

Impact of Mobility and Timing on User-Generated Content¹

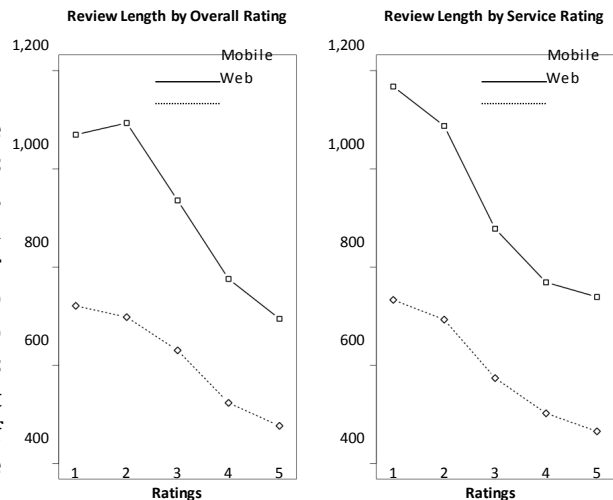
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Executive Summary

Online reviews of services and products are increasingly posted via mobile devices rather than a website. Our research shows that opinions posted via mobile devices are more timely, shorter, more “to the point” and more negative than web reviews. Moreover, more positive reviews are on average shorter than negative reviews. We arrived at these conclusions by analyzing all reviews posted in 2012 on a leading online review platform for travel products relating to the 25 largest U.S. markets (n=293,945). From this data we extracted matched samples of all reviews posted via mobile devices (30,540) and via the web interface (38,248) for the same product on the same day. Reviewers gave both an overall rating for the provider and for the service on a scale of 1 (extremely poor) to 5 (extremely good).

Reviews Posted via Mobile Devices Are Shorter

We found that reviewers posting via the website use, on average, 41.3% more text than mobile users (790 characters compared with 543 characters). We also found that, on average, the same individual writes 33.5% more text when using the web rather than the mobile opinion platform. There were also linguistic differences in reviews posted via the two platforms. Reviews posted from mobile devices use less punctuation and more abbreviations, but paradoxically had fewer misspellings (because of autocorrect features on mobiles). They also use more direct language.



Reviews from Mobile Devices are Posted Earlier

We found that those who post reviews from mobile devices are 2.46 times more likely to contribute their comments on the same day as the service encounter compared to those using the website. Conversely, individuals commenting in the months following the service encounter are 1.38 times more likely to do so via the web-based review system. These findings indicate that the portability and accessibility of mobile devices enables individuals to contribute their opinions closer in time to the service encounter. This is both a blessing and a curse for service providers. A shorter elapsed time from experience to review should increase the factual accuracy of the opinions. But the ability to post reviews soon after the service encounter may stimulate emotional and impulsive responses.

¹ The full article is published in the September 2014 issue of *MIS Quarterly Executive*, available online at www.misqe.org.

Reviews Posted from Mobile Devices Are More Negative

Reviews posted via mobile devices have a greater relative occurrence of negative ratings and a lower relative occurrence of positive evaluations than those posted via the web. Customers posting their commentary through the mobile platform select the worst evaluation proportionally 1.66 times more often for their overall rating and 2.02 times more often for their rating of service. Furthermore, reviews written through the mobile platform are consistently more negative than web-based reviews regardless of the timing of their submissions. However, such reviews posted on the same day as service have the highest proportion of extreme negative ratings.

Guidelines for Managing Reputation When More Opinions Are Posted via Mobile Devices

The reputations of companies, products and people are increasingly built and destroyed online, and more and more opinions will be posted via mobile devices. The always-on availability of mobile devices enables an unprecedented level of real-time access to individuals who can, as a consequence, register their impressions and sensations emotionally and impulsively. We provide four guidelines for recognizing the opportunities and proactively adjusting to the characteristics of opinions posted via mobile devices.

1. Manage the Essential Nature of Reviews Posted via Mobile Devices. Because people use a third less text when writing through a mobile device, they tend to address only the core elements of their experience—whether positive or negative. Managers should look for ways to stimulate positive reviews in response to the “essential” nature of negative reviews—perhaps by pointing the reader of a review to the content of lengthier positive reviews provided by others.

2. Recognize the Triggered Nature of Mobile-Posted Reviews. The anytime, anywhere availability of mobile devices enables customers to contribute their opinions in response to triggers, such as a rude response by an employee or a delay in the service. Or the trigger could be a delayed event—for example, a friend asking about the experience. These triggers may cause individuals to post a review emotionally and impulsively. A better understanding of the triggering mechanisms may identify practices for stimulating positive reviews.

3. Proactively Manage Communication Channels. One approach to limiting the impulsiveness, and consequent negative bias, of reviews posted via mobile platforms could be to prohibit anonymous reviewing from mobile devices. Such devices are generally associated with one user and therefore uniquely addressable, making seamless authentication feasible. It may be almost impossible to prevent customers from grabbing their mobile phone to vent their frustration by posting a negative review in the heat of the moment. Managers should seek to mitigate the need for customers to post negative reviews by creating a climate that welcomes and encourages feedback and empowers employees to redress the situation immediately.

4. Monitor for Early Signs of Customer Dissatisfaction. The always on, always available nature of mobile devices enables customers to post reviews anytime, anywhere, creating flows of real-time digital content that we call “digital data streams.” As digital data streams proliferate, their savvy use by organizations may help to counter the loss of control over digital conversations. Many social networks are accessed largely via mobile devices, and thus offer organizations an opportunity to tap into a real-time flow of opinions that can serve as an early warning signal for more permanent negative reviews.

In conclusion, the way in which people post reviews is shifting away from carefully crafting text and using a formal tone to increasingly using mobile devices while multitasking on-the-go. More importantly than the linguistic differences of such reviews, people seem to change what they say, not just how they say it; there is a greater prevalence of negative reviews posted via mobile platforms. Organizations that fail to understand the changing nature of user-generated content in the emerging era of ubiquitous mobile computing do so at their own peril. But those that proactively tap into and respond to these emerging conversations stand to reap the benefits by preparing for the unavoidable new world of continuous digital conversations.