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Battle of the voices: the effects of inconsistent sentiment valence between video content and danmaku

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper aims to examine the effects of inconsistent sentiment valence between video content and danmaku (positive video content with negative danmaku (PVND) versus negative video content with positive danmaku (NVPD)) and the gender of users (male versus female) on decision-making.

Method. An online experiment was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (PVND versus NVPD).

Analysis. Three hypotheses were tested using two-way ANOVA within SPSS software.

Results. Empirical results (N = 224) show significant difference in decision-making between users exposed to PVND and NVPD, but no gender difference is found. In addition, the interaction between inconsistent sentiment valence and gender affects their decision-making.

Conclusion(s). This study enriches the literature by not only shedding light on the effects of inconsistent sentiment valence in the dynamic video-based reviews but also adding to the scholarly understanding of gender differences in users' responses to online reviews.

Introduction

The exponential growth of social media platforms has created opportunities for users to share their opinions and experiences easily (Bi et al., 2018). Compared to other media such as static text and images, videos carry richer content because both visual and sound cues are integrated (Saed et al., 2021; Wendt et al., 2016). It is thus unsurprising that product review videos have become an increasingly important source of information to guide users' decisions (Chen et al., 2017).

To increase user engagement with social media postings, many platforms have incorporated a number of interactive features such as liking, sharing and commenting (Khan, 2017). One of the recent designs is danmaku which displays and scrolls users' comments across the screen like a marquee on a video post (Tzeng et al., 2023). This feature offers the advantages of real-time interaction and synchronisation with specific video timestamps (He et al., 2017). With the ability to post and view comments at the same time, users can express their sentiments more spontaneously (He et al., 2021).

In product review videos with danmaku, both video content and danmaku could be channels for users to obtain product information. Since the evaluations of the same product may sometimes vary between video content creators and their users, conflicting views arise (Bessi et al., 2016). Specifically, a positive product review video may attract a number of negative danmaku and vice versa. This phenomenon is commonly known as inconsistent sentiment valence (Zhang et al., 2014).

Previous research has yielded mixed findings on how inconsistent sentiment valence among online reviews affects users' decision-making. For instance, some studies found that a blend of positive and negative reviews decreases users' purchase intentions (Byun et al., 2021) whereas others reported no significant influence (Eslami & Ghasemaghaei, 2018; Kim et al., 2015). However, these studies were conducted on static text-based reviews. The effects of inconsistent sentiment valence across video-versus-danmaku reviews remain unexplored. Meanwhile, gender has been shown to be a significant factor in users' responses to online reviews. In particular, positive review valence has a stronger influence on female users' decision-making than males (Chaplin, 2015), while negative review valence affects males more (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2022). But these studies only explored gender differences in the context of either entirely positive or negative text reviews.

For these reasons, this paper aims to examine the effects of inconsistent sentiment valence between video content and danmaku (positive video content with negative danmaku (PVND) versus negative video content with positive danmaku (NVPD)) and the gender of users (male versus female) on their decision-making. Specifically, this paper investigates the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ 1: To what extent does inconsistent sentiment valence between video content and danmaku (PVND versus NVPD) affect decision-making?

RQ 2: To what extent does the gender (male versus female) affect decision-making?

RQ 3: To what extent does the interaction between inconsistent sentiment valence (PVND versus NVPD) and the gender (male versus female) affect decision-making?

This paper holds both theoretical and practical significance. On the theoretical front, it represents one of the earliest attempts to explore users' decision-making while taking into account the roles of inconsistent sentiment valence and gender in the product review videos. In this way, it provides a deeper understanding of users' responses in the dynamic video-based context compared with previous works that have primarily focused on static text-based reviews. On the practical front, this paper emphasises the importance of considering inconsistent sentiment valence and the gender of target users when creating social media engagement strategies. It also offers insights for

platform designers to integrate real-time interactions to provide a more immersive watching experience.

Literature review and hypotheses development

The role of inconsistent sentiment valence

In the context of online review, sentiment valence refers to the overall tone (e.g. positive, neutral or negative) in linguistic behavior expressed by the reviewer (Blau et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2023), which has been found to influence users' judgments of products or services (L. Zhang et al., 2020). However, in reality, user often come across conflicting evaluations from different review sources, leading to inconsistent sentiment valence (Byun et al., 2021). For the purpose of this paper, this inconsistency refers to the presence of opposite review tones between the video content and danmaku in product review videos, including two specific situations: PVND and NVPD.

Obviously, positive reviews reinforce users' inclination to make a shopping decision by evoking affirmative emotions whereas negative reviews can deter users and potentially lead to abandoned transactions (Dong et al., 2024). In videos with danmaku, some users may focus more on video content than on danmaku due to its eye-catching nature (Li et al., 2022). Others, however, tend to be drawn to textual content because of its dynamic presentation. Consequently, the decision-making intentions of users exposed to PVND and NVPD may be different. Thus, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant difference in decision-making between users exposed to PVND and NVPD.

The roles of gender and its interaction with inconsistent sentiment valence

The role of gender is an important point for consideration when exploring users' decision-making in product review videos. Generally dichotomised as either male or female (Wilson, 2002), differences between the genders have been found in most information processing studies (Markovits et al., 2006; Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2020). According to the selectivity hypothesis, males are selective processors who focus only on information they find interesting or useful while females are systematic processors who comprehensively process all information (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991; Richard et al., 2010). Prior works have shown that variations in information processing lead to distinct decision-making patterns (Salvendy & St, 2022; Svenson, 1979). Thus, the second hypothesis is thus proposed:

H2: There is a significant difference in decision-making between males and females.

Previous studies have shown that females and males respond differently to positive and negative sentiments (Alexander & Wood, 2000; Darley & Smith, 1995). For instance, females tend to up-regulate happy expressions, making them more sensitive to positive sentiments (Chaplin, 2015). Conversely, due to traditional masculine norms that emphasise strength and independence (Courtenay, 2000), males are often expected to control and suppress their emotions. This can result in more intense reactions to negative sentiments. These gender-based differences imply that when positive and negative sentiments coexist, the responses from females and males may differ. Therefore, the effect of inconsistent sentiment valence between video content and danmaku is not expected to be uniform between the genders. The final hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The interaction between the inconsistent sentiment valence and gender of users affects their decision-making.

Method

Research design and experimental stimuli

An online experiment was conducted to test three proposed hypotheses. The experimental setup involved product review videos of a fictitious product 'ClearSound' earbuds. This product type was

selected because most of users tend to watch video reviews of technical products such as computers and smartphones before purchase (Agrawal & Mittal, 2022; Zhai et al., 2022).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (PVND versus NVPD). In PVND, they watched a video praising the earbuds, but the danmaku contained criticisms and negative comments about the product, such as 'Battery drains fast' and 'Bluetooth cuts out constantly!'. In NVPD, participants were exposed to a video criticising the earbuds whereas the danmaku included positive comments, such as 'Battery lasts me for 12 hours' and 'Very comfortable to wear'.

To minimise the impact of potential extraneous variables, the following consistent settings were used for the experiment. First, both videos are the same length of one minute. Second, both videos were narrated in a neutral voice using artificial intelligence to avoid emotional influence on the participants. Third, each video displayed an equal number of danmaku scrolling across the top of the screen from right to left at a moderate speed, ensuring participants had sufficient reading time. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the stimulus under the PVND condition.



Figure 1. A screenshot of positive product review video with negative danmaku (PVND).

Participants and measures

Invitation to this study was disseminated through online advertisements. Participants were anonymised and were assured they could withdraw from the study at any point of time. After obtaining informed consent, participants were guided through two steps. In the first step, they were asked to imagine they were looking to purchase a pair of earbuds. Thereafter, they were randomly assigned to either the PVND or NVPD condition.

In the second step, participants were asked to complete a six-item questionnaire which covers decision-making and demographic information. Decision-making was measured by asking participants the extent they agreed with the following four statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): 'The likelihood of purchasing the earbuds is high.' 'The probability that I would considering buying the earbuds is high.' 'My willingness to buy the earbuds is high.' 'If I am going to buy earbuds, I would consider buying the earbuds.' These were adapted from works such as (Chen et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2014). Then the last two items on the questionnaire collect demographic information including participants' gender and age.

Data analyses

Data was analysed using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with SPSS software to test all hypotheses, following a three-step process. First, to ensure reliability of the measures, Cronbach's alpha was used. Second, the assumptions of two-way ANOVA were checked to ensure the validity of the analysis, including normality and homogeneity of variances. Specifically, normality was tested using Probability-Probability Plot (P-P Plot), and homogeneity of variances was tested using

Levene's test. Third, the assessment of the ANOVA model included examining main and interaction effects, followed by a series of Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Results

Sample, descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses

A total of 252 participants took part in study, with 28 dropping out midway. The complete responses from the remaining 224 participants were admitted for analysis. Specifically, 114 (50.9%) participants were assigned to the PVND condition while 110 (49.1%) were assigned to the NVPD condition. In terms of demographics, 110 (49.1%) were male and 114 (50.9%) were female. The average age was 32.60 years (Min = 21, Max = 53, SD = 8.05). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample.

Constructs	Full Dataset (N = 224)	PVND (n=114)	NVPD (n=110)
Gender (frequency)			
Male	110 (49.1%)	50 (43.9%)	60 (54.5%)
Female	114 (50.9%)	64 (56.1%)	50 (45.5%)
Age (M ± SD)	32.60 ± 8.05	32.66 ± 8.35	32.54 ± 7.74

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample.

The Cronbach's α value of decision-making was 0.92, exceeding the threshold of 0.7, which confirms the internal consistency of the measure (Nunnally, 1978). The P-P Plot results for all variables closely aligned with the diagonal line, indicating that all variables followed the normal distribution (Crutcher, 1975). Moreover, the p-value of Levene's Test of Equality of Variances for all variables was greater than 0.05, suggesting that the variances were homogeneously distributed (Lim & Loh, 1996). Thus, our sample met the basic assumptions for conducting subsequent ANOVA analysis.

Inferential statistics

The results for the hypotheses are as follows: First, there was a significant difference in decision-making between users exposed to PVND and NVPD. Specifically, users in NVPD condition exhibited a greater likelihood to respond positively than those in PVND ($M_{PVND} = 3.14 \pm 1.04$ vs. $M_{NVPD} = 3.49 \pm 1.12$; $F = 5.26$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that H1 was supported. Second, there was no significant difference in decision-making between males and females ($F = 0.75$; $p > 0.05$), indicating that H2 was also not supported. Third, there was a significant interaction effect between inconsistent sentiment valence and gender on decision-making ($F = 6.46$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that H3 was supported.

To further investigate the interaction effect, Bonferroni post hoc comparisons were conducted. As shown in Table 2, under PVND condition, males exhibited a significantly greater likelihood to respond positively than females, with a mean difference of 0.489 ($p < 0.05$). Conversely, no significant gender difference was observed under NVPD condition ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, among females, NVPD condition tend to elicit a positive response a significantly greater likelihood to respond positively compared to PVND condition, with a mean difference of 0.694 ($p < 0.01$). However, for males, there was no significant difference in decision-making between PVND and NVPD conditions ($p > 0.05$).

Comparison between groups			Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Treatment	Gender (I)	Gender (J)			
PVND	Male	Female	0.489*	0.202	0.016
NVPD	Male	Female	-0.241	0.205	0.240
Gender	Treatment (I)	Treatment (J)			
Male	PVND	NVPD	0.036	0.205	0.861

Note. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 2. Results of Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Discussion and conclusions

Key findings

Three major findings could be gleaned from this research. First, there is a significant difference in decision-making between users exposed to PVND and NVPD (H1). In particular, compared to PVND, users exposed to NVPD are more willing to make a decision. Contrary to previous studies that suggested users are primarily influenced by video content (Bolls et al., 2003; Li et al., 2022), this paper emphasises the dominant role of danmaku in shaping decision-making. One possible explanation is the dynamic and real-time nature of danmaku (Tzeng et al., 2023; Xi et al., 2021). Unlike traditional static text reviews, danmaku may distract users from the original video content, which has not been explored hitherto. Thus, future research is needed to shed light on how danmaku exerts such a significant influence, especially when inconsistent sentiment valence exists.

Second, there was no significant difference in decision-making between males and females (H2). This contradicts the literature that has generally showed gender differences in online shopping behaviors (Kanwal et al., 2022; Pradhana & Sastiono, 2019). In the context of this study, inconsistent sentiment valence might complicate the decision-making process as users attempt to reconcile contradicting sentiments (Blanchette & Richards, 2010; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018), leading to a similar impact on both genders. This unexpected result implies that the interplay of positive and negative sentiments might be potent enough to neutralise gender-based differences in decision-making.

Third, the interaction between inconsistent sentiment valence and the gender of users affects their decision-making (H3). Specifically, males exhibited a greater likelihood to respond positively than females under PVND, while no significant gender difference was observed under NVPD. Moreover, females showed a greater likelihood to respond positively with NVPD compared to PVND, whereas males showed no difference between the two conditions. This finding confirms gender differences in decision-making under different inconsistent sentiment valences (Alexander & Wood, 2000; Darley & Smith, 1995).

Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contributions of this paper are two-fold. First, it sheds light on the impact of inconsistent sentiment valence across video-versus-danmaku reviews. Previous studies have primarily focused on inconsistent sentiment valence within traditional static text-based reviews (Byun et al., 2021; Eslami & Ghasemaghaei, 2018; Kim et al., 2015). However, the literature has remained generally silent about the role of danmaku in the context of video reviews. In this vein, this paper starts a relatively new line of academic discourse by investigating how the conflict between video content and danmaku influences users' decision-making.

Two, this paper adds to the scholarly understanding of gender differences in users' responses to online reviews. Prior research suggested that gender differences in responses were evident in the context of either entirely positive or negative text reviews (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2022; Chaplin, 2015).

Extending the literature, this paper argues that when both positive and negative reviews coexist, male and female responses in shopping decisions become similar. Additionally, this paper also contributes to the literature on user decision-making by revealing the interplay between inconsistent sentiment valence and gender.

Practical implications

On the practical front, this paper offers implications for content creators. They could consider incorporating dynamic elements like danmaku into their content design strategies to foster user engagement and shape decision-making. Additionally, communication strategies should be tailored to account for inconsistent sentiment valence and the gender of target users. In this way, they can develop initiatives that resonate with diverse user groups.

For platform designers, this paper highlights the importance of optimising user experience to influence behaviors. Designers should focus on integrating features that facilitate real-time interactions to make the platform more engaging. They should also develop tools that help users navigate and reconcile mixed sentiments, such as sentiment analysis indicators. These features can enhance user satisfaction and increase the likelihood of purchases by providing immersive and informative experience.

Limitations and future research directions

Two limitations in this paper need to be acknowledged. First, this study's focus was limited to technical product review videos, which may not capture the variability in user responses that different product categories might elicit. Future research could explore user reactions under various product types, such as beauty products or household goods, to understand if the observed effects hold across different contexts.

Another limitation is the composition of the participant sample. The study primarily involved students, which may limit the generalisability of the findings, as individuals with different educational qualifications or professions might respond differently to the experimental stimuli. Future research should aim to include a more diverse participant pool, covering a broader range of education and occupational backgrounds.

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