

# **Faces matter: Supplementary survey studies on comparability and trustworthiness**

[Pre-registration file for two follow-up Survey Studies 4 and 5]

April 9, 2025

## **1 Study 4: Comparability of positive reviews used in Study 1 and Study 2**

In Study 4, we ask online respondents to assess the positive reviews used in Study 1 and Study 2 by answering Likert-scale questions relating to content informativeness, emotions, judgements, helpfulness, and positiveness.<sup>1</sup> We then compare their responses across the reviews in terms of review comparability. We specifically focus on the ‘Beef Pies’ product as suggested by the referee. For this product, we have 20 positive reviews from Study 1 and another set of 20 positive reviews from Study 2. Before being compared, we remove the profile photos and the 5-star review ratings.<sup>2</sup> As seen in the sample survey, we have 3 survey groups.

- Online respondents randomised into **Group 1** are asked to assess 10 positive reviews from Study 1 and 10 positive reviews from Study 2, noting that these positive reviews are randomly selected using a random number generator. The 20 reviews are then ordered randomly.
- Online respondents randomised into **Group 2** are asked to assess the remaining 20 positive reviews, one half from Study 1 and the other half from Study 2.<sup>3</sup>
- Additionally, online respondents randomised into **Group 3** are asked to assess the same set of 20 positive reviews seen in Group 1 but now we disclose their profile photos.

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<sup>1</sup>Please refer to the sample survey for the exact questions asked.

<sup>2</sup>We remove the profile photos since they are by design different as part of our treatments in the main field experiments so we should only assess the comparability of review information excluding the profile photos. We remove the 5-star review ratings to avoid priming the online respondents. Noting that all of these positive reviews are associated with 5-star review ratings.

<sup>3</sup>We could have just one group and ask this group to assess the combined 40 reviews but that would lead to 160 questions per subject.

Group 1 and Group 2: We hypothesise that the two sets of positive reviews used in Study 1 and Study 2 are comparable. Given that for each review we ask the online respondents 4 questions, the Likert-scale responses are quantifiable and can be used to assess their comparability using simple t-tests. A reasonable comparability may allow us to suggest that the act of personalisation does not motivate purchases as shown in Study 2 that involves a field experiment. We aim to have around 1000 subjects per group. Group 1 and Group 3: Responses from Group 3 are compared with those of Group 1 to explore how the presence of profile photos affects review perceptions differently. Note that we will once again be comparing the 4-question Likert-scale responses across the two groups, one hiding the profile photos versus the other group showing the profile photos. For example, we might be able to explore how showing faces would impact review positiveness perception using a face dummy and simple OLS regressions.<sup>4</sup>

## **2 Study 5: Trustworthiness of positive reviews used in Study 1 while replicating Study 3**

We now replicate the survey design of Study 3 in the paper while adding a new experimental group, as suggested by the referee. In addition to the two existing survey groups, the default profile-photo group and the face-photo group, we add one more group that would be exposed to the same set of 20 reviews but with their profile photos being replaced by 20 randomly selected personalised non-face photos from the field experiment.

We explore whether, given identical reviews, non-face profile images could also have impact on review trustworthiness. We mainly compare the Likert-scale trustworthiness responses and run OLS regressions with ‘Non-face profile photo’ as the dummy variable. We hypothesise that the non-face personalised profile-photo replacement does not improve trustworthiness perceptions of the reviews. As suggested by the referee, this could indeed highlight the importance of faces per se as profile photos.

## **3 IRB**

Both follow-up survey studies shown above were reviewed by the NYU Shanghai IRB to be exempt research (2025-003) based on 45 CFR 46.104.

## **4 Survey dates**

We plan to have the survey question sheets distributed online through the same survey platform used in Study 3 from April 9, 2025 onwards. Note that both survey studies will be conducted concurrently at the same time, online respondents will only be participating in one of the two studies and not both.

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<sup>4</sup>This exploration could be interesting in itself. For example, future studies can explore how emotional expressions in the product description section affect informativeness perceptions and, hence purchase decisions.