

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONLINE REVIEWS AND RATINGS AND CONSUMER TRUST PERCEPTION: AN ANALYSIS

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**Abstract :** In the digital marketplace, consumer trust plays a significant role in influencing buying behaviour. This research paper examines the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust in e-commerce platforms. With the proliferation of digital marketplaces, it has become very important for businesses to understand that user generated reviews, credibility, quantity, valence of reviews, along with star ratings have become key determinants in shaping perception of the consumer and their purchase intentions. Through a combination of literature review and empirical analysis, this study investigates the relationship between different dimensions of reviews:- authenticity, recency and profile of reviewer along with ratings to influence trust formation. The findings show that consumers will put more trust in product and services with consistent, detailed and favourable consumer testimonials supported by excellent aggregate ratings. Furthermore, authenticated reviews and perceived reviewer expertise plays an important role in elevating the perception of creditworthiness. This research offers actionable insights for businesses as well as platform developers to optimize their review systems, thereby cultivating greater consumer trust and promoting active engagement.

**Keywords:-** Consumer trust, Digital consumer behaviour, Online reviews, Consumer ratings, Trust perception, Electronic word of mouth, Online purchase decision, Digital consumer behaviour, Influence of reviews.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The rapid evolution of e-commerce has transformed the way consumers decide about their purchases. So, understanding the dynamics of online consumer behaviour plays a pivotal role for businesses to reach and engage their target consumers. In the contemporary digital marketplace, consumers are increasingly turning to online reviews and ratings as a primary source of information prior to their decision making regarding purchases. Various user-generated feedback, often found on different e-commerce platforms, travel portals, and social media channels, critically shape the perceptions of consumers and build trust among brands, products and services. The impact of conventional word-of-mouth is marginal as it is often transient and has a limited reach. While the online reviews provide extensive coverage, greater visibility, and a lasting footprint, rendering them as an influential tool in the digital marketplace. Consumer trust is a vital component in online dealings, given that lack of physical product examination and face-to-face integration breeds uncertainty. Within this context, reviews and ratings serve as proxy measures of product quality and seller dependability. The perceived credibility is enhanced when there are favourable reviews and high ratings, while adverse feedback tends to deplete trust of consumers. It has become crucial for businesses seeking to build and maintain credibility online, to understand how and to what extent reviews and ratings shape the perception of consumers. By exploring these forces, the research aims to equip businesses with actionable strategies for utilizing online reviews and ratings to foster trust and increase sales. Ultimately, the study examines the impact of different review-related variables - such as review volume, valence, credibility, and rating consistency- on consumer trust, aiming to provide understandings about the influence of digital feedback on consumer trust and perception.

## 2.0 Literature Review:

Various studies have been conducted to know the impact of reviews and ratings on consumer perception. A study by Zhou et al. shows the influence of digital reviews on the purchase behaviour of consumers. For this exploration experience goods were considered and data was used from over 400 Taobao shops. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model as well as consumer learning theory, the authors investigate factors such as review ratings, content, and reputation of shop. The results of this research shows that favourable

reviews, descriptive ratings, picture reviews, additional reviews, and cumulative reviews significantly influence purchasing decisions. Conversely, moderate and adverse reviews, logistics ratings, and service ratings exhibit negligible influence. The study highlights that consumers leverage review quantity and quality to mitigate risk and establish product expectations. Notably, descriptive ratings influenced consumers behaviour in a negative manner and cumulative reviews yield an unexpected adverse impact, contradicting prior expectations. Sellers are recommended by the authors to encourage detailed and visual reviews to enhance credibility and stimulate sales. Although the research offers actionable insights for online retailing strategy, its cross-sectional design limitations require future longitudinal research to assess long-term effects. Another study by Bansal et al. (2023) addresses the gap in existing literature by creating and validating a standardized measurement scale—the Online Review Scale (ORS)—to measure how the purchase decision is influenced by online reviews. Data was drawn from 431 consumers and four primary dimensions were established :- source credibility, review volume, language comprehension, and relevance. The assumption included that in the absence of physical products in the digital marketplace, consumers are heavily dependent on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) for making decisions (Schneider & Zielke, 2020). Considering ORS, a multi-dimensional approach has been used along with scale development procedures by Churchill (1979) and Brod et al. (2009). The study suggests that young consumers primarily depend on online reviews, because they consider them as trustworthy (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016; Singh et al., 2018). This study has introduced an instrument having 17 validated items that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of reviews among different platforms. A validated scale has been created in a study by Zhao et. al. (2020) by applying Uses and Gratification (U&G) and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) frameworks and taking into consideration responses from 1,112 hotel consumers from three nations. With a large percentage of travelers relying on online reviews before making hotel bookings, it has been found that online reviews positively influence the purchase decision of consumers through perceived effectiveness of social media platforms (PESMP) and online trust and is moderated by cosmopolitanism. The study offers both theoretical and practical implications which helps in guiding marketers how to strategically manage online reviews for enhancing customer engagement and purchase outcomes.

To examine the differences between the decision making of older adults and younger adults, a study was conducted by Gresz et al. (2019) focused on the processing of various types of product information in online purchases including, attributes, average consumer ratings and affect-rich reviews. Experiment was conducted involving 154 younger adults (mean age = 21) on one side and 165 older adults (mean age = 69) on the other side, showing them pairs of products and different review conditions (positive, negative, or no review). The findings indicated that single vivid reviews, primarily those which are not consistent with the overall ratings, significantly influenced choices. Older adults were found to be more vulnerable to such effective content, predominantly negative reviews, indicating their decisions are shaped not only by cognitive limitations but also by motivational and emotional changes due to aging. While both age groups tended to prefer the better-rated product when it also had superior attributes, the effect of product quality on decision-making was more pronounced in younger adults. Younger participants were heavily influenced by both average consumer ratings and positive, affect-rich reviews. Older adults did not place as much emphasis on these but were significantly influenced both by vivid, emotionally negative reviews even when they were unrepresentative. This implies that older adults process online review information differently and could stand to benefit from user interfaces designed for their requirements—such as highlighting negative reviews and decreasing dependency on average ratings. This research highlights the necessity of adapting online shopping contexts to suit the requirements of older consumers through taking into account both cognitive limitations and affective processing styles, particularly in reference to presentation and framing of reviews.

### **3.0 Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumers:**

#### **3.1 Online Reviews and Consumer Trust:**

1. Peer Pressure: Customers are more likely to believe other customers' reviews than brand promotions. Positive reviews enhance perceived credibility and reliability of the product or retailer.
2. Source Credibility: Buyers who are verified or extensive reviews (with photos or experiences) are viewed as being more credible, building consumer trust.
3. Volume and Uniformity of Information: More consistent positive reviews drive trust by minimizing perceived risk.

#### **3.2 Online Ratings and Perceived Quality:**

1. Star Ratings as Cognitive Rule of Thumb: Average star ratings (4.5/5) are commonly used shortcuts by consumers to make a product quality judgment without reading complete reviews.
2. Initially Shaping First Impressions: Good ratings tend to affect first impressions, determining the image of the brand beforehand without deeper examination.

### **3.3 Trust Perception and Purchase Intent:**

1. Trust as an Intermediary Factor: Trust gained from reviews and ratings has a positive effect on perception of the brand or product, which accordingly enhances purchase intention.
2. Trust Serving as a Screening Mechanism: People could ignore products or sellers they do not trust, irrespective of how appealing the product appears.

### **3.4 Impact of Negative Reviews:**

1. Giving added importance: People tend to pay more heed to negative comments, particularly if they also mention safety, authenticity, or durability concerns.
2. Influencing Perception: Even a few well-written negative comments can significantly change the perception of consumers, particularly in low-involvement or risk purchases.

### **3.5 Emotional Tone and Language:**

1. Affect-Rich Reviews: Emotional reviews, particularly ones of excitement or disappointment, have greater impact on consumer beliefs than neutral or technical reviews.
2. Verbal tone and authenticity: Natural, conversational language is seen as more authentic and believable than overly polished or generic reviews.

### **3.6 Demographics and Cultural Variations:**

1. Age differences and tech savvy: Younger buyers might find it easier to believe digital reviews, while older buyers might more readily believe professional or expert reviews.
2. Societal and cultural background: In a few cultures, collectivism and word of mouth are more powerful, further amplifying the influence of reviews.

Online reviews and ratings significantly shape consumer trust and perception by serving as social proof. They influence consumers' confidence in a product or service, which in turn affects their decision-making process, especially in online and high-risk purchases.

### **4.0 Research Objectives:**

1. To examine the relationship between online reviews and consumer trust in online products and services.
2. To analyze how the quality and quantity of online reviews influence consumer perception of a brand or product.
3. To assess the impact of positive vs. negative reviews on consumer trust and purchase intention.
4. To identify which review elements (e.g., star ratings, detailed feedback, reviewer profile) are most influential in building consumer trust.

### **5.0 Methodology**

The research paper is based on both primary and secondary data. For this study, the primary data has been collected through an online survey with respondents answering a set of questions. The conclusions are based on the primary data.

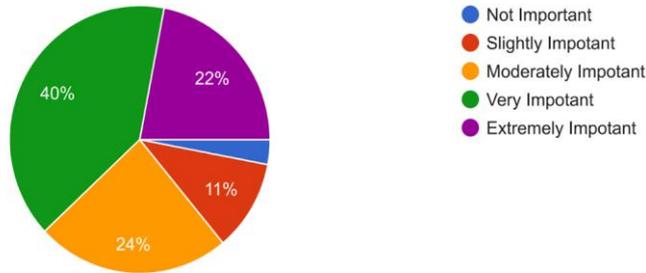
**5.1 Research design:** The data has been divided into two main categories- primary data and secondary data. The primary data have been collected through exploratory research like questionnaires from the users of online shopping. The secondary data collected from web sites, newspapers, journals, magazines, and research papers.

**5.2 Primary data:** The primary data for the research is collected from a survey in Haryana, India. There was a sample size of 100 respondents for this research.

### **6.0 Analysis of Data:**

1. How important are online reviews and ratings when you shop online?

100 responses

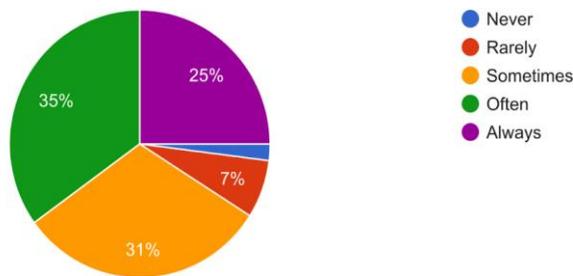


**Fig 6.1**

When asked about the importance of online reviews and ratings, 40% of respondents agreed that it is very important for them and 22% agreed that it is extremely important.

2. How often does your purchase decision get affected after assessing online reviews and ratings?

100 responses

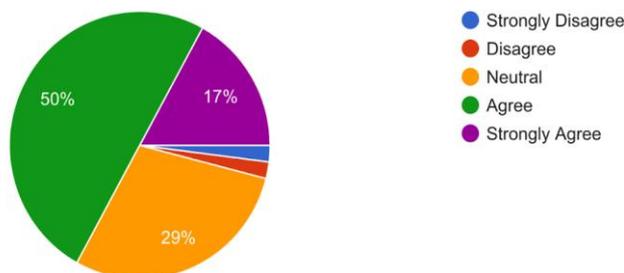


**Fig 6.2**

31% of the respondents said that their decision gets affected sometimes after the assessment of online reviews and ratings. A significant proportion of respondents, specifically 35% and 25%, indicated that online reviews play a role in influencing their purchase decision.

3. You trust products with a high number of positive reviews?

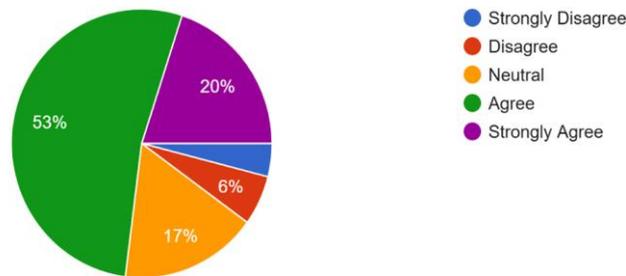
100 responses



**Fig. 6.3**

50% of respondents agreed that they trust products with a high number of positive reviews while 17% strongly agreed to the same.

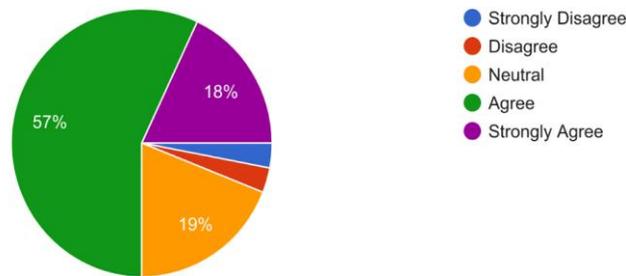
4. You avoid buying a product due to negative reviews.  
 100 responses



**Fig. 6.4**

The above figure indicates that 53% of respondents tend to avoid buying products with negative reviews, while 20% of respondents strongly endorsed this behaviour.

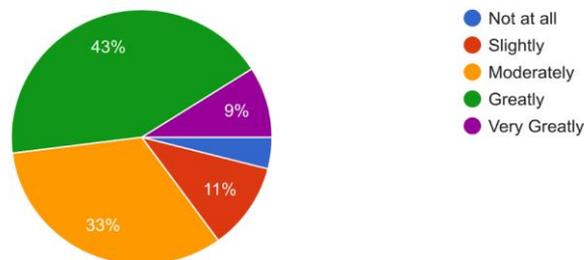
5. Negative reviews help you to make more informed decisions.  
 100 responses



**Fig 8.5**

The results of the above figure shows that 57% of respondents concurred that negative reviews facilitate informed decision-making, while 18% strongly concurred.

6. How does the volume of reviews and ratings impact your perception of a product or service?  
 100 responses

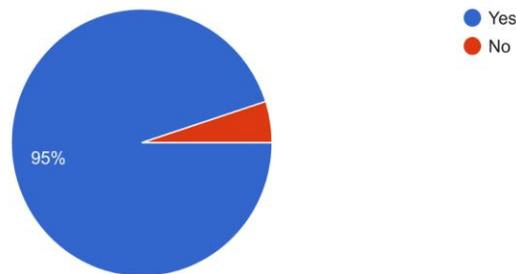


**Fig. 8.6**

The findings suggest that the volume of reviews and ratings has a substantial impact on product perception, with 52% of respondents (43% greatly + 9% very greatly) indicating a strong influence and an additional 33% reporting a moderate impact.

7. Does a large number of reviews and ratings make you more confident in a product or service?

100 responses

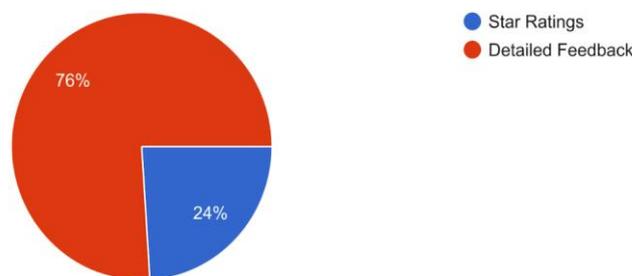


**Fig. 6.7**

From the above pie-chart, it has been found that 95% of respondents believe that a large number of reviews and ratings make them more confident in a product or service.

8. Which of the following is more influential while purchasing online?

100 responses



**Fig. 6.8**

From the above pie-chart, it has been found that 76% of the respondents believe that detailed feedback is more influential while purchasing online.

### 9.0 Findings

The findings of the survey indicate that online reviews and ratings are a big factor when it comes to influencing consumer trust as well as purchase behavior. To be precise, 40% of the people find them very important, and 22% find them extremely important. In terms of the impact on purchase decisions, 35% of the participants mentioned that their decisions frequently change after considering online reviews, and 25% mentioned that their decisions always change according to such appraisals.

Consumer trust is greatly affected by the availability of positive feedback. 50% of the interviewees agreed, and another 17% strongly agreed, that they have trust in products with many positive ratings. Negative reviews, however, have a strong negative influence: 53% agreed, and 20% strongly agreed, that they do not buy products

with negative comments. 57% also agreed, and 18% strongly agreed, that negative comments help them make better judgments.

The number of reviews also came out to highly influence consumer perception. A total of 43% concurred that the number of reviews influences their perception to a great degree, and 33% were of the view that it has a very strong influence. More crucially, written feedback in detail was rated higher than just star ratings, as 76% of those surveyed preferred in-depth reviews in making trust or purchase decisions.

## 10.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role that online reviews and ratings play in shaping consumer trust and influencing purchasing behavior. According to the results of the survey, a majority of consumers deemed reviews and ratings very important, with numerous individuals reportedly changing their choices frequently or always after coming into contact with such feedback. Positive reviews build trust, while negative reviews deter purchases and are valued for informed decision-making. Additionally, the volume of reviews emerges as a critical determinant of consumer perception, reinforcing the idea that social proof drives trust. Most importantly, detailed, written reviews are preferred over simple numerical scores, highlighting the importance consumers attach to authenticity, richness, and context in feedback.

The study confirms that online reviews and ratings are essential trust-building mechanisms influencing consumer decisions. For businesses, this underlines the necessity of fostering genuine customer engagement, encouraging authentic feedback, and addressing negative reviews constructively. For consumers, reviews continue to be a believable means of uncertainty reduction and rational purchase decision-making. This study therefore adds to an enhanced understanding of how online word-of-mouth persists in influencing contemporary consumer trust perceptions.

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