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Exploring How People Use Star Rating Distributions

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Abstract

When purchasing products online, often two products may have similar mean ratings and numbers of reviews, but such apparent similarities may hide important differences. Sometimes, the distribution of star ratings is also available to decision makers in addition to these two attributes. Will the decision still be as undifferentiated as before or will the distributions of stars engender a preference towards one of the products? To answer this question, the current study manipulated the displayed variability of ratings for choices with the same average rating. The behavioral studies showed that participants exhibited distinctive choice patterns when the distribution of ratings was provided even when the average rating and total number of reviews were the same between two compared products. A utility-based cognitive model was therefore developed to identify the underlying mechanism as to why people chose the way they did.