

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE COMMENTS ON ATTITUDE TOWARD ORGANIZATIONS
BASED ON INDIVIDUAL'S PRIOR ATTITUDE

By

KANG HOON SUNG

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2010

© 2010 Kang Hoon Sung

To my parents, Hae Yong Song and Ki Dok Ahn

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to my parents, Hae Yong Song and Ki Dok Ahn, for supporting me throughout my program. What I accomplished is due entirely to their love and support. This thesis would not have been possible without guidance and advice from my chair Dr. Moon Lee. I am grateful for the patience she has shown me as I persevered through trials and errors. In addition, I would like to show my gratitude to Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson and Dr. Spiro Kiouisis, the professors who helped me as committee members. They provided much needed advice and inspiration throughout the process. I also thank the rest of the Department, who taught me in their class and shared their knowledge with me. And last but not least, I thank my dearest friends. Bless you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
ABSTRACT.....	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	11
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Online Feedback Systems.....	14
Congruity Theory.....	16
Biased Assimilation.....	18
Influence of Online Comments.....	20
Type of Online Comments.....	21
Refutational vs. Non-refutational Two-sided Message.....	22
3 METHODOLOGY.....	25
Pre-study.....	25
Main Study.....	25
Procedure.....	25
Measures.....	26
Prior attitude toward organization.....	26
Post-viewing attitude toward the organization.....	27
Perceived credibility.....	27
Perceived usability.....	27
Perceived similarity.....	27
Perceived attitude change.....	28
4 RESULTS.....	29
Profile of the Sample.....	29
General Use of Online Comments.....	31
Manipulation Checks.....	32
Random Assignment.....	32
Type of Comment.....	32
The Impact of the Video Material.....	33
Hypotheses and Research Questions Testing.....	34
Group with a Prior Negative Attitude Toward the Organization.....	35

Group with a Prior Neutral Attitude Toward the Organization	36
Group with a Prior Positive Attitude Toward the Organization	37
Test of Research Question	38
5 DISCUSSION.....	39
Summary of Results	39
Implications	39
Limitations and Future Research	41
APPENDIX	
A YOUTUBE WEBSITE USED FOR THE EXPERIMENT	44
B THE LIST OF ONLINE COMMENTS USED	45
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	49
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	53

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
4-1 Demographic profile of participants	30
4-2 Number of participants in each cell	30
4-3 Cronbach's Alpha of Variables	34
4-4 Two-way independent ANOVA results	35
4-5 Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior negative attitude group)	36
4-6 Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior neutral group)	36
4-7 Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior positive group)	37
4-8 The relationship between perceived usability, perceived credibility, perceived similarity and perceived attitude change	38

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
4-1 General usage of online comments (Reading comments)	31
4-2 General usage of online comments (Posting comments).....	32
4-3 Simple main effects of type of online comments on attitude toward organization	34

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE COMMENTS ON ATTITUDE TOWARD
ORGANIZATIONS BASED ON INDIVIDUAL'S PRIOR ATTITUDE

By

Kang Hoon Sung

August 2010

Chair: Moon Lee

Major: Mass Communication

With the development of the Internet, the popularity and importance of online comments are constantly growing. However, despite the growing importance and wide use of online comments, research pertaining to the impact made by online comments on attitude toward organizations has not been extensive.

This study examined whether online comments posted below a negative video have an effect on people's attitude toward an organization. In particular, it examined how different types of online comments (positive vs. negative vs. two-sided) affect people's attitude based on their prior attitude toward the company. Furthermore, the study examined what factors of online comments would be influential to attitude change.

The findings indicated that online comments have a significant effect on people's attitude toward the organization. Also, the effect significantly differed depending on people's prior attitude toward the organization. As expected, people who had a neutral attitude toward the organization were the most affected by the negative or positive online comments. Two-sided message effect was also found. For people who had a prior negative attitude toward the organization, two-sided online comments were more effective in changing people's attitude than positive comments. Additionally, the results

showed that perceived usability was the most influential factor in people's attitude change rather than the perceived similarity or perceived credibility toward the people who posted the online comments.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Traditional media such as television and newspapers provide a one-way direction of communication from the media to the public, but with the development of the Internet, two-way communication between message sender and message receiver is becoming more prevalent. Members of the public can now immediately respond to media messages and express their opinions about a product or an issue using online forums and web sites. Many news sites, blogs, content-sharing sites, and online shopping sites currently use such online feedback platforms. In particular, consumers increasingly consult online reviews on product-rating or shopping sites before they make purchases and look up movie ratings and reviews on rating sites before going to the cinema. According to global information and media company Nielsen, online feedback is one of the most credible sources of product information. In a survey conducted in 2007 with more than 26,000 Internet users in 47 countries, 61% trusted “consumer opinions posted online,” following only “recommendations from consumers,” with 78%, and “newspapers,” with 63% (Nielsen, 2007).

Online feedback on blogs and forums is called online comments instead of online reviews. Rather than an evaluation of a product or service, these comments offer opinions or discuss an issue. Online comments are also used on news sites such as CNN and FOX, as well as on content-sharing sites such as the video-sharing site YouTube. In addition, companies are developing online tools that encourages and enhances the use of online comments. For example, Google Sidewiki launched by Google allows a person to post and read online comments alongside any web page, so even if a web site does not provide an embedded feedback platform, users can now

share their online comments using this tool. With such new technologies, online comments, already popular, may be used even more actively and broadly in the future.

Companies are aware of the growing popularity and importance of online feedback and are finding ways to use it to further their own interests. More companies, including leading multinational corporations, are hiring social media specialists to counteract misinformation posted online and to build positive relationships with the public (Lalley, 2009). However, despite the growing importance and wide use of online comments, research pertaining to the impact of online comments on attitudes toward organizations has not been extensive.

Recently, the Domino's Pizza prank viral video became a significant issue and increased interest in online crisis management. In the video, two Domino's Pizza workers showed how they used various body parts to contaminate the food. As word of the video spread, viewership of the video on YouTube skyrocketed. By the time Domino's became aware of this incident and got rid of the video, over a million views of the video clip had been counted. Domino's fired the two workers and issued a video of the president of the company apologizing for the situation. However, the damage was already done: not only had millions of people watched the video clip, they had also shared their opinions through online comments. Therefore, even though the video was gone, the question remained: Could online comments alone change or reinforce people's prior attitudes?

This study examines whether online comments have an impact on people's attitude toward an organization based on the individual's prior attitude. In particular, we examine the effect of online comments posted under a video clip that portrays the

organization negatively. The study provides an analysis of how positive, negative, and two-sided online comments affect people whose prior attitudes differ from that of the comment. In addition, factors that could influence the attitude change are examined.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Feedback Systems

Online feedback systems are seen as an evolution of offline word-of-mouth (WOM) (Chatterjee, 2001; Dellacorras, 2003; Godes, 2004). Chatterjee (2001) distinguished online WOM from offline WOM by emphasizing that online WOM uses both (a) online communication models such as e-mail and hypertext instead of oral communication and (b) many-to-many communication instead of person-to-person communication. Dellacorras (2003) stated that online feedback mechanisms are “using the Internet’s bidirectional communication capabilities to artificially engineer large-scale, word-of-mouth networks in which individuals share opinions and experiences on a wide range of topics, including companies, products, services, and even world events.”

Online feedback systems can be divided into two general categories: online reviews and online comments. Online reviews are usually feedback given on a retailer’s site regarding products or services. This system is adopted by most online retail sales and service-providing sites, including eBay.com, Amazon.com, and Yahoo! Movies. In contrast, online comments are feedback given regarding content such as clips, images, stories, and news and are usually found on opinion forums and news web sites such as BBC and CNN and on content-sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr.

Most past studies of online feedback systems have focused on online reviews in order to determine how online reviews affect the sales or price of products. Dellacorras (2003) summarized the main conclusions derived from these past studies: (a) Online reviews “seem to affect both prices and the probability of sale”; (b) “the impact of feedback profiles on prices and probability of sale is relatively higher for riskier

transactions and more expensive products”; and (c) “the overall number of positive and negative ratings, followed by the number of recently posted negative comments seem to be most influential in affecting buyer behavior.”

In contrast to the extensive studies conducted on online reviews, few studies have addressed the effects of online comments, but not because people write fewer online comments than online reviews: According to Pew Internet surveys, 31% of Internet users posted online reviews about a product they purchased or a service they received. Only slightly fewer Internet users (26%) posted comments to online news groups, web sites, blogs, or photo sites (Pew Internet, 2009). In South Korea, which has the highest average Internet speed (Wong, 2009) in the world, as well as the highest percentage of homes with broadband Internet connections (AFP, 2009), studies regarding online comments have been the most extensive. According to a survey conducted by the National Internet Development Agency of Korea (2006), 45.6% of Internet users in Korea post comments online for reasons that include “expressing my opinion” (54.2%), “exchanging information with others” (21.9%), and “to criticize the content or other comments” (11.8%). People read comments “to examine other people’s opinion” (46%), “to know more about the background of the issue” (32.9%), and “to obtain expert information” (12.1%).

Yang (2008) investigated how the tone of news stories and the tone of associated online comments affect readers’ attitudes toward controversial issues. Yang’s experiment showed that the tone of the online comments had a greater effect on the respondents’ attitudes toward the issues addressed than the tone of the news story

itself. However, it was the negative comments that had an effect, while the positive had none.

Park and Lee (2007) tested the effect of online comments about a company in an online news forum on people's perception of the company. The study was conducted in a 2 (tone of comments: negative vs. positive) × 2 (number of comments: one vs. five) factorial design experiment. Eighty students who participated in the experiment read a news article from an online news forum and manipulated online comments posted below the article. The results showed that the tone and number of comments had significant interaction effects on the company's corporate reputation. However, the main effect of the number of comments applied only to participants who read positive comments.

Park and Lee's study intentionally used a company that was not well known to minimize the presence of prior judgment about the company (Park & Lee, 2007). However, in reality, people would rather read about or discuss organizations that they are aware of and will, therefore, likely have an attitude about that organization going in. Therefore, the current study selected a well known organization in order to examine how prior attitude affects the impact of online comments that express a different attitude.

Congruity Theory

Osgood and Tannenbaum's congruity theory is based on the idea that an individual has a tendency to make his or her thoughts and attitudes consistent. Under this theory, if an individual has an association with two objects and an attitude toward both of them but those attitudes are incongruous, the person will try to change the incongruity by adjusting his or her attitudes. Let us assume that person A likes person B

and dislikes concept C. If person B and concept C have a positive association, an incongruity emerges. Thus, person A tries to change the incongruity by changing his or her attitude toward B (like to dislike) or toward C (dislike to like) to achieve consistency. Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) asserted that this theory can predict the amount of attitude change based on the person's initial attitude toward the source such that the more favorable the attitude person A has toward source B, the greater the effect of source B's positive message concerning concept C and the lower the effect of source B's negative message concerning concept C. If person A has an unfavorable attitude toward source B, the opposite effect will occur.

Osgood and Tannenbaum's congruity theory also explains neutral attitudes. If a person's attitude toward both source and object is neutral, movement in the person's attitude depends on the assertion. If person A has no attitudes concerning source B or concept C, his or her opinion will depend on source B's direction of assertion such that, if source B asserts a positive message toward concept C, the person will generate a positive attitude toward C, rather than a negative one.

Tannenbaum (1956) studied how one's initial attitude toward an issue and source affects attitude change by testing a hypothesis based on the susceptibility principle, which argues that the amount of attitude change toward an object is inversely proportional to the intensity of the original attitude toward that object. Tannenbaum's results supported the principle but could not explain why the change was not the greatest for the group with a neutral attitude toward the issue since, according to the susceptibility principle, people with a neutral attitude should change their attitude the most. Tannenbaum provided two possible explanations: Either the measurement scales

used for the experiment were not appropriate or some people are “intensely neutral.” Subsequent studies have also shown that initial attitude is an important factor in the effect of attempts to persuade. For example, Peters (2000) presented to over 350 people newspaper articles and television programs about genetic engineering that had different attitudes toward the issue. Participants who had positive attitudes toward the issue covered in the news were less persuaded by negative content, and those who had negative attitudes toward the issue were less persuaded by positive contents.

Biased Assimilation

Whereas congruity theory explains the tendency of people making his or her thoughts and attitudes consistent, the biased assimilation is “the tendency to evaluate belief-consistent information more positively than belief-inconsistent information” (Greitemeyer et al., 2008). The biased assimilation research addresses “how people evaluate information as a function of their decision, opinions, attitudes and expectation” (Fischer, Greitemeyer & Frey, 2008).

According to the theory, people who hold strong opinions on an issue are likely to evaluate relevant information in a biased manner. The famous study by Lord et al. (1979) showed that people tend to evaluate information that are consistent with their own beliefs as more favorable and convincing. Their study exposed college students to two studies, one supporting and one opposing capital punishment. As a result, college students who supported capital punishment initially rated the pro-capital punishment study as more convincing. On the other hand, college students who initially opposed capital punishment, rated the anti-capital punishment study as more convincing. Lord et al. (1979) suggested that biased assimilation arises since people “judge confirming evidence as relevant and reliable but disconfirming evidence as irrelevant and

unreliable.” People are also more cautious and critical when processing disconfirming information (Lord et al., 1979). Through two experiments, Edwards and Smith (1996) also provided evidence that arguments that are inconsistent with prior beliefs are scrutinized longer and more thorough, making the arguments weaker than arguments that are consistent with prior beliefs.

The biased assimilation process was demonstrated and supported in many other studies that examined various social issues including abortion (Pomerantz et al. 1995), safety of nuclear power (Plous, 1991), the JFK assassinations (McHoskey, 1995), homosexuality (Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro et al., 2004; Boyson & Vogel, 2007) and political campaigns (Munro et al., 2002; Greitemeyer et al., 2008). However, few studies have examined biased assimilation processes on attitudes toward organizations on an online setting.

Incorporating the theories, this study hypothesized that these tendencies will also be demonstrated on attitudes toward organizations when shown arguments through online comments. People with strong favorability toward an organization will perceive negative arguments about the organization as weak and unconvincing, therefore being less affected by those arguments. Similarly, people who strongly dislike an organization will perceive arguments that are favorable toward the organization as weak and unconvincing, therefore being affected by those arguments.

H 1: People who have a prior neutral attitude toward an organization are more affected by negative comments about the organization than will people who have a prior positive attitude toward the organization.

H 2: People who have a prior neutral attitude toward an organization are more affected by positive comments about the organization than will people who have a prior negative attitude toward the organization.

Influence of Online Comments

Several theories can be used to explain how online comments influence people. The social comparison theory posits that humans are driven to evaluate their own opinions and abilities and that, when there is no objective means available for such evaluation, the individual will evaluate by comparing himself or herself with others (Festinger, 1954). Considering that almost half of the people who read online comments read them in order to examine other people's opinions (National Internet Development Agency of Korea, 2006), one can assume that online comments are commonly used to compare opinions and, ultimately, to evaluate one's own opinion.

According to the social comparison theory, perceived similarity with others and their opinions is important in an individual's evaluation and judgment of his or her opinion through social comparison. The theory argues that self-evaluation occurs if the individual assimilates rather than contrasts himself or herself with the others, and that the tendency to compare with others decreases as the difference between one's opinion and those of others increases (Festinger, 1954; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). In addition, individuals whose opinions are more similar to those of others have a stronger tendency to change than do those whose opinion is more different from those of others (Festinger, 1954). Based on the theory, we can assume that people will be more influenced by online comments if the comments are similar to their own opinions and if they think that the comments were posted by people who are similar to themselves. If the comments' arguments are too different from the individual's opinion, the individual

will not even try to compare his or her opinion with that of the group. Also, if an individual thinks that the people who posted the online comments are significantly different from himself or herself, then those opinions will not have much effect.

Many studies suggested source credibility as an important influence in evaluating information (Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978) and in changing people's attitudes and behavioral intentions (Lutz et al., 1983; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). However, in the web, where there is no face-to-face relationship, the credibility of a message might be perceived by the context or the quality of the message (Elliott, 2002; cited from Lee & Lee, 2008).

Lee and Sung (2007) addressed the question concerning whether online comments posted under a news article can affect people's perception of the article by focusing on the usefulness and credibility of the online comments. The results of their experiment showed that the usefulness of comments significantly affected people's perception of an article. However, the credibility of comments did not have a significant effect on perception (Lee & Sung, 2007). This indicates that people are influenced by the usefulness of online comments, but not necessarily by their credibility.

RQ 1: What factors (e.g., perceived usability, perceived similarity, perceived credibility) are influential in perceived attitude change?

Type of Online Comments

While some online comments on web sites are filled with Internet slang and emotions that do not express significant meaning, most express some kind of positive, negative, or two-sided opinion. Allen (1991) defined a one-sided message as "a message that presents only those arguments in favor of a particular proposition" and a

two-sided message as “a message that presents the arguments in favor of a proposition but also considers the opposing arguments” (p. 391).

Refutational vs. Non-refutational Two-sided Message

Two-sided messages can be divided into either refutational or non-refutational messages. Allen (1991) defined refutational two-sided messages as “messages that mention counterarguments to the position advocated and then refute them” (p. 393) and non-refutational messages as “messages that only mentioned the counterarguments without offering a refutation of them” (p. 393). Hynd (2001) explained refutation as one of three types of persuasive arguments: one-sided, non-refutational two-sided, and refutational two-sided. Hynd differentiated the two types of two-sided messages on the basis of whether the author demonstrated a preference; authors who showed a preference for one side over the other engaged in a refutational argument, while those who did not reveal a preference engaged in a non-refutational argument (Hynd, 2001).

Many scholars have studied the effects of sided messages. One of the best known studies was conducted by Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield (1949), who used an experiment to determine the most effective way to persuade soldiers. The experiment, conducted with 625 soldiers, revealed that both one-sided and two-sided messages were effective in changing the soldiers’ opinions. However, if the prior opinion of the soldiers toward the issue was taken into account, the groups showed very different results, as soldiers who were initially opposed to the opinion were more persuaded by two-sided messages.

Through a meta-analysis, Allen (1991) showed that, in general, one-sided messages are more effective than non-refutational two-sided messages, but refutational two-sided messages are more effective than one-sided messages. Subsequent

research has supported the persuasive advantage of a two-sided refutational message over a one-sided message with psychological theories such as the inoculation theory, attribution theory, and cognitive response theory (Lin, 2006). However, some studies have not supported the message sidedness effect. For example, Lin, Lim, Kiouisis, and Ferguson (2006) studied the effect of message sidedness on perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and company evaluations by conducting an experiment with 205 undergraduate students in a 3 (message sidedness: one-sided vs. refutational two-sided vs. non-refutational two-sided) × 2 (involvement: high vs. low) treatment condition. Through CSR web sites containing one-sided, refutational two-sided, or non-refutational two-sided messages, the researchers measured which type of message was most effective in building a positive attitude toward the company. The results differed from those of some previous studies in that they found that a CSR web site with one-sided messages was more effective in building a positive attitude toward the company than was a site with refutational or non-refutational two-sided messages. The authors explained that possible “asymmetrical organization of arguments” and “respondents’ suspicion of the message sources” could have caused this contradictory result (Lin, Lim, Kiouisis, & Ferguson, 2006). Kim (2007) studied the effects of message sidedness on corporate goodwill and trustworthiness in weblogs by exposing students to weblogs with one-sided, non-refutational two-sided, or refutational two-sided messages. The results showed that message-sidedness had no significant impact on perceptions of trustworthiness or goodwill.

The current study examines whether message sidedness affects attitude toward an organization. In developing the hypothesis, the study refers to the experiment

conducted by Hovland et al. (1949), which used refutational two-sided messages that showed preference for one side over the other in an experiment. This approach is also more realistic than other approaches since it is difficult to find a non-refutational two-sided online comment that shows absolutely no preference for one side.

H 3: For people who have an initially negative attitude toward a company, two-sided comments that include arguments from both sides are more effective in changing attitude than are one-sided comments that present only positive arguments.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed hypotheses and to answer the research question, a 3 (previous attitude toward the organization: negative vs. neutral vs. positive) x 4 (type of online comments: positive vs. negative vs. two-sided vs. none) factorial design was employed. The dependent variables were attitude toward organization, perceived attitude change, perceived usability toward the online comments, and perceived similarity as well as perceived credibility toward the people who posted the online comments. Two weeks prior to the main experiment, a pre-study was conducted.

Pre-study

To select the organization for the main study and to measure participant's prior attitudes, a survey was taken two weeks prior to the main study in which participants responded to questionnaire items that measured their attitudes toward ten organizations. About 400 students from a southeastern university were recruited. Participants had to fill out questionnaire items that measured their attitude toward ten organizations. McDonald's was selected as the most appropriate organization for the main study since it had the best distributed attitude range.

Main Study

Procedure

The main experiment was conducted two weeks after the pre-study, and the same students who participated in the pre-study were invited. Based on their prior attitudes toward McDonald's, they were assigned to one of three groups (prior positive group, prior neutral group, or prior negative group). Within the three groups, every participant was then exposed randomly to one of the four YouTube web pages, while ensuring that

the participants in the same group get the same web page. The four YouTube web pages contained a video clip that was negative toward McDonald's, an experiment purporting to show how bad McDonald's French fries may be for people's health. Below the video clip, five positive comments were posted for the positive online comments condition, five negative comments were posted for the negative online comments condition, five refutational two-sided comments were posted for the two-sided comments condition and no comments were posted for the no comments condition. Several pretests were conducted to develop the online comments for the experiment using a seven-point Likert scale: negative/positive.

The students were asked to watch the video clip and read the online comments and then to complete a questionnaire that measured their attitude toward the organization, their perceptions of the credibility and similarity of the people who posted the online comments, their perception of the usability of the online comments and whether their attitude had changed. They were also asked questions about their perceptions and activities regarding online feedback systems, along with general questions about demographics.

Measures

Prior attitude toward organization

The participants' prior attitudes toward the organization were evaluated by four seven-point semantic differential scales: unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, dislike/like, and negative/positive (Holbrook and Batra, 1987). Participants with 4-11 points were assigned to the prior negative attitude group, participants with 12-20 points to the prior neutral attitude group and participants with 21-28 points to the prior positive attitude group.

Post-viewing attitude toward the organization

Participants' post-viewing attitudes toward the organization were evaluated by four seven-point semantic differential scales ($\alpha=.96$): unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, dislike/like, and negative/positive (Holbrook and Batra, 1987).

Perceived credibility

Participants' post-viewing attitudes toward the organization were evaluated by ten seven-point semantic differential scales ($\alpha=.92$): undependable/dependable, dishonest/honest, unreliable/reliable, insincere/sincere, untrustworthy/trustworthy, not an expert/expert, inexperienced/experienced, unknowledgeable/knowledgeable, unqualified/qualified, and unskilled/skilled (Ohanian, 1990).

Perceived usability

Perceived similarity was assessed using six seven-point Likert scales (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree) translated from the scales developed by Lee and Sung (2007), which were modified from the original usability scale developed by Davis (1989): "The online comments provided me with various information regarding the issue," "The online comments provided me with useful information," "The online comments broadened my knowledge about the issue," "The online comments helped me to better understand the issue," "The online comments were worth reading," and "The online comments provided me with new information" ($\alpha=.90$).

Perceived similarity

Perceived similarity was assessed using four seven-point Likert scales (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree): "People who posted the online comments that I just read are from a similar social class as mine," "People who posted the online comments that I just read have a similar background to mine," "People who posted the online comments

that I just read are similar to me,” and “People who posted the online comments that I just read have a lot in common with me” ($\alpha=.88$) (McCroskey, McCroskey & Richmond, 2006).

Perceived attitude change

The perceived attitude change was measured with a seven-point semantic scale (disagree/agree) for responses to “The online comments that I just read have affected my attitude toward the company.”

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Out of more than 400 students, only 373 college students finished the two studies successfully. In order to analyze the collected data, the SPSS program was used. The data set contained a total of 373 cases. This chapter consists of two sections. First, descriptive statistics about the participants of this study are discussed. Second, the hypothesis and the research questions are addressed, using the ANOVA analysis and regression analysis.

Profile of the Sample

All participants in this study were college students at the University of Florida. Among the total 373 participants, 238 (64.1%) were females and 134 (35.9%) were males (see Table 4-1). The vast majority of the participants were undergraduate students (99.2%) while the rest were graduate students. Among the undergraduate students, 61 participants (16.4%) were freshmen, 118 (31.6%) were sophomores, 123 (33%) were juniors, 68 (18.2%) were seniors or post-baccalaureates. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 29 with a mean age of 20.12 years old.

The 373 participants were assigned to one of the three groups (prior negative attitude, prior neutral attitude, prior positive attitude) according to their prior attitude toward the company McDonald's. The prior attitude was measured two weeks before the experiment with four seven-point semantic scales: Unfavorable/Favorable, Bad/Good, Dislike/Like and Negative/Positive. The four scale points of each participant were added, which ranged from 4 to 28. Participants within 4-11 points were assigned to the prior negative attitude group (N=106), participants with 12-20 points were assigned to the prior neutral attitude group (N=152) and participants with 21-27 points

were assigned to the prior positive attitude group (N=115). Within the group, they were randomly assigned to one of four different comments type conditions: negative, positive, two-sided or no comments (see Table 4-2). Thus, a total of 12 attitude-condition groups (Prior attitude group × Type of online comments) was generated. The number of participants in the each attitude-condition group ranged from 25 to 38. All participants signed an informed consent form before the experiment and were given class credit for their participation.

Table 4-1. Demographic profile of participants

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender		
Female	239	64.1
Male	134	35.9
Total	373	100
Age		
18-25	367	98.4
26-29	6	1.6
Total	373	100
Education Level		
Freshman	61	16.4
Sophomore	118	31.6
Junior	123	33.0
Senior or post-baccalaureate	68	18.2
Graduate Student	3	0.8
Total	373	100

Table 4-2. Number of participants in each cell

		Type of Comment				Total
		Positive	Negative	Two-sided	None	
Prior Attitude	Negative	25	27	28	26	106
	Neutral	38	38	38	38	152
	Positive	28	25	32	30	115
	Total	91	90	98	94	373

General Use of Online Comments

The survey regarding the participants' general use of online comments shows that reading online comments is a very common activity. Of the 373 participants, 252 participants (67.6%) read online comments more than once per month; while 54 participants (14.5%) read online comments daily (see Figure 4-1). However, posting online comments was not a very common activity, as only 96 of 373 participants (25.8%) reported posting online comments more than once per month. When asked for the three websites on which they most frequently read online comments, participants clearly favored the video-sharing website YouTube (24.4%) and the social networking website Facebook (21%), followed by ESPN (4.6%), Twitter (2.7%), gossip blog PerezHilton (2.6%) and Yahoo News (2.6%). Facebook (40.2%) was also the website on which participants reported posting online comments most frequently, followed by YouTube (14.9%), Twitter (4.4%), ESPN (2.7%), Myspace (2.4%) and e-learning (2.0%), the university online education tool.

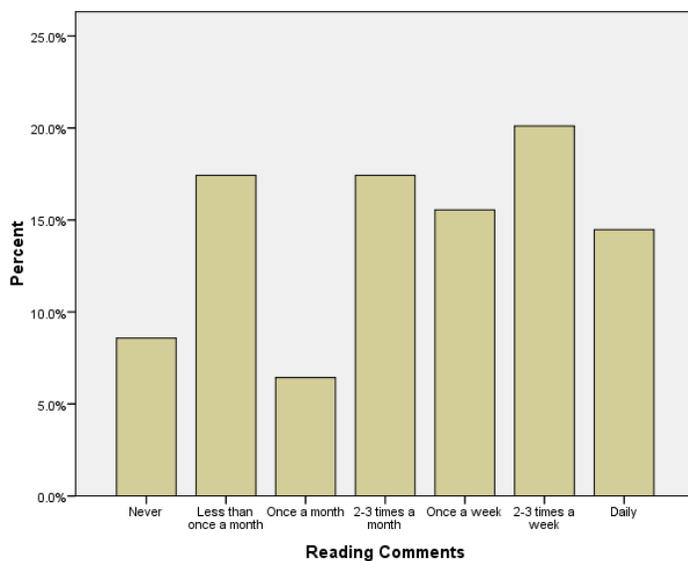


Figure 4-1. General usage of online comments (Reading comments)

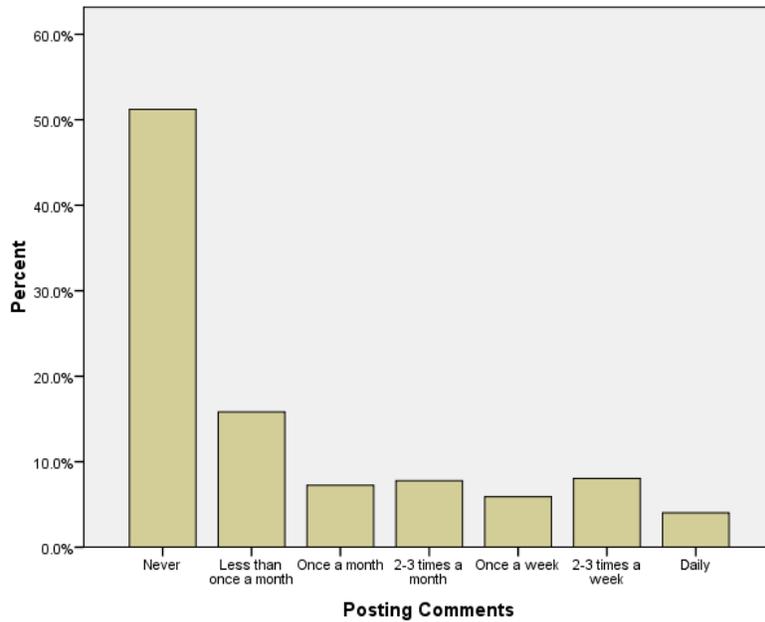


Figure 4-2. General usage of online comments (Posting comments)

Manipulation Checks

Random Assignment

Subjects were separated into three prior attitude groups (negative vs. neutral vs. positive) based upon their prior attitude toward the company, and within the group they were then randomly assigned to one of the four different types of comment conditions (positive vs. negative vs. two-sided vs. none). The ANOVA test was run with type of online comments as the independent variable and the prior attitude as the dependent variable to measure if random assignment was successful. Results showed that type of online comments had no significant effect on the prior attitude which supported the success of random assignment, $F(3, 369) = 0.58, p < .1$.

Type of Comment

The manipulation check for the different types of comments showed an acceptable level of manipulation. The participants were asked to rate their opinions toward the comments they had just read during the experiment using a seven-point Likert scale:

negative/positive. The group reading positive comments rated the comments as very positive (mean= 6.34, SD=1.231), the group reading negative comments rated the comments as very negative (mean=1.64, SD=1.065) and the group reading two-sided comments rated the comments as slightly positive (mean=4.9, SD=1.475).

The Impact of the Video Material

As expected, participants considered the video to be very negative toward the company (mean=1.73, N=373, s=1.023) when asked to rate their opinion toward the video through a seven-point Likert scale (negative-positive).

Reliability Check for Dependent Measures

All items for the dependent variable were averaged in this current study. There should be high internal reliability in order to average the items. Therefore, the reliability analysis was run for each dependent variable, including attitude toward company, perceived reputation of the company, perceived credibility of the online comments, perceived credibility of the people who posted the online comments, perceived usability, and perceived similarity. Past studies suggested that reliability coefficients over .90 are “excellent,” over .80 as “very good,” and over .70 as “adequate” (Kline, 1998).

The results of the reliability analysis showed that the indexes of the variable used for this study had a high internal reliability. Table 4-3 illustrates the Cronbach’s alpha for each scale. Each scale surpassed .80, indicating they are appropriate for use in the study.

Table 4-3. Cronbach's Alpha of Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude toward the company	.96.
Reputation	.84
Perceived usability K	.90
Perceived usability	.95
Perceived credibility toward online comments	.88
Perceived credibility toward online comment poster	.92
Perceived similarity	.88

Hypotheses and Research Questions Testing

A two-way independent ANOVA was performed with prior attitude toward the organization and the type of comment as independent variables and the post-video attitude as dependent variable. There was a significant interaction between the prior attitude toward the organization and the type of comment, on one hand, and the post-video attitude toward the organization on the other: $F(6, 361) = 3.710, p < .001$ (Table 4-4). Figure 4-3 shows the sample mean effects of the type of comment on the post-video attitude toward the organization.

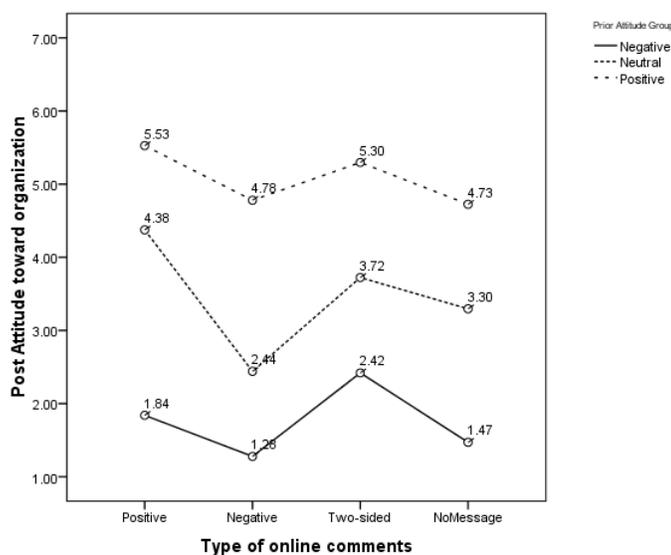


Figure 4-3. Simple main effects of type of online comments on attitude toward organization

Table 4-4. Two-way independent ANOVA results

	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11	60.777	0.000	0.649
Prior Attitude	2	282.082	0.000	0.610
Type of Comment	3	22.353	0.000	0.157
PA*TC	6	3.710	0.001	0.058
Error	361			

To gain a better understanding of the effect of the type of comment on the prior attitude groups, a one-way ANOVA was performed within the three different prior attitude groups with the type of comments as the independent variable and the post-video attitude as the dependent variable.

Group with a Prior Negative Attitude Toward the Organization

The results showed that the type of online comment had a significant effect on the post-video attitude for the group with a prior negative attitude toward the organization: $F(3, 102) = 13.164, p < .001$. To examine the effects of the different online comments, Scheffe post-hoc tests were performed (Table 4-5) to compare the different type of comments groups with the control group. The tests showed that only the post-video attitude mean score for the two-sided comments group was significantly higher than that of the no comments group. Compared to the post-video attitude mean score (ranging from 1 to 7) of participants in the control group who did not read any online comments (mean=1.47, SD=0.12), the mean score of the subjects who were exposed to negative comments was lower (mean=1.28, SD=0.48), and the mean score of the subjects who were exposed to positive comments was higher (mean=1.84, SD=0.76). The post-video attitude mean score of the subjects who were exposed to two-sided comments was the highest (M=2.42, SD=0.18).

Table 4-5. Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior negative attitude group)

	Mean Difference of post-attitude toward company (I-J)			
	Positive (J)	Negative	Two-sided	No comment
Positive (I)	0.56		-0.58*	0.37
Negative			-1.14*	-0.14
Two-sided				0.95*
No comment				

Note. 1. Scheffe post-hoc was performed. 2. * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Group with a Prior Neutral Attitude Toward the Organization

Again, the results of the ANOVA test showed that the type of online comments had a significant effect on the post-video attitude for this group: $F(3, 148) = 23.168, p < .001$. The Scheffe post-hoc test (Table 4-6) revealed that the post-video attitude mean score for the positive comments group was significantly higher than that of the no comments group. In addition, the post-video attitude mean score for the negative group was significantly lower than that of the no comments group. Compared to the post-video attitude mean score of the no comment group (mean=3.30, SD=0.92), the mean score of the negative comment group was lower (mean=2.44, SD=0.89), the mean score of the two-sided comment group was higher (mean=3.72, SD=1.12) and the mean score of the positive group was the highest (mean=4.38, SD=1.13).

Table 4-6. Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior neutral group)

	Mean Difference of post-attitude toward company (I-J)			
	Positive (J)	Negative	Two-sided	No comment
Positive (I)	1.93*		0.65	1.07*
Negative			-1.28*	-0.86*
Two-sided				0.43
No comment				

Note. 1. Scheffe post-hoc was performed. 2. * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Group with a Prior Positive Attitude Toward the Organization

Again, the results of the ANOVA test showed that the type of online comments had a significant effect on the post-video attitude for this group, $F(3, 111) = 2.753, p < .05$. Compared to the post-video attitude mean score of no comment group (mean=4.72, SD=1.50), the mean score of the negative comment group was almost the same (mean=4.78, SD=1.18), the mean score of the two-sided comment group was a bit higher (mean=5.30, SD=1.13) and the mean score of the positive group was a bit higher yet (mean=5.53, SD=1.18). However, the Scheffe post-hoc test (Table 4-7) revealed that the difference in the post-video attitude mean scores of the groups was insignificant.

Table 4-7. Multiple comparison of mean difference of post-attitude toward company persuasiveness (prior positive group)

	Mean Difference of post-attitude toward company (I-J)			
	Positive (J)	Negative	Two-sided	No comment
Positive (I)		0.75	0.23	0.80
Negative			-0.52	0.56
Two-sided				0.57
No comment				

Note. 1. Scheffe post-hoc was performed. 2. * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

According to the post hoc tests, the prior neutral attitude group was significantly affected by negative comments while the prior positive attitude group was not. Therefore, H1 was supported. Similarly, the prior neutral attitude group was significantly affected by positive comments while the prior negative attitude group was not. Therefore, H2 was also supported. Finally, for the prior negative attitude group, the two-sided comments were significantly more effective than the positive comments. Thus, H3 was also supported.

Test of Research Question

Multiple regression was performed to examine which factors are influential. As shown in Table 4-8, perceived usability, similarity and credibility all significantly influence attitude change, ($F=36.35$, $df=3, 275$, $p<.001$). However, when each variable was examined, perceived usability was the only factor that was significantly influential on perceived attitude change ($t=8.911$, $p<.001$). The other two variables were insignificant.

Table 4-8. The relationship between perceived usability, perceived credibility, perceived similarity and perceived attitude change

	Perceived attitude change (beta)	t	Sig.	df	F	R Square
Perceived usability	0.508	8.912	0.000	3, 275	36.352	0.284
Perceived credibility	0.032	0.552	0.581			
Perceived similarity	0.043	0.822	0.412			

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

This study examines whether online comments posted below a negative video have an effect on people's attitude toward an organization based on their previous attitudes toward that organization. The study also examines what factors related to online comments most influence attitude change.

The findings indicate that online comments have a significant effect on people's attitude toward an organization, although the effects differ significantly based upon their prior attitudes toward the organization. People who have a neutral attitude toward the organization are most affected by negative or positive online comments, and people who have a prior negative attitude toward the organization are more affected by two-sided online comments than by positive comments.

The results show that perceived usability of the comments was more influential factor in people's attitude change than perceived similarity or perceived credibility of the people who posted them. It is often difficult to determine the identity of an individual who posts an online comments, so similarity or credibility is difficult to evaluate. Therefore, it is reasonable that usability is the most influential factor.

Implications

Many studies concerning congruity theory of biased assimilation were conducted in regards to attitudes toward social issues or political campaigns, but not to attitudes toward organizations. This study showed that those theories could also explain attitude toward organizations. People with strong attitudes tend to change their attitudes less than people with neutral attitudes when exposed to belief-inconsistent arguments.

However, the results of the pretests showed that people tend to have less extreme attitudes toward organizations than to social or political issues. In fact, among the ten organizations in the pre-study, most of the organizations were rated as neutral from the participants when asked their attitude toward the organization. The company McDonald's was selected since people had a wide range of attitude toward the company that was appropriate enough to divide them into three different attitude groups. The fact that people have a more neutral attitude toward organizations means that attitudes toward organizations could be more vulnerable compared to attitudes toward social or political issues. This could also indicate that online comments in general could be more effective to change attitudes toward organizations than attitudes toward social or political issues.

Although results of past studies concerning message sidedness were controversial, this study supported the message sidedness effect. The refutational two-sided message that included arguments from both positive and negative side, but emphasized the positive side more, was especially effective in changing attitudes of people who initially disliked the organization.

For practical purposes, this study provides some important implications. Previous studies on online comments found out that they were effective in influencing people's attitude toward organizations (Park & Lee, 2007) but they did not consider people's initial attitudes toward the organization. The current study also supported the effect of online comments on changing people's attitude toward an organization. Additionally, the study revealed that initial attitude toward an organization is a very important variable. The results of the study suggest that practitioners should not only continue to observe

and care for online comments, but also to approach with different strategies to different groups. For example, if a practitioner represents an organization that is not well-known or has a more neutral attitude among people, extra care should be taken to online comments. Additionally, the study suggests that different types of messages could be more effective in dealing different attitude groups. For example, for a group that has negative opinions about the organization, conveying two-sided messages, rather than one-sided messages, could be more effective in changing their opinions.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has some limitations. The experiment was conducted with one company, the fast food chain restaurant McDonald's. It was selected through the pre-study since it was the organization that participants showed a wide range of attitudes toward that was needed to identify the different prior attitude groups. Since the company is concentrated in one business sector which is the food industry, to generalize the results of the current study to every organization, it would have been preferred if other organizations in different business sectors were additionally considered.

The study's limitations include the experiment's exposing each participant to only one type of comment (positive, negative, two-sided or none), while in reality it is rare to see only one type of message posted; usually, positive, negative, two-sided, and very random messages such as meaningless emoticons are posted together. The experiment would also have been more realistic if participants were not asked to read the comments since some people read comments and some do not.

While the study confirmed that online comments have a significant effect on people's attitude toward an organization, it does not intend to encourage inappropriate or misleading practices by practitioners. Past research has shown that online reviews

and online comments can affect consumer attitudes toward a product or a service, but these findings have tempted some practitioners to use online comments in the wrong way by planting fake online reviews or comments to improve their product or organization's image. However, according to a survey conducted by Burson-Marsteller (2007), a public relations company, consumers are becoming more suspicious about online reviews. Forty-eight percent of 150 online opinion leaders surveyed stated that they believe there is commercial activity on opinion web sites, which is nine percent higher than the finding from 2001. Moreover, 57 percent of them are less likely to purchase a product when they suspect a paid professional has left biased comments on an opinion web site.

Online reviews and comments are a revolutionary phenomenon that was not possible in the past. They are written voluntarily and are mostly interactive, the perfect example of a two-way communication. In these reviews and comments, people share information and views about products or services and discuss their problems or concerns without restriction. Therefore, the results of the Burson-Marsteller survey that people are becoming more suspicious of online comments, is causing much concern about the integrity of online comments for the future. Cases such as the fake Walmart blog case (Craig, 2007; Gogoi, 2006a; Gogoi, 2006b) also show that dishonest public relations practices also contribute to increasing mistrust of online reviews and comments.

Academicians and practitioners must devise ways to execute online management without violating ethics, like the code of ethics of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association. The history of online reviews and comments is brief and is in transition, so

it is a time when academicians and practitioners have great responsibility either to help elevate the advantages of online comments and reviews or to elevate the mistrust of some consumers and render such comments and reviews pointless.

APPENDIX A YOUTUBE WEBSITE USED FOR THE EXPERIMENT



MC-the truth2

92Rbgreen 1 videos



92Rbgreen — February 14, 2010 — *no description available*

135
views

MrKenrilee I haven't been to a McDonald's for at least 6 months and I don't plan to go back there anytime soon. Their artery-clogging, sugar overloaded food is just disgusting. Yuk, everyone should steer clear of them. Seriously, especially parents should not feed their children these kind of food!!

markus8099 Those McDonalds french fries are impregnated with artificial oil, and yes, it's not good for the body. Just think how hard your body has to work to break those fries down. You never really break some components of that oil down.

yummfrodo Gosh, there is definitely something wrong with the fries. People need to realize it's not just potatoes, oil, and salt in those fries because I'm pretty sure the other non-McDonald's fries had those ingredients and it still got molded up pretty fast.

mountain01011 I think the point is that the amount of preservatives that go into McDonalds french fries is seriously excessive and unhealthy. Imagine the problems you'd get eating them on a regular basis and how your body would react to all that.

jenrodgers1 Have you ever wondered that even after years and years of inflation, with the prices of everything going up and all, McDonald's can still sell you the same food at around the same price it's always been years ago? Makes you wonder what they are substituting into the food to keep selling it to you for 99 cents.

- ransom (fres AxCeL Mc**
120 views
rantom05 1:34
- pink panther**
6 views
MCtheBASSER 0:59
- Britney Spea No Satisfact**
7 views
MCtheGIRL 4:48
- M.C The Max Chazaseo(A**
4,376 views
mintwiner 4:16
- M.C the Max Cannot Go C**
92,450 views
SMarie7 4:43
- KRS-One - T**
62,522 views
The900Number 3:17
- McKids - The Nerd**
2,146,524 views
JamesNintendof 7:07
- Young MC - I**
181,732 views
deliciousvinyt 4:19
- MC Lyte ft. I Cold Rock TI**
137,528 views
MekamR0809 4:08
- McCain-Palin CAIN-Palin w**
3,008,954 views
LisaNova 3:22
- U Can't Touc Hammer**
7,068,942 views
BWFboy2008 1:58
- MC Yogi: Ob for Hope**
404,325 views
moyogimuslc 3:28
- MC Frontalot**
338,062 views
tutot 5:03
- MC Rove**
473,009 views
Jaf0232 1:47
- Mc Burberry**
13,382 views
burb3rmy03ats 5:13
- KRS-One vs the BFFF D**

APPENDIX B
THE LIST OF ONLINE COMMENTS USED

Positive Online Comments

mountain01011

McDonalds fries are? very tasty. I like eating them and this video hasnt changed my mind. The reason why their fries have not molded up is because of the way the fries are deep fried that sterilizes them. And a humans stomach is definitely different from an empty jar. 1 month ago

92Rbgreen

Yeah, if there is something wrong with the fries, the FDA would have said something. I am just over the crap that they say about fast food. McDonalds is one of the biggest fast food chain that creates a lot of jobs and money for America and gives back to the community.? 1 month ago

markus8099

What a waste of time and food. Read the book "McDonalds: The company that changed the way to doing business" by John F. Love. It shows that all processes involved in the production of McDonalds is high quality standard and safe. The food is what it is:? fast, cheap, and tasty. 1 month ago

yummfrodo

McDonalds is the best! I eat at McDonalds and I am in great shape. There is nothing wrong with 100%? American beef and some french fries. And our body contains enzymes that break down food like French fries. There was nothing in that jar! 1 month ago

jenrodgers1

I dont care what happens to the food if you put it in a jar. Most people eat what they order from McDonald's close to when they get it. If you are so freaked out about their fries then? don't eat them, leaves more for the rest of us who still like them.

Negative Online Comments

MrKenrilee

I haven't been to a McDonald's for at least 6 months and I don't plan to go back there anytime? soon. Their artery-clogging, sugar overloaded food is just disgusting. Yuk, everyone should steer clear of them. Seriously, especially parents should not feed their children these kind of food!! 1 month ago

markus8099

Those McDonalds french fries are impregnated with? artificial oil, and yes, it's not good for the body. Just think how hard your body has to work to break those fries down. You never really break some components of that oil down. 1 month ago

yummfrodo

Gosh, there is definitely something wrong with? the fries. People need to realize it's not just potatoes, oil, and salt in those fries because I'm pretty sure the other non-McDonald's fries had those ingredients and it still got molded up pretty fast. 1 month ago

mountain01011

I think the point is that the amount of preservatives? that go into McDonalds french fries is seriously excessive and unhealthy. Imagine the problems you'd get eating them on a regular basis and how your body would react to all that. 1 month ago

jenrodgers1

Have you? ever wondered that even after years and years of inflation, with the prices of everything going up and all, McDonald's can still sell you the same food at around the same price it's always been years ago? Makes you wonder what they are substituting into the food to keep selling it to you for 99 cents.

Two-sided Comments

92Rbgreen

People say that McDonalds is bad and unhealthy. And I agree in a sense. But I dont think that McDonalds is much healthier than other restaurants.? I eat Mcdonalds almost every week and I am fit. I dont think it is the food that makes people fat. It is rather the metabolism and their lifestyle. 1 month ago

MrKenrilee

I really dont like fast food and prefer healthier foods. But if there should be something wrong with the fries, the FDA would have said something. There are so many other foods that are healthier.? At least, McDonalds creates a lot of jobs and money for America and gives back to the community. 1 month ago

mountain01011

Yes, it looks disgusting and maybe they put something to preserve it longer. But really, do u think mcdonalds really re-uses like 3? month old fries? I dont think so. I get my fries warm, i look at them being fried, who cares if its disgusting after 2 weeks in the jar? The fries are good and i like them. 1 month ago

markus8099

Ok, maybe the? Mcfries are not the healthiest food on the planet, but putting them in a jar doesnt prove anything. FFS, our body contains enzymes that break down food like french fries, so why not put some enzymes in the jar so it can replicate human biology? This is such a pathetic experiment. 1 month ago

yummfrodo

Pretty lame. First of all, everybody in their right mind knows that McDonalds is not the most healthiest food. Duh! But I would? say that a human stomach acts much differently than a glass jar that's not even air-tight. The body will break down the food just fine. There are so many other foods that are worse than this. Trust me.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Agence France-Presse. (2009). South Korea tops in broadband penetration: study.
http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hKfY15Soi2yIu__gC6-lvdDHxt6w
- Allen, M. (1991). Meta-Analysis comparing the persuasiveness of one-sided and two-sided messages. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 55(4), 390-404.
- Asch, S. E. (1951). Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments. *Groups, Leadership and Men*, 177-190.
- Bohner, G., Einwiller, S., Herb, H. P., Siebler, F. (2003). When small means comfortable: Relations between product attributes in two-sided advertising. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13, 454-463
- Burson-Marsteller. (2007). New Survey Reveals E-Fluentials' Cynical About Commercial Activity on Consumer Web Sites. <http://www.burson-marsteller.com/newsroom/lists/PressReleases/DispForm.aspx?ID=675&nodename=Press%20Releases%20Archive&subTitle=New%20Survey%20Reveals%20E-Fluentials'%20Cynical%20About%20Commercial%20Activity%20on%20Consumer%20Web%20Sites>
- Buunk, G., Collins, R., Taylor, S., VanYperen, N., Dakof, G. (1990). The affective consequences of social comparison: Either direction has its ups and downs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59 (6).
- Chatterjee, P. (2001, January). Online Reviews: Do consumers use them? *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28(1), 129-133.
- Cosley, D., Lam, S. K., Konstan, J. A., Riedl, J. (2003). Is seeing believing? How recommender interfaces affect users' opinions. *CHI 2003. April 5-10. Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, USA*.
- Dellarocas, C. (2003, October). The digitization of word of mouth: Promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. *Management Science*, 49(10), 1407-1424.
- Edwards, K., & Smith, E. E. (1996). A disconfirmation bias in the evaluation of arguments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 5-24.
- Elliott, K. M. (2002). Understanding consumer-to-consumer influence on the web. *Doctoral Dissertation, Duke University*.

- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7, 117-140.
- Fischer, P., Greitemeyer, T., & Frey, D. (2008). Self-regulation and selective exposure: The impact of depleted self-regulation resources on confirmatory information processing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(3), 382-395.
- Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2004). Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth Communication. *Marketing Science*, 23(4), 545-560.
- Gogoi, P. (2006, October 8). Wal-Mart's Jim and Laura: The real story. *Business Week Online*. Retrieved December 20, 2006, from http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061009_579137.htm
- Golden, L., & Alpert, M. (1987). Comparative analysis of the relative effectiveness of one- and two-sided communication for contrasting products. *Journal of Advertising*, 16(1), 18-68.
- Greitemeyer, T., Fischer, P., Frey, D., & Schultz-Hardt, S. (2008). Biased assimilation: the role of source position. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 39 (1), 22-39.
- Hovland, C. I., Lumsdaine, A. A., & Sheffield, F. D. (1949). Experiments on mass communication. *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press*.
- Hynd, C. R. (2001). Refutational texts and the change process. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35, 699–714.
- Kim, J. (2007, 2007 Annual Meeting). Effects of message sidedness, corporate goodwill, and trustworthiness in weblogs: An experimental test of alternative public relations message strategies. *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association*.
- Lalley, H. (2009). Tweet for hire: More big businesses hire tweeters. *Associated Press*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory?id=8474352>
- Lee, J., Lee, M. (2008). Research on factors affecting the effects of reading replies. *Korea Association for Communication and Information Studies*, 42, 249-279.
- Lee, J., Sung, M. (2007). The effects of reading replies on the perception of online news articles. *The Korean journal of advertising and public relations*, 9-4, 7-44.

- Lin, S., Lim, J., Kioussis, S., & Ferguson, M. (2006). The effect of message sidedness on CSR perceptions and company evaluations. *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association*.
- Lord, C. G., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1979). Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 2098-2109.
- Lutz, R. J. (1975). Changing brand attitudes through modification of cognitive structure. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4, 49-59.
- MacKenzie, S. B., & Lutz, R. J. (1989). An empirical examination of the structural antecedents of attitude toward the Ad in an advertising pretesting context. *Journal of Marketing*, 53, 48-65.
- McCroskey, McCroskey & Richmond (2006). Analysis and improvement of the measurement of interpersonal attraction and homophily. *Communication Quarterly*, 54 (1), 1-31.
- McHoskey, J. W. (1995). Case closed? On the John F. Kennedy Assassination: Biased assimilation of evidence and attitude polarization. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 17, 395-409.
- Munro, G. D., & Ditto, P. H. (1997). Biased assimilation, attitude polarization, and affect in the processing of stereotype-relevant scientific information. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 636-653.
- Munro, G. D., Ditto, P. H., Lockhart, L. K., Fagerlin, A., Gready, M., & Peterson, E. (2002). Biased assimilation of sociopolitical arguments: Evaluating the 1996 U.S. presidential debate. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 15-26.
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorser's perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19 (3), 39-52.
- Osgood, C. E., Tannenbaum, P.H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological Review*, 62 (1), 42-55.
- Park, N., Lee, K. M. (2007). Effects of online news forum on corporate reputation. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 346-348.
- Peters, H. P. (2000). The committed are hard to persuade. Recipients' thoughts during exposure to newspaper and TV stories on genetic engineering and their effect on attitudes. *New Genetics and Society*, 19 (3).

- Pomerantz, E. M., Chaiken, S., & Tordesillas, R. S. (1995). Attitude strength and resistance processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 408-419.
- Plous, S. (1991). Biases in the assimilation of technological breakdowns: Do accidents make us safer? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 1058-1082.
- Steinfeld, C. W. (1986). Computer-mediated communication in an organizational setting: Explaining task-related and socio-emotional uses. In M. I. McLaughlin (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook*, 9 (pp. 777-804). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stone, B., Richtel, M. (2007). The hand that controls the sock puppet could get slapped. *New York Times*,
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/16/technology/16blog.html>.
- Tannenbaum, P. H. (1956). Initial attitude toward source and concept as factors in attitude change through communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 20, 414-425.
- The Nielsen Company. (2007). Word-of-mouth the most powerful selling tool: Nielsen Global Survey.
<http://asiapacific.acnielsen.com/news/20071002.shtml>
- Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90. 245-271
- Wong, W. (2009). Marketers go 2-way with social networking. *Chicago Tribune*.
<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2009/feb/03/business/chi-tue-social-media-marketing-feb03>
- Yang, H. (2008). The effects of the opinion and quality of user postings on internet news readers' attitude toward the news issue. *Korean Journal of Journalism & Communications Studies*, 52(2), 254-281.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kang Hoon Sung was born in South Korea. He graduated from Korea University in 2006, earning a B.A. in English Language and Literature. After graduation, he worked as a Public Relations consultant at News Communications and worked with leading multinational corporations such as Boeing, MasterCard, Outback Steakhouse and JP Morgan Asset Management.

He completed his Master of Arts in Mass Communication at University of Florida in 2010 and plans to begin his doctoral study in 2010 fall semester.