Analysis of the Factors Affecting Online Consumers’ Online and Offline Sentiment and Improvement Strategies

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Abstract. The online and offline emotional divergence of online consumers is a phenomenon that online consumers’ evaluation of a certain commodity are not the same with their real thoughts. Consumers’ online emotional expression has an impact on the identification of consumers’ sentiment to make marketing strategies and provides reference for other consumers. Therefore, this paper analyzes the influencing factors of online and offline emotional divergence through questionnaire survey, and finds that network environment, personal characteristics, website evaluation mechanism and unfair competition are the main factors affecting online and offline emotional divergence. Finally, from the perspectives of businessmen, individuals and regulators, this paper puts forward some countermeasures to deal with the emotional divergence between online and offline.

Introduction

According to the information issued by the authority, the favorable rating of online commodities are often close to 100%, but the goods sold are still accompanied by a high rate of complaints or return. From December 2017 to February 2018, the record of 200 commodities selected at random from Taobao and Jingdong, which are the main ecommerce platforms in China. The favorable rating was found to be 92.8%, which verified the statistical conclusions of authoritative departments. This phenomenon shows that there is a deviation between the emotional tendency reflected in online evaluation of online shopping consumers and their real emotional tendency in the real world. In the subjective, the cause of this deviation is related to some individual characteristics of consumers, such as the positive affirmation and the crowd psychology, and in the objective aspect, the existence of this deviation is also derived from the network environment (such as network violence, off-line threat, merchant seduction, seller's exercise, etc.) and the defect of website evaluation mechanism, including the default mechanism of evaluation or the closing mechanism of the return transaction, etc. Furthermore, the unfair competition also have a great impact on it, which contains scalping, water army and so on. At present, most enterprises utilize online reviews to analyze its consumers’ emotion, then launch the marketing strategy of related products and services. However, the single data source will restrict the comprehensiveness and accuracy of analysis results, and may lead to decision error of the enterprise extremely. Based on this, through the questionnaire survey, this paper analyzes and summarizes the factors that affect the emotional divergence of online shopping consumers so as to propose improvement strategies.

The Research Status of Online and Offline Emotional Divergence of Online Consumers

The Definition of Emotion Divergence

The emotional divergence of online consumers mainly refers to the situation that online consumers’ reviews of a commodity is not the same with their real thinking about the good in reality. Emotional analysis focuses more on people's inner experience.

Research Status of Affective Factors of Online Consumers

At present, there are not many researches on the influence factors of online consumers both domestic and international. The main way to analyze and study the influencing factors is through questionnaires, and SPSS, AMOS, Wrap PLS, LISREL and other tools are used to do data analysis.
The main methods used including descriptive statistical analysis, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, multiple linear regression analysis, linear correlation analysis and structural equation model analysis, etc. Based on the sample data from 689 observers, exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used to analyze the reliability of the dimensions and the validity between the dimensions. Structural equation model was used to verify the hypothesis and reveal the relationship between the various influencing factors (AlZaidi, 2012)[1]. Structural equation model was used to analyze the survey data of 157 teachers from pilot schools, and the strength of the relationship between the influencing factors was evaluated. (Kim, 2012)[2]. By extending the HowNet Emotional Dictionary and using the word segmentation method based on PAT tree and statistics, the content of comments obtained from Taobao website were analyzed, which was found to be valid to analyze the sentiment tendency of online shoppers’ reviews. (YongZong Li, SiQi Hu, 2016)[3]. Other scholars intergrate emotional divergence and user interests into the prediction of Microblog retweeting (XiaoBao Tang, 2017)[4].

Influence Factors of Online Consumers’ Online and Offline Emotional Divergence

Network Environment

Reviews except favourable comments may have negative effects on shop’s favorable rating so that if sellers misinterpret the meaning of the evaluation itself, it is possible for them to take extreme behavior. Some sellers never negotiate with their consumers or examine their own problem when they receive moderate or negative comments. They are trying to make consumers change or delete these comments through pastering them endlessly, such as telephone harassment or luring consumers with some small discounts, etc. Additionally, in order to make their favorable ratings close to 100%, they even adopt the way of online intimidation, offline threats of violence, or direct manipulation of reviews. For example, in April 2018, the incident of online consumers who give negative comments was threatened by sellers who would kill all his families. But it doesn’t not come singly but in pairs. In June 2018, a college graduate has been abused by phone calls and text messages of sellers, which finally have upgraded to the door-to-door threat. Moreover, online shopping evaluation is a form of mutual evaluation, there is often the phenomenon that buyers and sellers exchange favorable comments or give each other bad comments because of revenge. At the same time, there is also a phenomenon that even if they are not satisfied with the transaction, they will give each other good comments, which leads to online and offline emotional divergence.

Personal Traits

As the writer of e-products’ reviews, consumers are the main originators of reviews, and their personal online reviews may affect the overall characteristics of the reviews, and then affect the objectivity of reviews about e-products. If the e-products’ comment cannot represent the perception of most consumers and cannot transmit the real commodity information, it will increase the transaction risk of other consumers, and mislead the seller to make the wrong marketing strategy, and will also affect the efficiency of the information transmission of the online commodity review system.

Through the analysis of the collected data, regardless of whether the commodity meets their expectations or meets their needs, many consumers are accustomed to giving favorable rate to the goods, so other consumers are difficult to get the correct information about the goods from their evaluation. But offline, if they are not satisfied with the goods, they will not give favorable rate to the product. This creates emotional divergence of consumers between online and offline.

The Evaluation Mechanism

The evaluation mechanism of the website is a tool or mechanism used to produce and disseminate credit information in electronic commerce. Its purpose is to employ the information of previous transactions to judge the quality of products and services provided by sellers, and then to reduce the credit risk in transaction. Therefore, the scientificity of website evaluation mechanism is also
crucial to the authenticity of online product reviews. Concerned about the existing research, although the relevant literature mentioned that there are hidden dangers and drawbacks in the online commentary system of websites, it only describes the problem itself, and does not start with the relationship between website evaluation mechanism and comment deviation, using scientific research methods to study its impact mechanism in depth.

The “default” mechanism of China's online shopping website means that the consumers do not evaluate the goods within 15 days after the success of the transaction, then the system will give favorable comments automatically. This means that if the consumer does not evaluate the goods purchased in time, then the omission of the evaluation will only become good, not bad. So it can not reflect their real assessment about the product. The “return transaction closure” mechanism means that the transaction is over if consumers happen to return the goods to seller, which makes it impossible for consumers to make comments on these goods whose quality have problems.

**Unfair Competition**

When the score of online product reviews is calculated, it will become a measurement of the seller’s credit, which will determine its level on online shopping platform. Therefore, as a direct stakeholder of online product reviews, sellers have the motivation to manipulate the praise behavior. Some illegal operators began to take some improper measures to improve their own store credit rating or reduce the credit rating of other operators.

Online shopping platform such as Taobao and relevant departments have taken some action to regulate irregular business practices, such as Anti-Unfair Competition Law, which has proved the existence of manipulative comments. When search the key words of “favorable comments” and “Credit”, it is common to find that there are many shops aims to help other shops to improve the their credit rating. In order to combat this phenomenon of false transactions, Taobao upgraded its management rules in 2012 and cracked down on false transactions, ratings and credit information. In addition, the Ministry of Commerce will also promulgate the “Regulations on the Management of Online Retail” to focus on cracking down on irregular behavior of online transactions.

**Strategies to Solve Online and Offline Emotional Divergence**

**From the Perspective of Sellers**

For sellers, although the high favorable rating is conducive to attract consumers, but in the long run, it is not beneficial for sellers to establish a good reputation and improve customers’ loyalty. Based on this, sellers should regulate their trading behavior, avoid false transactions and comments. Secondly, this paper finds that consumers’ high or low expectations of products will affect their willingness to evaluate products actively and then affect the authenticity of online product reviews. While online product reviews with bias are not helpful for sellers to extract useful information from reviews, evaluate consumers’ preferences, and timely adjust marketing strategies. Therefore, sellers need to accurately and truthfully provide commodity information, and consciously help consumers establish the right expectations.

Post purchase reviews can effectively avoid this kind of evaluation bias. The current incentive measures are mostly from sellers, which encourage consumers to take the initiative to evaluate after purchasing in the form of coupons, discount cards and so on. However, only consumers give favorable comments, they can receive reward. Therefore, consumers may not have willingness to do it. Website as a trading platform, its incentives do not have sellers' preferences, can promote the correct dissemination of information. Therefore, the website can issue material incentives such as coupons or commodity discounts to consumers who actively evaluate products, or improve the level of membership, etc, which is conducive to help online product reviews return to reality.

**From the Perspective of Consumers**

For consumers, on the one hand, they should post their review actively so as to reduce the negative impact of “default” reviews and help others to obtain real comments about goods. On the other
hand, as the problem of the possible deviation of comments, we should not only pay attention to the overall score and the high favorable rating of the commodity evaluation, but also identify the useful information and establish the correct expectation by carefully reading negative rate and those favorable rates with detail content. Furthermore, according to the conclusion of this study, the seller’s manipulation of online product reviews decreases with time going by. Therefore, consumers can browse the recent product reviews by ranking “according to the latest evaluation” to reduce the probability of reading “false positive comments” to some extent.

**From the Perspective of Regulation**

Improve the default evaluation mechanism and the “return trading closure” mechanism. The first mechanism will overly boost the favorable rating, at the same time, it also provides a way for sellers to do false behavior to increase their credit. "Return transaction closure” mechanism shields a large number of negative information of goods, consequently, other consumers cannot find those information about goods to make right purchasing decisions. Therefore, this paper argues that we should improve the default evaluation mechanism with the purpose of obtaining a relatively objective score about goods rather than calculate default favorable rates into credit score. Then extending time of return transaction closure so that consumers can assess the good even the good has been returned. The evaluation comprehensively reflects the different consumers’ experience perception of commodities and maximizes the objectivity of commodity’s review information.

Strengthen the supervision of manipulation review. According to the research in this paper, many sellers manipulate reviews on online shopping websites in China, which is an important factor leading to extremely high favorable rating of online products. In recent years, although Taobao and related administrative departments have increased their efforts to crack down on fraudulent transactions, there are still many stores change the description of goods to help sellers improve credit and profit. Based on this, websites and related departments should strengthen the supervision of such phenomena, constantly optimize the original rules of false transactions, improve the frequency of rectification, take irregular investigation and increase the intensity of punishment.

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