Essays on online reviews:
Insights on the review process for B2C and B2B markets

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Submitted research papers that form part of this dissertation

1. Seutter, J. 2024. “The origination of online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study of the underlying motives of review writers,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.

2. Poniatowski, M., Seutter, J., Ryu, S., and Kundisch, D. 2024. “When to ask for a review: An empirical analysis of online review request timing for different product types,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.

3. Seutter, J., Neumann, J. 2024. “Reviewing the simple things–how ease of evaluation affects online rating behavior,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.

4. Seutter, J., Kutzner, K., Stadtländer, M., Kundisch, D., and Knackstedt, R. 2023. "“Sorry, too much information”—Designing online review systems that support information search and processing,” *Electronic Markets 33*(1), 47 (doi: 10.1007/s12525-023-00664-1).

5. Seutter, J., Müller, M., Müller, S., and Kundisch, D. 2024. “Moment or movement–the heterogeneous impact of the Black Lives Matter Movement on personal and societal Charitable crowdfunding campaigns,” *Internet Research, Ahead-of-print* (doi: 10.1108/INTR-11-2022-0904).

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1. Seutter, J., Neumann, J. 2019. "Head over feels? Differences in online rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic service aspects," *Proceedings of the 40th International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)*, Research-in-Progress, Munich, Germany.

2. Seutter, J., Neumann, J., Kundisch, D. 2020. "Nudging in judging – differences in online rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic service aspects," *Tagungsband der 15. Internationalen Tagung Wirtschaftsinformatik 2020 (WI)*, Research-in-Progress, Potsdam, Germany.

3. Seutter, J., Neumann, J. 2020. "Reviewing the simple Things- How ease of evaluation affects online rating behavior," *Proceedings of the 28th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)*, Virtual.

4. Kutzner, K., Stadtländer, M., Seutter, J., Kundisch, D., Knackstedt, R. 2021. ""Sorry, too much information" designing online review systems that support information search and processing," *Proceedings of the 29th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)*, Virtual.

5. Poniatowski, M., Seutter, J., Kundisch, D. 2021. ""Timing is everything" – an empirical analysis of the timing of online review elicitation," *Proceedings of the 42nd International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)*, Austin, USA.

6. Müller, M., Seutter, J., Müller, S., Kundisch, D. 2021. "Moment or movement – an empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns," *Proceedings of the 42nd International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)*, Research-in-Progress, Austin, USA.

7. Seutter, J., Müller, M., Müller, S., Kundisch, D. 2022. "Moment or movement – an empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns," In: *Proceedings of the 55th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)*, Virtual

8. Seutter, J. 2022. "Online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study of underlying motivations," *Proceedings of the 30th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)*, Timișoara, Romania.

9. Seutter, J. 2023. "The origination of online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study on the underlying motives of review writers," *Proceedings of AMA Summer Academic Conference*, Extended Abstract. San Francisco, USA.

Co-authored publications that are not part of this dissertation

1. Seutter, J., Müller, M., Kundisch, D. 2023. „Verdrängen Smart-Product-Service-Systeme die Interaktion in Online-Communities? — Empirische Evidenz aus einer Rezept-Community,“ *Wirtschaftsinformatik & Management*, 1-8.

2. Kempkes, J. P., Kreuzhage, K., Kundisch, D., Seutter, J., Weskamp, C. 2023. “Digitale Transformation im Theater – Mittels Besucherforschung und Entscheidungsunterstützung zur besseren Angebotsgestaltung,“ *Kultur Management Network Magazin*, 172.

3. Grieger, N., Seutter, J., Kundisch, D. 2022. “A rollercoaster of emotions – a semantic analysis of fundraising campaigns over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic,” *Proceedings of the 28th Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS)*, Minneapolis, USA.

Synopsis

1 Motivation

Due to the virtual nature of conducting business, e-commerce platforms face the challenge of how to establish trust and credibility among customers. Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar interactions, where customers can physically inspect products and engage with sellers, the digital context lacks these tangible cues. The difficulty of verifying the quality of products and the uncertainty surrounding online transactions create a barrier for customers. A market in which sellers possess more information about the quality of goods than buyers requires mechanisms for information disclosure, otherwise there is the potential for market failure (Akerlof 1970). Online reviews, a form of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) can be defined as consumer-generated, consumption-related communication that employs digital tools and is directed primarily at other consumers (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). As reviews facilitate information disclosure and foster trust and credibility in e-commerce, their importance has steadily grown with the emergence of e-commerce. Online review systems are web-based and facilitate the collection, aggregation, and dissemination of user-generated evaluations about products and services in the form of online reviews (e.g., Seutter et al. 2023). A review typically includes a textual description and a numerical rating (Seutter et al. 2023). Furthermore, information asymmetry can be further reduced by incorporating design features that support the reading and processing of online reviews, i.e., aggregation, presorting, highlighting, listing, filtering, sorting or translating (Seutter et al. 2023).

Online reviews influence purchase decisions both online (e.g., Mudambi and Schuff 2010) and offline (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). It is difficult to quantify the exact economic value of online reviews, as they offer different informational value to different types of consumers (Wu et al. 2015). However, it has been confirmed in the literature that online reviews can have a positive effect on sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006) and prices (Bai et al. 2017). In order to take advantage of these positive effects, knowledge on how to collect reviews is of crucial importance. The literature agrees that it is advantageous to sellers to receive a great number of reviews (Duan et al. 2008), positive reviews (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006) and information on the review context (e.g., information on the reviewers' identities; Forman et al. 2008). The voluntary nature of providing online reviews comes with challenges. This is evident in the rating distributions, which typically exhibit a J-shaped pattern on a 1 to 5 scale, contrary to the expected normal distribution seen in actual population distributions (Hu et al. 2017).

The majority of reviews have either a very high or a very low rating, and a smaller number of reviews are collected with a middle rating. In the literature, this phenomenon is described as the so-called underreporting bias (Hu et al. 2017). Consumers with extreme levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction are more likely to self-select to write a review than consumers with moderate satisfaction levels (Hu et al. 2017).

Hence, we find the following research problem:

Problem 1: How to stimulate the creation of a representative collection of online reviews without introducing bias.

To address this problem, academics began to conduct research on the underlying motives and elicitation strategies. From the literature, we know that there are many motives for writing online reviews, e.g., social benefits, economic incentives, concern for other consumers, and the potential to enhance one's self-worth (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). By considering the underlying motives, review system providers adapted their strategies to encourage consumers to write online reviews. Typical examples of such strategies are financial compensation (e.g., Qiao et al. 2020) or design features that provide information on peers' performance (e.g., Burtch et al. 2018). However, the quality of online reviews is often linked to the underlying motivation of a review's author. Khern-am-nuai et al. (2018) find that monetary incentives lead to significantly more positive reviews, but decrease the quality of the reviews, i.e., review length, helpfulness score, readability and frequency of product-features. Furthermore, the introduction of a monetary incentive can have a crowding out effect, as it reduces the contributors' intrinsic motivation. Hence, their review writing can be reduced or even stopped (Liu and Feng 2021). These findings highlight the importance of comprehending the motives and potential biases that affect review writers and determining appropriate elicitation strategies.

The current state of the online review literature has focused almost exclusively on the business-to-consumer (B2C) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) contexts and largely neglected online reviews in business-to-business (B2B) (Chatzipanagiotou et al. 2023; Gutt et al. 2019). Considering the rise of review platforms with a strong B2B focus (i.e., TrustRadius.com or G2.com), those systems are faced with new challenges (Gutt et al. 2019). As the B2B context differs in many aspects from the B2C and C2C contexts—in terms of the product itself or the relationships between buyer and seller—results from the B2C and C2C review literature cannot directly be transferred (Chatzipanagiotou et al. 2023). To a large extent, it is not clear why and how businesses that collect and provide online reviews take advantage of them. To address this knowledge gap, it is necessary to investigate how online reviews and online review systems in B2B differ from those in B2C and C2C and what the underlying motives to participate in them are. Thus, my first paper aims to better understand the underlying motives for review writing on B2B online review platforms (Seutter 2024).

As previously mentioned, review system providers are willing to utilize and implement costly and elaborate incentives to obtain a representative and rich review database (Hu et al. 2017). While financial compensation has received considerable attention in the literature, less intrusive strategies, such as strategically choosing the timing of review requests, are scarce. This is surprising, since choosing the best time slots for the request may offer a cost-effective way to increase the number of reviews. However, the timing of review requests requires careful consideration (Jung et al. 2023). In this sense, my second paper investigates the timing of review requests and how different timing slots impact the review response rate (Poniatowski et al. 2024).

Product characteristics (e.g., utilitarian and hedonic) can have a significant impact on the interaction of consumers with online reviews, and can induce biases (Kronrod and Danziger 2013; Ren and Nickerson 2019). Depending on whether a consumer has purchased a utilitarian or a hedonic product can influence the way in which online reviews are written (e.g., Kronrod and Danziger 2013) or perceived (e.g., Ren and Nickerson 2019). Utilitarian goods serve a functional purpose and fulfill consumers' practical needs, whereas hedonic goods provide pleasure, enjoyment, or aesthetic value (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). The literature is interested in how these characteristics alter reviewing behavior in the creation of online reviews. For instance, Zhu et al. (2019) find that the shorter the evaluation duration for hedonic goods, the more likely consumers are to give extreme ratings. By contrast, the longer the evaluation duration for utilitarian goods, the more likely users are to give extreme reviews. The third paper in this dissertation pursues a similar approach by analyzing the rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic products. In Seutter and Neumann (2024) we analyze the rating behavior of goods that consist of both utilitarian and hedonic attributes (e.g., a theater visit) to find out how the self-selection into predominantly utilitarian (e.g., parking facilities) or hedonic attributes (e.g., the performance of the play) in a review text affects rating behavior (Seutter and Neumann 2024).

With the first three papers of my dissertation, I address three relevant problems related to the creation of online reviews. By doing so, I contribute specific solutions to the overall problem of review creation. Specifically, I contribute to the B2B context, the timing of the review requests and rating biases related to utilitarian and hedonic attributes.

As the number of online reviews increases, solutions to make the collected reviews easier to read and process become ever more important. Faced with numerous reviews, customers can easily be overwhelmed by their vast number (Seutter et al. 2023). Unless the presentation of online reviews is actively managed, customers will struggle to search for relevant reviews. Literature finds that the amount of online reviews, coupled with uncertainties about the review source and quality—resulting in information overload—can be overwhelming (Furner and Zinko 2017; Hu and Krishen 2019). Review system providers are faced with the task of adequately supporting the users of review systems in their information search and processing. To this end, they provide design features aimed at improving the scanning, reading, and processing of online reviews. However, there is little knowledge on how such design features support the exposure to and evaluation of online reviews.

This leads to the second research problem underlying this dissertation:

> *Problem 2: How to provide adequate support for the exposure and evaluation of online reviews in review systems.*

As stated, review systems use a variety of design features to enhance the scanning, reading, and processing of online reviews. Such design features hold great potential to facilitate information search and processing in online review systems. However, their use is heterogeneous and far from being fully exploited. While previous research has looked at the effect of selected design features on information overload, little consideration has been given to the interactions between, and the consequences of different design choices for more than one feature. Consequently, there is a need for more knowledge about which particular design features can improve information search and processing in online review systems. This gap is addressed by Seutter et al. (2023) through the development and evaluation of a taxonomy for information search and processing in online review systems. We develop a taxonomy following the method for taxonomy development by Nickerson et al. (2013) and provide information about the variety of design features that are available to improve the information search and processing of review systems (Seutter et al. 2023).

The fifth paper of this dissertation (Seutter et al. 2024), analyzes donation behavior in crowdfunding in the context of social activism. Whilst it lies outside of the scope of the online review literature, it nevertheless represents a relevant part of my research activities during my doctorate, and for this reason the paper has been included in this dissertation.

The dissertation is structured as follows: Section 2 provides information on the functionality of online reviews in markets with information asymmetry. In Section 3, I provide an overview of the current state of knowledge and point out the research gaps and the resulting research questions that are answered by this dissertation. Section 4 outlines each study included in this dissertation, along with the individual contributions of all co-authors and associated scientific presentations and publications. The research methodology employed throughout this dissertation is reflected in Section 5. The conclusion of this dissertation in Section 6 presents the theoretical and practical contributions, as well as the limitations of each study, and offers directions for future research.

2 Theoretical background

Information asymmetry is a central theoretical construct which underlies research on the functionality of review systems. A market characterized by information asymmetry, where sellers possess more information about the good's quality than buyers, can fail (Akerlof 1970). In such a "market for lemons" it takes a long time for buyers to discover the true quality of a purchased good. Sellers cannot offer products at different prices depending on their quality, as customers cannot recognize differences in quality. As owners of high-quality products cannot ask for a price equal to their product's true value, high-quality sellers are driven out of the market. This increases the probability of encountering a lemon, and customers might decide to leave the market. As a result, the market might fail. This failure can be mitigated through signaling (Dewally and Ederington 2006) and screening mechanisms (Stiglitz 1975).

The Signaling Theory by Spence (1973) describes how individuals can use signals to support potential employers in assessing their abilities or characteristics. Signaling helps to overcome information asymmetry when the assessment of qualities is challenging (Spence 1973). It is important that the signals are costly or difficult to fake, especially when one does not fulfill the expected requirements or qualifications. A costly signal ensures that only individuals holding the claimed attributes can send the signal. Examples of signals are, e.g., education, which serves as a signal for an individual's abilities or intelligence, and brands which serve as a signal for product quality. Screening is another mechanism aimed towards identifying the quality in markets with imperfect information (Stiglitz 1975). Here, the uninformed side makes a conscious effort to find information that helps them assess the quality of the potential trade partner (Stiglitz 1975).

Transactions in e-commerce often occur between strangers and over a spatial and temporal distance (Mavlanova et al. 2012). To prevent digital markets from turning into a "market for lemons" it is crucial to let the better-informed parties provide information on the true quality of the products or services. Seller-generated signals, e.g., warranty or brands, can provide consumers with information (Wells et al. 2011). However, compared to seller-generated signals, online customer reviews are considered more credible and, hence, more influential signals for consumers (Wang et al. 2020). In the context of e-commerce, online reviews constitute an important source of information about product quality for consumers (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). The reviews help to inform consumers about the quality of a certain good (Li and Hitt 2010), and even a single review can serve as a signal by providing specific insights into a product's quality and performance. The content of the review, including its textual description and numerical rating, can indicate a reviewer's satisfaction with a product. Providing additional information on the reviewer's identity can further help to screen the signals provided in a review (Cheung et al. 2014). However, the usefulness of one single review as a signal can be limited, as one review can easily be fake or biased. Few studies have evaluated the impact of signal costs during the online review process (Wang et al. 2020). By contrast, the aggregation of reviews, often summarized with the rating distribution and an average rating, provides a more robust signal about a product and is harder to fake (Ivanova and Scholz 2017).

The voluntary nature of online reviews makes it challenging to collect a representative collection of online reviews. Considering this challenge, online review systems ought to be built in a way that prevents or addresses potential biases. Academic research that examines user behavior on online review platforms can support the identification and understanding of potential biases and help to address them. Important streams in this broad research field are the creation, the exposure, and the evaluation of online reviews (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). The creation of online reviews covers numerous aspects, e.g., understanding the motivation for writing reviews (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), strategies to elicit reviews from consumers (e.g., Burtch et al. 2018) or understanding differences in the reviewing behavior for different product types (e.g., Weathers et al. 2015). Review exposure and evaluation also covers different aspects, e.g., how mobile channels change the exposure to online reviews (Kim et al. 2021), or what the determinants of the helpfulness of online reviews are (Cao et al. 2011).

To conclude, results from research on the usage of online reviews aims to support the development of more sophisticated review systems that better support informed purchase decisions. In this way, online reviews will further improve their function as mechanisms that reduce information asymmetry in e-commerce.

3 Body of knowledge

3.1 Conceptual model

The concept of online reviews is described by Babić Rosario et al. (2020) as a three-stage process, i.e., the creation of online reviews, its exposure to consumers, and the evaluation of the online review content by consumers (see Figure 1). Consumers can engage in the online reviews process in the role of sender and receiver.

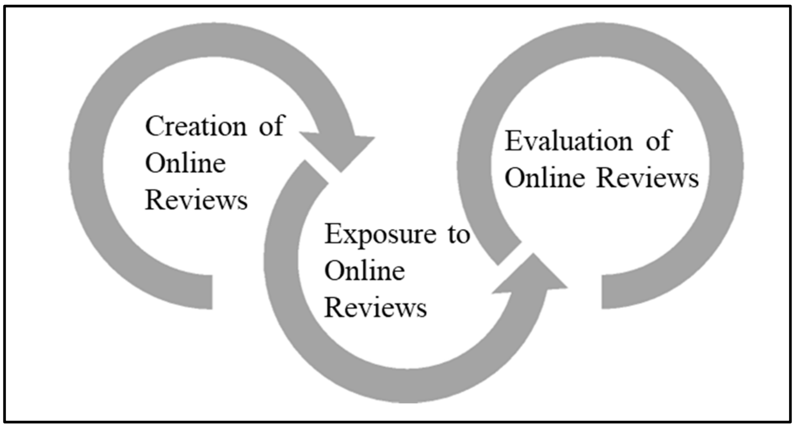

Figure 1. Three-stage process of online reviews.

Source: Based on Babić Rosario et al. 2020.

The creation of online reviews involves the generation of original content by consumers based on their experiences with products or services. During this stage, individuals share their perceptions, opinions, and evaluations online. By understanding consumers' motives, review system providers can adapt their elicitation strategies accordingly to encourage online review creation. For instance, if consumers are motivated by altruism, review system providers can emphasize the social impact of sharing online reviews (Babić Rosario et al. 2020).

Exposure to online reviews can occur either accidentally or deliberately, as a result of an active endeavor (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). The motivation to actively seek exposure can be influenced by individual traits and goals. For example, pre-purchase exposure might involve someone actively looking for online reviews in order to save decision-making time and improve the purchase decisions (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003), whilst post-purchase exposure might be sought when a consumer is extremely satisfied or dissatisfied with a purchase (Bailey 2005). Review system providers can support exposure to reviews by providing opportunities to access online reviews more easily by making them more visible through online platforms and search engine optimization (Babić Rosario et al. 2020).

Evaluation of online reviews means that consumers assess the value of online reviews they have been exposed to (Babić Rosario et al. 2020), interact with the reviews and assess their relevance, credibility, and usefulness. This stage is driven by characteristics of receivers, senders, the message and contextual characteristics (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). Recipients may evaluate the content based on factors such as the sender's reputation, the message's informativeness, and its alignment with personal needs or preferences (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). Review system providers can support the evaluation stage by providing a structure on their platform, e.g., highlighting pros and cons or using colors. However, Babić Rosario et al. (2020) explicitly state that research in this area is limited and that there is a need to know how review system providers can facilitate the online review process, e.g., through providing structure, highlights, and lists.

3.2 Research gaps

The body of research on online reviews is extensive but also scattered and diversified, which makes it difficult to gain an overall understanding of this field (Zhang et al. 2023). Despite its extensiveness, there are pertinent issues that call for further research due to ongoing changes, and continuing interest in online reviews. In the next section, I elaborate on the issues that the papers of my dissertation address.

Online reviews are multifaceted and employed in various contexts. By examining the underlying motives for participating in online reviews, their successful dissemination and usage has been supported by academia (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). While extant research has focused on online reviews in the C2C and B2C contexts, recent surveys indicate that B2B sales are also heavily influenced by WOM (Baer 2019). In line with these results, a rise of review platforms with a strong B2B focus (i.e., TrustRadius.com or G2.com) can be observed. However, it is undisputed that B2B and B2C markets differ in several aspects. B2C markets are typically characterized by standardized products, impersonal relationships between buyers and sellers, relatively unsophisticated products, and a reliance on mass market advertising (Mudambi 2002). By contrast, B2B markets typically offer customized products and services and are characterized by more personal relationships between buyer and supplier, highly complex products, sophisticated buyers, and personal selling interactions (Mudambi 2002). Given these distinctions, the findings of current research on online reviews in B2C contexts are insufficiently informative for the B2B context (Chatzipanagiotou et al. 2023; Iankova et al. 2019). Recent research suggests that the motives driving e-WOM in B2B and B2C contexts may differ (Kwon et al. 2022). This implies that the established motives for writing online reviews in the B2C context cannot be directly transferred to B2B review platforms. Accordingly, I formulate the following research gap:

Gap 1: There is a lack of knowledge about the motives for review writing on B2B online review platforms.

To obtain a representative and rich review database and to reduce a skewed representation of the product's quality in the reviews collected for a product, review system providers are willing to implement and use costly and elaborate incentives. Extant studies have primarily focused on elicitation strategies, e.g., financial compensation (e.g., Qiao et al. 2020) or design features that provide information on peers' performance (e.g., Burtch et al. 2018). Especially economic incentives have received much attention in the literature, while research on contextual factors of online review elicitation, e.g., the timing of review requests, is scarce. This is surprising, given that choosing the best time slots for the request might offer a cost-effective approach to increasing the number of reviews. However, the timing of review requests requires thoughtful consideration and planning (Jung et al. 2023). Based on two field experiments, Jung et al. (2023) find that the timing of a review request significantly impacts the likelihood of consumers providing feedback, as reminders immediately after the purchase reduce the chance of reviews being posted. The authors explain their findings with the reactance mechanism, as immediate review reminders might threaten consumers' autonomy and trigger negative feelings in them. However, further questions regarding the timing of review requests (e.g., whether the day of the week or the time of the day impact the response rate) have not yet been researched but constitute an important empirical question with considerable practical value.

Given the assumption that the timing of review requests impacts the review posting rate and that there are more or less favorable times for users to be prepared to provide feedback, I formulate the second research gap:

Gap 2: There is a lack of knowledge about the impact of the timing of review requests.

One commonly made distinction for products and services in the online review literature is between utilitarian and hedonic goods. Numerous studies focus on differences in the consumption and writing of online reviews on utilitarian and hedonic goods (Moore 2015; Sen and Lerman 2007; Zhu et al. 2019). They show that evaluations of utilitarian goods tend to be goal-oriented, compared with evaluations of hedonic goods, which are rather subjective and, therefore, may lack relevance to other consumers (Sen and Lerman 2007). Consequently, readers of reviews of utilitarian goods rated the helpfulness of negative reviews significantly higher than readers of reviews for hedonic goods (Sen and Lerman 2007). The helpfulness of reviews for utilitarian and hedonic goods is further moderated by the explanation type, which can be either action-oriented ("I choose this product because…") or reaction-oriented ("I love this product because…") (Moore 2015, p. 30). Consumers find an action-oriented explanation more helpful in predicting their attitude towards utilitarian goods, while a reaction-oriented explanation is more helpful in predicting their attitude towards hedonic goods. Consequently, review writers tend to take an action-oriented perspective for reviews for utilitarian goods, and reaction-oriented perspective in reviews for hedonic goods (Moore 2015). The study of Zhu et al. (2019) examines the impact of evaluation duration on rating behavior. They find that shorter evaluation durations for hedonic goods are more likely to result in extreme ratings, while longer evaluation durations for utilitarian goods are more likely to lead to extreme reviews. The authors explain their finding with attitude certainty theory, suggesting that the perceived certainty of users' own attitudes toward a product or service influences their rating behavior (Zhu et al. 2019). Although multiple studies on online reviews have distinguished between utilitarian and hedonic goods, to the best of my knowledge, no study has examined how utilitarian and hedonic attributes of a product or service that has both types of attribute impact reviewing behavior. While some products or services are clearly more utilitarian or hedonic, others are more complex and contain both types of attributes. Since reviewers are free to choose their review content, it is unclear whether focusing on a utilitarian or hedonic attribute in a review might lead to a systematic bias in the rating behavior. Thus, I formulate the third research gap:

> *Gap 3: There is a lack of knowledge about the impact of focusing the review text on different types of attributes for a product or service that has more than one type of attribute.*

More online reviews mean more comprehensive information about a product or service. Thus, it is desirable to increase the number of online reviews. However, in the exposure and evaluation stage, the absence of active management of the presentation of online reviews can result in consumers encountering an almost limitless number of reviews. Uncertainties about the review, whether about its writer or the text quality, in combination with a great number of reviews and the resulting information overload can be overwhelming (e.g., Furner and Zinko 2017; Hu and Krishen 2019). Review system providers are faced with the task of adequately supporting the users of review systems in information search and processing. A well-organized presentation of online reviews helps consumers to guide their information-seeking behavior and support their purchasing decisions (Li et al. 2017). To address this issue, review system providers have introduced design features aimed at improving the scanning, reading, and processing of online reviews (e.g., through presorting, highlighting, or filtering). These design features can facilitate information search and processing in online review systems. Still, their use is heterogeneous and not fully exploited. There is a considerable body of knowledge about how individual design features in online review systems are employed, e.g., the impact of salient top reviews on the efficiency of information provision (Jabr and Rahman 2022), or how images influence information quality and information load (Zinko et al. 2020). While previous research has examined the effects of selected design features, a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the design features that support the reading and processing of online reviews is missing. To make it easier for future research to focus on the interactions between multiple design features, more knowledge is needed about which design features can improve information search and processing in online review systems. Accordingly, I formulate the fourth research gap:

> *Gap 4: There is no comprehensive overview of design features in review systems that support the exposure and evaluation of online reviews.*

In response to the previously identified problems, the papers of this dissertation can be classified into the three-stage process of e-WOM according to the conceptual model presented in chapter 3.1. The papers aim to contribute knowledge on the three stages of the process and address the four identified research gaps (see Table 1). Three of the four papers contribute to the creation of online reviews, while the fourth contributes to the exposure and evaluation of online reviews. In the last paper, Seutter et al. (2024), we analyze the donation behavior in donation-based crowdfunding.

Table 1. Problem, conceptual classification and research gap for submitted papers.

Problem	**Stage**	**Research Gap**	**Paper**
How to stimulate the creation of a representative collection of online reviews without introducing bias.	Creation	Gap 1: There is a lack of knowledge about the motives for review writing on B2B online review platforms.	1. Seutter, J. 2024. “The origination of online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study of the underlying motives of review writers,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.
		Gap 2: There is a lack of knowledge about the impact of the timing of review requests.	2. Poniatowski, M., Seutter, J., Ryu, S., and Kundisch, D. 2024. “When to ask for a review: An empirical analysis of online review request timing for different product types,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.
		Gap 3: There is a lack of knowledge about the impact of focusing the review text on different types of attributes for a product or service that has more than one type of attribute.	3. Seutter, J. and Neumann, J. 2024. “Reviewing the simple things – how ease of evaluation affects online rating behavior,” *Working Paper*, Paderborn University.
How to provide adequate support for the exposure and evaluation of online reviews in review systems.	Exposure and Evaluation	Gap 4: There is no comprehensive overview of design features in review systems that support the exposure and evaluation of online reviews.	4. Seutter, J., Kutzner, K., Stadtländer, M., Kundisch, D., and Knackstedt, R. 2023. ““Sorry, too much information”—Designing online review systems that support information search and processing,” *Electronic Markets* 33(1), 47.
n/a	n/a	n/a	5. Seutter, J., Müller, M., Müller, S., and Kundisch, D. 2024. “Moment or movement – the heterogeneous impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on personal and societal charitable crowdfunding campaigns,” *Internet Research*, Ahead-of-print.

Note: Seutter et al. (2024) conduct research on donation-based crowdfunding and cannot be assigned to a particular stage of the online review process.

4 Overview on papers that form part of this dissertation

The aim of this dissertation is to better understand the online review process in its three stages, especially by contributing to the previously identified research gaps. To this end, I present five papers that form the core part of this dissertation. In these papers, I employ a wide range of research methods. In the first paper (Seutter 2024), we investigate the motives for writing reviews on B2B online review platforms. This involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 26 reviewers from major B2B online review platforms and analyzing the interview transcripts following the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al. 2013). In the second paper (Poniatowski et al. 2024), we focus on advancing our understanding of the timing of review requests. We analyze an extensive data set from Trusted Shops, a large European online shop certifier and online review platform owner. In Seutter and Neumann (2024) we examine how hedonic and utilitarian categories and attributes affect rating behavior. Using data from Yelp and Google Maps, we conduct a regression analysis with fixed effects. In the fourth paper (Seutter et al. 2023), we develop a taxonomy following the method for taxonomy development by Nickerson et al. (2013) and provide information about the variety of design features that are available to improve the information search and processing in review systems.

The fifth paper (Seutter et al. 2024) does not address a research gap in the context of online reviews and, hence, lies outside the scope of the research gaps presented so far. Based on a dataset from GoFundMe.com, a donation-based crowdfunding platform, we apply a quasi-experimental research design. The paper uncovers how the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the associated social protest cycle after the death of George Floyd have influenced donation behavior on GoFundMe. In the analysis, we consider campaigns supporting the black community, and distinguish between campaigns with a personal and those with a societal goal.

An overview of the submitted research papers is presented in Table 2, including the corresponding research question(s), research method, theoretical foundation and data source. The following provides a summary, detailed information on each author's individual contribution, and on the scientific dissemination of each paper.

Table 2. Properties of submitted research papers.

Paper	Research Question(s)	Research Method	Theoretical Foundation	Data Source
Seutter (2024)	What are the underlying motives for review writing on B2B online review platforms?	Qualitative Interview Study	Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan 1985)	Reviewers from B2B review platforms
Poniatowski et al. (2024)	Does the timing of a review request affect the probability of review postings for online shops, and if so, how? Does the impact of timing differ by product type, and if so, how?	Regression analysis with fixed effects	Concepts of utilitarian and hedonic goods (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), search and experience goods (Nelson 1970), low-involvement and high-involvement goods (Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	Trusted Shops
Seutter and Neumann (2024)	How does the ease of evaluation influence online rating behavior?	Regression analysis with fixed effects	Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver 1980) and concept of hedonic and utilitarian consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982)	Yelp and Google Maps reviews
Seutter et al. (2023)	What are the characteristic design features that support information search and processing in online review systems?	Taxonomy Development	Information Overload (Malhotra 1982)	Academic literature and Internet documents
Seutter et al. (2024)	How does a social protest cycle for the BLM movement affect the donation behavior for charitable crowdfunding campaigns related to the BLM movement, taking into consideration the difference between campaigns with a personal versus a societal goal?	Quasi-experimental research design (difference-in-differences design)	Construal Level Theory (Trope and Liberman 2010)	GoFundMe

4.1 Seutter (2024)

In this paper, I analyze the origination of online reviews in B2B markets. In the qualitative study, I identify the underlying motives for writing online reviews on review platforms that help companies collect reviews from their customers. I conducted in-depth interviews with 26 B2B review writers. Based on the analysis, I observe that reviews in the B2B context can be different from reviews in the B2C context. In summary, the results reveal three types of motives: those that are similar to the prevailing motives from B2C, those that differ from B2C but share some similarities, and those that are new to the online review literature. Among the latter are the desire to offer "Feedback to the Supplier," an "Appreciation of the Relationship with the Supplier," and, more broadly, the desire to "Contribute to a B2B Review Community". Demonstrating that motives for writing online reviews in the B2B context can differ from those in the B2C context, this study contributes to theory on the underlying motives for writing online reviews. For practitioners, it contributes valuable insights by better understanding the motives behind B2B online reviews. Specifically, suppliers of products and services and review platform providers can improve their processes to elicit reviews and operate in a more targeted and effective manner.

Table 3. Seutter (2024): The origination of online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study of the underlying motives of review writers.

Joint Work	Single authored paper
Presentations	▪ 06/2022: Seutter, J. 2022. Online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study of underlying motivations, contribution at: **European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS),** Timişoara, Romania. ▪ 12/2022: Seutter, J. 2022. Online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study on the underlying motives, contribution at: **Global Sourcing Workshop** (Pre-ICIS Workshop), Copenhagen, Denmark. ▪ 05/2023: Seutter, J. 2023. The origination of online reviews in B2B markets: A qualitative study on the underlying motives of review writers, contribution at: **AMA Summer Academic Conference**, San Francisco, USA.
Scientific Dissemination	▪ The work on this paper started in September 2021. ▪ An earlier version of this paper was published in the proceedings of the **European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)** 2022 (VHB-Rating 2024: A). ▪ An extended abstract of this paper was published in the proceedings of the **AMA Summer Academic Conference 2023**. ▪ The paper is currently in preparation for submission to **Industrial Marketing Management** (VHB-Rating 2024: B).

4.2 Poniatowski et al. (2024)

With this study, we investigate the effect that the timing of review requests has on the response rate. Specifically, we analyze a unique data set from Trusted Shops, one of Europe's largest online shop certifiers and online review platform owners. The dataset contains about 22.3 million requests and 2.3 million shop-level reviews for online shops that sell different product types. It comprises all relevant timestamps required for the analysis, i.e., when a customer purchases a product, when the review request is sent out, if the customer submits a review, and if they do, when. We identify two peaks during the day, around noon and early evening, that are associated with a substantially higher response rate. In the long run, we find the probability of receiving a review decreasing as the time between the purchase and the request increases. Moreover, our study reveals differences in customer response behavior for shops offering different product types, suggesting that those offering high-involvement (vs. low-involvement), experience (vs. search), or hedonic (vs. utilitarian) goods should wait longer after a purchase before sending out review requests. Our analysis focusing on product type contributes a novel aspect to the online review literature and supports online shops and review platform operators in their decisions on when to send out review requests to customers.

Table 4. Poniatowski et al. (2024): When to ask for a review: An empirical analysis of online review request timing for different product types.

Joint Work	Co-authorship with M. Poniatowski, S. Ryu and D. Kundisch (40% M. Poniatowski, 40% J. Seutter, 10% S. Ryu, 10% D. Kundisch) ▪ Concretization of the research question jointly by all authors ▪ Positioning of the paper jointly by all authors ▪ Literature review jointly with M. Poniatowski and S. Ryu ▪ Identification of theoretical background and hypotheses development jointly with M. Poniatowski ▪ Empirical analysis jointly with M. Poniatowski ▪ Write-up of paper jointly by all authors ▪ Feedback, comments, and corrections by all authors
Presentations	▪ 10/2021: Poniatowski, M. Seutter, J., Kundisch, D. 2021. “Timing is everything” – An empirical analysis of the timing of online review elicitation, contribution at: **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)**, Austin, USA.
Scientific Dissemination	▪ The work on this paper started in March 2020. ▪ An earlier version of this paper is published in the proceedings of the **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)** 2021 (VHB-Rating 2024: A). ▪ At the time when this dissertation was submitted, the paper was under review at Internet Research (VHB-Rating 2024: B).

4.3 Seutter and Neumann (2024)

Despite extensive research on online reviews and rating behaviors, little is known about how certain product characteristics influence the numerical rating. Certain product or service characteristics might be inherently easier to evaluate than others, e.g., due to various levels of complexity or subjectivity. The analyses are on the level of product category and product attribute, using datasets from Yelp (category level) and Google Maps (attribute level). By distinguishing between the utilitarian (i.e., easy-to-evaluate) and hedonic (i.e., difficult-to-evaluate) dimensions of a product or service that has both attributes, this study investigates how self-selecting into utilitarian or hedonic attributes affects the ratings. As the research method, we employ linear regression with fixed effects. Our findings indicate a bias in the rating behavior, namely, that utilitarian categories tend to receive more extreme ratings compared to hedonic categories, although this pattern does not hold consistently for attributes.

Table 5. Seutter and Neumann (2024): Reviewing the simple things–how ease of evaluation affects online rating behavior.

Joint Work	Co-authorship with J. Neumann (75% J. Seutter, 25% J. Neumann) ▪ Literature review by J. Seutter ▪ Concretization of the research question jointly with J. Neumann ▪ Positioning of the paper jointly with J. Neumann ▪ Hypotheses development by J. Seutter ▪ Data collection from Google Maps and Yelp jointly with J. Neumann ▪ Empirical analysis by J. Seutter ▪ Write-up of paper jointly with J. Neumann ▪ Feedback, comments, and corrections for the WI version of the paper by D. Kundisch ▪ Write-up of the response to the reviewers and revision for the ICIS, WI ECIS versions of the paper jointly with J. Neumann
Presentations	▪ 12/2019: Seutter J., Neumann, J. 2019. Head over feels? Differences in online rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic service aspects, contribution at: **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)**, Research-in-Progress, Munich, Germany. ▪ 03/2020: Seutter, J., Neumann, J., Kundisch, D. 2020. Nudging in judging – differences in online rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic service aspects, contribution at: **Internationale Tagung Wirtschaftsinformatik 2020 (WI)**, Research-in-Progress, Potsdam, Germany. ▪ Seutter, J., Neumann, J. 2020. Reviewing the simple things – How ease of evaluation affects online rating behavior, contribution at: **European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)**, Virtual.
Scientific Dissemination	▪ The work on this paper started in January 2020. ▪ Different versions of this paper are published in the proceedings of the **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)**, 2019 (VHB-Rating 2024: A) and the proceedings of the **Internationale Tagung Wirtschaftsinformatik (WI)**, 2020 VHB-Rating 2024: B).

4.4 Seutter et al. (2023)

When faced with numerous reviews, customers can easily become overwhelmed by the amount of information. To address this issue, review systems have implemented design features aimed at enhancing the scanning, reading, and processing of online reviews. Even though previous research has looked at the effect of selected design features on information overload, there is still no comprehensive overview of these features. This gap is addressed by Seutter et al. (2023) through the development and evaluation of a taxonomy for information search and processing within online review systems. Based on a sample of 65 review systems sourced from diverse online platform environments, our taxonomy presents 50 distinct characteristics in addition to the current knowledge status of the features implemented. We applied our taxonomy to a diverse sample of existing online platforms and were able to explore the feature frequency distribution. Our study helps scholars and practitioners better understand how specific design features and their combinations affect information overload, and how to use these features to improve online review systems for customers.

Table 6. Seutter et al. (2023): “Sorry, too much information”—Designing online review systems that support information search and processing.

Joint Work	Co-authorship with K. Kutzner, M. Stadtländer, D. Kundisch and R. Knackstedt (35% J. Seutter, 35% K. Kutzner, 15% M. Stadtländer, 10% D. Kundisch, 5% R. Knackstedt) ▪ Concretization of the research question jointly by all authors ▪ Positioning of the paper jointly with K. Kutzner and M. Stadtländer ▪ Literature collection jointly with K. Kutzner and M. Stadtländer ▪ Taxonomy development jointly K. Kutzner and M. Stadtländer ▪ Cluster analysis by K. Kutzner ▪ Write-up of initial paper jointly with K. Kutzner and M. Stadtländer ▪ Write-up of the response to the reviewers and revision for the ECIS version of the paper jointly with K. Kutzner and M. Stadtländer ▪ Write-up of the response to the editor, reviewers, and revision of the paper for the Electronic Markets revisions jointly with K. Kutzner (1st round) ▪ Write-up of the response to the editor, reviewers, and revision of the paper for the Electronic Markets revisions by J. Seutter (2nd and 3rd round) ▪ Feedback, comments, and corrections by D. Kundisch
Presentations	▪ Kutzner K., Stadtländer M., Seutter J., Kundisch D., Knackstedt R. 2021. ”Sorry, too much information” designing online review systems that support information search and processing, contribution at: **29th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)**, Virtual. Presented by M. Stadtländer and J. Seutter.
Scientific Dissemination	▪ The work on this paper started in August 2020. ▪ An earlier version of this paper was published in the proceedings of the **European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)** 2021 (VHB-Rating 2024: A). ▪ The paper was initially submitted to **Electronic Markets** in July 2022. ▪ The paper was published with **Electronic Markets** after three rounds of revisions in September 2023 (VHB-Rating 2024: B).

4.5 Seutter et al. (2024)

For social movements and activists seeking to tackle social injustice, charitable crowdfunding platforms offer a valuable opportunity to proactively advocate for equality by enabling affected people to raise donations for their cause. This research examines how the BLM movement and the associated social protest cycle after George Floyd's death have influenced donation behavior for campaigns with a personal goal and those with a societal goal supporting the black community. This paper adopts a quantitative research approach by applying a quasi-experimental research design to a GoFundMe dataset. A total of 67,905 campaigns and 1,362,499 individual donations were analyzed. We find a rise in donations for campaigns supporting the black community, which lasts substantially longer for campaigns with a societal than with a personal funding goal. Informed by construal level theory, we attribute this heterogeneity to modifications in the degree of abstraction of the issues that social movements aim to address. This research advances our understanding of donation behaviors in charitable crowdfunding. Our results indicate that charitable crowdfunding campaigns are an important tool for promoting social justice and anti-discrimination.

Table 7. Seutter (2024): Moment or movement–the heterogeneous impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on personal and societal charitable crowdfunding campaigns.

Joint Work	Co-authorship with M. Müller, S. Müller and D. Kundisch (40% J. Seutter, 40% M. Müller, 5% S. Müller, 15% D. Kundisch) ▪ Literature review jointly with M. Müller and S. Müller ▪ Concretization of the research question jointly by all authors ▪ Positioning of the paper jointly by all authors ▪ Hypotheses development by J. Seutter ▪ Data collection from GoFundMe jointly with M. Müller and N. Krüger (Student Assistant) ▪ Preparation of empirical analysis (e.g., variable development) jointly with S. Müller and M. Müller ▪ Empirical analysis by M. Müller ▪ Write-up of initial paper jointly with M. Müller and S. Müller ▪ Write-up of the response to the reviewers and revision for the ICIS and the HICSS versions of the paper and the Internet Research revisions jointly with J. Seutter and M. Müller ▪ Re-writing of Introduction by D. Kundisch ▪ Feedback, comments, and corrections by D. Kundisch
Awards	▪ Best Short Paper Runner-Up at **42nd International Conference on Information Systems** for Moment or Movement – An Empirical Analysis of the Heterogeneous Impact of Media Attention on Charitable Crowdfunding Campaigns (Research-in-Progress). ▪ Best Paper Award Nominee at **55th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences** for Moment or Movement – An Empirical Analysis of the Heterogeneous Impact of Media Attention on Charitable Crowdfunding Campaigns.

Presentations	▪ 09/2022: Seutter, J., Müller, M., Müller, S., Kundisch, D. 2022. Moment or movement – An empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns, contribution at: **Fakultätsforschungsworkshop** in Melle, Paderborn University. (presented by J. Seutter and M. Müller). ▪ 01/2022: Seutter J., Müller M., Müller S., Kundisch D. 2022. Moment or movement – An empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns, contribution at: **Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)**, Virtual. ▪ 12/2021: Müller M., Seutter J., Müller S., Kundisch D. 2021. Moment or movement – An empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns, contribution at: **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)**, Research-in-Progress, Austin, USA. (presented by M. Müller). ▪ 09/2021: Seutter, J., Müller, M., Müller, S., Kundisch, D. 2021. Moment or movement – An empirical analysis of the heterogeneous impact of media attention on charitable crowdfunding campaigns, contribution at research seminar: Grenoble École de Management, Grenoble, France.
Scientific Dissemination	▪ The work on this paper started in January 2020. ▪ Different versions of this paper are published in the proceedings of the **International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)**, 2021 (VHB-Rating 2024: A) and the proceedings of the **Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)**, 2022 VHB-Rating 2024: B). ▪ The paper was initially submitted to **Internet Research** in November 2022. ▪ The paper was published with **Internet Research** after three rounds of revision in February 2024 (VHB-Rating 2024: B).

5 Reflection on methodology

In this chapter, I reflect on the research methods employed in this dissertation (see Table 2). The critical reflection on the suitability of each paper's method for investigating the respective research question allows to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the methods deployed. The chapter consists of an outline of the methodology, the research design, the data collection, and analysis, alongside a discussion of the methodological choices made within each paper.

To address the first research gap, I applied a qualitative research approach, consisting of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative approaches can be particularly suitable if little knowledge is available on a topic and the aim is to get an initial overview (van Aken et al. 2007). Given that research on B2B online reviews is in its early stages, and considering the complexity of relationships among business partners, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews (Wu 2019). In the first step, I developed an interview guide based on literature on online reviews (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) and psychology—e.g., Deci (1975), who makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For the data collection, I recruited a sample of experienced reviewers operating on online review platforms. Due to the difficulty of recruiting participants with suitable qualifications, I used a convenience sample for the interviews. The analysis followed an inductive approach with deductive elements. Given the exploratory nature of the research, I followed an open coding approach, based on Gioia et al. (2013). Reflecting on the experiences I made while conducting the research for this paper, I had to make critical methodological choices. This paper was my first exposure to qualitative research, as all of my previous papers followed a quantitative research method (e.g., in particular analyzing observational data). Compared to quantitative approaches, I felt less certain about structures and rules of qualitative research and the consequences when making critical methodological choices. Another difference I perceived was the freedom when selecting the research question, as I was not dependent on data availability, and collected the data myself by conducting interviews. The flexibility in conducting semi-structured interviews helped to develop a detailed understanding of the motives underlying the writing process of B2B reviews. The sampling strategy constituted a challenge, as it was difficult to identify experienced reviewers and get their contact information. Thus, I decided in a first step to use contacts I was provided with by my project partner and in a second step by a leading B2B review platform. In general, my most important learning was to be transparent about each of my decisions and steps when conducting the research for this paper.

For the second paper, we were granted access to a suitable dataset by Trusted Shops, a large online shop certifier and review platform owner. The dataset contains timestamps of the time of the purchase, the time of the invitation to review having been sent out, and (in case a review was written) the time of when the customer had written the review. We aim to measure a relationship between two variables: the timing when an invitation to review was sent via email and the response rate to the invitation to review. For the third paper, we obtained data from Yelp and Google Maps. In this paper, we aim to measure the relationship between certain product categories and attributes and the extremity of the rating. In both papers, we aimed to analyze the relationship between two variables, and consequently decided for a quantitative research approach. The structure of our data and the nature of our research questions for both papers indicated that an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression approach with fixed effects would be the most appropriate methodology. OLS regression is a widely used approach to measure the strength and direction of the relationships between dependent and independent variables (Stock and Watson 2020). It offers insights into how changes in one variable might lead to changes in other variables. The decision for the OLS regression was brought up by a reviewer of the second paper, since the dependent variable is a 0-1 dummy variable. The reviewer suggested a logit or probit model as a more appropriate method for our analysis. We tried to calculate the coefficients for a logit and probit model, but we were unable to receive results due to computational limits of Stata, the statistical software we used for our analysis. We decided to stick with our initial statistical model (the OLS approach). According to Hellevik (2009) the "popular belief that linear regression should not be used when the dependent variable is a dichotomy" (p. 59) is not true. Additionally, the OLS approach is easy to interpret, and the results can be communicated to a broader audience in comparison to the logit or probit models (Hellevik 2009).

With the fourth paper, we provided an overview of the design features aimed at improving the scanning, reading, and processing of online reviews by developing a taxonomy based on the taxonomy development method described by Nickerson et al. (2013). Their method is widely used and has established itself as the standard for developing taxonomies in the Information Systems literature. Our research design consisted of multiple steps, i.e., conducting a literature review, selecting online platforms with review systems, iteratively building and evaluating a taxonomy for information search and processing in online review systems, and examining the design feature frequency distribution of the analyzed online platforms. When building and evaluating a taxonomy in IS, one needs to find a way to go beyond just describing the current state of research and practice, without crossing the line to doing another full research study, especially for the evaluation part, that could be a paper project in itself. In my understanding, this step is important when conducting this method, as it goes beyond the mere classification into layers, dimensions and characteristics and provides stronger contributions to research and implications for practitioners.

In Seutter et al. (2024) we employed a quasi-experimental research design. A difference-in-difference (DiD) design with monthly time leads and lags was used to estimate the effect of a social protest cycle for a social movement on the donation amount and number of donations on a crowdfunding platform (Autor 2003). This approach is particularly suited for identifying causal relationships (Angrist and Pischke 2009). To evaluate the donation behavior in charitable crowdfunding, we used a web-crawler to obtain data from Gofundme.com, which is currently the largest charitable crowdfunding platform (Lindner 2023). We used different text mining and coding approaches to analyze the dataset. A dictionary approach and a supervised machine learning algorithm were used to classify campaigns into relevant categories for our analysis (e.g., campaigns related to the interests of the black community, campaigns with a personal vs with a societal concern). When generating the personal vs. societal variable it was critical to ensure that the human coders were able to properly understand the concept of a personal and a societal donation campaign, using examples. Another methodological challenge we encountered while working with the dataset was that we were limited by the data that we had collected from the platform. While we were able to identify a causal effect, we could not explain the underlying mechanism with the same degree of certainty (i.e., what is driving the donation behavior?). Another important learning when working on the paper was due to the fact that the BLM movement addresses a highly sensitive social issue. As we worked on the paper, we became increasingly aware of the magnitude of this sensitivity, for example when naming variables and describing the primary goal of our analysis.

This dissertation employs a diverse set of research methods to address the multifaceted nature of the research questions, including semi-structured interviews, taxonomy development, OLS regression, and a quasi-experimental DiD analysis. Each method was chosen for its particular fit to address the underlying research question(s). Based on my experience with those research methods, I learned to better understand the distinction between the aim of *explaining* versus *understanding* (Hovorka et al. 2008). While understanding is connected to the "intentionality, thoughts, and motivations of the human subjects under study" (Hovorka and Lee 2010, p. 1), explanation is achieved by "subsuming individual instantiations of the phenomenon under broad general laws, or identifying causal mechanisms that support antecedent-consequent pairs" (Hovorka and Lee 2010, p. 1). While some methods are particularly well suited to understand complex situations (i.e., semi-structured interviews), the primary goal of other methods is to explain and demonstrate causal relationships (i.e., DiD analysis).

In Figure 2, I illustrate this distinction by classifying all four research methods employed in the papers that form part of this dissertation in a coordinate system with a "focus on understanding" on the x-axis and a "focus on explanation" on the y-axis. Semi-structured interviews and taxonomy development are primarily focused on understanding a phenomenon. Interviews provide important contextual information and capture the experiences and perspectives of participants. The method of taxonomy development organizes data into categories and thus enhances the conceptual understanding. The usefulness of a taxonomy can be validated by applying the taxonomy in practice (Kundisch et al. 2021). In contrast, OLS regression and quasi-experimental DiD analysis aim at explanation. OLS regression analyses allow exploring statistical associations between variables and provide insights into potential causal links. DiD analyses go a step further and offer a quasi-experimental setup to establish causality, making it possible to quantify the impact of specific interventions or changes.

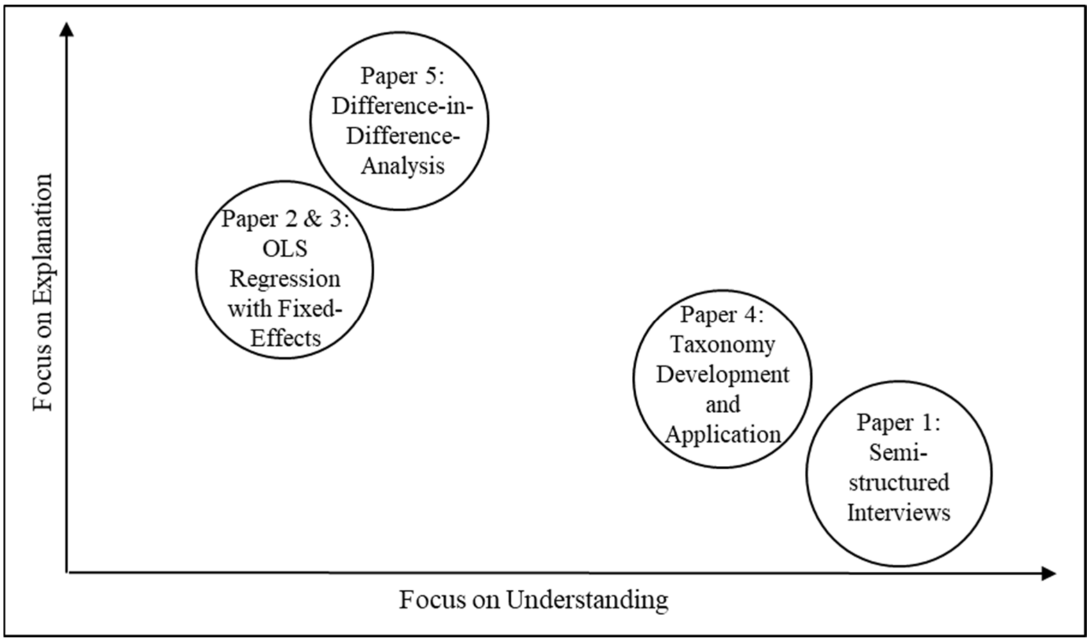

Figure 2. Focus of research methods on explaining versus understanding.

To conclude, the combination of these four methods allowed me to follow a comprehensive and diverse research approach. By integrating these diverse methods, I have learned how the choice of research method has to be tailored to the characteristics of the respective research question.

6 Conclusion

The studies from this dissertation support our understanding of the creation, exposure, and evaluation of online reviews (Babić Rosario et al. 2020). The first three papers can be assigned to the creation phase of online reviews. The fourth paper focuses on the exposure and evaluation of online reviews. The fifth paper is not part of the online review literature and contributes to the literature on donation-based crowdfunding.

6.1 Contribution and implications

First, I will discuss overarching contributions, before presenting the contributions made by each of the respective papers. My papers provide contextual extensions of online review research, i.e., research on online reviews in the B2B context (the first and fourth papers), performing arts (the third paper) and at a shop-level (the second paper). These extensions represent contexts that have been neglected by previous research, and therefore offer potential for future research. In two of my papers, I consider product types in the analysis. This allows me to understand how different product types affect rating behavior or response rates. On a more abstract level, all of my papers integrate cross-disciplinary theories. The studies rely on theories from diverse domains, such as Self-Determination Theory, Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, and Construal Level Theory (see Table 2). In this way, the papers either provide empirical validation of these theories and/or extend them to new contexts.

As the present work is a cumulative dissertation, the contributions and limitations initially refer to the individual papers. In the following, I describe each paper's contribution to research and theory, and their implications for practice.

Contribution to research and theory

The first paper of this dissertation stands out as one of only a few studies in Information Systems that examine online reviews in the B2B context. It identifies significant differences between the B2B and B2C contexts that influence online review systems and their usage. For instance, to ensure high review quality, B2B review platforms often require their reviewers to authenticate themselves via LinkedIn or their business email address. In addition, the platforms use certain elicitation measures, e.g., notification, compensation, or no explicit elicitation, which are reported openly with the review. The theoretical basis of the study is self-determination theory. The focus of online review research on B2C and C2C markets has led to definitions that might not be sufficient from a B2B perspective. The motives I identified as unique to B2B reviews, i.e., "Feedback to Supplier" and "Appreciation of the Relationship with the Supplier" contradict the definition given by Babić Rosario et al. (2020), which emphasizes that e-WOM primarily targets other consumers. These empirical results confirm Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2023), who argue in their literature review on e-WOM in the B2B context that e-WOM is not necessarily generated solely by or directed at consumers.

The second paper extends the literature on review creation by focusing on elicitation measures, particularly the timing of review requests. By analyzing the best time slot to send out review requests on an hour-of-the-week basis, this study introduces a new research avenue in the underdeveloped area of communication timing on review platforms. Additional timing-related analyses for different product types contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of product types (i.e., utilitarian versus hedonic goods, search versus experience goods, low-involvement versus high-involvement) on review elicitation. Additionally, this paper introduces the concept of shop-level reviews, which provide insights beyond product-level reviews by encompassing the overall shopping experience. This distinction contributes important insights with practical implications for shops and platform operators, expanding the scope of the existing online review literature.

The third paper is based on Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver 1980) and the concept of utilitarian and hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). The basic assumption of this paper is that utilitarian and hedonic characteristics are perceived differently by consumers, and thus influence their rating behavior. We conduct two studies, one at product category (i.e., writing a review for a product that is predominantly utilitarian or hedonic) and one at product attribute level (i.e., writing a review with a self-selected focus on a certain product attribute that is predominantly utilitarian or hedonic). This feature sets our work apart from previous studies examining drivers on online reviews. We contribute to the literature by providing empirical support for differences in rating behavior dependent on either utilitarian or hedonic product categories or attributes involved in the review writing.

The fourth paper contributes a theoretically grounded and empirically validated taxonomy focusing on the design features that support scanning, reading, and processing online reviews. Based on the assumption that there can be "too many" reviews, which means that customers can be overwhelmed by their sheer number, we emphasize the relevance of design features that support the reading and processing of online reviews on platforms. With our taxonomy, we complement the mature field of research on online reviews by offering a design perspective from the review reader's perspective. It provides a foundation for further analysis, and for the design, and configuration of online review systems.

With the last paper, we contribute to the literature stream on digital activism activities in social movements. Our study answers the call for more research by Nardini et al. (2021) on "changes to funding processes essential to providing resources to grassroots initiatives" (p. 134). To the best of our knowledge, we were among the first to empirically analyze charitable crowdfunding activity in the context of social movements, thus contributing to a stream of empirically grounded work on digital activism. We thus extend the scant stream of research on the dynamics of crowdfunding performance over time (Chen et al. 2023). Having identified Construal Level Theory as a suitable theoretical foundation for our study, we attribute our findings to a change in the level of abstractness of the problems that social movements aim to tackle.

Taken together, my dissertation offers contributions that advance knowledge in Information Systems research, particularly in the areas of online review systems, providing a basis for future research.

Implications for practice

This dissertation provides practical implications for providers, sellers, and consumers of review systems. The review creation stage lays the foundation for the quality and quantity of available reviews and is of crucial importance to practitioners. The first three papers of this dissertation demonstrate the complexity of the review creation stage, as it differs depending on the business context (i.e., B2B), the elicitation strategy (i.e., the timing of the review request) or the product types (i.e., utilitarian versus hedonic goods, search versus experience goods, low-involvement versus high-involvement goods).

The first paper has implications for different stakeholders in the B2B market. First, it helps to sharpen the understanding of B2B reviews and describes the key features of B2B review, and how they differ from other available reviews. The results also make clear that the business relationship impacts the reviewing behavior, i.e., if and how reviews are written. The quality of relationships between the reviewer and the seller can influence the content and tone of reviews. Encouraging stronger relationships can lead to a greater review volume and more detailed and useful reviews. Finally, the paper finds that reviewers in the B2B context always have a personal and a company perspective when writing a review. This tension is important for review system providers to consider, e.g., when sending a request or when designing their review template. For instance, review systems should be designed to capture and distinguish between these viewpoints.

The results of the second paper confirm that the time elapsed between product usage and the request can impact customers' responses differently. A significant contribution for practitioners is understanding the role of identified time slots, providing concrete guidance on developing a better-informed timing strategy for review request in online review systems. More specifically, online platforms should consider certain time slots, such as the morning and late afternoon, given the higher probability of review postings in response to a review request in those time slots. However, as different product types may require different timing strategies, a one-size-fits-all approach to sending review requests is not advisable. Online review systems should offer simple solutions to customize the timing of the request and might consider additional customization of review request timings based on the product type, providing practical suggestions for affiliated online shops.

The third paper provides a more nuanced understanding of reviewing behavior for, on the one hand, utilitarian and, on the other, hedonic product characteristics. The results suggest that both the category of a product or service and self-selection into different attributes of a product or service account for potential differences in ratings. While ratings of online reviews on utilitarian product or service categories are more extreme than ratings of reviews on hedonic product or service categories, this is not the case when reviewers comment on predominantly utilitarian attributes of a product or service that has both types of characteristics. Based on this, review system designers might consider designing a template that asks reviews to focus on specific attributes that are either utilitarian or hedonic.

Research on the exposure and evaluation of online reviews holds significant importance for understanding and facilitating the consumption of online reviews. In this regard, the fourth paper provides a taxonomy for information search and processing in online review systems. This taxonomy enables practitioners to better understand, compare, and further analyze the potential effects that specific design features and their combinations have on information overload, and to use these features accordingly to improve online review systems. Implementing a suitable combination of distinctive features can further assist providers of review systems in enhancing the user experience with their systems.

Although not related to the core topic of this dissertation, the fifth paper provides valuable insights for practitioners in the context of charitable crowdfunding. The paper promotes the categorization of crowdfunding campaigns into personal and societal campaigns. Platform providers should be aware of this distinction and tailor their strategies accordingly, as lending a campaign either a personal or a societal focus can trigger different donation behaviors in certain situations. Moreover, campaign operators should consider the timing of their campaign launches, especially in relation to trending social movements. Increased donation activities can be expected for up to three months for personal goals and five months for societal goals following a social protest cycle. The paper also suggests that media coverage associated with a social protest cycle can significantly influence donation behaviors. Charitable crowdfunding platforms and media outlets can collaborate to ensure that campaigns receive visibility, especially during periods of heightened social awareness.

To summarize, this dissertation presents a comprehensive set of practical implications for enhancing online review systems and charitable crowdfunding strategies. Practitioners can significantly improve the effectiveness and reliability of online reviews by understanding the unique aspects of B2B reviews, optimizing the timing of review requests, and tailoring review system designs. Furthermore, gaining insights into the conduct of charitable crowdfunding donors can aid platform providers and campaign operators in maximizing their impact.

6.2 Limitations and avenues for future research

Like any research, the studies in this dissertation have limitations that need to be acknowledged and could be addressed in future work. Some limitations arise from the methods used, while others stem from decisions made during the implementation of the methods or external factors, such as data availability. In the following sections, I will outline the most significant limitations and potential avenues for future research for each paper.

In the first paper of this dissertation, I conducted an interview study. Although I am confident that the sample is suitable for my research endeavor, it does not consider other relevant viewpoints, such as the perspective of non-reviewers. This means that the research does not capture the motives of those who have chosen not to post a review. Future research could explicitly consider non-reviewers to identify the factors that prevent them from writing a review. The study’s interview protocol specifically focuses on identifying the underlying motives behind review writing. Future research could aim to investigate different combinations of motives and circumstances, and build on the results of my paper to gain a more nuanced understanding of the identified motives. Due to the nature of qualitative research, statements regarding the distribution and frequency of identified motives are not possible. Future research might add quantitative surveys among B2B reviewers to quantify and validate the findings.

While our second study contributes to the understanding of timing strategies in online review requests, it also has limitations. Due to the General Data Protection Regulation, the dataset does not contain data on customer profiles. This prevents us from incorporating reviewer fixed effects into our analysis, which limits our ability to control for customer heterogeneity. Second, as the data were collected during the COVID-19 lockdown and subsequent re-opening stages, the pandemic might have changed customers' daily routines and feelings, which might have affected our results. Third, our study's exploratory nature leaves the mechanism underlying the identified response patterns unanswered. Future research should employ a mixed-method approach, such as surveys and interviews with customers, review system operators, and shop owners, to provide further information on the identified response patterns.

The third paper analyzes the rating behavior for utilitarian and hedonic product types and product attributes. A limitation of this paper is that our classification at the product category level is potentially too aggregated. This could lead to reviews of utilitarian products covering hedonic aspects and vice versa. Furthermore, we only examine the rating behavior for reviews where reviewers self-selected utilitarian or hedonic products or attributes. This means that reviewers freely decided to cover utilitarian or hedonic attributes with their review. In the future, research may examine how review templates that are tailored to either utilitarian or hedonic product categories or attributes impact rating behavior.

The fourth paper describes a taxonomy for information search and processing according to Nickerson et al. (2013). We defined specified ending conditions and considered evaluation criteria that were fulfilled (Kundisch et al. 2021). Limitations may stem from the sample we chose in order to develop the taxonomy, as we cannot guarantee the absence of any sampling bias. However, our objective was to achieve a balance in the selection of review systems from practice and outlets from academia. The taxonomy contains the design features for information search and processing and, as such, provides a comprehensive overview. We did not evaluate the extent to which design features allow the best possible support for information search and processing. In the future, research can examine potential combinations of design features and the extent to which these combinations facilitate information search and processing.

In the last paper of this dissertation, we analyze the donation behavior in charitable crowdfunding, in response to a BLM movement and its corresponding social protest cycle. The paper is limited to this single social movement. Future research might analyze other social movements to validate the findings and gain additional insights. Furthermore, our distinction between campaigns with personal or societal concerns provides a starting point for analyzing the heterogeneous supply side on charitable crowdfunding platforms. Future research might investigate other campaign characteristics.

In summary, the research presented in this dissertation offers valuable insights, and the identified limitations highlight promising avenues for future investigation to build upon and expand the findings discussed.

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