

Disentangling the Impact of Online Review Valence on Helpfulness

How regulatory orientation and feelings of gratitude shape online review helpfulness voting

Introduction

- Online review helpfulness ratings are an important indicator for the persuasiveness and impact of online reviews.
- Previous research focuses on observable qualities of the review (e.g., star rating, reviewer characteristics, textual characteristics) to explain helpfulness ratings
- I propose that contrary to previous research, consumers' goal orientation, specifically, self-regulatory orientation, shapes consumers' assessment of review helpfulness.
- Consumers may operate under a promotion focus (where approaching gains is more salient) or a prevention focus (where avoiding losses is more salient). Hence, positive (negative) reviews are more (less) relevant for consumers that have a promotion (prevention) focus.
- Incorporating a goal-oriented perspective helps us to understand why some consumers prefer negative reviews, while others prefer positive reviews. The key are feelings of gratitude developed towards the reviewer, which prompt helpfulness voting

Study 1: Large-scale field study

Pretest

111 participants evaluated a set of twelve randomly allocated products from different categories listed on Amazon.com. Respondents rated whether the products were more representative of promotion or prevention goals.

Data & Model

8,855 reviews for four product categories collected with R from Amazon.com.

Negative Binomial Regression Model to correct for overdispersion of the dependent count variable (helpfulness votes).

Results

For prevention-representative products an one-unit increase in star rating decreased the expected helpfulness votes by .93 ($b = -.069$, $\exp(b) = .93$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Large-scale data provides initial evidence that the interaction between regulatory orientation and review valence impacts helpfulness. Further experimental studies examine the process underlying this effect.

Studies 2 and 3: Experimental insights

Study 2: Replication of Study 1

Setup. 66 participants participated in a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) \times 2 (valence frame: positive vs. negative) mixed experimental design with regulatory focus as the between-subjects factor and review valence as the within subjects factor.

Results. Participants in the promotion condition perceived the positive review as more helpful ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.48$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 3.88$, $p < .001$), while participants in the prevention condition perceived the negative review as more helpful ($M_{\text{positive}} = 3.73$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 4.45$, $p < .001$).

Study 3: The role of gratitude

Setup. 190 participants were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) \times 2 (review valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects design. Mediation tests assessed whether increased helpfulness actually increased feelings of gratitude and whether this increase translated onto voting behavior.

Results.

Figure 1. The mediating role of perceived helpfulness

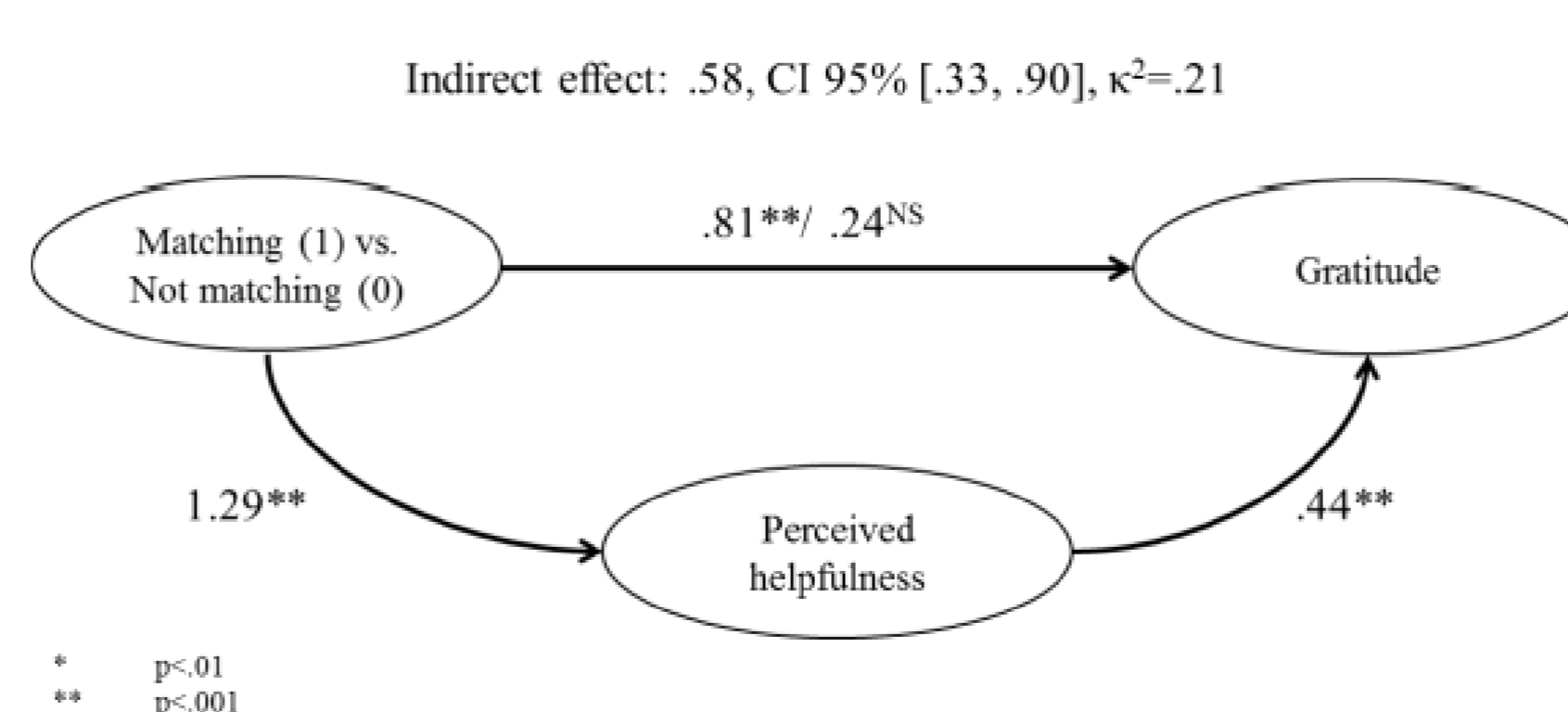
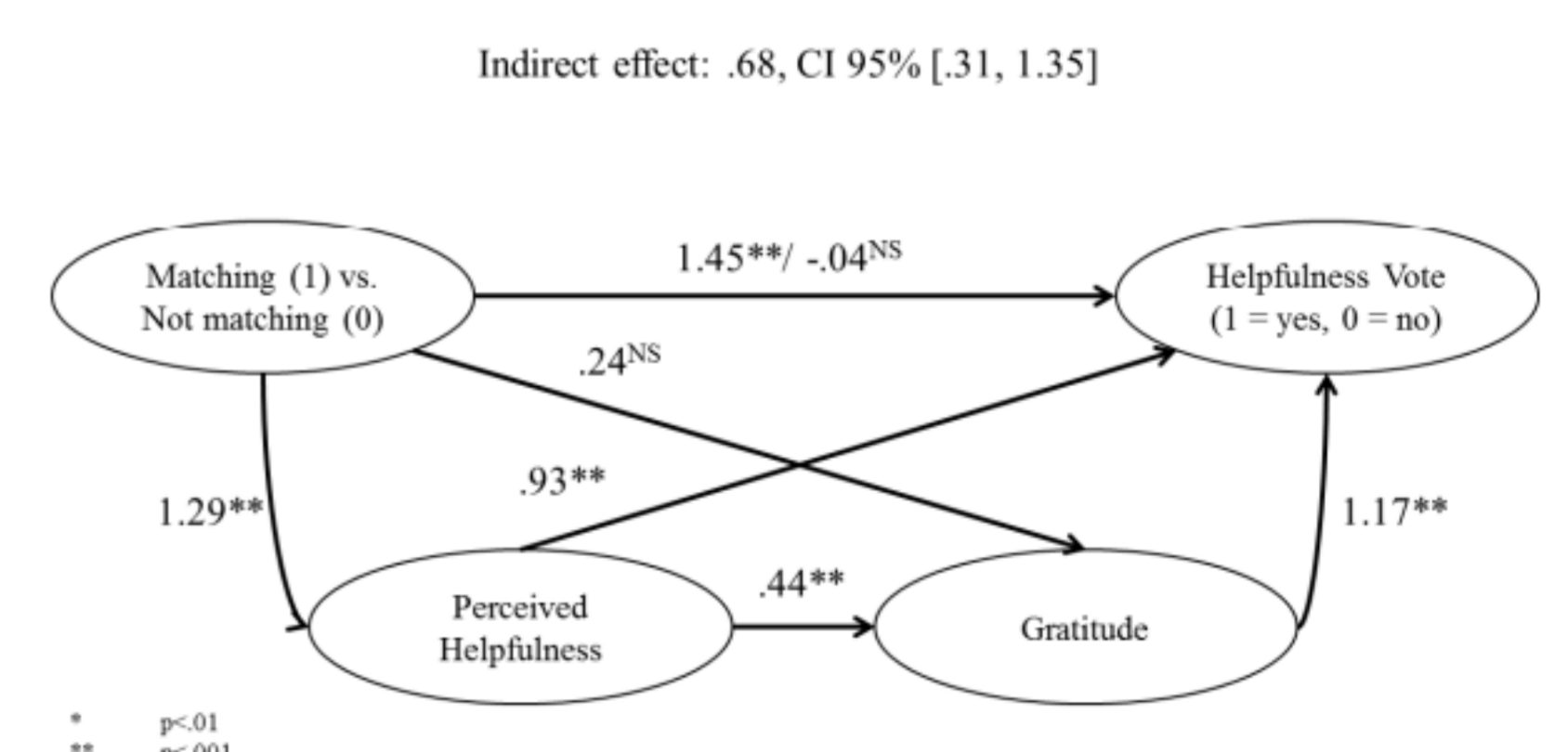


Figure 2. Serial mediation model with perceived helpfulness and gratitude as mediators



- Three studies using both field and lab data confirm that regulatory focus shapes helpfulness voting behavior.
- Matching valence to regulatory focus increases perceived helpfulness of the review.
- This leads to increased feelings of gratitude towards the reviewer, which leads consumers to vote a review as helpful.
- An additional experiment confirmed that the findings were unique to feeling grateful vs. feeling other positive emotions (e.g., happiness).