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## A Study on the Effect of Language Style Matching of a Review and the Whole Reviews on Perceived Customer Review Helpfulness

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**Abstract:** Based on the review data of the Amazon, our research discusses that the effect of language style matching of a review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness and the moderating effect of product type and product brand to the relationship between language style matching of a review and the whole reviews and perceived customer review helpfulness. Our study found: For experience goods and low reputation brand products, the language style matching of a review and the whole review have positive effects on perceived customer review helpfulness. That is: higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness; For search goods and high reputation brand products, the language style matching of a review and the whole review have negative effects on perceived customer review helpfulness. That is: lower language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness;

**Keywords:** Language style matching; The LSM of a review and the whole reviews; LIWC; Perceived customer review helpfulness; Product type; Product brand;

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers are increasingly relying on other people's comments for purchase decision. According to market research, 92% of network consumers read and use web reviews when making purchase decisions. The importance of online reviews has been confirmed by many studies. Studies identify the characteristics and motivations of those who write reviews, including strategic fake reviews written on behalf of organizations and non-strategic deceptive reviews written by individual, non-purchasers<sup>[1]</sup>.

However, in a realistic environment, consumers often face with dozens or even hundreds of online reviews. In such a situation, the problem that which a review or individual review stand out and have the greatest effect on consumer decision making has not been effectively explored in the study of perceived customer review helpfulness.

The existing research about the factors that affect perceived customer review helpfulness mainly focus on three aspects: the characteristics of reviewers research, comment feature of product research, review content research<sup>[2]</sup>. The study found: the identity disclosure more thoroughly, the more the number of reviews posted in the past, the higher the personal reputation, then the higher perceived customer review helpfulness (Friske, Raehler, 2012; Guo Peng Yin, 2014); In addition, product type and product features have significant effects on perceived customer review helpfulness (Ghose, Ipeirotis, 2011; Ya gao, 2010);

Factors that affect perceived customer review helpfulness is review content. Previous studies about review content focus on the basic content features of review rates, review length, review depth, review extremity (SM Mudambi, D Schuff, 2010; Penglan, 2011)<sup>[3][4]</sup>. Although the later research is gradually extended to the features of the language style. The language style is a kind of language style and atmosphere which is characterized by the

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features of language expression under the guidance of subjective and objective factors. In online environment, the process of reading reviews essentially is a language exchange process, just using another form of verbal communication. Therefore, the language style will have an impact on the results of the exchange. The LSM, or degree of synchronization between two conversants in terms of their use of function words, also has behavioral implications (Ireland and Pennebaker 2010)<sup>[5]</sup>. Many studies have proved that in the online communication, language style matching significantly affects the effect of communication between people. Language style matching plays an important role in promoting the success of the negotiation, predicting the relationship between the two parties, promoting the harmony of the group and maintaining the intimate relationship (Taylor, Thomas, 2008; Ireland, Pennebaker ; 2010, Hancock, Pennebaker; 2010; Niederhoffer, Pennebaker ; 2002; Ireland et al; 2011; Gonzales, et al., 2010)<sup>[6]</sup>;

Although existing researches on online reviews have paid attention to the effect of a certain review's own linguistic style on perceived customer review helpfulness, such as the higher the degree of subjectivity, emotional mixing degree and legibility of review, the higher perceived customer review helpfulness (Ghose, Ipeirotis, 2011; Ya gao, 2010), none of them have noticed the effect of language style matching of a specific review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness, which is severely contrast with the reality that each review is embed in the context of all other reviews as a whole. So, whether a review should be more matched with the whole reviews or more unique with the whole reviews in the language style in order to be perceived as more useful, that is a problem worth of further analysis.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview of language style matching**

First researchers used language style matching as an analytical tool to study on the topic of interpersonal relationship. Taylor and Thomas (2008) applied language style matching to the subject of negotiations and thought that the higher language style matching implies that two sides of dialogue has higher degree of similarity to the understanding of events. So two sides of dialogue are easier to work together<sup>[7]</sup>. Ireland and Pennebaker (2010)<sup>[8]</sup> discussed the effects of language style matching, explored the characteristics of language style matching and tried to explore whether the dynamic changes of language style matching reflected by the text can effectively predict the relationship between two people. Gonzales, Hancock and Pennebaker (2010) re-validated and attempted to extend the first study of Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2002) on language style matching. The results showed that no matter what kind of media to use, language style matching and group harmony is positively correlated in groups. Moreover, Ireland et al (2011) applied language style matching to intimate relationship topics<sup>[9]</sup>. Ireland et al. (2011) also analysed language style matching of instant message between lovers and observed their communication situation after three months, found that compared to lower language style matching lovers, high language style matching lovers had higher ratio of maintaining relationship (76.7% VS 53.5%)<sup>[10]</sup>.

After nearly 10 years of development, discussion scope of language style matching not only extended from individual level to group level, but also applied to different fields such as personal traits, intimacy, negotiation (Gonzales, et al., 2010; Ireland & Pennebaker, 2010; Ireland, et al. 2010; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Taylor & Thomas, 2008)<sup>[9][10][11]</sup>. Yet few research apply language style matching to business field, less to electronic commerce field. Therefore, our study focus on the effect of language style matching on perceived customer review helpfulness, especially the effect of the similarity between a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.

### **2.2 Perceived customer review helpfulness**

#### **2.2.1 The definition of perceived customer review helpfulness**

Perceived customer review helpfulness can be defined as peer-generated product evaluations posted on company or third party website(Mudambi,2010).Online retailers have commonly used review “helpfulness” as the primary way of measuring how consumers evaluate a review<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 2.2.2 Overview of influence factors of perceived customer review helpfulness

The existing research about the factors affect perceived customer review helpfulness mainly focus on three aspects:the characteristics of reviewers research,comment feature of product research,review content research<sup>[2][3][4][5][6]</sup>.Although existing research on online reviews has paid attention to the effect of a certain individual's own linguistic style on perceived customer review helpfulness,few researcher embed a review in the background of the whole reviews to explore the effect of individual language style.So our paper attempt to study the effect of Language style matching of a review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness.

### 2.3 Product type as moderating effect

According to Nelson (1970),search goods are those who have the ability to obtain information on product quality prior to purchase,while experience goods are products that require sampling or purchase in order to evaluate product quality.It is essential to account for product type as moderator variable when examining the effectiveness of online product reviews.Susan M. Mudambi(2010) indicated that review extremity and product type affect the perceived helpfulness of the review.For experience goods, reviews with extreme ratings are less helpful than reviews with moderate ratings<sup>[3]</sup>. We also use product types as a moderator variable.

### 2.4 Product brand as moderating effect

According to Zhongguancun online network (November 8, 2015),brands are divided into high reputation brand and low reputation brand by brand share.It is also essential to account for product brand as moderator variable when examining the effectiveness of online product reviews.The moderating effect of product brand has attracted many researchers' the attention.Yang Zhaojun (2014) studied customer review,the digital characteristics of reviewers had effect on perceived customer review helpfulness,found that review length and reviewer ranking has a positive effect on perceived customer review helpfulness and perceived customer review helpfulness of review length is moderated by brand<sup>[13]</sup>.

## 3. RESEARCH MODEL

Our research mainly study that the effect of Language style matching of a review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness and the moderating effect of product type and product brand to the relationship between Language style matching of a review and the whole reviews and perceived customer review helpfulness.Fig.1 illustrates the general framework.

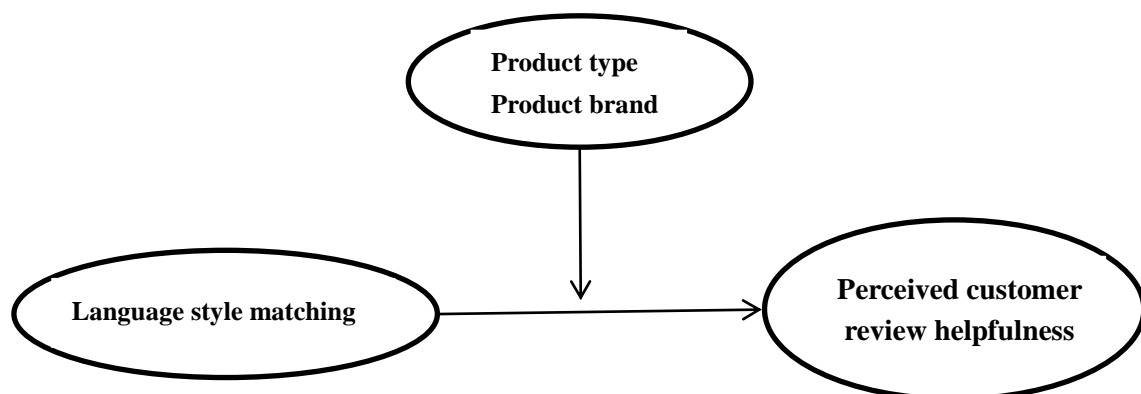


Figure 1. Research model

## **4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### **4.1 Main study**

According to the theory of language adaptation, the more consistent communication style (voice, posture, etiquette), the more easily lead to each other's social identity and can bring more approval and trust. Even based on text (nonverbal) communication, Language style matching of both sides is more important than the actual content of dialogue when setting up the common background perception. In a product review, people who regularly write reviews or read comments may use a particular language style and unconsciously imitate others. If a review are matched in the language style with the whole review, that can help readers and reviewers to establish a close relationship, stimulate readers dependence on information source of clues in the formation of attitude. Thus:

H1: The language style matching of a review and the whole review have positive effects on perceived customer review helpfulness;

### **4.2 Product type as moderator variable**

From the perspective of information economics, Nelson (1970, 1974) divides goods into search goods and experience goods. Given the idiosyncratic nature of experience goods, the effect of language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness is likely to be more critical for experience goods than for search goods. Thus:

H2: Product type moderates the effect of The language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.

H2(a): For experience goods, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness.

H2(b): For search goods, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to lower perceived customer review helpfulness.

### **4.3 Product brand as moderating effect**

For high reputation brand products, the higher the market share means that consumers are more familiar with the brand products and many product attributes from other channels can be obtained, so readers hope to add some relatively scarce or rare information from the comments. Therefore, a review which language style matching is higher with the whole review is more likely to be recognized by consumers as unique information that is not available in other reviews, so the higher perceived customer review helpfulness.

On the contrary, For low reputation brand products, the lower the market share means that consumers are less familiar with the brand products, so many of the basic attributes of the product need to be repeatedly identified from the review. From the consumer's point of view, a review which language style matching is lower with the whole review means that many other consumers do repeated confirmation to some basic properties of the product which can effectively reduce the uncertainty of the readers and has higher perceived usefulness. Thus:

H3: Product brand moderates the effect of The language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.

H3(a): For low reputation brand products, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness.

H3(b): For high reputation brand products, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to lower perceived customer review helpfulness.

## **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Data Collection**

We retrieved the pages containing all customer reviews for six products (see Table 1)<sup>[3]</sup>. We found three goods that fit search goods qualifications: digital camera, cell phone, and laser printer. Like our experience goods,

these are representative of search goods used in previous research (see Bei et al. 2004; Nelson 1970; Weathers et al. 2007). Digital cameras were compared on their image resolution (megapixels), display size, and level of optical zoom. Key cell phone attributes included hours of talk time, product dimensions, and network compatibility. Laser printers were compared on print resolution, print speed, and maximum sheet capacity<sup>[3]</sup>.

We selected three goods that fit experience goods qualifications well: DVD, MP3 player, and video game. These are also typical of experience goods as classified in previous studies (see Bhattacharjee et al. 2006, Bragge and Storgårds 2007, Nelson 1970, Weathers et al. 2007). Purchase decisions on DVD are highly personal, based on playing effect more related to subjective taste than measurable attributes. It is difficult to judge the quality of a melody without watching and hearing it. An MP3 player has several objective, functional features such as storage capacity, size, and weight that can be judged prior to purchase. However, the MP3 player we chose (the iPod) is widely regarded as being popular more due its image and style than its functionality. Evaluation of the iPod rests heavily on interacting with the product and hearing its sound quality. A video game can also be described with some technical specifications, but the real test of quality is whether the game is entertaining and engaging. The entertainment quality is a subjective judgment that requires playing the game<sup>[3]</sup>.

According to Zhongguancun online network (November 8, 2016), brands are divided into high reputation brand and low reputation brand by brand share. We choose 3 kinds of search products and 3 kinds of experience products. Within each of the six product categories, we randomly selected 10 reviews. Each of the 10 types of products consists of 5 kinds of high reputation brand products and 5 kinds of low reputation brand products. The products we used in the study is as Table 1<sup>[1]</sup>.

**Table 1. products used in the study**

Type	Product	Sources	High reputation brand			Low reputation brand		
Experience	MP3	Weathers et al. 2007	Fiio (94%)	SONY (24.5%)	Apple (15.7%)	Newsmy (0.6%)	Hidizs (0.1%)	1MORE (0.1%)
	DVD	Bhattacharjee 2006	PHILIPS (20.9%)	SAST (18.2%)	Pioneer (14.9%)	Haier (0.3%)	Skyworth (0.6%)	GIEC (1.3%)
	PC video game	Bragge and Storgårds 2007	SONY (52.04%)	Nintendo (27.74%)	GPD (8.41%)	iQue (4.92%)	Matrimax (2.7%)	NVIDIA (4.15%)
Search	Cell phone	Bei et al. 2004	HUAWEI (13.3%)	Apple (9.7%)	VIVO (9.6%)	HTC (1.1%)	NOKIA (0.9%)	LG (0.9%)
	Digital camera	Nelson 1970	Canon (41.5%)	Nikon (25.7%)	SONY (12.7%)	ALPA (0.1%)	SIGMA (0.2%)	Kodak (0.2%)
	Laser printer	Weathers et al. 2007	HP (66.2%)	Canon (6.8%)	Lenovo (6.0%)	OKI (0.7%)	RICOH (1.3%)	DELL (0.1%)

Subject to the reliability constraint that at least 10 people had indicated whether or not the review was helpful. The final sample contained 60 product reviews (30 search goods, 30 experience goods) with 1504 helpfulness ratings (an average of 25 ratings per review).

We collected the following data: ① Copy review content to a text document; ② The total number of people that voted in response to the question, “Was this review helpful to you (yes/no)?” ③ The number of people who voted that the review was helpful; ④ The word count of the review; ⑤ The star rating (1 to 5) the reviewer gave the product.

## 5.2 Variable measure

### 5.2.1 The language style matching of a review and the whole review

(1) The calculation method of language style matching

Texts were then analyzed with a computerized text analysis program, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007). LIWC calculates the percentage of total words in a text that fall into nine basic-level function-word categories (Table 2)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Table 2. Word Categories Used for Calculating Language Style Matching

Category	Examples
Personal pronouns	I, his, their
Impersonal pronouns	it, that, anything
Articles	a, an, the
Conjunctions	and, but, because
Prepositions	in, under, about
Auxiliary verbs	shall, be, was
High-frequency adverbs	very, rather, just
Negations	no, not, never
Quantifiers	much, few, lots

The calculation of LSM scores required a series of analytic steps. The first was to measure the degree to which each review used nine types of function words (Table 2)<sup>[6]</sup>. For each review, the percentage of total words for each of the nine function words was calculated<sup>[14]</sup>.

In dyadic comparisons of LSM, the absolute value of the difference between a review and whole review was divided by the total for each category. The resultant LSM score was between 0 and 1, with scores closest to 1 reflecting high degrees of style matching. For example, in the case of percentage of personal pronouns (pp) between a review and whole review, the calculation was as follows<sup>[14]</sup>:

$$LSM = 1 - \frac{|PP_1 - PP_2|}{pp_1 + pp_2 + 0.0001} \quad (1)$$

(2) The calculation method of language style matching of a review and the whole review<sup>[15]</sup>.

① We import the content of each review into LIWC software for analysis and calculate usage intensity separately for every function word in each review. We regard all reviews for each type of product as the whole review, each review as a review to calculate language style matching of a review and the whole review.

② We constructed the common linguistic style for reviews of a particular subgenre by averaging their usage intensity separately for every function word in the English language.

③ Having established a common usage intensity for each function word in a each product, we calculated separate LSM scores for each function word, using the following formula to derive the difference in usage

intensity of a particular word (e.g., "his") between  $review_i$  and the average usage intensity of that same word in the subgenre of  $review_i$ .

$$LSM_{"his"review_i} = 1 - \frac{|PP_1 - PP_2|}{pp_1 + pp_2 + 0.0001} \quad (2)$$

Where  $LSM_{"his"review_i}$  is the similarity in the usage intensity of the word "his" between a review and the general subgenre,  $pp_1$  is usage intensity of each function word in  $review_i$ ,  $pp_2$  is usage intensity of each function in the average usage intensity of that same word in the subgenre of  $review_i$ .

④ Third, in line with Ireland and Pennebaker (2010), we derived the overall LSM score of a particular

review by taking the average LSM score across all function words. For example, if a review used "despite" four times in a text of 100 words, it would yield an intensity of 0.04. If the average intensity across all reviews for the same subgenre was 0.02, the LSM score for "despite" in that review would be 0.98. After applying this approach for all function words, we averaged the LSM scores per review to yield a composite LSM score, bounded by 0 and 1; higher numbers represented greater stylistic similarity between a review and the subgenre style. Each review received a single LSM score.

### 5.2.2 Measurement of other variables

(1) Perceived customer review helpfulness: It measured by the percentage of people who found the review helpful (Helpfulness%). This was derived by dividing the number of people who voted that the review was helpful by the total votes in response to the "this reviews helpful to you" question (Total Votes).

(2) Moderator variable: Product type is coded as a binary variable, with a value of 1 for search goods and 0 for experience goods. Product brand is coded as a binary variable, with a value of 1 for high reputation brand products and 1 for low reputation brand products.

(3) Control variable: Review extremity is measured as the star rating of the review (Rating); Review depth is measured by the number of words of the review (Word Count).

## 5.3 Variable measure

### 5.3.1 Main study

The results of the regression analysis are included in Table 3.

**Table 3 main study results**

Variable	B	S.E	t	Sig
(constant)	0.926	0.008	121.951	0.000
LSM	0.028	0.004	7.540	0.000
Review depth	-0.006	0.005	-1.206	0.228
Review extremity	0.003	0.003	0.954	0.340

The findings in Table 3 show that the language style matching of a review and the whole review have positive effects on perceived customer review helpfulness,  $B=0.028$ ,  $P=0.000$ , supporting Hypothesis 1.

### 5.3.2 Moderating effect

To test moderating effect of product type and product brand (H2 and H3), we examined the interaction of language style matching and product type, language style matching and the interaction of product brand. The results of the regression analysis are included in Table 4. Language style matching  $\times$  Product type ( $p < 0.000$ ) and Product brand  $\times$  Product brand ( $p < 0.000$ ) were statistically significant. Product type and Product brand moderates the effect of the language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.

To further examine the relationship of language style matching and product type (product brand), we split the data into two subsamples, search goods and experience goods (low reputation brand and high reputation brand). Our study is based on Step drawing interaction diagram proposed by Aiken and West (1991) to show the interaction of language style matching and product type (product brand). The results see Figure 2.

For experience goods, the slope of LSM and perceived Customer review helpfulness is positive, which indicate that the higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to the higher perceived customer review helpfulness, supporting Hypothesis H2(a); For search goods, the slope of LSM and Perceived Customer review helpfulness is negative, which indicate that the higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to the lower perceived customer review helpfulness, supporting Hypothesis H2(b);

For low reputation brand products, the slope of LSM and perceived customer review helpfulness is



positive, which indicate that higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to the higher perceived customer review helpfulness, supporting Hypothesis H3(a); For high reputation brand products, the slope of LSM and perceived customer review helpfulness is negative, which indicate that higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to the lower perceived customer review helpfulness, supporting Hypothesis H3(b);

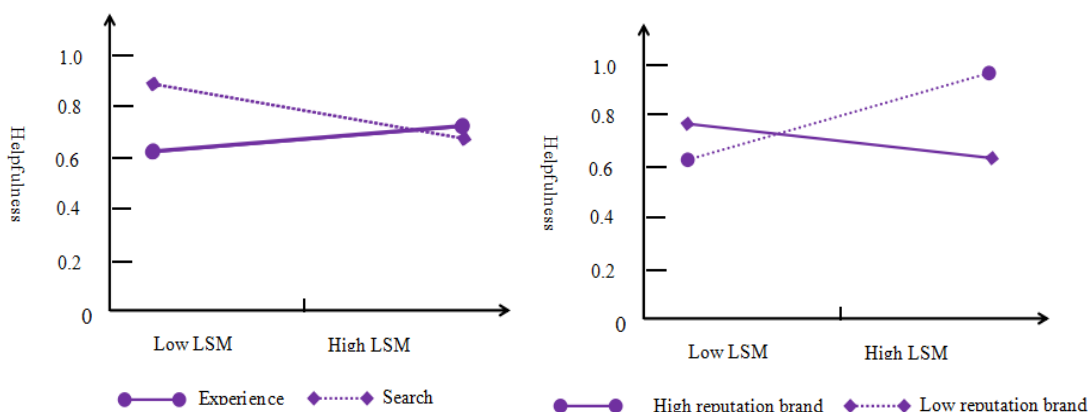


Figure 2. Language style matching and product type, Product brand

Table 4 Moderating effect of analysis results

Variable	B	S.E	t	Sig
(constant)	0.935	0.007	124.863	0.000
Independent variable effects				
LSM	0.027	0.004	7.578	0.000
LSM*product type	0.034	0.007	4.739	0.000
LSM*product brand	0.150	0.023	6.580	0.000
Control variable effects				
Review depth	-0.004	0.008	-0.545	0.262
Review extremity	0.017	0.005	3.034	0.022
Review depth *product type	-0.004	0.008	-0.345	0.260
Review extremity *product type	0.005	0.008	0.768	0.312
Review depth *product brand	-0.014	0.009	-1.493	0.068
Review extremity *product brand	-0.021	0.006	-3.397	0.001

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Summary of results

Based on the review data of the Amazon, our research discusses that the effect of Language style matching of a review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness and the moderating effect of product type and product brand to the relationship between Language style matching of a review and the whole reviews and perceived customer review helpfulness.

The empirical research shows that:

(1) Main study find that: the language style matching of a review and the whole review have positive effects on perceived customer review helpfulness. The result indicates that generally speaking, when consumers look at the website reviews, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness.

(2) Product type and product brand as moderator variable study find that: Product type and product brand moderate the effect of the language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness. The result indicates that when consumers face with the different product type and product brand, the evaluation to the perceived customer review helpfulness is different. For experience goods and low reputation brand products, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to higher perceived customer review helpfulness and consumers hope to add some relatively scarce or rare information from the comments. For search goods and high reputation brand products, higher language style matching between a review and the whole review leads to lower perceived customer review helpfulness and consumers are less familiar with the brand products, so many of the basic attributes of the product need to be repeatedly identified from the review.

## **6.2 Development suggestion**

From the point of practical application, our study can help the website designer to timely and automatically identify the usefulness of the reviews according to language style matching between a review and the whole review, then put useful reviews on the front to convenient consumer to read and help the website designer improve the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making. According to the conclusions of our study, development suggestions are as follows: For different product type and product brand, the evaluation system needs to be differentiated. For experience goods and low reputation brand products, the website designer should put positive reviews that have higher language style matching with whole review on the front to promote consumers to make purchase decisions. For search goods and high reputation brand products, the website designer should put positive reviews that have lower language style matching with whole review on the front.

## **6.3 Research innovation, deficiency and prospects**

### **6.3.1 Research innovation**

(1) We study the effect of language style matching of a specific review and the whole reviews on perceived customer review helpfulness, which is severely contrast with the reality that each review is embed in the context of all other reviews as a whole. This is the main innovation of our paper

(2) Our innovation include that the use of text analysis method and LIWC software and the calculation method of the language style matching between a review and the whole review, then put useful reviews.

(3) Previous studies independently examined the moderating effect of product type and product brand on perceived customer review helpfulness. An important contribution of this study is that simultaneous investigation the moderating effect of product type and product brand on perceived customer review helpfulness in the same study.

### **6.3.2 Research deficiency**

(1) Interaction between product type and product brand, consumer characteristics, emotion (negative emotion and positive emotion) should also moderate the effect of the language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.

(2) we study only a kind of online review form that is the review of B2C shopping website, but many consumers will be affected by a variety of online reviews, such as social forum, micro-blog or blog, email and so on. Factors affecting perceived customer review helpfulness of other online reviews forms have yet to be studied.

(3) The sample is restricted only to consumers who have been voting on the reviews, and it is not clear that users who do not have a vote on the usefulness of the reviews. So we should conduct an investigation to determine whether it is consistent with our findings

These Research deficiency need to be further studied.

### **6.3.3 Research prospects**

Based on Research deficiency, future research may focus on the following points:

- (1) Considering the moderating effect of interaction between product type and product brand, consumer characteristics, emotion (negative emotion and positive emotion) on the effect of the language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness.
- (2) Studying the language style matching of a review and the whole review on perceived customer review helpfulness in a variety of online reviews, such as social forum, micro-blog or blog, email and so on.
- (3) Increase experiment method to investigate consumers who have been voting on the reviews to ensure whether it is consistent with our findings.

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