The Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume on Product Returns as Mediated by Customer Expectations

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ABSTRACT

Customer reviews have transformed and created innovative ways for businesses to deliver their products. Their buying choices are often advised and guided by online reviews and it is a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that today is an integral part of the online environment containing more information about a product or service experience. While shopping online, customers cannot physically see the product and it builds customer expectations which can lead to product returns. Therefore, this study will analyze the effect of review valence and review volume on product returns, using customer expectations as mediation. Data was collected through a survey of those who live in Indonesia and have considered returning products from the Erigo Online Store in several e-commerce sites. In addition, the relationship between each variable will be determined by using partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This research draws conclusions about the effect of online reviews on product returns. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the field of consumer behavior.

Keywords: Review Valence, Review Volume, Customer Expectation, Product return.

1. Introduction

Customer reviews have changed and created innovative ways for businesses to deliver their products. Their purchase options are often suggested and guided by online reviews and this is the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) form that is currently an integral part of the online environment which contains more information about the product or service experience (Gottschalk, 2018). Nowadays, most of the platforms in e-commerce have a star rating system that can be used to rate and it plays a big part in any online business that wants to control its reputation on the Internet (Bassig, 2020). Many users consider online surveys to be a more reliable source of information than other traditional sources of information (Fang, Ye, Kucukusta, and Law, 2016). The average rating (e.g. valence) and amount of reviews (e.g. volume) of the product are frequently highlighted on the product page. Yang, Sarathy, and Walsh (2016) said that review valence, also known as average rating, counts in the distribution of star ratings on a product in the e-commerce.

According to the previous research which was done by Li, Ma, and Chu. (2020), the evidence shows that the review valence (average star rating) and the review volume (number of reviews) can raise customer expectations and thus improve product return behavior. When buying goods online, customers will have additional return rights because customers' decisions may be based on a brief description or photo, thus what the customers will get may not always be what has been expected. (Which, 2021). When shopping online, customers may not have a clear idea of the product that is going to be bought and it is given the fact that a product can be returned if it does not meet the customer's expectations will be an important factor to determine whether to make a purchase (Standford, 2021).

Through this research, review valence and review volume will be focused on determining whether customer expectation has an impact on product return. In accordance with Li et al. (2020), there is a possibility of increasing product returns due to online review and this result proves the evidence why it may happen. Also, the evidence suggests that customer expectations are a very important factor in review volume and review volume.

According to these reasons, the purpose of this research is (1) to analyze the effect of review valence on customer expectation, (2) to analyze

the effect of review volume on customer expectation, (3) to analyze the effect of customer expectation on product return, (4) to analyze the effect of review valence and product return mediated by customer expectation, (5) and to analyze the effect of review volume and product return mediated by customer expectation.

Furthermore, this research will use some literature reviews that are related to the relationship between review valence, review volume, customer expectation, and product return of the e-commerce in Indonesia. Also, it is expecting that this research will help the marketers or business owners to have a better understanding of the influential factors, so they can bring out conclusions about the effects of online reviews. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the field of consumer behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

The disconfirmation theory was found by Oliver (1980) and it is used by Li et al. (2020) in their previous research. Oliver (1980) stated that customer satisfaction is positively related to the disconfirmation. It means, an increased in customer satisfaction causes by a positive disconfirmation (perceived performance higher than expected), while the negative disconfirmation (lower than what it had been expected) would decrease customer satisfaction. As such, customer satisfaction is considered an important thing for disconfirmation. Additionally, Zhang, Wei, Line, and Cheng (2021) says online reviews in e-commerce which is considered as aWOMS, can be a determination for customers' expectation before making a purchase in e-commerce. Basically, the online reviews in e-commerce are usually written by other customers who are generally considered to be more reliable than the information provided by the service provider (Zhang et al., 2021).

2.2. Review Valence

Review valence refers to eWOM's "tone or preference" and is generally expressed as positive, negative, or neutral feedback to companies, manufacturers, and other consumers (You, Vadakkepatt, and Joshi 2015). Summaries of review valence are usually placed prominently in a table or graph between the brand name and the list price, and often use star rating systems (usually with a maximum of 5 stars), which due to its prominent location that valence consistently ranks as one of the most prominent and compelling features of online reviews (Karabas, Karaklas, Weber, and Muehling, 2020). It has been found that the valance of the review (i.e. positive or negative) influences how consumers think about products (Chen, 2016; Chen and Ng, 2017; Lombardi and Vernero, 2017). Reviews and review summaries suggest that they lead to more favorable responses from customers because more positive attitude and greater purchase intention (Tata et al., 2020).

2.3. Review Volume

Review volume is the total number of reviews for a product and it is an indicator of the popularity of the product and the intensity of WOM (Maslowska et al., 2017). According to Arora and Sharma. (2018), the number of reviews and discussions on the online platform helps them become more observable and not only shows the performance of the product in the market, but also the popularity of the product. Most of the consumers in e-commerce often rely on the review volume because they think if a store or a product does not have a huge number of reviews, they will not consider buying it and it will most likely affect the consumers' purchasing expectation towards the products (Vasic, Kilibarda, and Kaurin, 2019).

2.4. Customer Expectation

Customer expectations encompass everything customers expect a product, service, or organization. Basically, customer expectations are shaped in the customer's mind based on the customer's individual experience and lessons learned, as well as previous experience and knowledge (Salesforce, 2020). According to Willot (2020), customers have clear and tangible expectations about the products or services they have purchased, and performance expectations that include functional factors resulting from anticipated changes in products or services over time. Additionally, most importantly, customers have mutual and service level expectations that are directly related to customer relationships and interactions with businesses and organizations.

Sometimes all reviews are good, not even average, and when customers buy a product, they have some basic knowledge. Additionally, if some of the reviews are very different from customer expectations or other reviews, customers will consider the details of the information about the reviews (Peng, Cui, Zhuang, and Li, 2016).

2.5. Product Return

According to Li et al. (2020), product returns is related to the expectation discomfort theory (Oliver, 1980) that happens because the results are worse than what have been expected, for instance it will be considered negative disconfirmations if they are below the customers' expectation. It can be said that product returns are a major part of the customers' journey since product return may make it easier to get back to the earlier stages of the journey, or it could be part of a positive or a negative feedback that customers then share with friends or submit for app review (Robertson, Hamilton, and Jap, 2020).

2.6. The Relationship of Review Valence and Customer Expectation

In the context of online purchase, according to Qazi, Tamjidyamcholo, Raj, Hardaker, and Standing (2017), indicates that consumer expectations can be affected by electronic word-of-mouth because consumers use the information

in online reviews to form initial expectations for their products. High overview volume can increase business or product visibility as it is often seen as an indicator of market demand and sales levels (Li et al., 2020). Also, Lee. (2016), says that online reviews can help shape attitude (Wahyuarini et al., 2022) or readers' expectations about a product's quality and performance. When the valence of a product is too high, consumers may develop expectations about the quality of the product.

H1: Review valence has a positive impact on customer expectation.

2.7. The Relationship of Review Volume and Customer Expectation

Review volume refers to the number of reviews and therefore reflects the amount of information available to online shoppers (Yang et al., 2016). As stated by Arora and Sharma. (2018), the number of reviews reflects not only the market performance of the product, but also the popularity of the product as a large amount of information posted by existing customers, increasing the certainty of purchase decisions and reducing the risk of errors and risks. According to Yamada (2019), customers estimate customer expectations based on different information, such as number of reviews and comments included in reviews. On the other hand, if the customer has used the product/service, the customer will estimate the customer's expectations based on past experience. Therefore, the higher the number of the review, it will increase the customer expectation towards the products.

H2: Review volume has positive impact on customer expectation.

2.8. The Relationship of Customer Expectation and Product Return

As stated by Li et al. (2020) in their research, product returns are linked to the expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), which results from outcomes that are worse than expected. The customer prioritizes their needs, selects the products and services that can meet their expectations, and finally uses the possessed products (Madzík and Pelantová, 2018). Nevertheless, customers have high expectations of specific product features and are highly sought after as a after-sales service (Cardoni et al., 2018). Li et al. (2020) adds that once expectations are not met, customers take compelling or even aggressive measures, such as returning an item.

H3: Customer expectation has a positive impact on product return.

2.9. Mediation of Customer Expectation Towards Relationship of Review Valence and Product Returns

Zvagelsky (2021) adds that the researchers accurately predicted that the review valence of product was an effective indicator of quality, and that products with higher average ratings not only led to higher sales, but also lower returns. The congruence/incongruence of review valences influences the perception and behavior of consumers in the different stages of the decision-making process, especially in the service environment (Chen, Nguyen, and Klaus. 2015). According to Lee (2016), the readers' expectations will increase if the review valence is high. Product return occurs when a customer receives a product and finds that it is unsatisfactory or it does not meet the expectation, so customers can submit a return request.

Thus, if the expectations that are built does not meet the customers' expectation, customers will likely to return the product (Li et al., 2020). In addition, product returns make manage work difficult and undesirable for companies and consumers because the e-commerce industry is still struggling to provide consumers with the most relevant product information to prevent or at least reduce product returns (Gelbrich, Gäthke, and Hübner, 2017).

H4: The effect of review valence to product return is mediated by customer expectation.

2.10. Mediation of Customer Expectation Towards Relationship of Review Volume and Product Returns

A reputation information site estimates the rating of a product/service, which the consumer uses to decide whether to buy it or not, from reviewer feedback uploaded by number of reviewers (Yamada, 2019). In addition, a huge number of reviews are also positively correlated with great accuracy despite the results of highly accurate reviews and high ratings, products with varying ratings resulted in unclear signals of product quality to consumers, resulting in higher results (Zvagelsky ,2021). The consumers tend see the number of reviews for a particular product to find out if the product popular and valuable or not (Bataineh, 2015). In accordance with Li et al. (2020), if the expectations do not meet the customers expectation, they are more likely to make product returns.

H5: The effect of review volume to product return is mediated by customer expectation.

The purpose of this research will examine the relationship between variables that influence product returns such as review valence, review volume, and customer expectation. Through those variables, it will be found out whether those variables influence each other can strengthen or weaken the relationship between variables, then later will have an impact on the product returns of the e-commerce marketplace in Indonesia According to the hypothesis development, the research framework will be shown in Figure 1.1
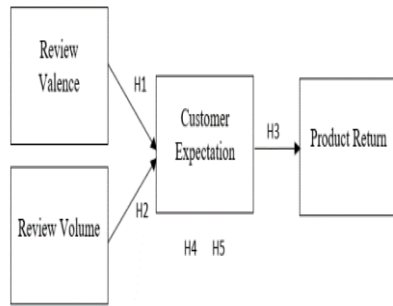
Figure 1 Theoritical framework of review valence, review volume, customer expectation and product return

3. Research Methodology

This research is using a quantitative method from purposive sampling. The requirements of the survey are those who make a purchase through Erigo Online Store at least once within the last 5 months. Participants have ever considered returning a product from Erigo Online Store.

The variables used are all based on the previous research by Li, Xa, and Chu (2020), such as review valence, review volume, customer expectation, and product return. The indicator of review valence is based on Xiao and Li (2019); and Antheunis, Valkenburg, and Peter (2010). Indicators of review volume is based on; Moe and Trusov (2011) in Li et al. (2020). Indicator of customer expectation is based on; Kosiba, Acheampong, Adeola, and Hinson (2020). And indicator of product return is based on; to Li et al. (2016) and Minnema et al. (2016).

This research is using the Likert scale in the interval of 1-5. In relation to the respondents, around 120 respondents are required for the questionnaire in the current survey, as the number of respondents depends on the number of variables and measurement statements. The samples will be collected and obtained from an online questionnaire for users in Indonesia. The characteristics of the respondents for the survey are gender, age, marital status, location, occupation, income, the use of e-commerce, making a purchase at Erigo Online Store, making a purchase at Erigo Online Store within the last 5 months, and returning a product from Erigo Online Store.

Data collected from online questionnaires, especially from Google Forms, are analyzed using PLS-SEM from SmartPLS. The data collected must first be checked for reliability and validity. In quantitative studies, the validity is classified as a measure of the accuracy of the spatial measurement, while the metric accuracy can be described as reliability (Heale and Twycross, 2015). In addition to validity and reliability, SEM can be used to test the effect of a descriptive variable on a dependent variable, and descriptive variables can be estimated indirectly or directly on a customer expectation.

Table 1 Respondents; Characteristics

		Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	66.2%
	Female	86	33.8%
Age	17	9	6.9%
	17-30	117	90%
	31-45	4	3.1%
Marital Status	Married	11	8.5%
	Single	119	91.5%
Location	Indonesia	130	100%
Occupation	Students	105	80%
	Private Employee	19	14.6%
	Entrepreneur	5	3.8%
	BUMN Employee	1	0.8%
Income	< Rp 1.000.000	35	26.9%
	Rp 1.000.000 – Rp 2.000.000	46	35.4%
	Rp 2.000.000 – Rp 3.000.000	21	16.2%
	Rp 3.000.000 – Rp 4.000.000	7	5.4%
	> Rp 4.000.000	21	16.2%
The use of the e-commerce	Yes	130	100%
Has ever made a purchase at Erigo Online Store	Yes	130	100%
Transaction at least once within the last 5 months	Yes	130	100%
Returning a product from Erigo Online Store	Yes	130	100%

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Measurement Model/ Outer Model

According to Hair et al. (2019), convergent validity evaluates how much the two measurements of the same concept correlate. The intended concept is being measured by the scale of the high correlation. Additionally, Ghozali and Latan (2015) stated that the convergent validity will be considered valid if the outer loading is ≥ 0.7. However, in the first stage of the research, the value of 0.5-0.7 will still be considered valid. Hair et al. (2019). In Table 2, it shows that all of the outer loadings are above 0.7 which is considered valid. In addition, the convergent validity is also considered valid if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is ≥ 0.5. The AVE of customer expectation is 0.674; product return 0.628; review valence 0.694; and review volume 0.642.

According to Hair et al. (2019), discriminant validity is different from the similar concept. The validity can be measured by each of the indicators in cross loading. Table 2 shows that the cross loading for each indicator is higher than the other variables. Cronbach's alpha in Table 6 is reliable because it is greater than the cut off 0.7.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Analysis

Construct and Item Description	Cross Loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Customer Expectation		0.674	0.757	Reliable & Valid
CE1. I assume that the checkout process at the Erigo store is not fast enough*.	0.741			Valid

CE2. I believe the quality of the products in the Erigo store is quite good.	0.850		Valid
CE3. In general, the service provided by the Erigo store is very good.	0.866		Valid
Product Return	0.628	0.704	Reliable & Valid
PR1. I have considered returning a product from Erigo store.	0.804		Valid
PR2. The return process at Erigo store does not take a long time.	0.804		Valid
PR3. The return process at Erigo store is easy.	0.768		Valid
Review Valence	0.694	0.780	Reliable & Valid
RVA1. In my opinion, the reviewers on the product at the Erigo store said it was worth buying.	0.86		Valid
RVA2. In my opinion, the average review rate of products in the Erigo store is high.	0.872		Valid
RVA3. In my opinion, the evaluation or feedback given to a product at the Erigo store is positive.	0.762		Valid
Review Volume	0.642	0.720	Reliable & Valid
RVO1. In my opinion, the total number of product reviews in the Erigo store is huge.	0.75		Valid
RVO2. In my opinion, the majority of the reviews are favorable.	0.818		Valid
RVO3. In my opinion, a certain product has a huge amount of positive review.	0.833		Valid

source data is processed, 2022

4.2. Structural Model/ Inner Model

Inner model is a structural model that is used to predict causality relationships (causal relationships) between latent variables or variables that cannot be measured directly. R-squared (R^2) is a statistical measure of the percentage of variance of the dependent variable described by one or more independent variables in the regression model. According to Hair et al. (2019), R-square of 0.25 is considered low, 0.50 moderate, and 0.75 strong. The R-square is shown in the Table 3. The following test is Q^2 predictive relevance. the value ranges from 0 to 1. If the Q^2 value is> 0, this indicates that the model used in the research has approximate relevance, and if the Q^2 value is 0, it indicates the model in research. The result of Q^2 will be shown in Table 4. Subsequently, Hair et al. (2019) said if the value closes +1, it means that the coefficient of the path is considered to be a strong relationship between the paths. If the value is close to -1, it can be considered as a negative relation. Nevertheless, if the value is close to -0, then the coefficient indicates that the path is positively correlated. It shows that the significant variables in the path coefficient support the hypothesis. As for the hypothesis, the criteria for hypothesis testing are that T-statistics should be 1.96 or greater and the level of p-value should be below 0.05. Based on Table 4, review valence has a positive impact on customer expectation with t-statistics value of 15.986; review volume has a positive impact on customer expectation with t-statistics value of 2.413; customer expectation has a positive impact on product return with t-statistics value of 23.207; review volume and product return affected by customer expectation with value of 2.262; and review

valence and product return affected by customer expectation with value of 0.670.

Table 3. R-Square

Variables	R-Square
Customer Expectation	0.917
Product Return	0.641

Source: 2023 Processed Data

Table 4. Q^2 Predictive Relevance

Dependent Variables	Q-Square
Customer Expectation	0.604
Product Return	0.388

Source: 2023 Processed Data

Table 5. Results Summary

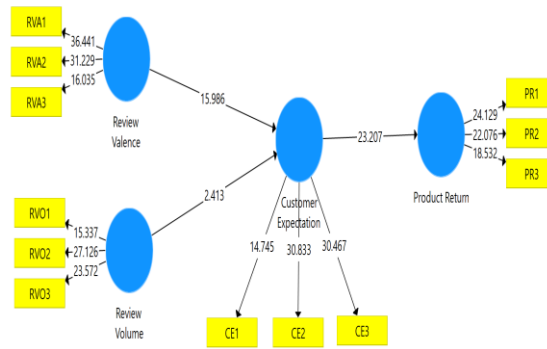| Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-statistics	P-value	Result
Review Valence -> Customer Expectation	0.837	15.986	0.000	Accepted
Review Volume -> Customer Expectation	0.147	2.413	0.016	Accepted
Customer Expectation -> Product Return	0.801	23.207	0.000	Accepted
Review Volume -> Customer Expectation -> Product Return	0.117	2.262	0.024	Accepted
Review Valence -> Customer Expectation -> Product Return	0.670	18.348	0.000	Accepted

Source: 2023 Processed Data

Figure 2. Inner Model

Accordingly, in the hypothesis testing involving 130 respondents, the five hypotheses are all supported. The review valance (or average rating) in the Erigo Store is high, and the average rating of the overall product is 4.8 out of 5. Hence, it builds up the customer expectation that their products are good enough. Hypothesis 1 showed a positive relationship between review valence and customer expectation with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 and showed the result of t-statistics 15.986. A similar result was found by Li et al. (2020), which stated that review valence significantly impacts increasing customer expectations. It means the customer will have expectations if the review valence (the average rating) is high. The anticipation can be improved through positive review valence to customers.

The review volume (number of reviews) in Erigo is enormous. Many of the studies have ratings between 4 and 5 stars. Because of this, it builds up the customer expectation, expecting the products in Erigo to be good. Hypothesis 2 showed a positive relationship between review volume and customer expectation with a p-value of 0.016 < 0.05, displaying the result of t-statistics 2.413. Li et al. (2020) found a similar result: review volume significantly impacts increasing customer expectations. It means customers will have expectations if the volume (number of reviews) is enormous. The anticipation can be improved through the vast number of customer reviews, especially if there are many positive reviews.

Based on the reviews in Erigo, some of the reviewers said that the studies in Erigo built up their expectations towards the product in terms of quality. It turned out the actual product was different from what they had expected. Hence, many people made a product return because the quality did not meet their expectations. Hypothesis 3 showed a positive relationship between customer expectation and product return with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05, displaying the result of t-statistics 23.207. This can be explained by the expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), which states that customers have a confident expectation towards a product. Then, the satisfaction is determined by the prior perception and the actual product. Therefore, a product return may occur if the expectations do

not meet with the actual product. According to the hypothesis, a significant relationship exists between review valence and product return, which is mediated by customer expectation. Li et al. (2020) found a similar result, which stated that reviewing customer expectations significantly impacts increasing product return. It means customers will be more likely to return a product if the actual product does not meet their expectations. Hence, product returns can be increased through high expectations, especially from the speed of checkout and product quality.

Hypothesis 4 showed a positive relationship between review valence and product return mediated by customer expectation with p-value 0.024 < 0.05 and displayed the result of t-statistics 2.262. Li et al. (2020) found a similar effect, which stated that review valence towards product return is mediated by customer expectation. Customers will be more likely to return a product if the review valence or the average review is high. Hence, the product return can be increased by expecting the highness of the intermediate product rating.

Hypothesis 5 showed a positive relationship between review volume and product return mediated by customer expectation with p-value 0.000 < 0.05 and showed the result of t-statistics 18.348. Li et al. (2020) found a similar effect, which stated that review valence towards product return is mediated by customer expectation. Customers will be more likely to return a product if the review valence or the average review is high. Hence, the product return can be increased by expecting the highness of the intermediate product rating.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to find out if review valence and review volume can affect product return mediated by customer expectation. Five hypotheses are found in this research: 3 are direct effects, and the other 2 are indirect effects, which use customer expectation as the mediation. Based on the result and discussion, the five hypotheses are all supported.

Suppose online stores have many reviews, and the average is high. In that case, online stores should maintain their product quality so that the customer's expectations can be met and product returns will be less likely to occur. Also, it can review volume to build up customer expectations. Hence, a considerable number of reviews and a highness average rating do not determine whether the products will be the same as what is expected, leading to product return. Nevertheless, customers must be able to choose the products they purchase wisely so they will not be scammed.

There are two limitations to this research. First, the respondents are dominated by students, so the types of respondents are not various. Lastly, it isn't easy to find respondents due to specific criteria.

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