



A Study of Online Reviews Affecting Non-Face-to-Face Shopping

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate how the online review usefulness affect consumers' shopping behavior in non-face-to-face shopping, which is now very common format of shopping environment after COVID-19 pandemic. Factors influencing online reviews were determined as quantity of review, agreement of review and characteristic of review based on research by existing researchers. **Research design, data, and methodology:** Customers in their teens to 60s who had experience of checking online reviews and purchasing products were surveyed using a Google questionnaire form from January 15, 2022 to February 19, 2022. To verify the validity and reliability of the research model, confirmatory factor analysis and discriminant validity analysis were conducted. In addition, the causal relationship between factors was verified through path analysis. **Results:** As a result, quantity of review and agreement of review had a statistically significant effect on review usefulness. However, characteristic of review did not have a statistically significant influence on review usefulness. And review usefulness had a statistically significant effect on attitude and purchase intention. **Conclusions:** This study investigated the factors affecting usefulness of online reviews and empirically analyzed the effects of online reviews on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions providing practical and theoretical implications for corporate online review management.

Keywords: Information Quantity, Agreement of Review, Review Usefulness, Attitude, Purchase Intention

JEL Classification Code: D11, D12, L81, P46

1. Introduction

As the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19) spreads around the world, various changes have occurred in the domestic retail industry. The biggest change is that domestic purchasing behavior has changed from offline to online and mobile-oriented. In addition, consumers' 'Untact' consumption has become commonplace. Accordingly, the transaction amount of the domestic online market is showing rapid growth every year, recording KRW 19 trillion in 2018, KRW 27 trillion in 2019, KRW 43 trillion in 2020,

and KRW 58 trillion in 2021 (Korea Statistics, 2021). According to the Korea Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (2021), before COVID-19, food was one of the slowest sectors to convert online among several product groups. However, since COVID-19, the growth rate of online sales in the food group recorded 51.5%, showing the most surprising change among product groups. With the rapid spread of COVID-19, demand for non-face-to-face services has increased, and consumers have preferred to purchase products through online. According to the Mobile Index 2021 survey, the application usage time of online purchase channels such as Coupang, Market Curly, and SSG

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has more than doubled from the time of the outbreak of COVID-19. In particular, during the first surge in the number of confirmed cases in 2020, the increase in usage time of the application was remarkable. In addition to purchasing materials, the delivery market has also grown. Due to COVID-19, consumers prefer ordering delivery rather than dining out, and the usage time of delivery apps such as Baedal Minjok, Yogiyo, and Coupang Eats is steadily increasing. These new consumption habits are expected to continue in the future. In this way, as the online market through the Internet is activated, consumers' online community activities are also active. Buyers convey their satisfaction with the product, purchasing status, and personal opinion based on their purchasing experience through online reviews or comments. These comments play a very important role in the purchase decision of consumers who purchase non-face-to-face (Kim & Hwang, 2007). In non-face-to-face consumption, consumers cannot directly check products, so online reviews are used as an important source of information. Consumers consult online reviews written by other consumers to determine the value of a product and make the best possible judgment. The sales volume of restaurant companies and distributors is also affected by whether the buyer's review direction is positive or negative. Therefore, companies are interested in consumers' reviews, such as actively promoting online review writing events. Existing studies in online shopping simply analyzed how online reviews affect customer attitudes and purchase intentions. However, this study verified how the usefulness of online reviews affects customer attitudes and purchase intentions. In addition, this study dealt with the food sector, which has not yet taken up a large portion of online sales. The proportion of consumers buying food in online sales is increasing. The difference from previous studies is that this study intensively studied online reviews in the food sector. This study aims to confirm whether the characteristics of online reviews have a significant effect on consumers' purchase decisions in online products purchases activated by COVID-19.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Domestic Online Market Status

Since the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19), consumers' offline shopping has declined sharply, and the e-commerce market is showing great growth, centered on daily necessities (Korea Statistics, 2021). Due to social distancing and restrictions on movement due to quarantine and refraining from going out, the tendency to consume untact (non-face-to-face) has been strengthened. In 2019, before the spread of Corona 19, the

online distribution industry was in a disadvantageous environment compared to offline due to slowing international economic growth and decreasing domestic consumption. However, after COVID-19, face-to-face consumption is limited in many parts, and both companies and customers cannot avoid the transition to online. As a result, domestic product purchase behavior has changed from offline to online-mobile. According to Korea Statistics (2021), the online market has grown at an average annual rate of 34%, doubling from 17.1 trillion won in 2019 before COVID-19 to 32.8 trillion won in 2021. Online penetration rate refers to the percentage of online transactions based on the total consumption market. Among online markets, the food market has a low online penetration rate compared to other industries. In the food market, the online penetration rate is low, and the age group of consumers who purchase online is concentrated in their 20s and 30s. Therefore, as the size of the online food market shows steady growth, the online penetration rate is expected to steadily rise. According to Market Kurly, consumers in their 50s and 60s, who had a low online penetration rate, began to purchase fresh food online. As of 2021, the number of newly subscribed consumers in their 50s and 60s increased by about 2.3 times compared to the previous year. The online retailer that showed a clear difference before and after the spread of COVID-19 is Coupang. Coupang's large-scale logistics system and fast delivery service such as rocket delivery can be cited as reasons for showing greater growth than WeMakePrice, Timon, Auction, Gmarket, and other open market companies. Consumers who had limited purchases of fresh food due to COVID-19 can now receive fresh food on the same day or the next morning through rocket delivery. This has become a great advantage and the number of application users has expanded (Fan, 2021).

2.2. Online word-of-mouth and online reviews

Unlike commercial advertising by companies with the purpose of pursuing profit, word of mouth (WOM: Words-of-Mouth), in which consumers voluntarily provide their experiences, gains the trust of other consumers. Word of mouth is also used by consumers to reduce the risk of purchase failure and to obtain information about products (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). Word of mouth that exists in a virtual space like the Internet is defined as electronic word of mouth (e-Wom), and is also called 'internet word of mouth communication' or 'online word of mouth communication'. Online word-of-mouth is conveying a message about a product or service based on one's experience on the Internet (Lee & Park, 2006). Online word-of-mouth is carried out through online reviews, and online reviews have evolved from online word-of-mouth methods in which buyers report their purchase experience and

product satisfaction through Internet bulletin boards, comments, and chat rooms (Kim, 2011). With the spread of the Internet, the amount of online word of mouth is explosively increasing. Online word of mouth is characterized by good accessibility, excellent durability, and most of the contents stored on the Internet for a long time and accessible (Jun, & Park, 2016). In online shopping such as the Internet, consumers cannot obtain sufficient information about a product by experiencing it directly before purchase, as in offline shopping, so they consider other people's purchase experiences and evaluations through online reviews, which are a kind of online word-of-mouth. In other words, online reviews are a useful information source for consumers' purchase decision-making and can help indirect experience of products before actual purchase (Cha & Lee, 2021). According to Lee (2018), when purchasing fresh product online, consumers value purchase reviews next to quality. Since it is difficult to accurately judge the quality of food only with the image attached by the seller, it can be seen that the quality is judged through the reviews of consumers with a purchase history.

2.3. Characteristics of online reviews

2.3.1. Information Quantity of Review

The quality of online reviews is determined by the quality of information they provide. Existing studies have confirmed that the quality of a review is determined by the amount of written text, whether images such as photos and videos are attached, and the rating given by the reviewer (Sparks, & Browning, 2011). Several studies have confirmed that the amount of text, that is, the length of a review, has a positive effect on review usefulness. Sparks and Browning (2011) said that the greater the amount of information provided by online reviews, the more consumers find the reviews useful and trust the contents of the reviews. In addition, the length of the review has a greater effect, especially in the case of experience goods. Since food is an experiential good that can only be judged by consumers directly purchasing and experiencing it, the following hypotheses were established based on the judgment that the amount of information in reviews would affect the usefulness of reviews in non-face-to-face food consumption.

H1: The quantity of online reviews will have a positive (+) effect on review usefulness.

2.3.2. Agreement of Review

In order to resolve consumer confusion due to the increase in the amount of online reviews, several sites that provide reviews can check how useful consumers find the reviews.

All reviews do not have the same influence on consumers, and the degree of influence can vary as they gain sympathy from a large number of consumers. The number of views and recommendations of the review are indicators to determine how much sympathy was received, indicating the level of agreement of other consumers to the review. In addition, it is possible to sort in the order of reviews with high agreement. Hur et al. (2009) confirmed that the usefulness of the review increases as consumers who read online reviews agree with them. Based on this, the following hypotheses were derived.

H2: Agreement of online reviews will have a positive (+) effect on review usefulness.

2.3.3. Who is Reviewer

Characteristics of the reviewer, the source of information, play an important role in helping consumers read reviews and adopt information. Identifying the characteristics of a reviewer is relatively more important online than offline. Hsu et al. (2017) identified the effects of the characteristics of online review writers on the usefulness of reviews. The reputation of the reviewer, the degree of exposure to other users, and the number of badges the reviewer earned in the online shopping mall were expected to have a positive effect on the usefulness of the review. A reviewer's reputation was determined by other consumers' ratings of all reviews written by the author. It was confirmed that the more reviews written by users with high reputation, the higher the usefulness of the review. Zhu et al. (2014) considered the reviewer's reputation and number of badges as professionalism among the reviewer's characteristics. It was confirmed that this had a significant effect on the usefulness of the review. Based on this, the following hypotheses were established.

H3: Characteristics of reviewers will have a positive (+) effect on review usefulness.

2.3.4. Review Usefulness

The usefulness of a review refers to the extent to which consumers who refer to the review perceive the review as useful. Several studies claim that review usefulness is the most important factor among many factors related to online reviews. Reviews consumers judged to be useful were found to have a greater degree of influence on purchase decisions than other reviews (Topaloglu & Dass, 2021). Thus, review usefulness helps consumers find the information they want to explore in the purchasing decision-making process and resolves the condition of having incomplete information about a product (Topaloglu & Dass, 2021). Factors influencing the usefulness of reviews were verified by the

characteristics of review writers, the quality and content of reviews, and ratings.

2.3.5. Attitude for merchandise

Xiao et al. (2019) confirmed that the usefulness of information included in reviews has a positive effect on consumers' product attitudes. Lee and Min (2019) confirmed that if consumers' product attitude is positive, their purchase intention is also positive.

2.3.6. Purchase Intention

Intention is a concept that refers to the likelihood that an attitude or trust will be transformed into an action. Purchasing intention can be said to be a predicted future behavior that a consumer is likely to do in the future (Aaker & Keller, 1990). It refers to the expression of the consumer's willingness to take a future action in relation to purchasing a product (Taylor & Baker, 1994). Nam and Han (2010) defined purchase intention as the willingness to recommend a product to other consumers and pay for the product even if the price is high. When consumers perceive the value of a product in a positive way through a series of processes, their purchase intention increases. Conversely, if the value of a product is perceived negatively, purchase intention decreases (Lee & Shin, 2014). Hong et al. (2009) said that online reviews of online shopping malls can have a positive or negative impact on consumers by delivering reliable and lively information to consumers with purchase intentions. According to the characteristics of online word of mouth (eWOM), reviews containing negative reviews or unsatisfactory experiences spread faster than positive reviews. Therefore, consumers are more likely to respond more sensitively to negative opinions than to positive ones (Lee & Park, 2006). Kim, Suh and Suh (2008) confirmed that the usefulness of product reviews has a significant effect on purchase intention through review acceptance and the usefulness of online reviews is important in the purchasing decision-making process of consumers. Hsu, Yu, and Chang (2017) judged that the higher the perceived usefulness of product reviews, the higher the purchase intention. Dutta and Bhat (2016) also confirmed that the usefulness of online reviews has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions. Based on the above, the following hypothesis were provided.

H4: The usefulness of reviews will have a positive (+) effect on purchase intention.

H5: The usefulness of reviews will have a positive (+) effect on product attitudes.

H6: Consumer's product attitude will have a positive (+)

effect on purchase intention.

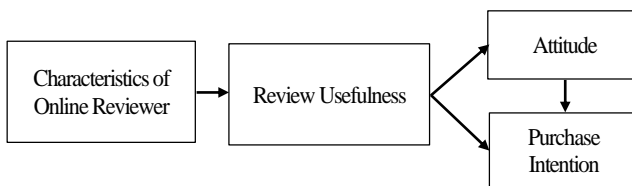


Figure 1: Research model

3. Research Method

For the study, men and women in their 10s to 60s who had experience in purchasing non-face-to-face food online and who had the experience of checking and using online reviews when purchasing non-face-to-face food were targeted. The survey for the study was conducted using a Google questionnaire form from January 15, 2022 to February 19, 2022. The Google questionnaire form was surveyed with a total of 30 questions on 5 scales, and a total of 267 sample subjects were secured.

Table1: Demographic traits of the research

Demographic traits		Sample No.	%
Gender	Female	139	52
	Male	128	48
Age	10s	24	9
	20s	77	29
	30s	93	35
	40s	51	19
	Over 50s	21	8
Job	Student	77	29
	Employee	104	39
	Housewife	48	18
	Entrepreneur	24	9
	Professional	8	3
	Etc.	5	2

Teens accounted for 9%, 20s 29%, 30s 35%, 40s 19%, and 50s or older 8%. For those in their 50s and older who had a low online penetration rate, this study also confirmed that the rate was low.

As a result of confirmatory factor analysis, the model fit was assessed with AGFI=0.84, TLI=0.92, GFI = 0.88, NFI=0.89, CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94. Composite Reliability (C.R) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) meet the criteria (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Overall factor loadings are significant

($p < 0.01$) statistically. So, it confirmed convergent validity. Table 2 presents the confirmatory factor analysis results.

Table2: The Result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Standardized Coefficient	CR	AVE
Information Quantity of Review	Quantity01	0.851	0.87	0.70
	Quantity02	0.814		
	Quantity03	0.832		
Agreement of Review	Agreement01	0.608	0.76	0.52
	Agreement02	0.795		
	Agreement03	0.739		
Who is reviewer	Reviewer01	0.856	0.81	0.59
	Reviewer 02	0.725		
	Reviewer 03	0.71		
Review Usefulness	Usefulness01	0.762	0.87	0.64
	Usefulness02	0.755		
	Usefulness03	0.838		
	Usefulness04	0.830		
Attitude	Attitude01	0.813	0.87	0.63
	Attitude02	0.814		
	Attitude03	0.723		
	Attitude04	0.796		
Purchase Intention	Purchase Intention01	0.814	0.86	0.62
	Purchase Intention02	0.837		
	Purchase Intention03	0.806		
	Purchase Intention04	0.670		

Chi-square = 376.558, Degrees of freedom = 174, GFI = 0.88, AGFI=0.84, NFI=0.89, CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94, TLI=0.92

In order to verify the discriminant validity among the factors, AVE's square root was used that proved one-dimensionality. Analysis of discriminant validity found that the square root value of AVE was greater than 0.5 and greater than all nondiagonal correlation values in relevant rows, columns (Table 3). Therefore, discriminant validity was demonstrated that the measurement results between different components had corresponding differences.

Table3: Discriminant factor analysis

	RU	AR	WR	AT	PI	IQR
RU	0.797					
AR	0.411	0.719				
WR	0.507	0.598	0.766			
AT	0.584	0.402	0.657	0.787		
PI	0.635	0.445	0.610	0.706	0.784	
IQR	0.682	0.540	0.344	0.449	0.496	0.832

RU	0.797					
AR	0.411	0.719				
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IQR	0.682	0.540	0.344	0.449	0.496	0.832

RU: Review Usefulness, AR: Agreement of Review, WR: Who is Reviewer, AT: Attitude, PI: Purchase Intention, IQR: Information Quantity of Review

4. Result of the Research

As a result of the analysis, the hypothesis 1 that the quantity of reviews will have a significant effect on the usefulness of reviews showed statistically significant results. In other words, it was confirmed that the detailed description of the user's experience, such as a review with a large number of characters or a review with attached media such as photos and videos, secured reliability. Hypothesis 2, which suggests that agreement of the review will have a significant effect on review usefulness, also showed statistically significant results. In other words, it was confirmed that reviews with high number of views or recommendations from other users were recognized as more useful reviews. Hypothesis 4, which states that the usefulness of reviews will have an effect on product attitudes, also showed statistically significant results. As a result, it was confirmed that online reviews have an effect on product perception. As a result of testing Hypothesis 5, it was proven that the usefulness of reviews had a statistically significant influence on purchase intention. As a result of testing Hypothesis 6, it was analyzed that attitude had a statistically significant influence on purchase intention. However, hypothesis 3 that the reviewer's characteristics had a significant influence on the usefulness of the review was rejected. The results of the empirical analysis are shown in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Result of the research

Hypothesis	Paths	Path Coefficient	t value	Results
H1	Information Quantity of Review → Review Usefulness	0.459	***	Support
H2	Agreement of Review → Review Usefulness	0.401	***	Support
H3	Who is Reviewer → Review	-0.254	0.067	Reject

	Usefulness			
H4	Review Usefulness → Attitude	0.630	***	Support
H5	Review Usefulness → Purchase Intention	0.380	***	Support
H6	Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.468	***	Support

5. Conclusion and Implications

Since the spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19), domestic consumers' food consumption behavior has changed from offline to online-mobile. This study analyzed which characteristics of online reviews affect the usefulness of reviews in non-face-to-face food purchases. In addition, we analyzed how the usefulness of reviews perceived by consumers affects product attitudes. In addition, we tried to find out what role it plays in the process of moving toward purchase intention.

As a result of the analysis, quantity of the review and the agreement of the review, excluding the characteristics of the reviewer, affected the usefulness of the review. In addition, it was found that the usefulness of the review had a statistically significant effect on purchase intention and attitude on purchase intention. Finally, attitude was analyzed to have a significant effect on consumer's purchase intention.

The results are compared with previous studies and interpreted as follows. First, the quantity of review and the agreement of reviews have a positive effect on the usefulness of reviews. Among the factors found to have a significant effect on the perception of usefulness of reviews, quantity and agreement have been repeatedly studied in various fields. It can be seen that consumers who want to purchase food online also perceive reviews with a high amount of information and agreement as useful.

Second, the correlation between the usefulness of reviews, product attitudes, and purchase intentions was confirmed. It can be interpreted that useful reviews provided with key information based on experience, such as food quality, taste, and sanitary conditions, will have a significant impact on consumers' product attitudes and purchase intentions.

Third, the reviewers' characteristics do not affect the usefulness of the review. In this study, reputation, number of badges, actual purchase, and number of reviews written on shopping mall sites were set as characteristics of reviewers.

Existing studies have shown that there is a tendency to evaluate review writers' expertise through the number of reviews they have left (Topaloglu & Dass, 2021). Huang et al. (2018) said that it is not necessarily judged to be more useful. In addition, there are relatively few existing studies on review characteristics compared to other factors. This can be interpreted as the difficulty in deriving the characteristics of reviewers from online reviews.

Fourth, product attitude perceived as usefulness of reviews had a statistically significant effect on purchase intention. According to Dutta and Bhat (2016), consumers with high internet familiarity said that online reviews are not the only criterion for judgment. In summary, it was confirmed that if the usefulness of online reviews is secured, product attitudes can be formed with the information acquired through reviews, and consumers perceive the usefulness of reviews to form purchase intentions. Therefore, online food sales companies should increase the amount of information and consent of reviews, which are the factors that obtain the usefulness of online reviews.

The practical implications are presented as follows. First, it was confirmed that the amount of information in online reviews had a significant effect on the usefulness of reviews. Therefore, online sales companies should encourage buyers to write informative reviews. The amount of information in a review is determined by the amount of text (length of the review) and image materials such as photos and videos. Therefore, it is recommended that companies prepare a space where detailed reviews can be uploaded in sales sites or applications. And it seems that placing an intuitive interface that allows users to check product reviews right on the product sales page will help sales. In order to induce writing reviews with rich information, points are paid according to the number of words in the review, or more points are paid when photos and videos are attached. Companies should use a method that pays points according to the number of words in the review or pays more points when attaching photos or videos to induce reviews with rich information.

Second, it was confirmed that the agreement of online reviews had a significant effect on the usefulness of reviews. Therefore, online sales companies allow consumers to agree, recommend, or disapprove the reviews of other buyers, and make it easy to check them together with the reviews. This is related not only to the agreement of online reviews, but also to inducing writing reviews that are rich in information in reviews. Buyers will write better quality reviews if benefits such as points are given to consumers who write reviews that have received a certain level of recommendation from consumers. Even insincere reviews can be marked as downvoted, so buyers write more helpful

reviews. And it is good to provide consumers with an environment where they can judge the value of products more carefully through reviews.

Third, it was confirmed that the characteristics of online review writers did not significantly affect the usefulness of reviews. Several previous studies have also disputed whether knowing the number of reviews previously written by reviewers affects usefulness. Therefore, it can be seen that there is no need for online sales companies to rank according to the number of reviews written by reviewers. However, consumers have more trust in the review if it is a review from a real purchaser, and it has been confirmed that they do not trust reviews written by non-purchasers through free provision, etc.

This study has the following limitations and is intended to suggest a direction for future research. In future studies, it is necessary to change the survey and variables according to the purchase channel, open market, mobile application, online shopping site, etc. In addition, it is necessary to recognize and analyze the fact that the characteristics that consumers value in online reviews may differ depending on the type of product they purchase. It is necessary to conduct research by setting up other factors that affect purchase intention in online channel.

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