

Effect of 'Webcare' on Students' Online Review Intention: Implications for Customers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract

As consumers increasingly put their faith in online consumer reviews, taking advantage of their right of reply through the production of appropriate response or webcare has become a growing challenge for e-commerce businesses. This study examines the effect of webcare on students' review intentions and its implications for patronage intention. The study specifically examines the main and interaction effects of webcare strategies (i.e., appreciative, accommodative or no webcare) and review consensus (i.e., high or low) on students review intention based on the theoretical foundation of social learning theory and elaboration likelihood model. The study adopts a 3(appreciative vs. accommodative vs. No webcare) × (2 high vs. low) factorial experimental design and a sample of 82 undergraduate students were randomly assigned to one of the 6 experimental conditions. Four hypotheses were tested using a two-way or factorial ANOVA on SPSS version 15. The results show significant main effect of webcare but not consensus on review intentions. Appreciative webcare was found to increase review intention more than the accommodative webcare when consensus in positively balanced message is low whereas the accommodative webcare influence review intentions more than other webcare strategies when consensus in a negatively balanced review is high. Therefore, it is worthwhile for internet retailers to monitor reviews on their social media and other online platforms for both positive and negative reviews and cautiously appreciate positive feedback while apologizing for service failure and attempting to remedy the situation publicly to motivate reviews that are more favorable.

1 Introduction

Advances in Internet technology has made it possible for consumers to share their consumption experiences about brands, products, services, and companies publicly online, enabling not only close network but also multitude of other people across the world to access it quickly and inexpensively (Ismagilova et al., 2017). These shared experiences, otherwise known as online consumer review have become a great influencers of customers' decision making (Wu, Mattila, Wang, & Hanks, 2016; Britt, 2017) and very determinative in influencing consumer's purchase decision (Winer & Fider, 2016). Anecdotal evidence even suggests that consumers who do not consult review before making purchase seldom express dissonance with their choices. Accordingly, firms including internet retailers rather than being passive observers to these conversations are shifting their social media strategy to proactively responding to online reviews by means of 'webcare' (Li, Cui & Peng, 2017; Xie et al., 2017).

Webcare can be defined as "the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns and complaints)" (van Noort & Willemsen, 2011, p. 133). Webcare is also referred to as management response and usually appear as open-ended piece of text permanently displayed beneath the customer reviews it addresses

(Xie et al., 2017; Proserpio & Zervas, 2016) and could be more telling than the review itself (Xie et al., 2014). Due to its public nature, webcare gives the impression that a company is emphatic to the needs of its customers and that it provides good service (Sparks et al., 2014). Firms can therefore utilize webcare as a proactive tool for building interactive dialogue with its customers, which reflect their positive or negative feelings on a firm's products and business processes.

While online reviews have been thoroughly studied in the literature, how and to what extent webcare affect marketing outcomes is sparsely documented (Xie et al., 2014; Proserpio and Zervas, 2016). However, the existing studies in the domain of webcare have produce mixed and inconclusive findings. For instance, Mauri and Minazzi (2013) and Xie et al. (2014) find that providing a response to customers' reviews online could negatively affect customer perception and purchase intention. In contrast, a number of other studies find webcare to positively relate to marketing outcomes (Lee & Song, 2010; Sparks et al., 2016; Rose & Blodgett, 2016). Furthermore, most of the previous studies investigated the effect of webcare directed at negative reviews with one negative review (Sparks et al., 2016) and a number of supporting reviews (Lee & Cranage, 2014). Accordingly, Ismagivola et al. (2017) call for further research on the effect of webcare strategies in response to clusters of negative reviews. This study

fills this gap and examines consensus information in reviews and its independent and interaction effect with webcare on consumer behavior. This perspective is important given the potential damage clusters of negative reviews can have on a firm.

2 Review of related literature

2.1 Review Consensus

The dimension of consensus refers to the degree of agreement between two or more review provider about a product, a service or a retailer (Khare et al., 2011). Consensus indicates whether majority of consumers' experiences with a focal brand is positive or negative (Benedicktus et al., 2010). Typically, consumers are easily able to decipher the number of positive and negative comments and thus evaluate the quality of a service quantitatively (Lee & Cranage, 2014) such that a high consensus indicate that a greater proportion of the reviews are positive (or negative), while a low consensus means that some consumers hold contrary opinion about the focal brand. When there is greater conformity in messages, it reduces functional risk associated with a brand (Rosario et al., 2016) and increases message persuasiveness (Khare et al., 2011). But divergent views increases uncertainty about product or retailers' performance and can adversely affect sales (Rosario et al., 2016).

2.2 Webcare

Webcare has emerged as an important part of online reputation and customer relationship management (Sparks & Bradley, 2014) and a potent strategy for reducing uncertainty about firms' capabilities and customers' perceived risk (Rose & Blodget, 2016). Gu and Ye (2014) define Webcare as "... a business's effort to interact with and respond to customer comments on experiences with the business or its products and services" (p. 570). Typically, webcare are displayed as open-ended text after the complaint it addresses or the recommendations it reinforces (Xie et al., 2017). In general, webcare are expressions of gratitude or apologies (Zhang & Vasquez, 2014) for customers' recommendation or complaints. When it addresses customers' recommendation, it is an indication that the firm is listening, expressing appreciation and reinforcing positive WOM (Wei et al., 2013). Thus, such webcare directed at positive reviews can increase engagement intention of potential customers (Schaefer & Schamari, 2015). However, webcare are most often used to address customer complaints in negative reviews (Xie et al., 2014) as a service recovery strategy. The aim of reacting to customers' negative review is to enhance consumer satisfaction and mitigate the potential damage of the negative review (Willemsen et al., 2013).

2.3 Webcare strategies

Webcare strategies are how a company chooses to respond to positive or negative reviews from a (dis)satisfied customers. (Chuang et al., 2015). Webcare is aimed at positively influencing the perception of the complaining customers or reinforcing the recommendation of satisfied customers and other potential customers who might read the comments (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). A company can choose to respond to complaint using any of accommodative, defensive and no-response strategies and respond to recommendation by showing gratitude and being personal in its response.

Webcare Strategies directed at negative reviews

When consumers post negative reviews, companies can deal with such complaint by using any of accommodative, defensive or no response strategy (Lee & Song, 2010). Companies use accommodative strategy by courteously accepting responsibility for dissatisfying experiences caused by the company and taking necessary actions to assuage the situation (Lee & Song, 2010; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). Accommodative strategies include of any form of apology, compensation and corrective action. Apologies are basic and probably the most essential component of a company's response to customers' complaint or service failure (Lee & Cranage, 2014). Apologies signal that the company acknowledges the service failure and accepts responsibility for the negative event (Purnawirawan et al., 2013). Though apologies from a company may be interpreted by potential customers as a confession of guilt, which may negatively affect behavioral intentions towards the company (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017) however, they communicate empathy and sincerity (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Purnawirawan et al., 2015) and are effective in re-establishing trust (Lee & Cranage, 2014). Apologizing can also be considered a form of psychological compensation (van Noort et al., 2014). Compensation refers to solving customers' problem by repairing, replacing or compensating for a faulty product (van Noort et al., 2014). Lee and Song (2010) add that even partial compensation may be enough to restore consumers' attitude and enhance repurchase intention.

Not responding or taking no overt action is another strategic decision with regard to webcare directed at negative reviews. By using a "no-action" strategy, a company remains silent and takes no action (Lee & Song, 2010) in order to exonerate itself from the negative events (Lee, 2004). No-action strategy is capable of damaging a company's reputation by allowing negative information about the company to stand unchallenged (Lee & Song, 2010). Several

studies find not responding to have negative impact on consumer behavior (Sparks et al., 2016; van Noort & Willemsen, 2014; Lee & Song, 2010; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). In contrast, providing a response can adversely affect consumer behavior (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013) and firm performance (Xie et al., 2014).

In general, accommodative response strategies have stronger impact on consumer behavior than the no-action or defensive strategy (Lee & Song, 2010; Lee & Cranage, 2014; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Specifically, combining an apology, a compensation and corrective action increases positive brand-related outcomes (Lee & Song, 2010; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017) depending on the information and message consensus (Purnawirawan et al., 2015; Lee & Cranage, 2014). For the purpose of this present study, we focus on the “no-action” strategy and accommodative strategy following a preliminary investigation of the response strategy mostly adopted by internet retailers in the context of this study.

Webcare strategies directed at positive reviews

Most of the literature on webcare considered webcare as a tool for managing and mitigating the potential harmful effect of negative reviews (van Noort et al., 2014; Lee & Song, 2010). Recently, some studies have shown that webcare directed at positive reviews could also provide some beneficial (Schamari & Schaefer, 2015; Wei et al., 2013) or detrimental effects (Crijins et al., 2017; Demmers et al., 2014) on marketing outcomes. These effects are subject to the response strategy of the firm. For instance, Schamari & Schaefer (2015) and Crijins et al. (2017) identified personalization as a response strategy to positive reviews with mixed findings howbeit in different context. Further, the literature also identify *appreciation* as a frequent response strategy though common to both positive and negative reviews but more prominent in positive reviews. Corroborating the use of *appreciation* as a webcare strategy to positive review, Wei et al. (2013) report that “... potential customers interpret hotels’ management responses as an appreciation for their customers” (p. 324). Appreciation is mostly used as a form of acknowledgement in negative reviews (Sparks & Bradley, 2014; Zhang & Vasquez, 2014), but as expression of gratitude for a kind gesture in positive review (Wei et al., 2013) and it is usually affect laden.

The concept of appreciation is well rooted in the psychology literature (Adler & Fagey, 2005, 2012; Wood, Froh & Geraghty, 2010; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). From a psychological perspective, appreciation or gratitude refers to the

“tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other peoples’ benevolence” (McCullough et al., 2002, p.112). According to Grant and Gino (2010) gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness directed towards others that emerges through social exchange between helpers and beneficiaries. Beneficiaries such as companies usually express gratitude by thanking helpers (in this case, customer) for their contribution or patronage. Though, such expression of gratitude especially towards customers is commonplace in marketing, but is scantily documented (Ragio et al., 2014). In eWOM environment, customers post positive reviews out of altruistic or self-enhancement motivation. Therefore, when firms expresses gratitude to customers’ for positive review, customers are intrinsically motivated through the feeling of self-worth to provide such help again and also help others (Gino & Grant, 2010).

2.4 Hypotheses Development and Conceptual schema

Recent studies suggest that it his beneficial for firms to engage in interactive communication with customers (Schamari & Schaefer, 2015; Gu & Ye, 2014; Crijins et al., 2017). Although a number of studies report negative effect of webcare on marketing outcomes, majority argue for a positive impact. For instance, Mauri and Minazzi (2013) find a negative impact of webcare on purchase intention and Xie et al. (2016) report a negative effect of webcare on hotel performance. In contrast, Lee and Song (2010) show that webcare has positive impact on brand evaluation than not responding. Sparks et al. (2016) also report that webcare enhances customer’s trust and inference. In addition, evidence suggests that the overall ratings of firms increased after they started responding to reviews (Proserpio & Zervas, 2016). Therefore, by responding, firms can enhance consumer perceptions, increase positive word-of-mouth intention and patronage intention (Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). Accordingly, it is expected that webcare will positively impact customers’ reviews intentions.

Furthermore, Proserpio and Zervas (2016) observed an increase in the overall rating of firms after they started responding to reviews. Moreover, a number of recent studies find response to negative reviews to be more effective in generating favorable marketing outcomes than positive reviews (Rim & Song, 2016; Wei et al., 2013; Crijins et al., 2017). However, webcare directed at positive reviews is likely to magnify the positive reviews and reinforce positive feelings (Xie et al., 2014). Also, customers who post positive reviewer see webcare as an incentive to leave reviews (Proserpio & Zervas, 2016). Schamari and Schaefer (2015) recently show that webcare directed at positive reviews increases customers’ engagement

intention. Hence, we argued that webcare will affect customers' reviews intentions but that the effect will be stronger for accommodative webcare than other webcare strategies. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H₁: Webcare strategies will significantly affect customer review intention but the impact will be stronger for accommodative webcare than other webcare strategies.

Previous research show that the consensus in WOM messages influence customer's evaluation of a brand (Lee & Cranage, 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Khare et al., 2011). When most reviews are negative, customers brand preference reduces. However, it is unlikely that mostly positive reviews will increase customers brand preference. Evidence suggests that reviews that are extremely polarized in the positive direction are not helpful (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010) because they appear to be too good to be true (Maslowka et al., 2017) and that moderate reviews are more helpful (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Khare et al. (2011) demonstrate that low level agreement among WOM providers in negative WOM environment reduces the loss attributed to high volume WOM while low consensus reduces the preference gained by high volume in positive WOM environment. Therefore it is conceivable to presume that consensus will influence customers' reviews intentions such that low consensus will have stronger impact on customers' reviews intentions in positive WOM environment whereas high consensus will have stronger impact on customers' reviews intentions in negative WOM environment. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H₂: Review consensus will have a significant effect on customer review intention such that low consensus will have stronger impact on customer review intention in positive WOM environment whereas high consensus will have a stronger impact on customer review intention when the reviews are mostly negative.

How and when firms should respond to negative online consumer review has been the subject of recent webcare studies. A number of scholars argue that potential customers who read negative reviews and the corresponding webcare associated webcare with guilt and evaluated the firm negatively (Kim et al., 2016). However, the consensus across reviewers has been shown to affect how potential customers evaluate the reviewer-firm dialogue (Lee & Cranage, 2014). Previous studies show that when consensus is

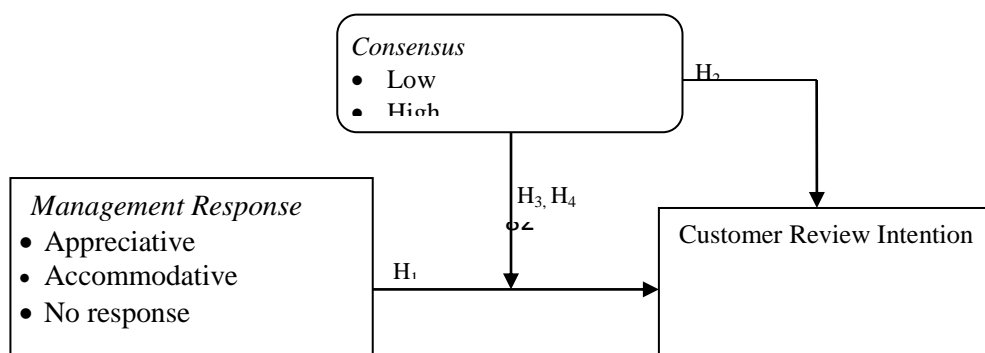
low (i.e., relatively balanced), customers may suspect the few negative reviewers to actually be the cause of the problem in which case a no response strategy might just be appropriate. But when the consensus is high, providing an accommodative response such as an apology and a remedy will lead to favorable brand evaluation (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Lee & Cranage, 2014; Lee & Song, 2010). Based on the above reasoning, we argue that when consensus in negative reviews is high, providing an accommodative strategy should be more impactful on customers' reviews intentions than other response strategies whereas when consensus is low, providing no response should provide more favorable impact. Thus:

H₃: When consensus is high, accommodative response will impact customer review intention stronger than other response strategies whereas when consensus is low, no response will impact customer review intention stronger than other response strategies.

The literature also suggests that webcare directed at positive reviews reinforces favorable outcomes (Schamari & Scahefers, 2015; Kim, 2015). Since customers interpret management response as appreciation for their customers, it is logical to assume based on social learning theory that appreciative response will impact positively on customers review intention. Furthermore, the uniformity in opinion has been shown to moderate the relationship between webcare and customer evaluation of firms. Howbeit, the effect have been not been investigated in the positive reviews environment. Therefore, we expect consensus to moderate the effect of webcare on customers' reviews intentions in positive reviews environment also, such that when consensus is low, an appreciative response will impact stronger on customer review intention than other response strategies whereas when consensus is high not responding will have the most significant impact on review intention in positive reviews environment. Thus:

H₄: When consensus is low, appreciative webcare will impact customer reviews intention stronger than other response strategies whereas when consensus is high, no response will impact customer reviews intention stronger than other response strategies.

Based on the foregoing literature review, the conceptual schema shown below will guide this study.



3 Research Method

The study adopts an experimental research design. Specifically, the study adopts a randomized between-group experiment consisting of 3×2 factorial designs. Thus, the study employed a 3(management response: accommodative vs. appreciative vs. no response) \times 2(consensus: high vs. low) between-subject factorial design. Experimental research use manipulation and controlled testing to understand causal process whereby one or more variables are manipulated to determine their effect on a dependent variable (Blakstad, 2008). Though experiments typically include treatments and control groups, experimental design with only experimental groups is possible (Kothari, 2011). Experimental research design has long been applied in the pharmaceutical sciences, natural sciences, manufacturing and psychology. However, the design is not entirely new in investigating marketing phenomena, though only few marketing researchers and executives apply the design (Almquist & Wyner, 2001). Almquist and Wyner (2001) argue that experimental research makes it possible for marketing researchers to analyzed how various combination of marketing stimuli affect consumer behavior and specifically isolate the factor(s) that drives behavior.

3.1 Stimulus Material

To ensure effective manipulation of the independent variables, a professional computer scientist was consulted to simulate webpage for a fictitious online store to reduce confounding effects of familiarity (Wei et al., 2013). The simulated webpage contained a link to Facebook review page simulated after the Facebook review page of an online store. The materials were developed using reviews and webcare extracted and modified from Facebook review page of an online retailer. The simulated webpage contained a fictitious name of an online store *betashop.com.ng*, including a picture of a laptop, seller's information, price and other standard elements such search panel, shipping policy, payment security, and shopping cart and help button which were held constant across all the conditions. The webpage, reviews and webcare

were based on real webpage entries to achieve high ecological validity. For webcare, the webpage will contain *appreciative response* condition, an *accommodative response* condition and *no response* condition. Appreciative response contained responses that suggest gratitude from the retailer. Because firms typically appreciate customers when they write reviews whether positive or negative, appreciation for positive response was manipulated to suggest positive affect.

On the other hand, accommodative response contained webcare apologizing to customers for service failure or dissatisfying experiences and an attempt to remedy the failure. Both the appreciative response and accommodative response appeared immediately after the reviews they correspond to. No response contained only reviews - positive or negative without a response from the retailer. Finally, depending on whether the review set is positively balanced or negatively balanced, the level of consensus varied according to the following: High consensus condition contained 7 positive (or negative) and 1 negative (or positive) when the reviews is positively (or negatively) balanced while the low consensus condition consists of 4 positive (or negative), 3 negative (or positive) and 1 neutral review when the review set is positively (or negatively) balanced.

3.2 Procedure

Pretest

First, a pretest is conducted to determine the product category and number of reviews based on average number of reviews consumers typically read. For the product category, a list of product categories including phones, cameras, laptop and clothes were presented to respondents. The respondents were then asked to rate the "extent they will search for information online before purchase" (1 = to a very large extent" to "7 = to a very small extent) and "the likelihood to read online reviews before purchase from (1 = very unlikely, 7= very likely). Based on the

pretest a Laptop was selected. In addition, respondents were presented with collection of reviews ranging from 5 to 14 reviews about an online retailer including positive and negative reviews. Then we asked respondents to indicate the average number of reviews they read. On average respondents read 8 reviews. The test result was used to develop a shopping task and design the experimental conditions for the consensus and webcare conditions.

A second pretest was conducted based on a 3(webcare: appreciative vs. accommodative vs. no response) x 2(consensus: high vs. low) between-subject factorial design with a convenience sample of 30 undergraduate students. The participants were assigned upon arrival to a computer in a university computer lab in sessions of 15 subjects. The study was described as an online shopping task, based on review information provided by others. Specifically, the participants were informed that the task involves shopping for a laptop they will use for their undergraduate theses from an online store. Then, participants reported their age, gender and online shopping experience. Afterwards, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions. Thus, participants were exposed to an appreciative response, or an accommodative response, or no response in a high or low review consensus condition. The reviews and subsequent webcare varied according to each of the conditions while all other information such as dates, name of reviewers and webpage graphics were held constant across all six conditions. The webpage contained a graphical display of a not very popular brand of the selected Laptop - *Lenovo*, the price, shipping information, and link to social media and a radio button that prompted participants to click to read reviews and webcare directed at the reviews. All the reviews and the webcare were retrieved from an online retailers' Facebook review page (<https://web.facebook.com/pg/jumia.com.ng>) and modified to suit the purpose of this study. The webpage was created following contents from online retailers' website and contains reviews and webcare extracted and modified from the Facebook review links from the site. Different webpage was created for each of the six conditions. Though, the first page of the website was the same for all conditions with a cover story describing the task and incentive for completing the task (see appendix A). Subsequent pages varied according to the experimental conditions. After reading the review and corresponding webcare, participants then completed the questionnaire designed to check the effectiveness of the manipulations and the dependent variable. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Main experiment

The main experiment used a 3(webcare: appreciative vs. accommodative vs. no response) x 2(consensus: high vs. low) between-subject factorial design. 82 participants were recruited from the Department of Marketing and Department of Entrepreneurship, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. As in the pretest, the participants were told the task involves shopping for a laptop online. A fictitious retailer was used in this study but the reviews and corresponding webcare were retrieved from the Facebook review platform of a real retailer. After reading the scenario, the participants were then randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions. Thus, participants were exposed to an appreciative or an accommodative or no response to online customer reviews with a high or low consensus. The webcare were identical in all conditions but varied in the low and high consensus conditions. The negative review valence will contain identical reviews with the positive review but mirrored to reflect the positive conditions (or *vice versa*). Participants will then proceed to the manipulation check, dependent variables and demographic information questions.

3.3 Measures

Independent variables

Webcare. To ensure effective manipulation, webcare was operationalized as the extent the response from the retailer is perceived as appreciative or accommodative of the reviews. A number of manipulation checks were performed to ensure the respondents interpreted the webcare as intended. Only those assigned to the appreciative or accommodative response condition were given the manipulation check questions while those in the no response condition were prompted to proceed to the dependent variable items. The respondents first indicated whether the retailer responded to the reviews. Then, they were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with the following statements: "The retailer was very thankful for the comments," "The retailer was very grateful for the comments," and "The retailer was very appreciative of the comments" and "The retailer apologized to customers for the complaints" and "The retailer admitted responsibility for the complaint" and "The retailer offered a remedy for the complaint". The scale items were adapted from Palmatier et al., (2009), Lee & Cranage, (2014) and modified to reflect the context of online retailing. To ascertain the success of the manipulations, the items were averaged such that participants in the appreciative (vs. accommodative) condition gave higher (vs. lower) ratings on the first three items but lower (vs. higher) ratings on the latter three items. All items were re-coded into categorical variables such

that 1 equal accommodative response and 2 equals appreciative response.

Review Consensus. Consensus was operationalize as the extent most of the reviews are in similar direction whether positive or negative and was manipulated by the proportion of reviews that are in the same direction. To assess the efficacy of the manipulation, consensus was measured with 3 – items “There is a unanimity of opinion about the characteristics of this retailer,” “I believe all the reviews indicate a consensus about this retailer,” and “the level of agreement in the reviews about this retailer is high” anchored on 7-point Likert-scale from 1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The items were adapted from Khare et al. (2011) and modified to fit the online retail context.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable measures customers’ review posting intention. Three items measured customers’ review posting intention. The items for patronage intentions includes: “I would recommend this retailer to anyone on social media”, “I would speak favorably about this retailer for others to see online”, “I am likely to say positive things about this for others to see online”, “I would not hesitate to refer people to this retailer” (Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). All items were measured using seven-point Likert scales. As with the manipulations of the independent variables, the items were averaged such that a high score mean indicates a more favorable customer review intentions.

4 Results

4.1 Administration of Instruments

206 respondents participated in the study but 80 responses were used in the final analysis. About 60 percent of the responses were excluded for incomplete responses and incorrect checking of attention check items. As an example while the brand of Laptop displayed was a Lenovo, some of the respondents filled HP. Table 4.1 below presents a summary of the questionnaire administration.

Table 4.1 Questionnaire Administration and Collection

Questionnaire Administration	Frequency	Percentage
Number Issued	206	100
Number of valid responses	80	38.83

Table 4.2 Analysis of Variance Table for customer review intention

Source	Type III Sum Square	Df	Mean Square	F	p – value
Corrected Model	266.640 ^a	7	38.091	16.005	.000

Number of invalid responses	124	61.17
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4.2 Respondents Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents’ show that the participants were split with 39% male and 61% female mostly between 18 to 25 years of age (86%). Majority (68%) has internet shopping experience but most of them (72%) do not read reviews when shopping online.

4.3 Manipulation Check

To assess the success of the manipulations, an independent sample t-test was performed. The result shows a significant effect for the consensus condition $t(1, 25) = -31.61, p < .001$, with participants in the high consensus condition providing higher ratings ($M = 5.36, S.D = 0.94$) for the review consensus than participants in the low consensus condition ($M = 3.49, S.D = 0.73$). The manipulation for the webcare strategy was also successful with participants in the appreciative condition providing higher ratings for the appreciative webcare condition than participants in the accommodative webcare condition ($M_{appreciative} = 5.89, S.D = 0.89$ vs. $M_{accommodative} = 4.32; S.D = 1.02; t[1, 25] = 11.26, p < .005$). In contrast, participants in the accommodative conditions provided higher ratings for the accommodative response items than participants in the appreciative webcare conditions ($M_{accommodative} = 4.82, S.D = 0.97$ vs. $M_{appreciative} = 3.92, S.D = 1.01; t[1, 25] = 7.44, p < .05$). In other words, the manipulations for the review consensus and webcare strategy were successful.

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested via a 3×2 full-factorial ANOVA. Cell sizes ranged from 16 to 24. To test H1 and H2, the main effects of review consensus and webcare strategy were examined. To test H3 and H4, the appropriate interactions were examined. The result demonstrate a statistically significant main effect of webcare strategy ($F[1,72] = 66.58, p < .01$) on customer review intention. A follow-up simple effect analysis show that the respondents exposed to webcare – appreciative ($M_{appreciative} = 4.54$) or accommodative ($M_{accommodative} = 4.55$) - differ significantly from those in the no webcare strategy on customer review intention ($M_{control} = 4.13; F(1, 72) = 4.50, p < .05$). Therefore, H1 is supported. However, in contrast to our expectation, the main effect of review consensus was not significant ($F[1, 72] = 0.62, p = .38$). Thus, H2 is not supported.

Intercept	947.187	1	947.187	397.978	.000
Webcare	158.453	2	158.453	66.577	.000
Consensus	8.550	1	8.550	3.592	.062
webcare × consensus	1.864	2	57.864	11.783	.003
Error	171.360	72	2.380		
Total	1718.000	80			
Corrected Total	438.000	79			

a. $R^2 = .572$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .547$)

In line with H3, the interaction of webcare strategies and review consensus shows a statistically significant effect on customer review intention ($F[1, 72] = 57.86$, $p < .05$). A follow-up planned contrast indicate that appreciative webcare ($M = 4.13$; $t [80] = 2.82$, $p < .01$) increased customer review intention than the accommodative webcare ($M = 3.97$; $t [80] = 2.10$, $p < .05$) and no webcare conditions ($M = 3.45$) when consensus in positively balanced review is low. However, in high consensus conditions both accommodative responses ($M = 3.85$) and no response ($M = 3.46$) were more effective than appreciative webcare ($M = 2.96$) in influencing customers review intentions, $t(80) = 2.24$, $p < .05$. H3 is also supported.

Finally, as predicted in H4, accommodative webcare ($M = 4.29$) show higher significant effect on customer review intentions than the appreciative webcare ($M = 5.42$) and no webcare ($M = 3.39$) condition when consensus in negatively balanced review is high ($t[80] = .055$, $p = .95$). In contrast, when consensus is low, there is no significant difference in the webcare strategies ($t = -.14$, $p = .86$). Put differently, when a greater proportion of the reviews are negative, providing an apology and a remedy to the customer complaints will increase potential customers review intentions more than an appreciation to customers and not responding at all. Whereas, when the proportion of positive and negative reviews is balanced, the firms' response does not have any effect on customer review intention. Thus, H4 is partially supported. The summary of the ANOVA table is presented in Table 4.2 above.

4.5 Discussions

As online customer reviews becomes prevalent and companies begin to take advantage of the 'right of apply' on social media platforms, deciding when and how to respond is important in engendering positive brand evaluation. While webcare directed at negative review is found to mitigate the deleterious effect of negative review, the effect of webcare strategies directed at positive reviews has been largely underexplored. This study examines the effect of webcare strategies of appreciative, accommodative and no-action on customer review intentions. The

results from the study demonstrate the positive effect of webcare strategies on customer review intention. The finding lends supports to Schamari & Schaefer (2015) and Dens et al. (2015) but contradicts Mauri and Minazzi (2013) and Xie et al. (2016). In addition, the finding confirms the positive relationship between appreciation and prosocial behavior (Emmons & Tsang, 2004; McCulloch et al., 2001; Ragio & Fose, 2011) and endangering positive WOM (Soscia, 2007). Precisely, appreciative webcare and accommodative webcare affects customer review intention more than no-action strategy. In this regard, following social learning theory, potential customers perceive firms response to the complaints and recommendations of their customers as a reward to want to write reviews themselves. Thus, responding to customer reviews whether positive or negative provide advocacy benefits than not responding. The non-significant main effect of consensus indicates that the majority of opinion does not explain customer review intention alone but interacts with webcare strategy to affect customer's behavior.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the webcare strategy is contingent on the consensus among reviewers. Such that when consensus in a positively balanced review is high, appreciating the many positive reviewers may raise skepticism among potential customers (Crijns et al., 2016) thus, a no response or an accommodative webcare in mitigating the few negative reviews could be more effective in engendering review posting intentions of potential customers. This finding supports Dens et al. (2015) and Lee and Cranage (2014) and partially supports Weitz and Hutzinger (2017). The consensus in reviews in a positively balanced review environment might explain the non-significant effect of webcare on engagement intention in Schamari and Schaefer (2015) found in brand-generated platform. In contrast, when consensus is low, an appreciative webcare strategy targeted at positive review would increase customer review intentions of potential customers more than the accommodative or no response strategy. Low consensus creates feelings of uncertainty amongst potential customers and leads potential customers to discount the validity of the reviews. Therefore, by

responding, retailers can provide additional information to potential customers for further elaboration and reduce skepticism.

When there are much more negative reviews than positive reviews, an accommodative webcare is a more effective strategy than the appreciative strategy or the no-action strategy in stimulating customer review intentions. This finding confirms Dens et al. (2015), Lee & Cranage (2014) but contradicts Crijns et al. (2017), Rim and Song (2016) and Wei et al. (2013). However, when there is a balance in the number of positive and negative reviews, there are no differences in whether retailers respond to customers' reviews or not with regards to potential customers' review intention. This contradicts Lee and Cranage (2014). The finding is surprising since low consensus suggest that customers are divided in their opinion and a response from the retailer could have provided further elaboration depending of the direction of the reviews for potential customers. Nevertheless, a plausible explanation is that customers are strict with their recommendations (Dens et al., 2015) thus, doubt the reliability of the webcare and find it not rewarding enough to spur their review intention.

Conclusion and Managerial Implications

Given that consumers now put their faith in online customer reviews, firms seeks to understand how best and when to respond to customers online. This study examines the effect of webcare on customer review intention. From the findings, we conclude that webcare generally affects customer review intentions. The extent webcare affects customer intentions is moderated by the consensus in review information. Appreciative webcare is a more effective strategy in stimulating customer review intention than the accommodative webcare or no webcare strategy when the level of agreement in a positively balanced message is low. A no-action webcare strategy and accommodative webcare is better response strategy than the appreciative webcare strategy when the level of agreement among reviewers is high. However, in situations when the reviews are negatively balanced and the level of agreement among reviewers is high, an apologizing and remedying the cause of failure is more effective than saying thank you to customers or not saying anything at all. However, the webcare strategies do not affect customers' intention to write reviews differently when the level of agreement is low. In sum, customers are talking; companies should pay attention and respond appropriately.

The findings hold a number of implication for management. First, Previous research demonstrates the need for marketers to motivate customers in order to write reviews. The findings from this study provide

evidence that by responding to reviews, marketers can motivate potential customers to post reviews. Although, marketers rarely respond to reviews, and when they do, they focus on negative reviews only. It is important that marketers monitor social media for positive reviews such as comments, recommendations, praise etc as well as negative reviews and respond appropriately by thanking customers who provide the reviews and interacting with them. This will motivate potential customers who read these interactions to want to write reviews themselves. Second, Marketers should apply caution when responding to positive reviews. When there is more positive review than negative in a review set and the level of agreement is high, it is worthwhile to use a no-action strategy in such situations. However, when the level of agreement is low, marketers should publicly express gratitude to customers who write these reviews and by so doing motivate potential customers to rite reviews themselves and by implication patronize the retailer. Third, Marketers should reiterate positive reviews about their businesses to potential customers and mention efforts to upgrade its services and other related services they wish to share with potential customers. Marketers should vary the responses to customer reviews and avoid standard responses. It is also worthwhile to request customers to post reviews. Finally, marketers should attempt to address customers' complaints by apologizing and remedying the customer complaints publicly for potential customers to see especially when there are much more negative reviews than positive reviews. This will motivate potential customers to evaluate the firm positively.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

Several limitations of the study need to be addressed. First, the study is based on the webcare strategy and consensus among reviewers. Several other factors such as emoticons used in responses, (im) personal nature of the webcare, comments of other users which might affect how consumers evaluate the firms' response were not investigated in the present study. Future studies could be conducted to include these factors. Second, the study involved experimentation using simulated environment. Accordingly, some common biases in experimentation such as ecological validity, interferences may have affected the outcome of the study. For instance, some of the links which may affect how consumers naturally navigate an online site were deactivated. Also, the use of generator might have introduced noise that may affect how respondents processed the information. Future studies may use online laboratory in conducting similar experiments. Third, the sample size was

relative small and involved student samples. This may affect the generalizability of the result. Although students are future markets for most business, they are not reliable representative of online shoppers due to their limited income. Future studies may examine internet shoppers.

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