: kies een merk maar 1x!
Hieronder volgen een aantal stellingen die onder andere betrekking hebben op de zojuist gelezen review. Klik bij elke stelling met de muis op het antwoord dat het beste uw mening weergeeft. Als u alle stellingen hebt beantwoord, klikt dan op "VOLGENDE".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stelling</th>
<th>Helemaal niet mee eens</th>
<th>helemaal mee eens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. De camera uit de recensie is goed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. De camera uit de recensie is positief op mij overgekomen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. De camera uit de recensie is aantrekkelijk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stel dat u in de komende drie maanden een camera gaat aanschaffen, zou u dan de camera uit de recensie overwegen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Stel dat uw camera kapot gaat, zou u dan de camera uit de recensie overwegen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Stel dat u een groot cadeau wilt kopen, zou u dan de camera uit de recensie overwegen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hieronder volgen een aantal stellingen die onder andere betrekking hebben op de gelezen review. Klik bij elke stelling met de muis op het antwoord dat het beste uw mening weergeeft. Als u alle stellingen heeft beantwoord, klik dan op "VOLGENDE".

De recensie was:

|  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
| objectief | subjectief |
| 1. rationeel |  |  |  |  |
| 2. zakelijk |  |  |  |  |
| 3. productoordeel |  |  |  |
| 4. verstandelijk |  |  |  |
| 5. feitelijk |  |  |  |
| 6. gericht op producteigenschappen |  |  |  |
| 7.  |  |  |  |  |

Hieronder ziet u een plaatje met cirkels. Beeldt u zich in dat een van de cirkels in de linker kolom uw eigen zelfdefinitie of identiteit vertegenwoordigt en de andere cirkel in de rechter kolom vertegenwoordigt de identiteit van de recensent (van de recensie die je net hebt gelezen). Geef aan welk geval (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, of H) het beste de mate van overlap beschrijft tussen uw identiteit en die van de recensent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ik</th>
<th>Recensent</th>
<th>Overlappingsgraad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ver uit elkaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dichtbij elkaar, maar gescheiden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zeer kleine overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kleine overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gemiddelde overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grote overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zeer grote overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complete overlap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hieronder volgen een aantal stellingen die betrekking hebben op de recensent van de door jou gelezen review. Klik bij elke stelling met de muis op het antwoord dat het beste jouw mening weergeeft. 
Als je alle stellingen hebt beantwoord, klik dan op "VOLGENDE".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stelling</th>
<th>Helemaal niet mee eens</th>
<th>Mee eens</th>
<th>Heel erg mee eens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ik ben hetzelfde als de recensent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ik heb veel overeenkomsten met de recensent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ik lijk veel op de recensent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bedankt, u bent aan het einde gekomen van deze vragenlijst!

Door hieronder uw e-mail adres in te vullen maakt u kans om een camera te winnen!

.................................................................

U kunt hieronder aangeven welk merk camera uw voorkeur heeft (wellicht kunnen we hier rekening mee houden):

Voorkeur 1: 
Voorkeur 2: 
Voorkeur 3:

U bent aan het einde gekomen van dit onderzoek.

De recensie is ten behoeve van dit onderzoek gemanipuleerd, en berust niet op waarheid. Als u vragen of opmerkingen heeft over dit onderzoek kunt u zich wenden tot Jacintha de Graaf.

Bedankt voor uw deelname!