

IMPACT OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER TRUST AND SHOPPING CHOICES

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

In which product categories do online reviews have the most significant impact on consumer trust and purchase decisions, specifically comparing electronics, apparel, and travel?

How do online reviews affect consumer trust differently across various demographic groups (e.g., gender, age, education level)?:

Proposed Research methodology and sampling technique

Our study on the impact of online reviews on consumer trust and shopping choices will employ a mixed-methods approach. We'll begin with a comparative literature analysis to establish a theoretical foundation. This will be followed by widespread online surveys, targeting a stratified random sample of 1000 participants across diverse age groups (18-55+), genders, education levels, and geographic locations. To ensure representation of rural areas in our study on the impact of online reviews on shopping choices, we will employ a multi-faceted approach. This includes targeting rural residents with internet access through social media and local online community groups for surveys, and conducting brief telephone interviews for those without internet. We'll also use convenience sampling via team members' rural connections and distribute paper surveys through friends, family, and local businesses.

Additionally, we will leverage our college's alumni network and student body to reach participants from rural backgrounds, and reach out to rural high schools and community colleges to help share the survey. While not fully representative, this approach will offer valuable insights into rural and semi-urban perspectives. Throughout the survey process, we'll prioritize informed consent and data privacy, allowing participants to withdraw at any time without consequences. Next, we'll conduct virtual ethnographic studies, observing and interviewing participants during online shopping experiences. This qualitative approach will provide rich, contextual insights into decision-making processes. Ethical considerations here include minimizing intrusion into participants' privacy and ensuring they're comfortable with the observation process. Finally, we aim to implement an experimental design, creating simulated online shopping scenarios for electronics, apparel, and travel categories. Participants will be presented with manipulated review sets to measure how variations in review volume, valence, and credibility affect trust and purchase intentions. After the experiment, we'll fully disclose any deception used and debrief participants. This mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation of findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of how online reviews impact consumer trust and shopping choices across different product categories and demographic groups. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enables us to identify broad trends while gaining deep insights into consumer behavior.

Questionnaire for interview

Demographic Information

(to help us better understand the demographic profile of participants in this study.)

1.What is your age group?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 44-55
- 55 and above

2.What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3.What is your highest level of education?

- High school
- University
- Bachelor's degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Other (please specify)

4.How often do you shop online?

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Practically only

5. Which of the following best describes the area where you currently live?

- A large city or urban area
- A smaller town or suburban area
- A rural or countryside area
- Prefer not to say

Consumer Trust and Purchase Decisions

1. How often do you get your information from online reviews when making the following purchases?

(Rate on a 5-point scale: 5 = Always, 1 = Never)

- Electronics (e.g., laptops, smartphones)
- Apparel (e.g., clothing, accessories, shoes)
- Travel (e.g., hotels, airfare, vacation packages)

2. Which product category do you think online reviews have the biggest impact on when making purchase decisions?

3. Have you ever chosen not to buy a product because of what you read online? If so, which product category was the most affected?

4. What aspect of online reviews influences your apparel purchase the most?

- Overall rating (stars)
- Detailed comments from reviewers
- Photos or videos shared by customers
- Verified purchase status of reviewers
- Number of reviews available
- None of the above

5. When purchasing apparel, what type of reviews do you find most helpful?

6. How do you feel when a product has mixed reviews for an apparel item?

7. What type of apparel do you rely on online reviews for the most?

- Casual wear (e.g., t-shirts, jeans)
- Formal wear (e.g., suits, dresses)
- Shoes or footwear
- Accessories (e.g., bags, belts, scarves)
- Activewear/sportswear
- I don't rely on reviews for apparel

8. How much do online reviews affect your trust in apparel brands you've never purchased from before?

9. Do you think online reviews provide an accurate reflection of the quality of apparel products?

- Yes, they are mostly accurate

- They are somewhat accurate
- No, they are often inaccurate
- I'm unsure

10. When planning a vacation, what resources do you primarily use when choosing a destination?

- Online travel vlogs (YouTube, etc.)
- Photos on Google
- Articles on Google
- Travel planning websites (e.g., MakeMyTrip, TripAdvisor)
- Social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook)
- Recommendations from friends/family

11. How much do online reviews on travel websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google Reviews) influence your decision when booking hotels or activities?

- Very much
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Not much
- Not at all

12. Do you trust travel vlogs/reviews on YouTube more than written reviews on travel websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, MakeMyTrip)?

- Yes
- No
- I trust both equally
- Unsure

13. When choosing a hotel or restaurant, what type of reviews influence you the most?

14. What type of online reviews do you trust the most when shopping for electronics?

15. Have you ever changed your mind about purchasing an electronic product after reading negative reviews?

- Yes, multiple times
- Yes, once or twice
- No, I usually stick to my decision
- I don't read negative reviews

16. What is the most important aspect of online reviews that influences your decision when buying electronics?

- Detailed product features and specifications
- Price comparisons
- Reviewer's personal experience
- Product durability and reliability feedback
- Customer service and warranty reviews
- Brand reputation

17. Which platform's reviews do you rely on the most when shopping for electronics?

- Amazon reviews
- YouTube video reviews
- Social media recommendations
- Retailer website reviews
- None of the above

18. Do you prefer to buy electronics that have a large number of reviews, even if some are mixed?

19. How often do you leave a review for an electronic product after purchasing it?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Consumer Trust

8.To what extent do you believe online reviews when deciding what to buy?

- a significant amount
- Generally Neutral
- Not much at all

9.How likely are you to purchase a product that has a mix of positive and negative reviews?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Neutral

- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

10. Have you ever encountered a situation where the product or service you used did not match the reviews? If so, how did it affect your confidence in reviews going forward?

- Yes, it significantly reduced my confidence in reviews.
- Yes, it somewhat reduced my confidence, but I still rely on reviews.
- Yes, but it didn't affect my confidence in reviews.
- No, I haven't encountered such a situation.
- Other (please specify).

11. Do you focus more on positive or negative reviews?

Variations in Demographics

12. Do you believe that the degree to which different age groups trust internet reviews varies? If so, describe why.

13. Do you think men and women are influenced differently by online reviews when they shop? If so, describe why.

14. Do you trust verified reviews (e.g., "Verified Buyer") more than unverified ones?

- Yes
- No
- I don't pay attention to this