Reducing Uncertainty for Refurbished Products: The Role of Customer Reviews and Refurbishment Disclosures Across Platforms

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Refurbished electronics advance circular-economy goals but often evoke uncertainty about product condition and performance. An exploratory pilot study underlines that consumers' hesitation is primarily driven by perceived product variability, lower quality, and higher risk rather than by moral aspects. Building on Cue Utilization Theory, this research investigates how peer-generated cues (customer reviews) and firm-generated cues (refurbishment disclosures) influence purchase intentions across two platform types: Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs; e.g., a refurbished iPad on Apple's website) and Third-Party Refurbishers (TPRs; e.g., the same device offered on an independent marketplace). In an experimental study (N = 585), customer reviews consistently enhanced purchase intention by signaling higher quality, whereas refurbishment disclosures proved persuasive only on OEM platforms, where the alignment between brand reputation and refurbishment information increased their diagnostic value. The findings extend CUT by showing that cue effectiveness depends on platform congruence and offer actionable insights for refurbishers, OEMs, and policymakers.

Keywords: circular economy, refurbishment, cue utilization theory