



Working Paper

Online User Comments versus Professional Reviews: Differential Influences on Pre-release Movie Evaluation by Anindita Chakravarty, Yong Liu, and Tridib Mazumdar, 2008 [08-105]

Online user comments and critical reviews have become important inputs to consumer decision-making processes, particularly for entertainment products such as movies. In this report, Chakravarty, Liu, and Mazumdar examine the influences of online user comments and reviews by professional critics on moviegoers' evaluation of to-be-released movies. Unlike extant studies that have treated moviegoers as a homogenous group, their study segments movie audiences into frequent and infrequent moviegoers, a classification that has direct managerial implications for the movie business.

Utilizing an experimental context in which the subjects are exposed to information posted on a simulated website, the authors establish clear causal linkage between the information from online user comments and critical reviews and the subjects' movie evaluation.

Their key finding is that, compared with infrequent moviegoers, frequent moviegoers are less influenced by online user comments but more influenced by critical reviews.

In addition, frequent moviegoers, or heavier users of the product, are more resistant to -negative user comments than are infrequent consumers. This resistance, however, breaks down when negative comments come from professional reviewers or critics.

Thus, overall, the study suggests that movie critics are still important, despite the ubiquity of movie websites and of user comments, due to their influence on frequent moviegoers, who are critically important to the industry.

Further, creating word-of-mouth through deliberate marketing campaigns should work equally well on both frequent and infrequent consumers, since (hopefully) the word-of-mouth generated through the campaign is mostly positive. Beyond the movie industry, such a strategy seems to be particularly useful for the introduction of new product categories as it helps create positive user comments and reduce negative ones, which are detrimental when most consumers are still infrequent users.

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