

**ROLE OF E-WOM IN THE CONTEXT OF LONG TAIL: A STUDY OF REVIEW  
CHARACTERISTICS & SEQUENCE INFORMATION**



सिद्धिमूलं प्रबन्धनम्  
भा. प्र. सं. इन्दौर  
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AARUSHI JAIN [2017FPM01]

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THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PROF. RAJHANS MISHRA

[CHAIRPERSON]

PROF. ABHISHEK MISHRA

[MEMBER]

PROF. MUKUL GUPTA

[MEMBER]

## ABSTRACT

The advent of the internet has made online shopping more accessible as people can quickly obtain product information online using various online channels. The consumer refers to online consumer reviews to get information about the product to form a quick general impression. Therefore, the primary source to gather product information from the consumers is eWOM (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Central e-commerce platforms like Amazon allow users to express their opinions and experiences about the product through online consumer reviews. These reviews are vital in enhancing consumer purchase decisions and impacting product sales. Various products are available online Ghose and Iperiotis (2011). The products have been categorized into mainstream products (hit) and niche (non-hit) products in the online settings.

Furthermore, due to the emergence of eWOM and the availability of the internet, consumers obtain product information and discover product quality through online reviews. The consumers review the product based on two categories, i.e., subjectively reviewing the product and objectively reviewing the product. The advantages of the internet have made the consumers prefer their choice of products more, leading to the shift in the demand from mainstream products to niche products. This has led to the facilitation of the long tail phenomenon (Anderson, 2004). The review characteristics also play an essential role in forming the long tail (Wang & Wang, 2020).

Therefore, in this thesis, for the product categorization, we propose a new type of product categorization based on the objectivity and subjectivity of the product evaluation standards. The mainstream and niche products have mixed definitions by authors. For instance, Meisberg (2016) defines mainstream products as “the products well known to the consumers” & niche products as “the products which have fewer ratings and scarce information.” (Ghose

& Iperiotis, 2011) defined the experience goods and search goods as the goods “in which the reviewers give a very personal description of the product, and give information that typically does not appear in the official description of the product” & the goods in which “listing the characteristics of the product, and giving an alternative product description that confirms (or rejects) the description given by the supplier” respectively. On the review characteristics front, the online consumer review data have various review dimensions, which have been known to impact product sales. The dimensions of the review data include volume, valence, and polarity of reviews.

Along with these review data dimensions, we are adding the fourth dimension, i.e., the sequence of reviews. The review sequence has hardly been explored in the literature and plays an essential role in forming the purchase-related decision, leading to sales of a product within a product category. Hence, we argue that the review sequence would also impact the long tail curve for different product categories, which we will examine in this thesis. For the long tail validation, the power-law distribution has been utilized to demonstrate the existence of the long tail in this work.

The results for this thesis are conflicting regarding the characteristics of online reviews for both the product categories and the product types. We found that the rich get richer effect still holds dominance in the e-commerce platform. Likewise, for the review characteristics, we found that consumers prefer the mainstream products in the online platforms more than the niche products. Furthermore, when the reviews are more objectively evaluated, the consumers prefer such products more, leading to the inhibition of the long tail formation. The findings of this thesis could have resembled the interpretation of Olmedilla et al., (2019). The results might indicate that the vendors could adopt alternative product strategies depending upon the product category, mainstream (experiential or search), and niche (experiential or search). From the aspect of review sequence, the primacy effect prevails while making a

purchase decision than the recency effect. Consumers make a related purchase decision while reviewing the initial reviews for the mainstream products. The niche products do not dominate the online platform Amazon, leading to the inhibition of the long tail phenomenon.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

## **ABSTRACT**

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Overview
- 1.2 Long tail & its importance in business
  - 1.2.1 The anatomy of the long tail
  - 1.2.2 The success of long-tail in business
- 1.3 Drivers of Long Tail: Supply & Demand-side drivers
- 1.4 Motivation for the study and the research objective
- 1.5 Thesis Outline

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

- 2.1 Literature review process & Background Work
- 2.2 Overview of the Long Tail
- 2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)
- 2.4 The emergence of eWOM communities
- 2.5 The linkage of online reviews and the long tail phenomenon
- 2.6 Online Review characteristics
  - 2.6.1 Volume of Reviews (Awareness Effect)
  - 2.6.2 Valence of Reviews (Informative Effect)
  - 2.6.3 Polarity of Reviews
  - 2.6.4 Sequence of Reviews
- 2.7 Product categorization
  - 2.7.1 Mainstream Products
  - 2.7.2 Niche Products
- 2.8 Product Evaluation
  - 2.8.1 Subjective Evaluation Standards
  - 2.8.2 Objective Evaluation Standards
- 2.9 Research Gap
- 2.10 Objective and research questions of the study

## **CHAPTER 3: EXPLAINING POWER LAW FOR MAINSTREAM & NICHE PRODUCTS**

### 3.1 The concept of Power Law distribution

#### 3.1.1 Estimation of the scaling parameter $\alpha$

#### 3.1.2 Estimation of $x_{\min}$

3.2 How long tail distribution follows the power law distribution across different eWOM communities

### 3.3 Fitting Power Law to the gathered data

## **CHAPTER 4: HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPEMENT**

### 4.1 Hypothesis Development

#### 4.1.1 Hypothesis development for Volume

#### 4.1.2 Hypothesis development for Valence

#### 4.1.3 Hypothesis development for Polarity of reviews

#### 4.1.4 Hypothesis development for Sequence of reviews

### 3.4 Summary of proposed hypotheses

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA COLLECTION & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### 5.1 Data web scraping process from Amazon.in platform

### 5.2 Gathering User Generated reviews from Amazon

## **CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### 6.1 Power Law parameters findings

### 6.2 Fitting power law to the gathered data

### 6.3 Hypothesis testing

### 6.4 Results of hypotheses testing

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

### 7.1 Discussion on findings from the study

#### 7.1.1 Theoretical contributions of the study

#### 7.1.2 Managerial Implications

### 7.2 Limitations and future research directions

### 7.3 Conclusions

## **REFERENCES**

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Different eWOM communities
Table 2	Power Law parameters
Table 3	Section structure of Amazon.in platform
Table 4	Summary of review extraction for different products
Table 5	Extraction of total helpful reviews
Table 6	Variable Description for the study
Table 7	Hypothesis 1
Table 8	Multicollinearity H1
Table 9	Hypothesis 2a
Table 10	Multicollinearity H1
Table 11	Hypothesis 2b
Table 12	Multicollinearity H2b
Table 13	Hypothesis H3a
Table 14	Multicollinearity H3a
Table 15	Hypothesis H4
Table 16	Hypothesis H5
Table 17	Summary of Hypothesis (Supported/not supported)

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1 Product Categorization
- Figure 2 Different forces acting on Long Tail (Ullah & Amblee, 2008)
- Figure 3 Long Tail Curve (Anderson, 2004)
- Figure 4 Online Review Characteristics
- Figure 5 Volume of Reviews
- Figure 6 Valence of Reviews
- Figure 7 Positive consumer reviews on Amazon
- Figure 8 Negative consumer reviews on Amazon
- Figure 9 Sequence of reviews on Amazon
- Figure 10 Experiential & Search Goods
- Figure 11 Product Evaluation Standards
- Figure 12 Distribution of reviews for Mainstream products
- Figure 13 Distribution of reviews for Niche products
- Figure 14 Combined graphical representation of Mainstream & Niche products
- Figure 15 Amazon choice products
- Figure 16 Pictorial representations of best seller products in Amazon
- Figure 17 Illustrative snapshot of Octoparse tool
- Figure 18 Workflow demonstrations in Octoparse
- Figure 19 Reviews extraction in Octoparse
- Figure 20 VADER for Sentiment Analysis



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