

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The content of this chapter illustrates how the research problem occurred due to the significant role of book reviews in online markets. After the problem is declared, the purposes of the study are set for the study. Then, the definition of key terms, scope of the study, and importance of the study are explained. The contents of this chapter mentioned above provide preliminary and necessary detailed information related to the study.

Background and Importance of Book Reviews

Writing is used in many ways for communication. As mentioned by Stone and Bell (1983, p. 9), writing is a medium for communication. Writing can provide a record of our thoughts that we would be able to study and evaluate in a way that conversation cannot (Wyrick, 1979, p. 7). Coulmas (2003, p. 1) remarked that more communication takes place in written than in oral mode, as can be seen from the Internet explosion which has laid to rest the idea that for the human race at large writing is only a minor form of communication. He also claimed that writing can be called the single most consequential technology ever invented and the immensity of the written record make it difficult to imagine an aspect of modern life unaffected by writing.

Today, the Internet serves as a major publishing venue for virtually every sector of the working world, from news media organization to corporations to the academy. Writers now are involved in more than basic prose writing; their work involves a wide range of publishing roles requiring vastly different skills in both publishing and writing. According to Baehr and Schaller (2010, pp. 4-5) Internet writing has changed tremendously in just the past decade largely due to shifts in technology, expectations of the online readers, content, and method of online distribution. Communicative writing can be effective when a reader can get or understand the same ideas as the writer wants to present. According to Stone and Bell (1983, p. 10), the writing that lacks consideration for the reader's comprehension ability is going to be unread.

When a person writes something, he or she has a purpose for writing. Nostrand, Knoblauch, McGuire, and Pettigrew (1978, p. 4) pointed out that writing is a process in which a writer chooses words for writing and expressing their meaning properly, according to his or her purpose. The writer may have motivations of which he or she is unaware. According to Doty (2004), the writer may also have mixed, and even contradictory, motivations for writing. In summary, there is always a purpose in writing. The purpose of writing can be accomplished when the writer can effectively get his or her readers to understand what he or she writes. Hughes and Duhamel (1966) said, "A writer is effective only if he succeeds in persuading his audience" (p. 157).

Nowadays, the most common purpose we experience in our daily life is persuasion. Hughes and Duhamel (1966) wrote, "Persuasion is that state of mind wherein the reader is determined to act according to the intentions of the

writer” (p. 157). Everyday we face with persuasion, especially in form of advertisements. Food makers want us to buy their products, film makers want us to watch their movies and hotels want us to buy their service. Apart from loads of images, selections of words and specific writing techniques are effectively and professionally used in persuasion. According to Barnard (2005), persuasive writing seeks to influence the reader to take some action or bring about change to an idea or opinion and it may contain factual information, such as reasons, examples, or comparisons. Examples include editorials or persuasive speeches and advertisements.

In advertisement, persuasive writing plays a great role in appealing to readers or consumers’ mind, and stimulating their decision-making process to purchase. Of course, the design and photograph can visually attract interest of people but in order to entice people to make a purchase, pictures of products alone cannot effectively do so. According to Palmer (1993, pp. 192-193), reviewing is an ever-growing industry and a part of a commercial process. As consumers, people try to make sure that they get exactly what they want and what’s worth paying. Sometimes, consumers end up finding out that the items or service they pay for have little to no quality whatsoever. Hence, through reading the descriptions or reviews of product, customers can quickly get to know more about the products in which they are interested or looking for and that is why it is important to pay attention to reviews regarding certain products or services. According to Maghirang (2009), reading reviews online can help strengthen a customer’s trust and belief on the product, brand or service of their choice.

Along the dramatic increase of online sales on the Internet, advertisers and digital designers are forced to stay on the position of greatest advancement in terms of website design and content presentation. Countless numbers of websites use advertisement to draw people to their websites and make the online purchase of products they sell. In order to make effective sales in the competitive online business, it is certain that the companies try to do their best in advertising their products and advocate their product is the best strategy. But in reality it is the consumer who can decide which product is better by using it. However, since no one can use all the products, this is where the product and service reviews come into play. Reviews and description of the products are therefore fundamentally used as tools to appeal customers' interest and purchase.

According to Garrigan (2010), online research is central to consumer shopping behavior. He supported his claim by referring to a survey of 2010 Social Shopping Study conducted by E-tailing group, Inc. and PowerReviews, Inc., in 2010; based on the research findings he explained, "50% of online shoppers say they conduct research online for at least one half of their purchases, and 64% consistently read online reviews prior to making product purchase decisions."

In 2010, E-tailing group and PowerReviews conducted a survey over 1,000 consumers who shop at least four times per year and spend \$250 or more annually shopping online to assess their motivations and preference regarding online product research and customer reviews, and their findings with regard to website capabilities or features that influence product selection

and purchase decisions revealed that customer reviews and rating are the most important among the shoppers surveyed (72%), followed by customer service information (69%), and third-party buying category guides and expert opinions (64%) as displayed in the chart below.

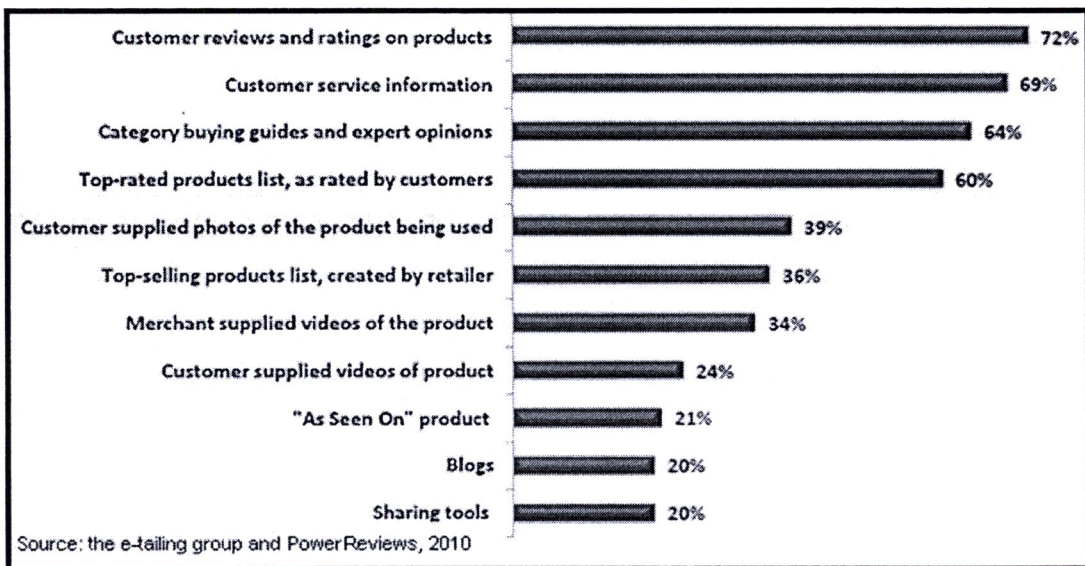


Figure 1 The result of survey on consumer shopping behavior conducted by e-tailing group and power reviews.

Note. From *Online Shoppers Value Reviews, Ratings, Search*, by T. Garrigan, 2010, Retrieved January 10, 2010, from http://www.admaxnetwork.com/news_press/243_online-shoppers-value-reviews-ratings-search.php

The above chart shows some interesting ideas, namely that sharing tools, blogs and videos are not as important as customer reviews, ratings and customer service information. Knowing the pros and cons of a particular product or service from the people who have experienced it first-hand gives readers






the power to make informed decision for their purchase. There are many websites that provide product reviews, including the shopping websites like Amazon.com. Such websites usually have a rating and pros and cons section in each review.

Amazon.com is America's largest online retailer, founded in 1994 and launched online in 1995. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia (n.d.-a), *Amazon.com*, Inc., is an American-based multinational electronic commerce company which first started as an on-line bookstore and soon diversified into many product lines such as movies, MP3, computer software, electronics, apparel, furniture, food, toys, etc. It also provides international shipping to certain countries for some of its products. A survey published by Verdict in 2009, (as cited in Wikipedia Encyclopedia, n.d.-a), a United Kingdom-based company which conducts research into all aspects of retailing, in both syndicated publications and tailored consulting projects, found that Amazon is the UK's favorite music and video retailer and comes third in overall retail rankings. Being widely and commonly recognized as a large on-line bookstore, Amazon.com provides online service for purchasing numerous books which usually come along with professional editorial reviews written by professional book review agents, as well as free reviews from customers or readers who can also vote for the books they like. According to Shepard (2009), on his book entitled *Aiming at Amazon*, which was written regarding self-publishing on on-line bookstores, "Customer Reviews" is the most crucial part of all Amazon special features and has established itself as one of the most powerful influences on book sales on Amazon.com. He added that it's common to see reviews

written by the authors under fake names, or for older reviews, anonymously. Inside the website, there is also a program called Amazon Vine, a way to get publishers' pre-release books to interested and vocal reviewers. According to Internet Reputation Management (2011), a group of internet marketing professionals specializing in online reputation management and search engine optimization, stated that Amazon has created a special category of reviewers called Amazon Vine reviewers, who are meant to be more trusted than other reviewers and are chosen based on trust they have earned in the Amazon community for writing accurate and insightful reviews. As Amazon.com put it on their website about Amazon Vine program (n.d.-b):

Amazon Vine is a program that enables a select group of Amazon customers to post opinions about new and pre-release items to help their fellow customers make educated purchase decisions. Customers are invited to become Amazon Vine Voices based on the trust they have earned in the Amazon community for writing accurate and insightful reviews. Amazon provides Amazon Vine members with free copies of products that have been submitted to the program by vendors. Amazon does not influence the opinion of Amazon Vine member, nor does it modify or edit their reviews.

Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought Page 1 of 20

				
The Girl Who Played with Fire (Vintage Crime / B... by Stieg Larsson ★★★★☆ (1,235) \$9.27	The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest by Stieg Larsson ★★★★☆ (1,081) \$11.89	Water for Elephants: A Novel by Sara Gruen ★★★★☆ (2,502) \$8.30	The Art of Racing in the Rain: A Novel by Garth Stein ★★★★☆ (1,325) \$5.84	The Help by Kathryn Stockett ★★★★☆ (3,110) \$13.53

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, September 2008: Once you start *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, there's no turning back. This debut thriller--the first in a trilogy from the late Stieg Larsson--is a serious page-turner rivaling the best of *Charles Huston* and *Michael Connelly*. Mikael Blomkvist, a once-respected financial journalist, watches his professional life rapidly crumble around him. Prospects appear bleak until an unexpected (and unsettling) offer to resurrect his name is extended by an old-school titan of Swedish industry. The catch--and there's always a catch--is that Blomkvist must first spend a year researching a mysterious disappearance that has remained unsolved for nearly four decades. With few other options, he accepts and enlists the help of investigator Lisbeth Salander, a misunderstood genius with a cache of authority issues. Little is as it seems in Larsson's novel, but there is at least one constant: you really *don't* want to mess with the girl with the dragon tattoo. --*Dave Kallan*

--This text refers to the **Hardcover** edition.

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Cases rarely come much colder than the decades-old disappearance of teen heiress Harriet Vanger from her family's remote island retreat north of Stockholm, nor do fiction debuts hotter than this European bestseller by muckraking Swedish journalist Larsson. At once a strikingly original thriller and a vivisection of Sweden's dirty not-so-little secrets (as suggested by its original title, *Men Who Hate Women*), this first of a trilogy introduces a provocatively odd couple: disgraced financial journalist Mikael Blomkvist, freshly sentenced to jail for libeling a shady businessman, and the multipierced and tattooed Lisbeth Salander, a feral but vulnerable superhacker. Hired by octogenarian industrialist Henrik Vanger, who wants to find out what happened to his beloved great-niece before he dies, the duo gradually uncover a festering morass of familial corruption--at the same time, Larsson skillfully bares some of the similar horrors that have left Salander such a marked woman. Larsson died in 2004, shortly after handing in the manuscripts for what will be his legacy. *100,000 first printing.* (Sept.)






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Figure 2 Appearance of editorial review section on website Amazon.com.

Editorial reviews of the books are placed under the “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought” section, which displays other books’ titles, pictures and price under the same categories or similar topics or genres. In the editorial reviews section, about two or three outstanding and trusted reviews as selected by the website are displayed. Under the editorial reviews section is a section available for other free reviews and comments where reviewers can also vote for the book they like, as displayed in Figure 3.

Customer Reviews

50 Reviews

5 star:		(31)
4 star:		(16)
3 star:		(2)
2 star:		(0)
1 star:		(1)

Average Customer Review
 (50 customer reviews)

Most Helpful Customer Reviews

32 of 34 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Fantastic**, September 26, 1999
 By **Jeanne Bodine** (Philadelphia, PA) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: **Garnethill (Hardcover)**

This was a wonderful book. It was, at turns, suspenseful, hilarious, gritty, thrilling, sad, witty, insightful and spooky. I stayed up late two evenings in a row to finish it and annoyed my traveling companion by continually reading funny or perceptive lines. It's hard to believe that this is the author's first book. I hope the author has a long and successful career ... and is prolific. I also hope the book (& author) become popular in the U.S. so future books are quickly and readily available.

Help other customers find the most helpful reviews [Report abuse](#) [Permalink](#)

Was this review helpful to you? ☒ Yes ☐ No [Comment](#)

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Bleak as befits the genre, but with very Glaswegian humour**, November 17, 2002
 By **A Customer**

This review is from: **Garnethill: A Novel of Crime (Paperback)**

Neither bleak nor a suburb, Garnethill is compact island of a neighbourhood in the centre of Glasgow, full of dauntingly steep hills à la Bullitt's best car chase scenes. It is certainly not among Glasgow's worst, but neither is it among its best. The book is bleak at times, yes, as befits the genre. And Glasgow, like many places, can be bleak, especially on short winter days with biting rain and wind. This story lives among the low-lives and marginals of the city, and while those are not the only Glasgow - or urban - stories to tell, they are surely among the most compelling.

Figure 3 Appearance of customer reviews section on Amazon.com.

In this section, reviews and comments are freely written by trusted customers as well as false customers. Next to their name there is a link available for viewing other reviews posted by the same reviewer. This can also help customers to judge the reliability of the reviewer and it prevents the book's authors from posting their own book reviews. Apart from trusted reviewers, there are "shill" reviewers who, according to Weber (2007, p. 195), do what is sometimes called "astroturfing", which is a dishonest tactic of writing contrived reviews to simulate a grassroots movement for a book on Amazon. However, the identification of whether or not the reviews are made by trusted reviewers or shill reviewers is not the purpose of this research. List below are examples of book reviews from the Editorial reviews section, one from fiction category

and the other from non-fiction category, which will be studied more deeply in this research:

Fiction book review

Book title: *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*

Author: Stieg Larsson and Reg Keeland

Reviewer: Dave Callanan from Publisher Weekly

“Amazon Best Books of the Month, May 2010. As the finale to Stieg Larsson’s Millennium Trilogy, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* is not content to merely match the adrenaline-charged pace that made international bestsellers out of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *The Girl Who Played with Fire*. Instead, it roars with an explosive storyline that blows the doors off the series and announces that the very best has been saved for last. . .”
(*The girl who kicked the hornet's nest*, 2010).

Non-fiction book review

Book title: *Cell of Cells: The Global Race to Capture and Control the Stem Cell*

Author: Cynthia Fox

Reviewer: Journal of Law and Medicine

“Cynthia Fox is an award-winning science writer whose work has appeared in a variety of high-profile populist publications. Her new book on human embryonic stem (hES) cells is a fascinating and accessible work. . . The book contains a myriad of fascinating and disturbing tales. The reader cannot but be overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the discoveries which are in the process constantly now of coming to light. This early part of the 21st

century is a remarkable time. Many of the components of stem cell research, though, are not so edifying. . .” (*Cell of cells: The global race to capture and control the stem cell*, 2007)

Statement of the Problem

In a bookstore, the customers can pick up the book in which they are interested, open it and browse the content before making a decision to buy one. However, through online market on the Internet, customer cannot do so. In order to buy a book or to find a book for reading, readers can simply guess from the book's title to know what the book is written about, if it is non-fiction, but they need to go through the book reviews in order to gather the information and then find out if the book is what they are really looking for. The book reviews posted on Amazon.com are consequently the key elements that customers use in order to supplement their decision in purchasing a book.

However, in the commercial website where sales volume is the first priority, the researcher assumed that the book reviews on the website do not only provide plain and simple information of the products, but there can also be some specific strategies used by reviewers in order to make the messages sound persuasive and highly attractive for customer in making decision to buy the product, apart from being informative. In recent years, there are studies conducted with regard to the reviews both in term of academic and commercial interests. In an academic aspect, the study of related book reviews concerns the effectiveness of the process. In the commercial area, the study focused on

the effect of product reviews on customer's shopping behavior in comparison to other marketing strategies, but there are few analyzing frameworks that study the strategies used in reviewing products in commercial context, especially from a linguistic aspect. Therefore, in this research, the website Amazon.com is a source of book reviews which will be examined to find out what linguistic instruments are used by reviewers and how they are used for persuasive purposes. In addition, since the book reviews under study are on the website Amazon.com, which is a commercial website that advertises products in competition with other websites, it is beneficial to study further how the information and content of the book is represented to customers and also whether there is enough information for them as it is a possibility that the proportion of advertising messages or propaganda is much more than the actual content of the book in such commercial context, which therefore could mislead the consumers. For example, by claiming one book as the best seller of the month or referring to the high volume of its sale, the trustworthiness of the books is enhanced and the interest of readers is stimulated because the popularity is represented. However, this might not be informative enough for customers at the end as they cannot know whether the book contains the information they actually want to make use of. Since a book could be well received by many readers, but not all, and the so-claimed popularity cannot guarantee that the book has the content that a reader exactly wants, the researcher, therefore, finds it also interesting to study further what are the advertising elements which comprise in book reviews on the website Amazon.com. In addition, it is also important for book reviewers to know that it is crucial to make balance

between information and advertisement when reviewing book so that readers can make use of their work at best benefits and it can help promote the books to a prominent position in the market.

The Purposes of the Study



The purposes of the study are as followed:

1. To examine the distinctive characteristics of book reviews on the website Amazon.com and find out further whether they share any similarities with academic reviews as discussed in other related studies.

2. To examine what linguistic instruments are employed by book reviewers between fiction and non-fiction book categories, specifically the rhetorical devices, as well as how they are used for persuasive purposes.

3. To search for other elements comprised in the book reviews, and how they are used for persuasion.

Specifically, the study examines the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of fiction and non-fiction book reviews on the website Amazon.com?

2. In terms of style, what is the choice of rhetorical devices of fiction and non-fiction book reviews on Amazon.com?

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3. In terms of persuasion, what persuasive strategies are employed by the book reviewers to attract readers' interest?

Delimitations of the Study

This research intends to study the characteristics of book reviews and writing style of book reviews in non-fiction and fiction category posted on the website Amazon.com. For non-fiction, the categories sciences, economics, crime and criminals, and religion are studied. In the fiction category, the book reviews which will be studied are under the following topics: comedy, drama, mystery and thriller, and romance. (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, n.d.-a)

To begin, the researcher would study the general characteristics of editorial book reviews for books in fiction and non-fiction categories. The techniques and the way that the information of the book content is expressed or represented to readers will also be examined. Finally, the researcher would study the use of rhetorical devices and find out how frequently they are employed by book reviewers in fiction and non-fiction book categories.

Since this research is aimed at studying specifically the characteristics of editorial book reviews and persuasive strategies applied in book reviews posted on Amazon.com, the content of the books will not be neither studied nor discussed in detail, and the book reviews that contain merely compliments or comments will not be taken into account for this research. Lastly, even though this research is conducted by using materials from Amazon.com, it is not sponsored by the company and it is intended solely for academic purposes.

Importance of the Study

This research study, which focuses on the general characteristics of book reviews and persuasive strategies in book reviews, should provide the following significant benefits:

Firstly, writers who would like to review a book and current book reviewers should gain a better knowledge and understanding of characteristics of book reviews both in general and specifically in the e-commerce market. Unlike academic book reviews, the characteristics and writing style of book reviews posted on commercial websites are also shaped by the advertising purpose. Without proper reviews, the readers could be misled to purchase them and waste money and time reading the books they might not actually want. Moreover, the books themselves will not be recognized and find it difficult to demand a prominent position in the market. Secondly, since a good review helps readers decide if it is worth the time and money to buy and read a particular book, the expectation of this study is to give knowledge to writers in selecting the most effective use of language and writing styles for writing their book reviews. Lastly, the writer of book reviews will understand how all elements mentioned effectively work together in order to write an appropriate book review, which is an ever-growing work today, especially on the Internet. For book reviewers, this study can also be used as a reference for proving the value of their written works: it enables writers of book reviews to acknowledge what a book review should consist of, to choose the most appropriate and effective writing approach for reviewing fiction and non-fiction books, to learn

how stylistic devices persuasively affect readers when reviewing fiction and non-fiction books. In addition, the study is conducted with an expectation that it can broaden the knowledge in the use of rhetorical devices in commercial context, as in the past they were studied broadly merely in terms of speech.

Definitions of Terms

In this section the key concepts used in this study will be defined.

These are website, book reviews, fiction, non-fiction, rhetorical devices.

1. Website refers to an online storage which, functioning as table of contents in a book, presents many directory subjects on various contents. It provides convenience for users who are looking for an interesting subject to read or study or for some products to buy. There are many varieties of websites, each specializing in a particular type of content or use. A review website, for example, is categorized a site on which people can post reviews for products or services.

2. Book review refers to a descriptive and critical review, which focuses on the book's purpose, content and authority.

3. Fiction refers to a form of narrative which deals, in part or in whole, with events that are not factual, but rather, imaginary and invented by its author(s).

4. Non-fiction refers to an account or representation of a subject which is presented as fact. This presentation may be accurate or not; that is, it can give either a true or a false account of the subject in question. However, it is

generally assumed that the authors of such accounts believe them to be truthful at the time of their composition.

5. Rhetorical Devices refer to the strategies used by a speaker or a writer in attempting to communicate with an audience. The rhetorical devices in the study include hyperbole, metaphor, simile, personification and rhetorical questions.

Summary

Chapter 1 has provided the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study, the research questions, delimitation of the study, importance of the study, and definitions of terms. The background of the study reveals the necessary information and ideas related to the data of the study, which is useful for the analysis of the data to be conducted in the next few chapters. Moreover, the importance of reviewing products in relation to the customer's decision-making on purchasing is also presented in the background of the study. The important parts of this chapter, however, are the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study, and the research questions, which significantly shape and organize the content and structure of this research.