

Online Reviews: An Accurate Source of Product Attribute Information (?)

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Motivation

Online reviews are widely used by shoppers to inform their purchase decisions. Researchers find mixed results regarding their efficacy. Some hold reviews to be nearly perfect information, while others highlight that reviews are non-random, frequently falsified, and lack correlation with objective measures of quality. We try to bridge the gap between those two camps to understand in what ways reviews may and may not be helpful.

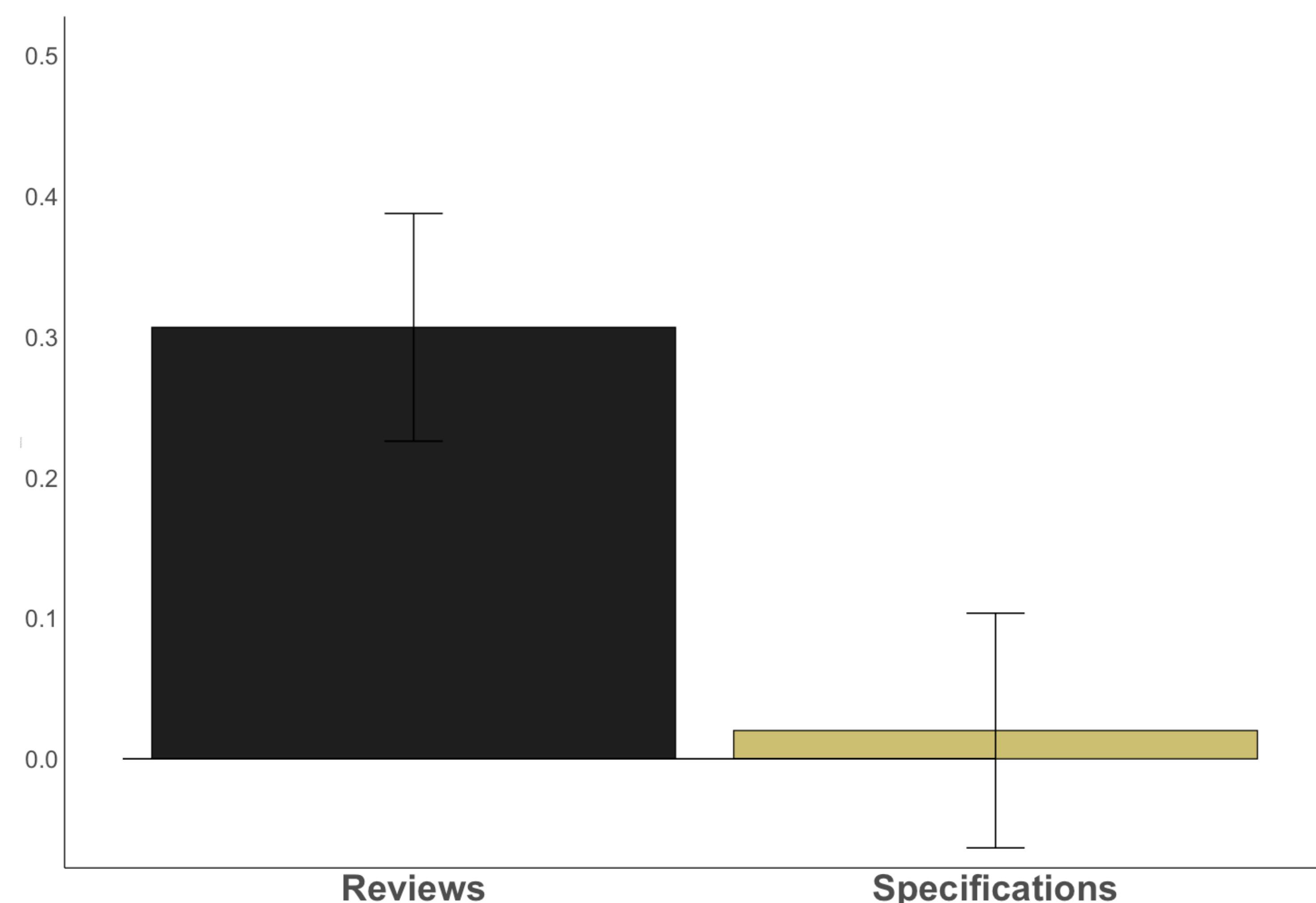
Methods

Our studies have subjects learn about two products within a single category, comparing them on the performance of individual attributes. We selected products that had similar Consumer Reports overall ratings, but different attribute ratings. Our main DV “accuracy” is calculated as the correlation of a subject’s attribute comparison to Consumer Reports’ difference scores on the same attributes.

| | N | Information Groups | Product Groups | DV |
|----|-----|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| S1 | 159 | 1. Stars 2. Text 3. Both | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blenders Blood Glucose Meters Gas Grills | Accuracy (Subject – CR Correlation) |
| S2 | 159 | 1. Reviews 2. Specifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blenders Gas Grills | Accuracy |
| S3 | 351 | 1. Reviews 2. Specifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gas Grills | Accuracy + Principal-Agent Choice |

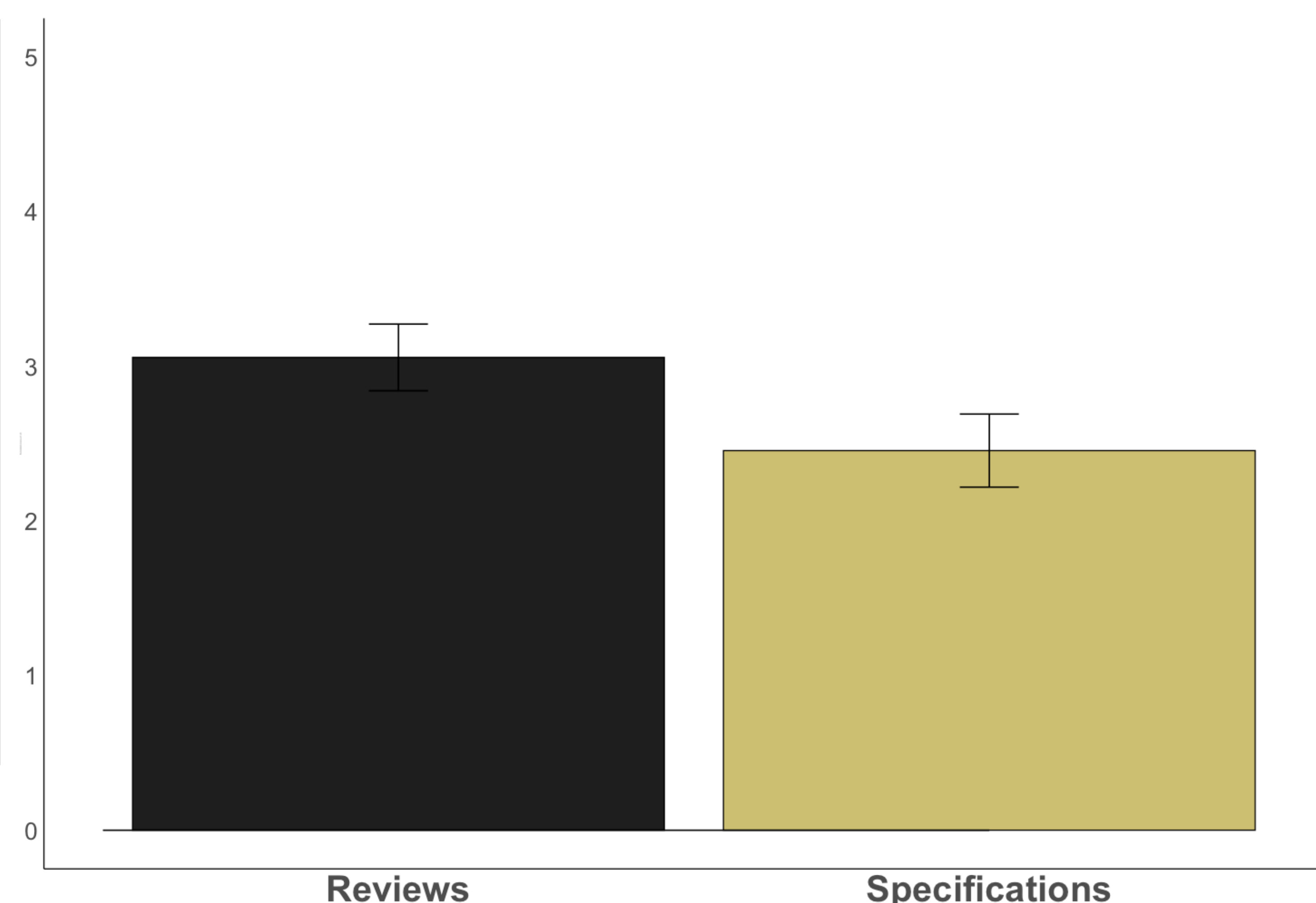
Attribute Accuracy

Which of two products is better on each of 4 attributes?



Recommendation Accuracy (0-5)

Preferences were given such that either product A or B could be superior.



Summary

We find that reviews are **helpful for informing shoppers about product attributes** more so than products overall. Across our pre-registered studies, we find that subjects who read online reviews made more accurate comparative judgements of specific attributes than those who saw only star ratings or manufacturer provided information.¹

Our studies suggest that while **star ratings may not be a good indicator of overall product quality** (de Langhe et al. 2016), the information contained in **written reviews** helps people to purchase products that are **better for their individual needs** (Study 3).

¹ Accuracy is defined as the correlation between a subject’s attribute comparisons and Consumer Reports’ scores.

Sample Stimuli

Reviews:

Specifications:



USER REVIEWS:

Review 1:
★★★★★

I've had it a week. Worked great out of the box. My wife has one of the name brands and this works identically. Plus I really like the Bluetooth connectivity to my iPhone and the app with the log and all the data tracking and cool charts you can view. It's s keeper!

Review 2:
★☆☆☆☆

So disappointed. Not user friendly. Requires too much to get a reading. Much prefer the accu nano.

Features:

- Calculates glucose averages.
- Automatic coding.
- Requires less than 1µL of blood for a reading.
- Readings in the memory can be downloaded to a PC and/or a smart device.
- Stores at least 360 readings.
- Has larger digits on the display than some of the meters.
- Has a larger screen than some of the meters.
- Has a date and time stamp.
- User can flag their results as pre- or post meal for reference.

| Features | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Displays averages | Yes |
| Sets strip code automatically | Yes |
| Greater than 5 second | No |