



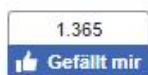
Social-Media-Blindness: "Like" statements leave website visitors feeling indifferent

Ratings from social media platforms are hardly noticed on websites

Social media ratings are everywhere. An eye-tracking study now shows that ratings that are integrated on company websites are hardly noticed by visitors and have no positive influence.

After a good meal, guests like to pull out their mobile phones and tell their family and friends through likes or ratings on social media platforms such as Facebook, TripAdvisor or Google whether or not they recommend a restaurant or other services. On the TripAdvisor portal alone, 190 million reviews are stored, and 115 entries are added every minute.ⁱ

The platforms offer website operators an uncomplicated way to integrate social media feedback into their own websites. Thus, it can be shown directly on the own website how many people have marked the page with "Like". Here are two examples from our study:



But is this embedded information also noticed? And if so, how do they influence the visitors?

The most important findings at a glance:

- About 30 % of visitors on websites do not notice likes and ratings.
- Further 30 % do not consciously perceive them and cannot remember them afterwards.
- The services were not rated more positively because of the social media content.

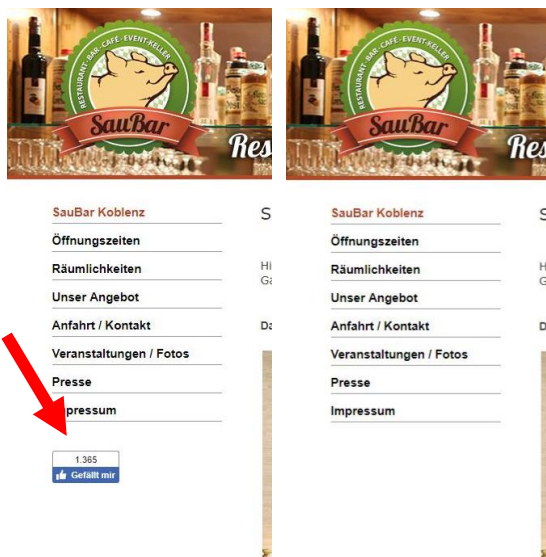
Eye tracking study on the effect of "Likes"

In a study with 20 test participants, we, EYEVIDO investigated whether and how website visitors perceive the embedded ratings. We also analyzed if the ratings influence the visitors when they decide whether they find an offer attractive or not.

To analyze the visual perception of the individual web page areas, the eyes of the test persons were recorded with an eye tracker during the study. Eye tracking is used to record where people look on the computer screen.

Structure of the study

In our study, participants looked at the home pages of eight different websites while their gaze data was recorded. The task in each case was to identify what the company offers and what distinguishes it. After viewing the site, the test participants were asked to assess how willing they were to explore the offers on the websites. The companies came from different sectors. In concrete terms, they were three restaurants, two service providers for team events, a café, a zoo, and a logistics company. Social media content from either Facebook or TripAdvisor was included on each of the sites. Either the number of likes, points or the average rating was displayed. The test participants were divided into two groups. Ten participants were shown the unchanged websites with social media content. For the other ten participants, the websites were manipulated by us and displayed without social media content. Here is an example from the study:



Left: Original website of the restaurant SauBar with social media element. Right: Manipulated website without social media element.

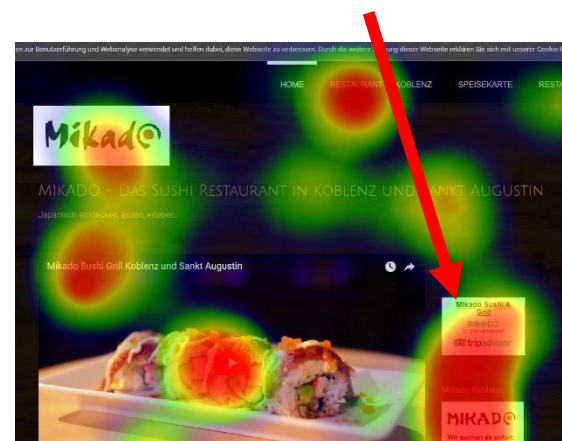
Eye-tracking result: little attention paid to social media content

Our test participants took a lot of time to browse through the websites of the eight companies: on average, they spent 48 seconds looking at the individual homepages.

In about one third of the recorded gaze data, the areas with the likes and ratings were not viewed at all or were only looked at while skimming through. If the likes and ratings were observed as such, they were only spotted relatively late, on average after 25 seconds. The viewing time was then very short, lasting on average just over two seconds.

Since the content was very simple, a short viewing time is quite plausible. The following figure shows the data of a typical test person who viewed the TripAdvisor rating on the side of a sushi restaurant for 2.2 seconds. In a subsequent survey he stated that he had noticed the ratings despite the short viewing time.

Ratings of Restaurants on TripAdvisor



Heatmap of a test person with a fixation time of 2.2 seconds on the TripAdvisor rating.

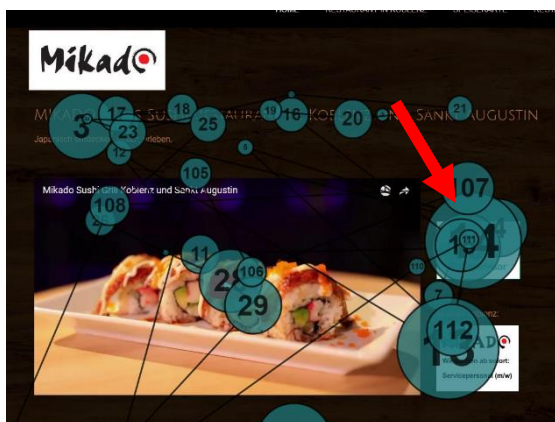
Closing question: Ratings are considered important, but hardly ever noticed

We asked the study participants whether they think that social media feedback plays a major role in the ranking of an offer for them. All respondents clearly agreed with this question.

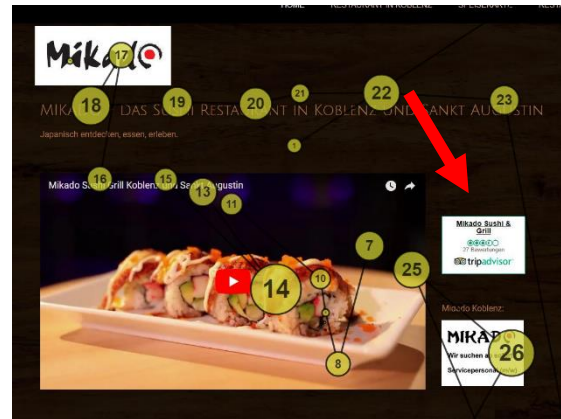
The last website shown in the study contained social media ratings. After the evaluation, the participants were asked whether they had noticed the ratings.

- One third of the test persons had not perceived the ratings.
- One third was not sure if there were any reviews.
- The remaining respondents had noticed the ratings.

The information provided by the test participants was reflected in the eye-tracking data. Participants who were unsure or denied the question did not view the social media content. The two cases can be clearly distinguished by means of eye tracking data. In the following illustrations gaze fixations are shown as circles, the numbers indicate the sequence of observation. Fixations are the phases in which the eye rests for a short moment on an area and perceives the visual content. Here are gaze paths and feedback of two test participants:



Female participant, 22 years old: "Yes, I noticed the company's evaluations". There are several fixations on the TripAdvisor ratings.



Participant male, 36 years old: "I did not notice any ratings". No fixations on the ratings.

Services were not perceived as more attractive despite likes and ratings

For each website we looked at, we asked the participants whether they would like to take up the company's services, i.e. whether they would like to have a drink in a café or eat out in a restaurant. In the evaluation, the assessments of the participants with social media were compared with the assessments of the participants without social media ads.

Contrary to our expectations, it was found that the ratings had no influence on the opinions of the participants and that there was no positive feedback when displaying social media ratings. Restaurants and leisure activities were therefore not perceived as more attractive. This did not change when we only included the data from test participants who had viewed the social media content for at least two seconds.

Conclusion: No positive influence measurable through social media ratings

Positive social media ratings are very important for companies. In direct comparison of different offers, such as search listings or comparison portals, the positive influence on the visitors was proven several timesⁱⁱ.

However, our study shows that the influence of social media ratings, which are integrated into websites, is not significant. A more positive impression of the website services could not be measured.

Website visitors often block out social media content on websites, presumably because it doesn't provide them with information about the products or the company presented. The term banner-blindnessⁱⁱⁱ describes such an effect for advertisements that are blocked out

by the viewer unintentionally in such a way that the content is no longer perceived. In our study we are also dealing with the effect of social-media-blindness.

The question remains open as to whether other social media content, such as comments from social networks, would receive more attention and thus have a stronger influence on the visitors' perception.

i The Telegraph, 20.11.2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/lists/TripAdvisor-in-numbers>

ii Z.B. Gavilan, Diana & Avello, Maria & Martinez, Gema. (2017). The influence of online ratings and reviews on hotel booking consideration. Tourism Management. 66.

iii Jan Panero Benway (1998). Banner Blindness: The Irony of Attention Grabbing on the World Wide Web. Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting, Vol 42, 1998.



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