


## Chapter 8

# Did You Read the Customer Reviews Before Shopping?

### The Effect of Customer Reviews About Online Retail Platforms on Consumer Behavioral Responses

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Online customer reviews are the most trustworthy source of information of consumers while determining the value of online retail platforms. They act to convince customers and serve the purpose of formation of trust and emotional attachment with the platform. This study reports the results of an experiment investigating the effects of online customer reviews on emotional attachment, trust, and repurchase intention while taking the previous emotional attachment strength into consideration. Results revealed that, depending on the previous attachment strength, both positive and negative reviews strongly affect emotional attachment. However, trust is only influenced by positive reviews. Besides, trust is a more durable construct compared to emotional attachment and is not subject to change easily. When the repurchase intention is investigated, only strongly attached consumers are affected by customer reviews.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional retailing was once fundamental for the sustainability of the economies. However, with the rise of e-commerce, diffusion of connected devices, this long-standing dominance has almost come to an end. In the value chain of the economy, online retail platforms emerged as one new entity (Reinartz, Wiegand & Imschloss, 2019).

Online platform economy (OPE) is changing the nature of the workforce, it provides an opportunity for traditional retailers to directly connect to their customers (Farrel & Greig, 2017). Online retail platforms are distinguished from the online retailers in the sense that they have no products of their own to sell (e.g., Alibaba, eBay, n11). Their sole business is to provide the platform for buyers and sellers and enable transactions. They themselves do not have any brand name that belongs to a product. In these platforms both buyers (individuals or business customers) and sellers (retailers, wholesalers) act as the customers of the platform owner (Zhang, Pang, Shi, & Wang, 2014).

Introduced as a new entity, online retail platforms change the way traditional retailers do their businesses. Platforms enable them to have immediate, ready-made and robust digital shops and become a part of the OPE in the Internet world. Being so attractive both to the customers and the retailers, it takes the attention of the marketing scholars to understand the dynamics of the platforms. Most marketing studies concerning online platforms emphasize the business model, especially the social media (Ab Hamid, Akhir, & Cheng, 2013; Zhao, Chi, Zhou, & Jiang, 2018; Bhattachary & Anand, 2017), pricing (Chen, Nan, & Li, 2018; Chan, Liu, & Zhang, 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2014) and customer experiences (Petermans, Janssens, & Van Cleempoel, 2013; Chan et al., 2018; Morosan & Bowen, 2018).

The retailers' wish for customers to have good experiences on the platform calls for more researches on the subject. The main concern of the retailers who give the similar kind of services for similar products is attracting customers to the site first, and make them return eventually for repurchase, while increasing trust, loyalty and emotional attachment (Li, Patel, & Wolfe, 2019).

According to the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), if a consumer creates intense attitudes toward a brand, it leads to an establishment of a psychological bond (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This bond, along with emotional bonding, creates true loyalty (Oliver, 1999). A trusting and emotionally bonded consumer is the one that will return to the site for repurchase, recommend the site to the others, and become the advocate of the retail platform. In order to have these really strong bonds with the platform, which is in question in the current study, consumers need evidence. Here come the current customer experiences/views/opinions in the form of online

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