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The effect of Rate My Professor reviews on class enrollment likelihood

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Abstract

Existing research indicates that negative information is more salient than positive information. It is understood that humans are more attuned to negative information because it is perceived as more trustworthy and has a greater risk for poor outcomes than positive information. The current study is interested in investigating this “negativity” phenomenon among a college-aged population. Using *Rate My Professors*, we studied the influence of reviews on course enrollment decision-making. Negative and positive reviews equally influenced enrollment likelihood. We also found a correlation between peer pressure susceptibility and total mean enrollment.

Introduction

Online reviews are a predominant consulting source among consumers. Considering the popularity of online shopping, today’s generation is constantly filtering through opinions on the internet. When scrolling through online reviews, people tend to perceive negative opinions as more salient than positive opinions. From an evolutionary standpoint, humans are more aware of negativity because of survival mechanisms. Therefore, we were interested in studying how college students process *Rate My Professors* reviews. We hypothesized that negative reviews would influence course enrollment decisions greater than positive or neutral reviews. We also hypothesized that participants would be more influenced by negative reviews when enrolling in an easier (100-level) course than a difficult (500-level) course.

Method

Participants

Ninety-three undergraduate students at Boston University completed the present study.

Materials

Participants were presented with eight hypothetical *Rate My Professor* scenarios and corresponding questions. Participants were asked to fill out the Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised Scale (PPSQ-R).

Procedure

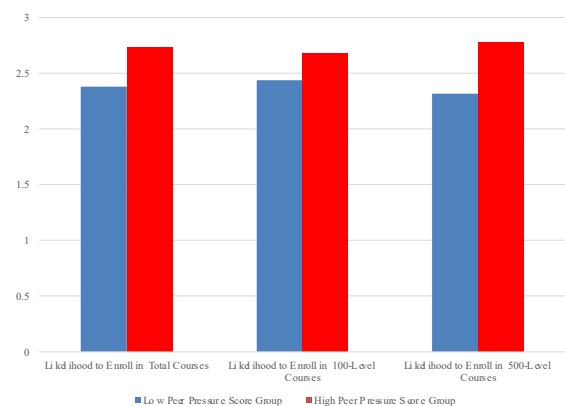
Participants received a consent form and instructions via email that described that they would be reviewing randomly assigned Boston University *Rate My Professors* situations and were asked to imagine that they needed/wanted to enroll in the courses. After evaluating the *Rate My Professors* criteria, professor name, course name and level, and corresponding reviews (a one star, three stars, and five stars), they were asked “How likely are you to enroll in this course?” rated on a four-point Likert scale (from extremely unlikely to extremely likely). Then, participants were asked to provide a direct quote from one of the three reviews that most influenced their decision. After completing the *Rate My Professors* survey, participants were asked to fill out the Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised Survey (PPSQ-R). Following the study, participants were debriefed.

Results

For **Peer Pressure and Enrollment**, there was a significant weak positive relationship between peer pressure and total enrollment such that the **higher a participant’s peer pressure susceptibility was, the more likely they were to enroll in all the listed courses**, $r(91) = .23$, $p = .024$.

Participants were then divided into high and low groups based on their peer pressure score. The **high peer pressure participants ($n=78$) were more likely to enroll in a class ($M = 2.73$) than the low peer pressure ($n=15$) participants ($M = 2.38$), $t(93) = -3.60$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.02$. The **high peer pressure group was also more likely to enroll in a 500-level course ($M = 2.78$) than those in the low peer pressure group ($M = 2.32$), $t(93) = -3.41$, $p < .001$, $d = -.96$. There was no significant difference for enrolling in a 100-level course between the two peer pressure groups.****

Table 1
Likelihood to Enroll In Courses Based on Peer Pressure Group



For **Likelihood to Enroll by Course Review**, a Chi-Square Test for Independence was conducted. The relationship between the likelihood to enroll and course review (1.0, 3.0, or 5.0) was significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 93) = .58$, $p < .001$. Not surprising, we found that **high (5.0) ratings made participants more likely to enroll in a course. Low (1.0) ratings made participants less likely to enroll in a course. Neutral (3.0) ratings did not influence enrollment decisions in either direction** (see Table 2). There was no significant difference in which review participants utilized in their course enrollment decision-making, $\chi^2(2, N = 93) = 2.16$, $p = .341$.

Table 2
Likelihood to Enroll by Course Rating

Likelihood to Enroll in Course	1.0 Rating	3.0 Rating	5.0 Rating
Extremely Unlikely	32.80%	11.80%	0.85%
Unlikely	65.60%	43.60%	1.30%
Likely	1.60%	39.80%	73.50%
Extremely Likely	0.00%	4.80%	24.35%

Discussion

The findings of the study did not support the hypotheses, as it was found that participants equally used the negative and positive reviews in their class enrollment decision-making and course level did not impact likelihood of enrollment. Although the hypotheses were not supported, when participants justified their course enrollment with the negative review, they were almost always unlikely or extremely unlikely to take the course. Similarly, when participants justified course enrollment with the positive review, they were almost always likely or extremely likely to take the course. This finding demonstrates that students do heavily take *Rate My Professors* reviews into consideration when enrolling in courses. Our results also do highlight peer pressure as a factor, since students high in peer pressure susceptibility claimed that they were more likely to enroll in a course, especially at the 500-level class, while students low in peer pressure susceptibility were less likely to state that they would enroll in a course.

Limitations

- Sampling bias because all the participants were Boston University undergraduates.
- Many reported that the survey took a long time to complete which may have resulted in rushing through the study.
- The structured nature of our survey was not representative of real websites. The review column on a website ranges dramatically in number of posts, content, and opinions. It is possible participants processed the *Rate My Professors* reviews as part of a hypothetical survey rather than part of a real decision-making process

Future Applications

- Students’ ability to be salient to polarized opinions, both positive and negative, could have considerable effects on social media marketing, possibly altering the way influencers advertise products or speak about topics.