

The Power of Beauty? The Interactive Effects of Awe and Online Reviews on Purchase Intentions

Abstract

Prior research has established that online consumer reviews can have significant influences on the evaluations of a product or a service. In particular, studies show that negative (vs. positive) reviews lead to unfavorable evaluations because they heighten purchase risk. The present research seeks to examine a contextual cue that can alleviate this potential problem. Across three studies, this research demonstrates how the emotion of awe – elicited by a beautiful product in the advertisement – can reduce the perception of purchase risk, leading to favorable consumer evaluations of a product or service even though it has negative reviews. The implications of this research are beneficial for advertisers by highlighting the potentials of eliciting awe (e.g., by utilizing beauty) in their advertisements.

Keywords: awe; online review; beauty; advertising

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Introduction

The presence of negative online reviews for any business is generally unavoidable. Indeed, “a satisfied customer may tell some people about their experience with a company, but a dissatisfied one will tell everybody they meet” (Chatterjee, 2001, p. 129). Importantly, consumers tend to consider user-generated information (i.e., online reviews) to be more credible, trustworthy, and useful than seller-created information, particularly for experiential products and services, such as restaurants and hotels (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Chen & Xie, 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Thus, online consumer reviews are considered to be a significant component of the marketing communications mix and serve as a type of “free sales assistant” for the company (Chen & Xie, 2008, p. 478).

Studies on consumer reviews have established that the valence of reviews—whether they are positive or negative in evaluative direction—can significantly influence consumer attitudes toward a product or service (e.g., Floh, Koller, & Zauner, 2013; Park & Nicolau, 2015; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Overall, research in this area has established that negative (vs. positive) reviews lead to less (vs. more) favorable evaluations (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Chen & Xie, 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2015) because negative reviews induce a perception of purchase risk (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Lee, Park, & Han, 2008).

Studies examining ways to deal with negative reviews have typically focused on management of online consumer reviews (e.g., if, when, and how to respond; Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2015; Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016). However, while some management strategies are offered to handle reviews (Sparks & Bradley, 2017; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), such direct approaches might not always be effective (Min, Lim, & Magnini, 2015). Other research has also examined fixed, uncontrollable factors which lead to the influence and susceptibility of reading reviews such as product type, brand familiarity, and cultural background (Bae & Lee, 2011; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Although such findings are informative, they offer limited

understanding of how marketers can develop effective communication strategies to mitigate the issues presented by negative reviews.

The present research draws upon the literature in emotion elicitation in advertisements to examine how negative reviews can be circumvented. Marketers regularly employ positive emotional appeals in their marketing campaigns to attract consumers' attention (Cavanaugh, Bettman, & Luce, 2015; Septianto et al., 2018). As reading negative reviews result in a perception of purchase risk (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Lee et al., 2008), eliciting a specific emotion via advertisements might reduce such perceived risk, thus helping to mitigate the effects of negative reviews. In particular, we focus on a growing body of literature examining the emotion of 'awe'.

Awe is a positive emotion that is characterized by amazement and wonder (Griskevicius, Shiota, & Neufeld, 2010). While awe is typically known to occur in the presence of grand beauty, such as panoramic scenery (Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007), recent studies suggest that beautiful objects (e.g., arts, products) can also evoke awe (Cesareo et al., 2018; Fredericks, 2018). Notably, research focusing on the emotion of awe demonstrates that it facilitates the need for accommodation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Rudd, Hildebrand, & Vohs, 2018; Shiota et al., 2007), meaning that it motivates consumers to revise their existing knowledge or mental structures (Fiedler, 2001; Rudd et al., 2018). As such, we investigate how awe—elicited by a beautiful product or advertisement—can decrease the potential issue of negative reviews. In other words, we investigate the moderating role of awe on the relationship between negative reviews and consumer evaluations of a product or service.

By empirically testing this prediction, we provide actionable insights for marketers because our research demonstrates how the emotion of awe can be temporarily and purposively elicited via a beautiful product or advertisement. Thus, the key purpose of this paper is to introduce a novel mechanism that assists managers to develop a more effective advertising

strategy and to mitigate the potential problem of negative reviews. In addition to being of substantive interest for practitioners, this research also contributes to the literature on awe by studying the influences of integral awe because most studies in this area have examined incidental awe (i.e., awe that is elicited by an unrelated task), as opposed to integral awe (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2018). Furthermore, we also contribute to the literature on product aesthetics by identifying the role of specific emotions, such as awe, in driving the effects of beauty in advertisements.

In the sections that follow, prior literature on online reviews and their valence are discussed. Following this, a hypothesis is built upon by discussing the emotion of awe and how it can mitigate the harmful effects of negative reviews by increasing purchase intentions in the presence of more negative reviews. Studies 1a and 1b then provide initial evidence on this prediction. Study 2 extends Studies 1a and 1b through the manipulation of product beauty to elicit awe. Notably, Study 2 also rules out alternative explanations, such as other positive emotions (Cesareo et al., 2018), individual differences (Shiota et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2018), and perceptions of efforts (Wu et al., 2017). To conclude, we provide a discussion of the theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

Theoretical Background

Online Consumer Reviews

Online consumer reviews have become one of the most critical elements in marketing communications (Chen & Xie, 2008). Online consumer reviews can be defined as comment, rating, or ranking of a product, service, or experience made in the online environment with a specific valence (e.g., positive, negative, or neutral) (Filieri, 2016; Floh et al., 2013). Prior research has found that consumers rely on reviews and use them as recommendation-based heuristics, particularly when the decision involves an overload of information and is unfamiliar or new to the consumer (Chatterjee, 2001). For example, when consumers encounter a large

set of reviews, they generally rely on the overall balance of reviews (i.e., the ratio of negative vs. positive reviews) to gauge the general evaluation of previous customers (Purnawirawan, De Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2012).

Moreover, the influence of positive and negative reviews is asymmetric (Floh et al., 2013; Park & Nicolau, 2015; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). From an information processing perspective, negative information has a stronger effect on consumers' judgments and choices than positive information—this is called the negativity effect (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Tsang & Prendergast, 2009). This effect implies that the degree to which negative reviews impact on consumers outweighs the benefits of positive reviews for sellers (Tsang & Prendergast, 2009). In other words, negative reviews reduce the perceived reliability of a seller, retailer, or a product and in general, reduces purchase or patronage intentions (Chatterjee, 2001).

Past studies have typically found that negative (vs. positive) reviews negatively impact consumer attitudes (Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), purchase intentions (Cheung & Lee, 2008; Floh et al., 2013; Sparks & Browning, 2011), and reduce company sales (Berger, Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010; Ho-Dac, Carson, & Moore, 2013; Ye et al., 2011); also, see Purnawirawan et al. (2015) for a review and meta-analysis. Yet, despite a large number of studies focusing on online reviews, how marketers can proactively reduce the impact of negative reviews is still less clear. For example, several management strategies are offered to handle online consumer reviews (Schuckert et al., 2015). Such strategies involve the use of company-focused versus customer-focused styles (Bonfanti, Vigolo, & Negri, 2016), adopting a corporate vs. personal identity (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), and specifically, acknowledging, holding to account and taking action for service failure in review replies (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). However, management responses to negative reviews may not entirely help businesses to navigate the consequences of negative reviews (Min et al., 2015).

Other research focuses on review influence and its relation to uncontrollable factors such as product type, reviewers' demographics (Bae & Lee, 2011; Purnawirawan et al., 2015), reviewers' reputation (Hu, Liu, & Zhang, 2008), as well as review readers' characteristics (Bae & Lee, 2011; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Instead, our research examines a contextual cue that is directly controllable by marketers and firms; specifically, we investigate the moderating role of awe that can be elicited by an advertisement.

Awe and Need for Accommodation

An emerging body of literature has classified 'awe' as a distinct positive emotion (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Rudd et al., 2018), which is consistent with a growing body of literature suggesting the distinction among discrete positive emotions (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Septianto & Chiew, 2018; Yang & Zhang, 2018). This emotion is characterized by feelings of amazement and wonder (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Awe typically arises in the presence of grand beauty, such as panoramic scenery (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007); however, beautiful objects (e.g., arts, products) might also evoke awe (Cesareo et al., 2018; Fredericks, 2018). Prior research has showed that awe can foster a heightened spirituality (Saroglou, Buxant, & Tilquin, 2008), increase well-being and patience (Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012), evoke a sense of self-diminishment (Piff et al., 2015), and increase moral behaviors (Cesareo et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018).

According to Keltner and Haidt (2003), there are two defining features of awe. First, awe is associated with perceived vastness, meaning that one has encountered something grand (e.g., can be in terms of size, number, complexity, ability) (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007). Second, this emotion elicits the need for accommodation, which refers to the sense that one's existing mental structure is insufficient to understand the awe-eliciting object (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007). This second feature of awe is germane to the current research because it alludes to the potential of awe in reducing purchase risk, which is

consistent with research showing how awe enhances curiosity (McDougall, 1908), learning (Rudd et al., 2018), and openness to uncertain situations (Shiota et al., 2007).

Accommodation refers to mental processes in which individuals find a discrepancy between stimuli (e.g., awe-eliciting objects) and their existing knowledge or mental structures and thus, they need to revise their existing mental structures to resolve this discrepancy (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Rudd et al., 2018). Notably, while the argument that awe engenders the need for accommodation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007) is in line with the established research on the effects of positive emotions on cognition and information processing (Isen, 2001), it also highlights the uniqueness of awe. While other positive emotions (e.g., happiness) might facilitate assimilation (i.e., integrating new stimuli into existing mental structures) (Fiedler, 2001), only awe leads to the need for accommodation (i.e., revision of current mental structures) (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007).

To reiterate, we draw upon research on negative reviews and the emotion of awe to argue for the moderating role of awe on the effects of negative reviews. Specifically, consumers perceive a higher purchase risk after reading negative reviews (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Lee et al., 2008). However, awe elicits the need for accommodation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007), meaning that consumers would revise their existing mental structures by being more open to uncertain situations and become more curious (McDougall, 1908; Shiota et al., 2007). Consequently, when consumers experience awe, this emotion should reduce the perceived risk caused by the presence of negative reviews, leading to an increased willingness to try a product or service. In contrast, when the reviews are positive, because there is no discrepancy between the awe-eliciting product and their existing mental structures about the product (i.e., they are both favorable), consumers do not need to revise their existing mental structures, and therefore, awe would not lead to increased willingness to try a product (see Figure 1). Formally, we predict that awe should moderate the effects of negative review such

that:

H1: Consumers who are exposed to negative reviews will report higher purchase intentions when they experience high (vs. low) levels of awe.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Study 1a

Study 1a seeks to provide initial support for the proposed hypothesis through examining a hotel context. Consistent with the proposed arguments, it is predicted that increasing awe should lead to higher purchase intentions in the negative review condition. However, we do not expect awe to influence purchase intentions in the positive review conditions.

Method

Seventy-nine participants¹ (53% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.27$, $SD = 11.84$) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Appendix A for demographic profiles of participants in this and all subsequent studies). This study had a one-factor, two-level (review valence: positive, negative) between-subjects design.

We present the overall procedure of the experiments in Appendix B. Specifically, participants were presented with a fictitious hotel advertisement (see Appendix C) and its online reviews simultaneously. Specifically, they were randomly shown four negative reviews and two positive reviews (in the negative condition) or four positive reviews and two negative reviews (in the positive condition). The reviews were obtained from previous research (Purnawirawan et al., 2012). According to prior research, most consumers in general would read at least five reviews when doing an online search (Purnawirawan et al., 2012); thus, we chose to present each participant with six reviews.

¹ Based on the literature, most research typically collect at least 30 participants for each experimental cell condition (List, Sadoff, & Wagner, 2011; Woodside, De Villiers, & Marshall, 2016). We sought to collect a larger sample size (than 30 participants per cell) to improve the statistical power. Thus, we collected approximately 40 participants per cell (Studies 1a and 2) and 55 participants per cell (Study 1b).

Then, the degree to which the participants experienced feelings of awe was measured using two items (“awe” and “amazed”; $\alpha = .90$) on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). As the dependent variable, purchase intentions were measured using three items on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). These were: (1) “it is very likely that I will stay at this hotel,” (2) “I will certainly try this hotel”, and (3) “there is a great chance that I will choose this hotel” ($\alpha = .97$) (Purnawirawan et al., 2012).

As a manipulation check, participants indicated their evaluations of the overall valence of reviews for the fictitious hotel on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Specifically, based on the reviews the participant was presented with (i.e., either in the positive or negative condition) they were asked to rate the degree to which they perceived most people (1) “are satisfied with the hotel,” (2) “find the hotel good,” and (3) “would recommend the hotel” ($\alpha = .98$) (Purnawirawan et al., 2012). Lastly, participants were presented with basic demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, education level, ethnicity, and income level).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check. As expected, the results indicated that participants who read positive reviews ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 1.06$) had more favorable evaluations of the fictitious hotel in comparison to those who read negative reviews ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.56$, $t(77) = 11.01$, $p < .001$).

Purchase Intentions. To test the proposed hypothesis, a moderated regression analysis was conducted with purchase intentions as the dependent variable and awe scores, review valence (1 = positive, 0 = negative), and their interaction as independent variables. Results revealed significant main effects of awe ($B = .59$, $SE = .24$, $t = 2.49$, $p = .015$) and review valence ($B = 5.14$, $SE = 2.00$, $t = 2.71$, $p = .008$). However, these were qualified by an interaction between awe and review valence ($B = -.81$, $SE = .33$, $t = -2.45$, $p = .017$). Simple-slope analyses showed that higher degrees of awe were associated with higher purchase

intentions when the reviews were negative ($B = .59$, $SE = .24$, $t = 2.49$, $p = .015$). However, when the reviews were positive, there was no significant association between awe and purchase intentions ($B = -.21$, $SE = .23$, $t = -.94$, $p = .352$; see Figure 2). These findings support our hypothesis that awe can mitigate the potential issues that negative reviews can create.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Study 1b

Study 1b aims to provide further support on our prediction. In particular, we replicate and extend Study 1a in two ways. First, Study 1a manipulated the conditions of positive and negative reviews using a specific combination of reviews (i.e., four negative + two positive for the negative review condition, and four positive + two negative for the positive review condition). Study 1b aims to test a more granular analysis by examining all possible conditions (seven conditions of reviews, ranging from ‘six negative reviews’ to ‘no negative review’). Second, we have argued that awe can decrease perceived purchase risk and we directly examine this argument in Study 1b.

Method

Three hundred and eighty-six participants (54% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.69$, $SD = 11.05$) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. This study had a one-factor, seven-level (the number of negative reviews: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) between-subjects design.

Study 1b employed materials identical to those employed in Study 1a with some changes in procedure. In this study, participants were randomly allocated to one of seven conditions (based on the number of negative reviews they saw, ranging from 0 to 6) and were exposed to a list of hotel reviews. Subsequently, as a manipulation check, they rated their evaluations of the overall valence of the reviews. In addition, they rated their perceived risk using two items: (1) “Visiting this hotel would be a poor decision” and (2) “It is risky to stay at this hotel” (adapted from Lee et al., 2008), measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree,

7 = strongly agree). Participants were then asked to evaluate the hotel advertisement and rated their 'awe' in response to the ad. After indicating their purchase intentions as the dependent variable, we asked them again to indicate their perceived risk (the same two items).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check. A one-way ANOVA examining review valence evaluations across seven review conditions revealed a significant effect ($F(6, 379) = 123.59, p < .001$). Table 1 describes means and standard deviations of each condition (see Appendix D for follow-up t-tests examining differences across the seven conditions). As expected, participants who saw higher numbers of negative reviews reported less favorable evaluations of the hotel.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Perceived Risk. One-way ANOVAs examining perceived risk before ($F(6, 379) = 76.40, p < .001$) and after ($F(6, 379) = 37.26, p < .001$) the exposure of the advertisement across seven review conditions revealed significant effects. As can be seen in Table 1 (and Appendix D), consistent with our expectations, higher numbers of negative reviews led to higher levels of perceived purchase risk.

To examine these patterns in more detail, we conducted a mixed ANOVA with perceived risk (pre- and post-exposure) as a within-subject (repeated measures) factor and the seven review conditions as a between-subject factor. Results revealed significant main effects of risk ($F(1, 379) = 109.17, p < .001$) and review conditions ($F(6, 379) = 73.55, p < .001$). However, there was a significant interaction between risk and review ($F(6, 379) = 5.51, p < .001$). We then conducted follow-up paired t-tests across the seven conditions (see Table 1). Overall, exposure to the advertisement decreased purchase risk, except in the conditions of zero and in the case of one negative review (i.e., extremely positive conditions). These findings were consistent with our expectation that awe should not lead to any effects in the positive review condition. These results thus provided overall support that awe can reduce a perception

of purchase risk.

Purchase Intentions. To test the proposed hypothesis, a moderated regression analysis was conducted with purchase intentions as the dependent variable and awe scores, review conditions, and their interaction as independent variables. However, given that we had multicategorical review conditions (i.e., seven conditions), following prior research (Whelan & T. Hingston, 2018), we converted this multicategorical variable into six dummy variables (with the condition of six negative reviews [no positive review] as the baseline). Accordingly, the interaction between review conditions and awe scores was captured with six interaction terms.

Insert Table 2 about here.

As can be seen in Table 2, results revealed significant interactions between review conditions and awe in the negative (vs. positive) review conditions (i.e., the numbers of negative reviews are five, four, and three). Simple-slope analyses further showed that increasing awe was positively associated with purchase intentions when the reviews are negative (i.e., the numbers of negative reviews are five, four, three, and two).

In addition, when there were no positive reviews (i.e., extremely negative conditions), increasing awe was not associated with increasing purchase intentions (see Figure 3). These results provided further evidence for our hypothesis by showing a more granular effect of awe across different review conditions. In addition, Study 1b also suggested that awe effects did not emerge in both extreme negative and positive review conditions.

Insert Figure 3 about here.

Study 2

Study 2 extends the findings of Studies 1a and 1b in two meaningful ways. First, it seeks to provide stronger evidence on our predictions by manipulating different levels of awe operationalized using an advertisement with high (vs. low) beauty. This approach follows prior

research in this area. Aesthetic evaluations of an object (e.g., an advertisement) can positively influence attitudes and evaluations of the object or individual (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Subsequently, prior studies have found that physically attractive individuals are perceived more favorably for other functional characteristics (e.g., intelligence, success) (Ahearne, Gruen, & Jarvis, 1999; Borkeanu & Liebler, 1995; Wang et al., 2016). While these phenomena might occur via a halo effect (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), emotions can also be the underlying explanation.

While consumers might have different emotional responses to a product's beauty (Bloch, Brunel, & Arnold, 2003; Candi et al., 2017; Kumar & Garg, 2010), in general, this has been associated with the 'feeling-as-information' hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that positive emotional reactions (from beauty) can influence consumer evaluations of a product (Pham, 1998; Schwarz, 1990; Yeung & Wyer, 2005). Here, we seek to extend the literature in this area by showing that the effects of beauty on consumer evaluations is driven by the emotion of awe. In other words, we expect that negative (vs. positive) reviews will lead to higher purchase intentions in the low (but not high) beauty condition because consumers experience low levels of awe in this condition.

Secondly, we aim to provide stronger confidence that awe explains our predictions and rule out alternative explanations such as other positive emotions (Cesareo et al., 2018), perceived effort (Wu et al., 2017), and individual differences such as dispositional awe (i.e., individual tendencies to experience awe) and need for closure (i.e., individuals' aversion toward uncertainty) (Shiota et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2018). Hence, we include these additional measures to control for them as plausible alternative explanations for our effects.

Method

One hundred and sixty-six participants (58% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.57$, $SD = 12.62$) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. This study employed a 2 (beauty: high, low) \times 2

(review valence: positive, negative) between-subjects design.

In a similar fashion to Study 1a, participants were presented with a fictitious advertisement for a new café (see Appendix C). Two advertisements were developed that differed only across the visual aesthetics of the product advertised (artistic cappuccino vs. regular cappuccino) (adapted from Cesareo et al., 2018). Participants were also randomly shown four negative reviews and two positive reviews (in the negative condition) or four positive reviews and two negative reviews (in the positive condition). The reviews were based on those used in previous research (adapted from Cesareo et al., 2018).

Participants' emotional reactions to the advertisement (“awe” and “amazed” to measure awe, $\alpha = .92$; “happy” and “pleased” to measure general positive affect, $\alpha = .85$; “appreciative” and “thankful” to measure gratitude, $\alpha = .89$; “surprised” and “unexpected” to measure surprise, $\alpha = .89$) were measured on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). As a manipulation check, the degree to which the cappuccino was perceived as aesthetically-pleasing was measured (“beautiful” and “pretty”; $\alpha = .90$). The same items as Studies 1a and 1b were used to measure purchase intentions (dependent variable; $\alpha = .95$) as well as for the review valence manipulation check ($\alpha = .98$).

Lastly, participants completed a six-item dispositional awe measure and a five-item need for closure measure (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The items for dispositional awe were: “I often feel awe”; “I see beauty all around me”; “I feel wonder almost every day”; “I often look for patterns in the objects around me”; “I have many opportunities to see the beauty of nature”; “I seek out experiences that challenge my understanding of the world” (Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). The items for need for closure were: “I dislike unpredictable situations”; “I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life”; “I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more”; “I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it”; “I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my

temperament” (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. Results indicated that participants who read positive reviews ($M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.01$) had more favorable evaluations of the fictitious café in comparison to those who read negative reviews ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 2.20$, $t(162) = 11.18$, $p < .001$). Additionally, participants perceived the artistic cappuccino ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.00$) as more beautiful than the regular cappuccino ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.43$, $t(162) = 4.23$, $p < .001$), indicating that the experimental manipulations were successful.

Purchase Intentions. To test the proposed hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA was conducted, with purchase intentions as the dependent variable and beauty, review valence, and their interaction as independent variables. Results revealed significant main effects of beauty ($F(1, 162) = 11.78$, $p < .001$) and review valence ($F(1, 162) = 33.91$, $p < .001$). However and as predicted, there was a significant interaction effect between beauty and review valence ($F(1, 162) = 5.28$, $p = .023$). Planned contrasts showed that in the negative review condition, participants demonstrated higher purchase intentions in the high beauty condition ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.76$) than in the low beauty condition ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 2.05$, $t(162) = 3.95$, $p < .001$), supporting our hypothesis. However, as predicted, the difference of purchase intentions between high beauty ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.44$) and low beauty conditions ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.34$, $t(162) = .82$, $p = .411$) was not significant in the positive review condition. Figure 4 describes the results.

Insert Figure 4 about here.

Alternative Explanations. As discussed, there might be alternative explanations to our predictions. That is, beautiful advertisements might elicit other types of emotions (e.g., positive affect, gratitude, surprise) (Cesareo et al., 2018) and heighten the perception of effort (Wu et al., 2017). Also, individual differences such as dispositional awe and need for closure might

further influence how consumers perceive beautiful products (Shiota et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2018).

If these factors explained our results, then including these factors as predictors in the model estimating purchase intentions should attenuate the significant interaction effect between beauty and review valence. We then conducted a two-way ANOVA predicting purchase intentions and included these additional factors as covariates. The results showed that increasing positive affect ($B = .29$, $SE = .13$, $t(156) = 2.34$, $p = .021$) and increasing dispositional awe ($B = .27$, $SE = .11$, $t(156) = 2.53$, $p = .012$) were associated with higher purchase intentions. However, the interaction between beauty and review valence remained significant ($F(1, 156) = 10.14$, $p = .002$). These results suggest that while these factors might play a role in influencing purchase intentions, they did not account for our predicted effects.

General Discussion

Research on online reviews has established that negative (vs. positive) reviews lead to less (vs. more) favorable consumer evaluations (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Chen & Xie, 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2015) because negative reviews induce a perception of purchase risk (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Lee et al., 2008). Building upon a growing literature on awe (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2018), we conduct three studies and demonstrate how the emotion of awe can mitigate the problems caused by the presence of negative reviews.

Studies 1a and 1b show that consumers experiencing high (vs. low) levels of awe report higher purchase intentions when the reviews are negative. In addition, Study 1b offers a more nuanced empirical evidence such that awe can reduce purchase risk and increase purchase intentions, although it does not work in the extreme conditions (i.e., extremely positive or negative reviews). Study 2 extends these findings by manipulating different levels of beauty as the antecedent of awe. Results show that a product with high (vs. low) beauty evokes awe,

which in turns increases purchase intentions when the reviews are negative (vs. positive). Importantly, we rule out plausible alternative explanations such as perceived effort, positive emotions other than awe (e.g., gratitude, positive affect, surprise), and individual differences (e.g., need for closure and dispositional awe).

This research makes three theoretical and managerial contributions. First, this study contributes to the literature on online reviews and eWOM by demonstrating the moderating role of awe on the relationship between negative reviews and purchase intentions. Notably, the emotion of awe, elicited by product aesthetics in an advertisement, can mitigate the potential issues of negative reviews. This is significant because past research has shown that negative reviews increase consumers' perceived risk of purchase (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Lee et al., 2008), leading to unfavorable consumer evaluations (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Chen & Xie, 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Thus, we demonstrate how marketers can capitalize on consumers' emotional responses to a beautiful product or advertisement such as awe to lessen such negative effects.

Consequently, this research offers a practical solution for marketers and advertisers to circumvent the impact of negative reviews and foster positive attitudes and stronger purchase intentions by providing another means to implement reputation management, going beyond the management of responses to reviews post-experience (Schuckert et al., 2015). Specifically, this research empirically demonstrates a proactive way for advertisers to strategically manage explicitly controllable aspects of the marketing mix (i.e., beautiful advertisements) in order to break through the noise that negative reviews can create and thereby increase sales and revenues.

Secondly, our findings show that awe can be evoked by smaller-scale, everyday beauties surrounding consumers (e.g., products, advertisements) (Cesareo et al., 2018; Fredericks, 2018), and not necessarily by something grand, such as natural wonders (Keltner

& Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007). By doing that, we contribute to the literature differentiating integral emotions (i.e., emotions related to focal situation such as a product advertisement) and incidental emotions (i.e., emotions associated with an unrelated experience) (So et al., 2015). Prior research on awe has mostly investigated ambient or incidental awe, as opposed to integral awe (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2018). Thus, we address the call for future research of So et al. (2015) by examining the influences of integral awe that is evoked by beautiful product advertisements and further demonstrate that marketers, and even artists, can create and elicit awe from the ‘everyday’ rather than the grand and wondrous. Moreover, the examination of integral awe is also managerially meaningful because marketers cannot fully extrapolate such findings when considering incidental emotion (because they are by definition, uncontrollable), whereas the examination of integral emotions offers actionable implications for marketers.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the literature on product aesthetics. Prior research has established the significant role of product beauty in improving favorable consumer evaluations (Dion et al., 1972; Hoegg, Alba, & Dahl, 2010; Magnier, Schoormans, & Mugge, 2016). In particular, while these phenomena might be explained by positive affect in general (Pham, 1998; Schwarz, 1990; Yeung & Wyer, 2005), previous studies had yet to identify the role of discrete positive emotions in driving the effects. Hence, our research takes a step forward by highlighting a specific emotional response to beauty (in this case, awe) and demonstrating the unique effect of awe in driving the effects of beauty in advertisements. In addition, we also empirically rule out several other plausible explanations of the results, such as other positive emotions (gratitude, positive affect, and surprise), highlighting the importance of awe in consumers’ aesthetic experiences.

We acknowledge several limitations of the current research and offer opportunities for future research. This paper only examined the predictions in the service context (hotel and café).

Thus, further empirical validation is required to ensure these findings hold true in other contexts. Notably, as both hotels and cafés involve experiential products focused on hedonism, future studies could examine more utilitarian products which would allow further enhancement of the knowledge in this area of research. In addition, the predicted awe effects seem to be complex, depending on the number of positive vs. negative reviews (Study 1b). This highlights a limitation regarding whether the number of reviews tested is sufficient (six reviews in total for each condition). We used a specific ratio of positive versus negative reviews to simplify our analysis because the focal purpose of this paper was to demonstrate the potential role of awe in mitigating the problem of negative reviews. However, it is crucial for future research to use secondary data to replicate our findings in a real-world context. Finally, it would also be interesting to examine whether the effects are replicated when a negative review is perceived to be fake or genuine. This difference might moderate the effects because real or fake reviews can further influence the risk perceived by consumers. In conclusion, the present research tests a novel perspective to deal with potential issues of negative reviews by eliciting the emotion of awe.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Seven Review Conditions (Study 1b)

Condition: Number of Negative Reviews	Review Evaluations		Perceived Risk (Pre Ad Exposure)		Perceived Risk (Post Ad Exposure)		Paired t-tests (Post - Pre)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	t-value	p-value
6	1.93	1.46	5.76	1.57	4.94	1.60	3.18	0.002
5	2.30	1.40	5.70	1.18	4.22	1.71	6.13	< 0.001
4	3.06	1.21	5.04	1.29	3.93	1.66	6.29	< 0.001
3	3.81	1.29	4.27	1.30	3.29	1.44	5.03	< 0.001
2	5.35	1.04	3.07	1.46	2.25	1.38	4.13	< 0.001
1	6.05	0.90	2.08	1.23	1.82	1.25	1.63	0.109
0	6.23	0.92	1.99	1.56	1.87	1.46	0.71	0.480

Table 2. Moderated Regression Results (Study 1b)

	B	SE	t-value	p-value
Predictor				
Constant	3.19	0.77	4.12	< 0.001
Awe	0.05	0.13	0.35	0.727
5 Negative Review	-2.48	0.99	-2.50	0.013
4 Negative Review	-1.41	1.17	-1.21	0.228
3 Negative Review	-0.84	1.01	-0.83	0.406
2 Negative Review	0.57	1.29	0.44	0.660
1 Negative Review	2.14	1.05	2.04	0.042
No Negative Review	2.05	1.07	1.93	0.055
5 Negative Review x Awe	0.59	0.17	3.40	0.001
4 Negative Review x Awe	0.43	0.20	2.12	0.035
3 Negative Review x Awe	0.35	0.18	1.99	0.048
2 Negative Review x Awe	0.28	0.21	1.31	0.190
1 Negative Review x Awe	0.07	0.18	0.41	0.683
No Negative Review x Awe	0.12	0.18	0.65	0.519
Conditional Effects of Review Conditions x Awe				
6 Negative Review	0.05	0.13	0.35	0.727
5 Negative Review	0.64	0.11	5.84	< 0.001
4 Negative Review	0.47	0.15	3.18	0.002
3 Negative Review	0.40	0.12	3.46	0.001
2 Negative Review	0.33	0.17	1.98	0.049
1 Negative Review	0.12	0.12	1.01	0.312
No Negative Review	0.16	0.12	1.35	0.177

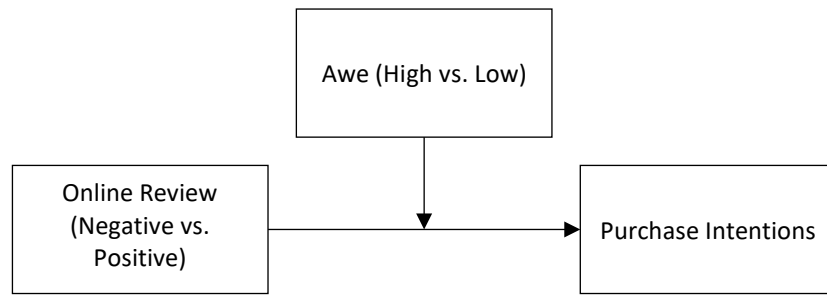


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

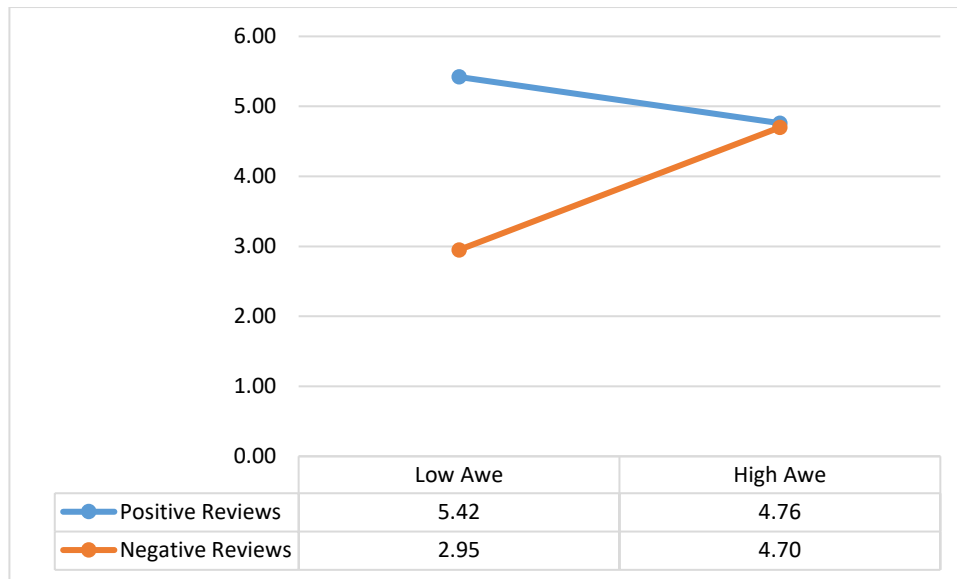


Figure 2. Purchase Intentions by Awe and Review Valence Conditions (Study 1a)



Figure 3. Purchase Intentions by Awe and Review Conditions (Study 1b)

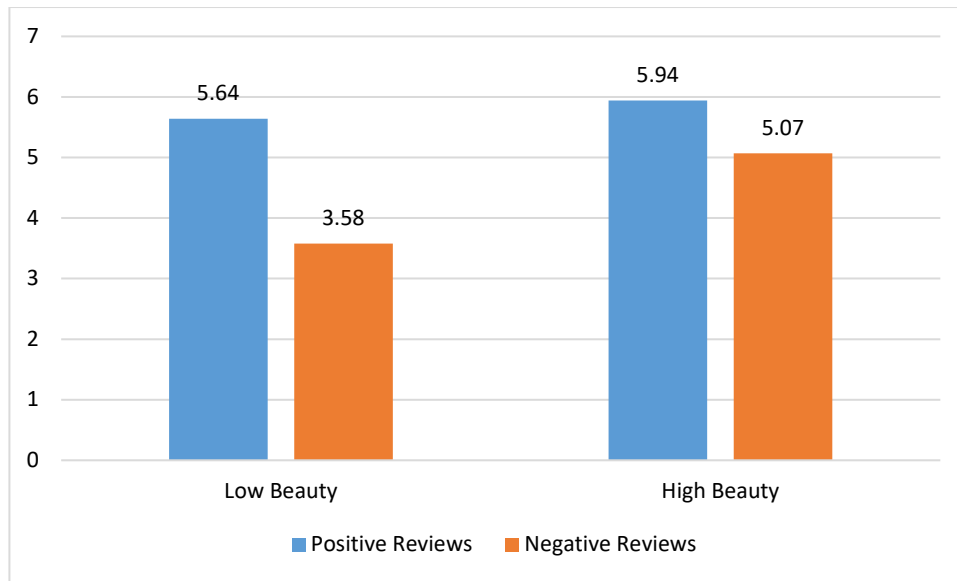
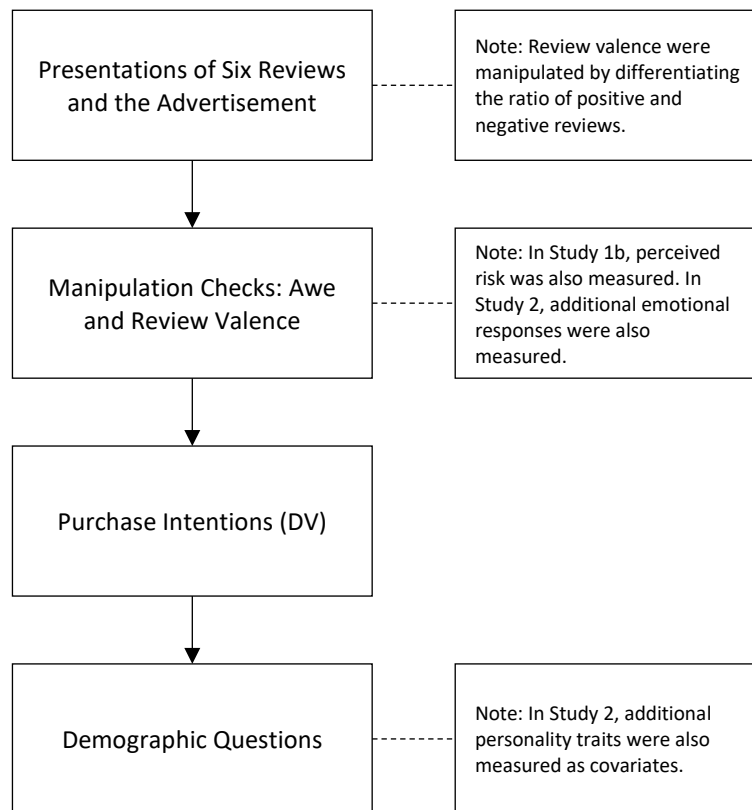


Figure 4. Purchase Intentions by Beauty and Review Valence Conditions (Study 2)

Appendix A. Demographic Profiles of Participants

	Study 1a	Study 1b	Study 2
Sample Size	79	386	166
Gender			
Male	53%	54%	58%
Female	47%	46%	42%
Average Age	35.27	35.69	35.57
Education			
Less than High school	1%	0%	1%
High School or equivalent (e.g., GED)	15%	24%	19%
Trade/technical/vocational training	16%	19%	11%
Bachelor's degree	61%	44%	55%
Post-graduate qualification	7%	13%	14%
Ethnic Background			
Caucasian	44%	72%	56%
African American	10%	7%	5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%	1%
Asian	33%	10%	28%
Native American or Alaska Native	6%	2%	4%
Hispanic or Latino	5%	6%	5%
Other	2%	2%	1%
Annual Household Income			
Less than \$15,000	17%	6%	13%
\$15,000 ~ \$24,999	4%	10%	14%
\$25,000 ~ \$34,999	20%	12%	20%
\$35,000 ~ \$49,999	18%	22%	14%
\$50,000 ~ \$84,999	28%	30%	25%
\$85,000 ~ \$99,999	8%	8%	5%
Greater than \$100,000	5%	12%	9%

Appendix B. Overall Procedure of Experiments



Appendix C. Advertisement Stimuli



Hotel Advertisement (Studies 1a and 1b)



High Beauty Café Advertisement (Study 2)



Low Beauty Café Advertisement (Study 2)

Appendix D. Follow-up Tests Examining Differences across Seven Review Conditions

(Study 1b)

Condition	Review Evaluations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	1.63	---				
	0.105	---				
3	5.01	3.37	---			
	< 0.001	< 0.001	---			
4	8.22	6.6	3.29	---		
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	---		
5	15.11	13.48	10.15	6.72	---	
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	---	
6	18.22	16.59	13.27	9.8	3.12	---
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.002	---
7	18.94	17.32	14.02	10.55	3.91	0.81
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.42
Condition	Perceived Risk (Pre Ad Exposure)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	-0.24	---				
	0.809	---				
3	-2.78	-2.54	---			
	0.006	0.012	---			
4	-5.62	-5.38	-2.89	---		
	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.004	---		
5	-10.29	-10.05	-7.54	-4.55	---	
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	---	
6	-14.08	-13.84	-11.35	-8.3	-3.81	---
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	---
7	-14.36	-14.11	-11.64	-8.61	-4.13	-0.34
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.733
Condition	Perceived Risk (Post Ad Exposure)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	-2.5	---				
	0.013	---				
3	-3.53	-1.01	---			
	0.001	0.312	---			
4	-5.67	-3.19	-2.2	---		
	< 0.001	0.002	0.028	---		
5	-9.4	-6.89	-5.9	-3.61	---	
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	---	
6	-10.9	-8.39	-7.41	-5.1	-1.51	---
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.133	---
7	-10.67	-8.17	-7.19	-4.9	-1.32	0.18
	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.188	0.858

Note: Upper scores indicate t-values, while lower scores indicate p-values.