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The Impact of Positive and Negative Reviews on Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract. In recent years, driven by the rapid advancement of online retail, a growing number of consumers have opted to purchase goods through e-commerce platforms. Nowadays, the Internet has become an open platform for consumers to express their opinions. Consumers will leave their evaluations of the shopping experience along with accompanying pictures after making an online purchase. Nowadays, an increasing number of consumers have started to adjust their consumption decisions based on the number of reviews of an online store, the quality of those reviews, and the store's reputation. Existing research mainly focuses on the impact of diversified forms such as picture reviews, quality of service, inertia to change and so on, which can influence consumers' willingness to buy. But research on the display order of positive and negative reviews remains limited. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on studying the influence of the priority order of positive and negative reviews on customers' purchase intention. This paper mainly adopts the methods of questionnaire surveys and regression models. According to the priority order, the reviews are divided into a control group, experimental group 1, and experimental group 2. The experimental results show that when consumers see negative reviews first and then positive reviews, it has a significant positive impact on their purchase intention; conversely, the impact of positive reviews being shown first is relatively weak. This paper mainly draws the following conclusions: First, giving priority to negative reviews is more conducive for merchants to increase sales. Second, compared with only presenting a simple introduction of the product, displaying more evaluations of the product from other consumers can increase customers' purchase intention. In addition, this study provides new evidence for merchants to boost sales and has important reference value for policymakers in making decisions in related aspects.

Keywords: Review Display Order, Comparison of Consumers' Purchase Intention, Regression Model, Questionnaire Survey.

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1. Introduction

In today's era where the digital economy dominates the globe, online trading platforms have transcended their mere property as commercial tools and evolved into essential necessities for social development. These platforms not only break through the limitations of geographical location and time, making purchases convenient, time-saving, and labor-saving, but they also offer a diverse range of choices. Online platforms are capable of providing a much wider variety of products compared to physical stores. Consumers can browse various brands and products from around the world on these online platforms, thus satisfying different needs. Additionally, personalized recommendations have become a significant selling point. Merchants can leverage big data collection and artificial intelligence technologies to recommend personalized products according to consumers' shopping preferences, thereby enhancing the overall shopping experience. Moreover, consumers can view the reviews and feedback from other buyers, gaining insights into the quality and usage experience of the products, which helps in reducing the purchase risk. They can also access comprehensive product information, including detailed product descriptions, pictures, and videos, enabling them to have a thorough understanding of the products before making a purchase.

Online shopping has completely transformed the traditional ways of business activities. In the past, business activities relied heavily on face-to-face communication and transactions. Nowadays, through the internet, seamless connections can be established between merchants and consumers. Consumers only need to click the mouse to select their desired products from a global scale, while merchants can reach a broader customer base at a lower cost. This convenient trading method has significantly improved the efficiency of business activities, reduced intermediate links, and lowered operating costs

In the era of e-commerce, user reviews of online shopping platforms have had a far-reaching impact on consumer behavior. User comments are not only an extension of product information, but also an important cornerstone of brand trust. Before purchasing goods, consumers often refer to the comments of other users, which intuitively show the quality and actual use of the goods. Especially when buying complex products such as electronic equipment, it is particularly important to deeply analyze the evaluation of performance.

The diversity of user reviews allows consumers to fully understand the goods. From five-star praise to one-star criticism, there is a unique story behind each rating. However, consumers need to have critical thinking when browsing comments, identify truly valuable information, and avoid being misled by behaviors such as comments. The emotional factors in the comments can also directly affect shopping decisions. Positive comments can stimulate the desire to buy, while negative comments may cause doubts.

The authenticity and credibility of comments are the focus of e-commerce platforms. Many platforms have launched measures such as real-name authentication and purchase verification to improve the credibility of evaluation. In addition, the interaction of user comment areas not only enhances consumers' sense of community, but also helps merchants solve problems in a timely manner and improve the quality of products and services. Positive comments can promote product sales, and properly handling negative comments can help businesses regain consumer trust.

With the advancement of technology and the development of the logistics industry, online shopping has continuously presented new research topics in terms of improving transaction efficiency, reducing costs, and enhancing the user experience, attracting the attention of numerous scholars.

The theme of this research is how the display order of product reviews, both positive and negative, affects consumers' purchase intentions during online shopping. Online information reviews

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are of varying quality, and some consumers may make impulsive purchases simply by looking at either the positive or negative reviews. This situation is inevitable. How consumers can find the optimal solution among countless positive and negative reviews, thereby having a comprehensive understanding of the products while promoting consumption and economic development has become a huge point of contention. By analyzing previous literature, it is found that there are not many articles studying the impact of review order on consumers' purchase decisions. Only a few articles mention the relationship between reviews and impulsive purchases, and they do not point out how to adjust the reviews to promote consumers' purchase intentions. (Authors of the cited articles are attached.) Previous studies have found that when consumers are purchasing low-involvement (versus high-involvement) products and reading reviews published by senior reviewers (versus junior reviewers), the influence of third-party positive reviews on impulsive purchase intentions is stronger. It has also been found that the credibility of third-party positive reviews has no significant impact on impulsive purchase intentions, and the mediating effects of happy emotions on timeliness, as well as the mediating effects of arousal emotions on the favorability and timeliness, are all not significant. Therefore, this paper studies the impact of the priority order of reviews on consumers' purchase decisions: Will changes in age groups lead to different purchase intentions under the same circumstances? Will changes in the order lead to changes in consumers' purchase intentions?

The research objective of this paper is to find out which order can most strongly stimulate consumers' purchase intentions while enabling them to have a thorough understanding of the products. The researchers adopted the form of a questionnaire survey and conducted investigations on people of different age groups both at home and abroad. The majority of the samples are young people.

This study first presents a basic introduction of the research product, a smartwatch, as a control group to observe consumers' original purchase intentions. In Experimental Group 1, after the basic introduction, positive reviews are displayed first. After reading them, negative reviews are shown, and then consumers' purchase intentions are observed again. Conversely, in Experimental Group 2, negative reviews are presented first after the introduction of the research product, followed by positive reviews, and finally, consumers' purchase intentions are observed. The purchase intention is divided into 10 levels (for the convenience of data quantification), with 1 to 10 representing no purchase intention at all to a strong purchase intention respectively. Finally, the conclusions of the three sets of data are compared and summarized.

The significance of this experimental study lies in how sellers can improve consumers' purchase intentions by changing the display order of reviews. At the same time, consumers can avoid falling into consumption traps and truly achieve rational consumption. The innovative aspect of this research lies in conducting extensive investigations both at home and abroad and in the vast inland areas. Most of the respondents are young people who are avid pursuers of online consumption. A linear regression model is used for in-depth research.

2. Literature review

Nadia Purnawirawan et al. find how the balance and order of online reviews affect consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, finding that the order in which reviews are presented influences their perceived usefulness and thus consumer decision making[1-2]. In our experiment, online reviews were divided into good reviews and bad reviews for further testing, and the order of good reviews and bad reviews was switched to test the two groups of testers on consumption decisions, so as to find out how the display order of good reviews and bad reviews has an influence on consumers'

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purchase intention and how much it has an impact on consumers' purchase intention. Our purchase intention is divided into 1-10 levels, allowing consumers to score after reading good reviews and bad reviews, so as to collect consumers' specific purchase intention after reading different natures of reviews QuYan examines the effect of verbal evaluations by unknown onlookers such as other people's language on consumers' willingness to purchase everyday functional products in a shopping environment[3]. Based on the double processing theory, this study proposes that perceived value and activated positive emotion play a mediating role between others' language and purchase intention, and examines the moderating role of consumers' moderating personality traits (promotion orientation and preventive orientation) in the above relationship. The result shows that positive verbal evaluation by others positively affects purchase intention by enhancing consumers' perceived value and activating positive emotions and perceived value and activated positive emotion play a partial mediating role between others' language and purchase intention. However, the study did not take into account that other individual differences such as cultural background and past experience which might also influence the effect of other people's language on purchase intention. Therefore, our experiment investigated the age and gender of consumers and whether they had used similar high-tech shovel products before, so as to consider the sensitivity of consumers of different ages and genders to other people's opinions, and then further collected experimental data.

Ann E. Schlosser examined how including both strengths and weaknesses in online reviews affects their usefulness and persuasiveness, and the results show that this balanced presentation of information has a positive influence on consumers' purchasing intention[4]. And Kristopher Floyd et al. examined how online product reviews affect retail sales and found that the order in which reviews are presented positively and negatively has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions[5]. From the above literature, it can be summarized that the mechanism of the display order of good and bad reviews affecting consumers' purchase intention mainly includes:

Firstly, it may be caused by cognitive bias. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance, consumers may experience discomfort when confronted with information that is inconsistent with their initial attitudes. If you see a bad review first, it can lead to negative expectations about the product and influence the purchase decision.

Secondly, the information processing sequence also plays a significant role. The Primacy effect suggests that information received initially tends to have a more substantial cognitive influence. Presenting favorable reviews at the outset can establish a positive first impression in the consumer's mind, thereby enhancing their purchasing intention.

Thirdly, emotional response will also affect consumers' purchasing decisions. Positive emotions may be triggered by favorable comments, and expectations for the product may be enhanced; And bad reviews that come first may raise doubts or concerns, reducing willingness to buy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Experiment overview

The experiment, titled "Investigating the Impact of Online Product Reviews on People's First Impressions," was conducted from February 17th to 22nd, 2025. The study aims to examine how the order of online reviews (positive-first vs. negative-first) affects consumer purchasing decisions.

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire consists of five key questions:

Gender

Age

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Prior purchasing behavior:

"Have you purchased similar products before?"

"Would you buy this product?" (pre-treatment purchase intention)

Purchase Intention (0-10 scale): Initial rating before exposure to reviews.

Willingness to pay: Participants quantify their purchase intention by stating the maximum price they are Purchase Intention for the product.

Following the product introduction, participants are randomly assigned to one of two groups:

Positive-first group: Participants see positive reviews first, followed by negative reviews.

Negative-first group: Participants see negative reviews first, followed by positive reviews.

After exposure to the reviews, participants answer the purchase intention and willingness-to-pay questions again, allowing measurement of changes in their responses.

3.2. Rationale for experiment setup

Our experiment presents a product that does not exist in the market. This ensures that participants have no prior knowledge or bias, allowing for a clean measurement of the impact of review order.

Outcome is measured by: First measurement: Before reading reviews, participants rate their initial purchase intention (0-10 scale). Second measurement: After reading reviews, they rate their purchase intention again. The difference between these two scores captures how review order influences purchase decisions.

We expect participants' Purchase Intention is expected to decrease after seeing negative reviews, as the contrast may create a psychological gap and raise doubts in the Positive-first group. While in the Negative-first group, participants' Purchase Intention is expected to increase after seeing positive reviews, leading to a "low opening, high going" perception.

We quantify purchase intention (0-10 scale) to convert subjective attitudes into statistically analyzable data, making comparisons between groups more precise and meaningful.

Data and Variables

The dataset includes participant responses on willingness to purchase and perceived product value, along with demographic and prior purchasing behavior data. The key variables used in the regression analysis are:

Dependent Variables:

Purchase Intention: Variable indicating whether the participant is willing to purchase the product.

lnprice: The natural logarithm of the participant's stated willingness-to-pay (price), which accounts for potential heteroscedasticity.

Independent Variables:

Positive First (T1): Dummy variable, 1 if the participant sees positive reviews first.

Negative First (T2): Dummy variable, 1 if the participant sees negative reviews first.

gender*T1: Interaction term between gender and T1, used to analyze gender differences in review order effects.

gender*T2: Interaction term between gender and T2.

Control Variables:

age: Participant's age.

agesq: The square of age, controlling for potential non-linear effects of age on decision-making.

gender: Dummy variable, 1 for male, 0 for female.

bought: Dummy variable, 1 if the participant has previously purchased similar products.

would: Dummy variable, 1 if the participant was initially willing to buy the product before the treatment.

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Regression Model

To analyze the relationship between review order and consumer decisions, we estimate the following Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models:

Basic models:

$$PurchaseIntention\ i = \beta 0 + \beta 1Ti + \beta 2Xi + \epsilon i$$

$$ln(price)i = \beta 0 + \beta 1PositiveFirst\ i + \beta 2Xi + \epsilon i$$

Where Xi is a vector combining all the control variables such as age gender bought would. Ti stands for which group this observation belongs to, like PositiveFirst, NegativeFirst or control.

3.3. Interaction models

$$PurchaseIntention\ i = \beta 0 + \beta 1Ti + \beta 2Xi + \beta 3genderi + \beta 4genderi*Ti + \epsilon i$$

$$ln(price)i = \beta 0 + \beta 1Ti + \beta 2Xi + \beta 3genderi + \beta 4genderi*Ti + \epsilon i$$

Similarly, Xi contains control variables without gender, which now is the one we are interested in. Here we have the product of the variable genderi and Ti to investigate the potential interaction effects.

3.4. Data processing

Transformation: The price variable is log-transformed (lnprice = ln(price)) to mitigate heteroscedasticity and normalize distribution.

Interaction Terms: gendert1 and gendert2 are generated to examine gender differences in treatment effects.

Handling Missing Data: Observations with incomplete responses are removed to ensure robustness in estimation.

This methodology ensures a comprehensive examination of how first impressions influence consumer decision-making, while accounting for individual demographic factors and prior purchasing intent.

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3.5. Statistics summary

Table 1: Statistics summary

VARIABLES	Observation	Mean	Std.dev.	Min	Max
Panel A: Control Group					
age	249	26.26	13.38	15	70
gender	249	0.365	0.483	0	1
bought	249	0.671	0.471	0	1
would	249	0.871	0.335	0	1
will	249	6.297	2.241	1	10
price	249	1,739	1,698	30	10,000
agesq	249	867.9	917.3	225	4,900
lnprice	249	6.985	1.048	3.401	9.21
Panel B: Positive-first Group					
age	135	30.24	15.5	15	70
gender	135	0.348	0.478	0	1
bought	135	0.63	0.485	0	1
would	135	0.874	0.333	0	1
will	135	6.474	2.349	1	10
price	135	1,492	1,420	0	7,000
agesq	135	1,153	1,085	225	4,900
lnprice	133	6.897	0.989	3.401	8.854
Panel C: Negative-first Group					
age	114	21.55	8.157	15	51
gender	114	0.386	0.489	0	1
bought	114	0.719	0.451	0	1
would	114	0.868	0.34	0	1
will	114	6.807	2.026	1	10
price	114	1,832	1,664	0	9,000
agesq	114	530.5	489	225	2,601
lnprice	111	7.114	0.987	5.293	9.105

Table 1 presents the basic sample characteristics for the three groups: Control, Positive-first, and Negative-first.

Control Group (n = 249):

Age: The average age is 26.26 years (SD = 13.38), ranging from 15 to 70 years.

Gender: The proportion of males is 36.5% (gender mean = 0.365), indicating a predominance of female participants.

Purchase experience: The mean of "bought" is 0.671, suggesting that most participants had prior experience with similar products; the initial purchase intention (would mean = 0.871) is relatively high.

Key dependent variables: The average purchase intention is 6.297 (out of 10); the average price is approximately 1,739 yuan, with a log-transformed mean (lnprice) of 6.985.

Positive-first Group (n = 135):

Age: The average age is 30.24 years (SD = 15.5), slightly higher than the Control group.

Gender: The male proportion is slightly lower (gender mean = 0.348).

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Purchase experience: The means of "bought" and "would" are 0.63 and 0.874, respectively, similar to the Control group.

Purchase intention has a mean of 6.474; the average price is approximately 1,492 yuan, with lnprice = 6.897.

Negative-first Group (n = 114):

Age: The average age is 21.55 years (SD = 8.16), indicating a younger sample.

Gender: The male proportion is similar to other groups (gender mean = 0.386).

Purchase experience: The "bought" mean is 0.719, slightly higher than other groups; "would" mean is 0.868.

Purchase intention has a mean of 6.807; the average price is approximately 1,832 yuan, with lnprice = 7.114.

Overall, there are noticeable differences in age and purchase experience among the three groups, which may influence the results. Therefore, control variables (age, agesq, gender, bought, would) were included in the regression models to account for these potential confounders.

4. Empirical findings

Table 2: Basic models with/without control variables (dependent variable: purchase intention)

Dependent variable: Purchase Intention						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Positive First	0.017		0.177	0.082		0.215
	(0.225)		(0.238)	(0.214)		(0.224)
Negative First		0.448*	0.510**		0.395*	0.464*
		(0.237)	(0.252)		(0.226)	(0.237)
Control Variable	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
N	498	498	498	498	498	498
R-sq	0	0.007	0.008	0.14	0.145	0.147

Notes: All models are estimated using OLS. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, and * $p < 0.1$.

Table 2 reports the baseline regression models examining purchase intention:

Basic model (without control variables):

The coefficient for Positive First is small and insignificant across models, while the coefficient for Negative First is positive and reaches the 10% significance level in some models. This suggests that participants exposed to negative reviews first exhibit higher purchase intention compared to the Control group.

Extended model (with control variables):

After controlling for age, gender, prior purchase experience (bought), initial purchase intention (would), and age squared (agesq), the explanatory power (R-squared) increases from nearly zero to around 0.14-0.15.

The positive effect of Negative First remains significant, reinforcing the finding that seeing negative reviews first can positively influence purchase intention. In contrast, Positive First remains insignificant.

Overall, Table 2 indicates that negative-first exposure has a stable and significant positive impact on purchase intention, even after accounting for other factors.

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Table 3: Price perception models (dependent variable: ln(price))

Dependent variable: ln(price)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Positive First	-0.128		-0.117
	(0.103)		(0.106)
Negative First		0.16	0.144
		(0.110)	(0.113)
Control Variable	NO	NO	YES
N	498	498	498
R-sq	0.003	0.004	0.089

Notes: All models are estimated using OLS. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, and * p < 0.1.

Table 3 examines how review order influences consumers' price willingness:

Basic model (without control variables):

The coefficient for Positive First is negative, suggesting that participants exposed to positive reviews first might indicate a lower willingness to pay. However, this effect is not significant. The coefficient for Negative First is positive but also not significant.

Extended model (with control variables):

After introducing control variables, the model's explanatory power (R-squared) increases to 0.089, indicating that these factors contribute to explaining price perception. However, the coefficients for both Positive First and Negative First remain insignificant.

This suggests that while review order significantly affects purchase intention, its influence on price perception (measured by ln(price)) is relatively weak and lacks statistical significance.

Table 4: Interaction models

	(1) Purchase Intention	(2) Purchase Intention	(3) Purchase Intention	(4) ln(price)	(5) ln(price)	(6) ln(price)
Positive First (t1)	0.153		0.241	-0.033		-0.014
	(0.265)		(0.278)	(0.126)		(0.132)
Negative First (t2)		0.245	0.325		0.079	0.077
		(0.285)	(0.301)		(0.137)	(0.143)
Gender	0.183	0.027	0.058	0.225**	0.071	0.169
	(0.227)	(0.222)	(0.274)	(0.107)	(0.105)	(0.129)
Gender*T1	-0.202		-0.08	-0.345*		-0.29
	(0.440)		(0.465)	(0.208)		(0.220)
Gender*T2		0.394	0.364		0.268	0.17
		(0.458)	(0.485)		(0.218)	(0.231)
Control Variable	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	498	498	498	498	498	498
R-sq	0.141	0.147	0.148	0.091	0.089	0.095

Notes: All models are estimated using OLS. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, and * p < 0.1.

Table 4 examines whether gender moderates the effect of review order on purchase intention and price perception:

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Interaction effect of Positive First (T1):

In the purchase intention models, the interaction term (gendert1) is negative and reaches the 10% significance level in some specifications, suggesting that males may be less sensitive to positive-first reviews than females.

However, in other specifications, this effect remains negative but not significant, implying that gender differences in response to positive-first reviews are not robust.

Interaction effect of Negative First (T2):

The interaction term (gendert2) is generally positive, indicating that males may have a higher purchase intention when exposed to negative-first reviews (or are less negatively affected). However, this effect does not reach statistical significance in most cases. In the price perception models, the interaction term for T2 also fails to show significance.

Overall, the results in Table 4 suggest that while some trends indicate potential gender differences in response to review order, these effects lack strong statistical significance, preventing definitive conclusions about gender moderation.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid development of the Internet, due to regional factors, consumers are gradually shifting from offline shopping to online shopping. Compared with offline products, the virtual nature of the online shopping experience brings great convenience. Meanwhile, due to information asymmetry, the reviews from purchased users have become the main criterion for hesitant users to make judgments. This experiment aims to investigate the impact of the priority order of positive and negative reviews on buyers' purchase intention. Also, consumers are divided into different groups based on factors such as gender, age, and prior knowledge of the product. In this experiment, the reviews are divided into a control group (only a brief introduction to the research product is shown), experimental group 1 (after showing a brief introduction, positive reviews are presented first, followed by negative reviews), and experimental group 2 (after showing a brief introduction, negative reviews are presented first, followed by positive reviews). The data research reveals that consumers' purchase decisions and purchase intentions are influenced by the order of positive and negative reviews.

This experiment is based on in - depth discussions among multiple professional researchers both at home and abroad and has yielded remarkable results. However, due to the limitations of the research group's scientific research capabilities, rigid conditions, and objective resources, there are inevitably some shortcomings that call for further research and improvement. For instance, the sample size of this experiment is insufficient, which differs from actual market purchases and may affect the external validity of the experiment. Moreover, as this experiment is a questionnaire survey, all subjects will read all the reviews. But in the actual market environment, not all consumers have enough patience to read through all positive and negative reviews. Therefore, this experiment has certain limitations. Based on this experiment, consumers can recognize the limitations of online shopping, that is, some reviews can create preconceived notions, affect people's first impression of the product, and ultimately lead to deviations in people's purchase decisions.

The results of this experiment put forward the following suggestions for major consumer and e - commerce platforms: First, display negative reviews first and then positive reviews to stimulate consumers' purchase intention. The experimental results show that when consumers see negative reviews first and then positive reviews, their purchase intention significantly increases. Thus, e - commerce platforms can adjust the order of page reviews according to this result to boost sales. Second, strengthen the construction of third - party review platforms. Third - party review platforms

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independent of enterprises have high credibility. Network supervision departments should, in coordination with laws, strictly regulate and guide online consumption to standardize and guide the online consumer market. Third, in future research, it is recommended that merchants divide a certain product into several categories. For example, clothing can be divided into luxury, sports, work, casual, children's categories, etc. Then conduct experiments on the impact of the priority of positive and negative reviews on consumers' purchase intention in each category, and adopt different marketing strategies for different products.

The following suggestions are given to consumers:

First, consumers can actively participate in third - party reviews. The advantage of this proposal is that it can increase the number of reviews, promote sales, and drive economic development. Research results indicate that positive reviews of goods (services) on third - party review websites in the online environment have a significant impact on the purchase intention of online consumers, and the more reviews there are, the greater the impact.

Second, it is recommended that consumers read multiple reviews before making a purchase decision and give priority to viewing negative reviews, so as to obtain more authentic and reliable product evaluations. Research results show that some merchants deliberately generate a large number of positive reviews on their own online platforms in an attempt to increase sales. In conclusion, consumers should give priority to browsing negative reviews to obtain the most authentic product evaluations.

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