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What are relationships made of?

Commercial relationships are so much more than a series of transactions between seller and buyer. At their best, they are experiences built on trust, dialogue, mutual interest, collaboration, and shared moments in time. Sounds a lot like the best human relationships, right? As the physical and digital worlds collapse into one, boundaries between commercial and human relationships are vanishing into the background.

We think the best social technologies help make experiences like shopping more human. From this perspective, every review, question, answer, and helpfulness vote in the Bazaarvoice network is an opportunity to build better relationships between businesses and consumers.
In The Conversation Index Volume 6, we look at one of the most important dimensions of human and commercial relationships: responsiveness. How do responses to feedback—especially critical feedback—change the way consumers feel about products, brands, and sellers? What do the most helpful responses have in common, and who typically provides them? In which product categories are consumers reaching out to businesses, and how can these response opportunities be detected at scale?

To answer these questions, we analyzed over 100,000 reviews in our network and commissioned a survey of 1,600 nationally representative US adults, ages 18 and up.

Ready for the insights? Read on!

Lisa Pearson (@lpearson)
Chief Marketing Officer, Bazaarvoice
What we’ve found

• Responding to poor customer feedback increases purchase intent.
• Brand responses improve product sentiment among potential buyers.
• Lengthier, more detailed, and more balanced customer feedback is considered most helpful.
• Reviews often contain calls to action – opportunities to respond.
Helpful responses to negative feedback can dramatically increase purchase intent among future shoppers.
Responsive brands increase sales

The vast majority of reviews are positive – 82% of products across our network are rated four stars or higher. But inevitably, negative feedback does happen for every brand. A poor customer experience left unaddressed, not only threatens the reviewer’s repeat business, but can push other shoppers who read the review away from the brand. But with the ability to reach out to dissatisfied customers, and to target the brand’s responses as much to future shoppers as the original reviewer, brands can positively influence future sales.

In our survey, half of the respondents were placed in a control group, which saw several negative reviews for a number of different products. The other half comprised the test group, which saw the same reviews, but also saw a company response to each. The two groups walked away with vastly different feelings about the products and brands in question.

After the test group read negative feedback and read a brand response, shopper intent to purchase more than doubled that of the control group, who saw only the negative feedback without the brand response. Product appeal (consumers’ overall opinion of the product) also doubled, and one third of the negative impact of the review was eliminated. When a fictional reviewer mentioned a prior satisfactory experience with the brand, this increase in intent to purchase was higher – and was lower when the fictional reviewer had mentioned a prior negative experience with the brand.

Correct misconceptions and offer replacements

While “user error” has become a bit of a punch line due to its overuse by brands that refuse to accept blame for poor customer experiences, sometimes a displeased reviewer is indeed misusing the product. In four scenarios, shoppers were shown a review in which the product owner obviously misused or demonstrated a significant misconception about the product or type of product. The test group saw responses from the brands that clearly explained the correct uses of the products, while the control group saw no responses. Shoppers who saw the brand responses were 186% more likely to purchase than those who didn’t.
In other scenarios, a different product might better meet a reviewer’s needs. In two tests, shoppers who saw a brand response that offered to refund, upgrade, or exchange the disgruntled customer’s product for a different model were 92% more likely to purchase than shoppers who saw no response.

**Strive for “first contact resolution”**

Shoppers expect company review respondents to be helpful within their responses. The response, in their eyes, should be customer service in itself—not simply copied-and-pasted “we regret the inconvenience” boilerplate with customer service contact information. In ten scenarios, shoppers who saw a brand response that required additional steps on the part of the reviewer (such as contacting customer service) saw a lower average increase in intent to purchase (89%) than the average increase for all brand responses (116%).
Shoppers who read helpful brand responses to reviews show higher purchase intent and stronger sentiment.

When brands respond to product misuse with guiding explanations, shoppers who see the review response are more likely to purchase.

Shoppers who read brand responses that offer to refund, upgrade, or exchange products are more likely to purchase.

Shoppers who see brand responses suggesting additional steps (such as contacting customer service) see a lower average increase in intent to purchase.

**EXTRA STEPS**

- 89%
- 89%

**ALL RESPONSES**

- 116%
- 107%
When brands respond to feedback, they score points with consumers.

Q: Which of the following, if any, does a brand’s response to an online consumer review make you think?

- They really care about consumers. 41%
- They have great customer service. 35%
- They are a trustworthy brand. 22%
- Their products are high quality. 14%
- None of these. 29%
Perception improves when brands respond to consumers

When done right, responding to feedback improves a brand’s image. After seeing a brand response to a review, 71% of consumers in the survey changed their perception of the brand.

Being truly responsive means using conversational, human language that fits the brand and avoiding “corporate speak.” Thank reviewers for their comments, good or bad. And never use a canned response. Copying and pasting the same response does not show a brand is listening; in fact, it suggests the opposite and is almost as bad as not responding at all.

**Build positive brand associations**

When brands communicate with their customers and prove they’re listening, other consumers take it as a sign that the brand cares about their experience beyond the sale. Seeing a brand response to a review made 41% of consumers think the
Shoppers see responsive brands as caring and trustworthy and show higher sentiment toward their products.

brand “really cares about consumers.” Thirty-five percent thought the brand “has great customer service,” 22% thought it’s “a trustworthy brand,” and 14% thought its “products are high quality.”

Looking at data from actual product reviews, we found that reviews with company responses are much more likely to be voted helpful by readers in some product categories – so respond to reviews to increase their value to other shoppers. For example, in the Health and Beauty category, reviews with company responses were 15 times more likely to be voted helpful than those without.

**Increase shopper product sentiment**

After reading review responses that corrected product misuse and gave instructions for using the products correctly, shoppers showed 157% higher average sentiment toward the products than those who read the reviews without brand responses. And when a brand response offered to refund or upgrade the reviewer’s product, readers showed 88% higher average product sentiment than those who didn’t see the response.

Just as was the case for intent to purchase, shopper sentiment improved less when the brand response required an additional customer service contact on the part of the reviewer. Shoppers who read these types of responses exhibited an 89% average increase in product sentiment – lower than the 107% average increase in product sentiment for all brand responses.
Reviews with brand responses are up to 15 times more likely to be considered helpful.

Odds ratio of brand responses considered helpful, by industry:

- Health & Beauty: 15x
- Office Supplies: 6x
- Consumer Packaged Goods: 3x
- Hardware: 2.75x
- Financial Services: 2.3x
- Footwear: 2.4x
- Consumer Electronics: 2x

Health & Beauty reviews with company responses are 15x more likely to be voted helpful than those without responses.
Consumers often include calls to action (CTAs) in feedback, such as product suggestions, support requests, and simple words of thanks. All CTAs are opportunities to respond.

Percentage of reviews containing CTAs, by industry:

- **Consumer Packaged Goods**: 30%
- **Financial Services**: 29%
- **Consumer Electronics**: 14%
- **Health & Beauty**: 11%
- **Footwear**: 7.6%
- **Hardware**: 2.5%
- **Sporting Goods**: 2%
Many reviews contain appeals for help and recommended improvements

Many reviews contain calls to action (CTAs), such as specific suggestions for product improvement, requests for help, and words of thanks directed at the manufacturer or seller. These CTAs are all opportunities to respond and boost perception and purchase intent. For example, within reviews for TVs, brands can often find feedback and suggestions relating to nearly every aspect of every feature – entire paragraphs devoted to desired remote functionality are not uncommon.

CTAs are more common in some verticals than others. Their presence doesn’t appear to correlate with product complexity or price – in fact, CTAs are most common in the CPG category.

Use pivot language to spot CTAs, then act

Negative reviews often contain information on what specifically is wrong with a product; four-star reviews often explain how a product could improve to become five-star. To find these calls to action, search reviews for “pivot language” that reveals a change in sentiment – phrases like “if only,” “I wish,” or “one change.” These indicate that a recommendation might follow.

Set up filters to catch likely CTAs. In addition to the pivot language above, search for second-person statements – such as “you,” “yours,” and “you’re” – which may indicate that the reviewer is talking specifically to the brand. Watch for these types of statements in reviews and tag them as containing CTAs.

Then, share these CTAs with relevant parties across the business, answer any reviewer questions, and thank reviewers for their suggestions. When changes are planned or made in response to feedback, let customers know by responding to their reviews. This not only assures other shoppers that the product is improving but also shows that the brand is responsive to customers.
Helpfulness is predictable

All reviews can be classified into one of six distinct groups, with varying degrees of prevalence and helpfulness. To create these categories, we tagged over two dozen characteristics within a random sample of reviews from across the Bazaarvoice client network, including attributes like:

*Does reviewer speak in second person?*
*Does reviewer include pro and cons?*
*Is review instructional?*
*Does reviewer include an introduction? A conclusion? Both?*

Using these tags, we built a model that can classify any review into one of these six groups using text alone:

1. **Ratings Boosters** (25%) Short, very positive reviews which don’t present a very balanced perspective. All are four or five stars.
2. **Marketing Gold** (20%) Positive reviews with more context and detail than ratings boosters, but still short. All are four or five stars.
3. **Product Feedback Providers** (19%) These reviews include high-value context and both positives and negatives, separated by pivot language. While they have high ratings overall, they tend to include lots of product feedback and suggestions. Brands should thank these reviewers for their recommendations.
4. **Detractors** (15%) Low-rated reviews that contain detailed feedback on the customer’s dissatisfaction. All are one or two stars. Detractor reviews are perfect opportunities for a brand response.
5. **Storytellers** (11%) The lengthiest reviews at an average of 220 words – over twice the overall average review length. These very detailed reviews discuss use cases and expertise.
6. **Icebergs** (10%) These reviewers want to like the product, but something holds them back. Reviews are lukewarm (no one- or five-star reviews), discussing positives and/or negatives with a high frequency of pivot words. Icebergs present a good opportunity to improve brand image by offering an exchange or return.
Resonate with consumers by using elements from the most helpful review types in your responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Outer Ring</th>
<th>Inner Ring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storytellers</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Feedback</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Gold</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings Boosters</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebergs</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detractors</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of all helpfulness votes are positive across all categories.

Key:
- **Outer ring**: Percentage of helpfulness votes that are positive
- **Inner ring**: Percentage of all reviews that match this type

Total All Categories: 74%
In some industries, the gender that contributes less content is considered more helpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female Share (%)</th>
<th>Male Share (%)</th>
<th>Most helpful review types per category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel/Accessories</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1. Storytellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Detractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Product Feedback Providers (PFP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Electronics</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>1. Storytellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Marketing Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Detractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Packaged Goods</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1. Storytellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Marketing Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Detractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware/Home Improvement</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1. PFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Marketing Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Ratings Boosters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Merchants/Department Stores</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1. Storytellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Marketing Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Detractors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Model responses after the most helpful reviews
Storytellers are the most helpful review type – 97% of helpfulness votes for these lengthy and detailed reviews are positive. Product Feedback Providers are the second most helpful review type. These reviews contain a mix of pros and cons that help accurately set shopper expectations.

Businesses should model how they interact with customers on what shoppers find most helpful in reviews. Search the most helpful reviews for common language and attributes, and then optimize your responses with this knowledge.

Gender and helpfulness
Surprisingly, in some categories, the most helpful reviews are not left by the gender that submits more reviews in that category.

For example, although men post more frequently in Consumer Electronics, reviews authored by women are considered more helpful in the category. And while women post more in Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG), CPG reviews authored by men are voted more helpful. Likewise in Mass Merchant/Department Store reviews, women post most often, but shoppers vote male-authored reviews more helpful.
The bottom line? Feedback is a dialogue – and responsive businesses win

Every review is an opportunity to improve experiences, build strong relationships, and yes, increase sales. Negative feedback is an opportunity to correct misperceptions, answer calls for help, and improve perception among shoppers. And hidden within reviews are the answers to developing better products and crafting the most effective brand responses.
How do you stack up?

Visit our industry benchmarking tool to see how you compare to others in your industry. You’ll discover:

- ROI for companies in your industry using Ratings & Reviews
- ROI for companies in your industry using Questions & Answers
- Average product/service ratings in your industry
- Distribution of product/service ratings, on a scale of 1-5, in your industry
- Net Promoter Score for companies in your industry

Compare now here: bv-url.com/compareROI
The methodology behind The Conversation Index Volume 6

Volume 6 is based on an analysis of data from over 100,000 pieces of user-generated content in the Bazaarvoice network and responses from a survey, commissioned by Bazaarvoice and conducted by Wakefield Research, of 1,600 nationally representative US adults, ages 18 and up. Eight hundred respondents were placed in a control group, which saw several scenarios that each featured a negative review of a product. Eight hundred respondents were placed in a test group, which saw the same negative reviews for the same products, plus a company response to each negative review.

Contributors

Column Five Media created the visualizations for The Conversation Index Volume 6.

columnfivemedia.com
Contact us

Contact us to see how we help brands gain invaluable consumer and product insights by putting consumers’ conversations at the heart of their organizations.

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About Bazaarvoice

Bazaarvoice connects businesses together to amplify the authentic voices of people where they shop. Each month, more than 400 million people view and share opinions, questions and experiences about 20 million products in the Bazaarvoice network. The company’s technology platform channels these voices into the places that influence purchase decisions, helping businesses gain access to a wider audience of shoppers and trusted consumer content to improve sales and marketing. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Bazaarvoice has offices across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific.

For more information, visit bazaarvoice.com, read the blog at bazaarvoice.com/blog, and follow on Twitter at twitter.com/bazaarvoice.