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IMPACT OF ONLINE REVIEWS AND RATINGS ON CONSUMER BUYING DECISIONS

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer purchasing decisions in digital marketplaces. With the growing importance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), consumers increasingly rely on user-generated feedback as a form of social proof to reduce uncertainty and evaluate product reliability.

The study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design and collects primary data through a structured questionnaire from a sample of 56 regular online shoppers. The research focuses on two key independent variables: textual reviews, which provide detailed information about product quality and user experience, and star ratings, which offer a quick numerical evaluation of products.

The findings indicate that a majority of consumers refer to online reviews before making a purchase and often consider them more reliable than traditional advertising. Positive reviews tend to enhance purchase intention, while negative reviews have a stronger impact in discouraging potential buyers. Furthermore, detailed and logical reviews are found to be more influential in the decision-making process compared to simple star ratings.

Index Terms – Online Reviews, Consumer Behavior, E-commerce, Purchase Decision, Ratings

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital era, there has been a significant shift in the way businesses operate and consumers make purchasing decisions. Traditionally, consumers relied on word-of-mouth communication from friends and family to build trust and gather product information. However, with the rapid growth of internet usage and smartphone accessibility, online shopping has become increasingly prevalent. In such a virtual environment, where physical interaction with products is not possible, online reviews and ratings play a crucial role in influencing consumer decisions.

Online reviews, commonly referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), are user-generated evaluations that provide insights into product quality and performance. These reviews act as a form of social proof, where individuals rely on the experiences and opinions of others when making decisions under uncertainty. A majority of consumers tend to read online reviews before making a purchase, and such reviews are often considered more reliable than company-provided information.

The effectiveness of online reviews is influenced by various factors, including the valence (positive or negative nature), volume (number of reviews), and credibility of the reviewer. Consumers generally evaluate aspects such as product quality, usability, price, and overall value. While positive reviews can enhance consumer confidence and increase purchase intention, negative reviews often have a stronger impact and may discourage potential buyers.

Despite the growing importance of online reviews, the relationship between reviews and consumer decision-making remains complex. Existing studies suggest that although consumers rely heavily on reviews, only a limited proportion change their final decisions based on them. Furthermore, there is a

need to explore how factors such as language style, emotional tone, and presentation of reviews influence consumer perceptions. This study aims to examine the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying decisions and provide insights for businesses to better manage consumer feedback.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined the growing influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying behavior, highlighting a significant shift from traditional word-of-mouth communication to digital forms of social proof.

Keerthana and Aravindaraj (2024) analyzed the demographic factors influencing consumer reliance on online reviews and found that age plays a significant role, while gender does not have a substantial impact. Their study revealed that consumers in the 37–47 age group are more likely to be influenced by online reviews, as these reviews help build trust by providing real-life user experiences.

Similarly, Devedi, Sujatha, and Pathak (2017) focused on the type of information consumers seek in online reviews. Their findings identified key motivations such as verifying brand claims, understanding personal benefits, avoiding unsatisfactory purchases, and gaining knowledge about product features. The study emphasized that aspects like product quality, usage information, and cost-benefit analysis significantly influence decision-making.

Mallik et al. (2025) examined the role of collective opinions in shaping consumer preferences. Their study found that positive reviews enhance purchase intention, while negative reviews have a stronger impact in discouraging buyers and shifting them toward alternative brands. They also observed that products with reviews are significantly more likely to be purchased compared to those without, although only a small proportion of consumers change their decisions once they have made a firm choice.

In addition, Ibrahim (2024) highlighted the importance of review credibility and volume. The study indicated that consumers tend to trust reviews from verified buyers more than anonymous sources. Furthermore, a higher number of reviews creates a perception of product popularity and reliability, thereby influencing purchase decisions.

Gurav, Ingawale, and Yadav (2024) explored consumer behavior related to the timing and format of review usage. Their findings showed that a large majority of consumers check reviews before making purchases, with many doing so during the browsing stage. The study also revealed that detailed and logical reviews are more influential than simple numerical ratings, suggesting that consumers prefer informative and reason-based feedback.

Supporting these findings, Zhang, Zheng, and Wang (2019) reported that a significant proportion of online shoppers consider customer reviews as a critical factor in their purchase decisions. This highlights the growing importance of user-generated content as a primary source of information in digital marketplaces.

Overall, existing literature indicates that online reviews and ratings play a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior. However, there remains a need to further examine how different characteristics of reviews, such as content quality and presentation, impact consumer decision-making.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Although existing studies confirm that online reviews and ratings influence consumer buying behavior, several important aspects remain underexplored. Most research has focused on quantitative factors such as the number of reviews and overall ratings, while giving limited attention to qualitative aspects like language style, emotional tone, and reviewer credibility. These elements play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions but are not adequately addressed in current literature.

Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding of the psychological processes involved in decision-making during the pre-purchase stage. While a large number of consumers rely on online reviews, only a small proportion actually change their decisions based on them. This indicates that deeper factors influencing consumer judgment are not fully explained.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by examining how qualitative characteristics of reviews, along with reviewer credibility, influence consumer buying decisions. The research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors that drive consumer behavior in digital marketplaces.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying decisions.
2. To identify the key factors in review content, such as product quality, usage information, and logical reasoning, that affect consumer behavior.
3. To analyze the impact of demographic factors, such as age and gender, on consumer reliance on online reviews.
4. To study the effect of review characteristics, including volume and valence (positive or negative), on consumer purchase intention.

V. HYPOTHESES

H1: Positive online reviews and higher star ratings significantly influence consumer buying decisions.

H2: A higher volume of online reviews positively influences consumer trust and perception of product popularity.

H3: Detailed and reasoning-based reviews have a greater influence on consumer buying decisions than simple star ratings.

H4: Demographic factors, particularly gender, do not significantly influence the relationship between online reviews and consumer buying decisions.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design to examine consumer behavior in relation to online reviews and ratings. This approach is suitable as it helps in describing and analyzing the influence of specific variables, such as review content and star ratings, on consumer buying decisions. The study is based on primary data, which is collected directly from respondents to ensure relevance to the research objectives.

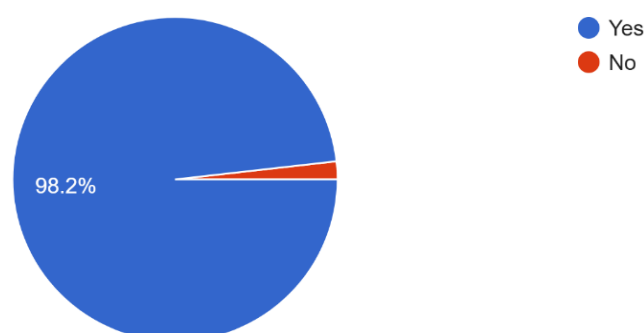
Data is collected using a structured questionnaire, which is an effective tool for gathering consumer opinions in a systematic manner. The questionnaire is distributed through Google Forms to ensure easy accessibility for respondents. It consists of close-ended questions designed to measure factors such as product quality, usage information, and the extent to which consumers rely on reviews before making a purchase.

The study uses convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, where respondents are selected based on ease of access. A sample of 56 respondents was collected using convenience sampling, representing a group of regular online shoppers. This sample size is considered sufficient to provide basic insights into consumer behavior for the purpose of this research.

The collected data is analyzed using percentage analysis and presented through charts such as pie charts and bar graphs. These tools help in simplifying the interpretation of data and enable clear comparison of responses across different categories.

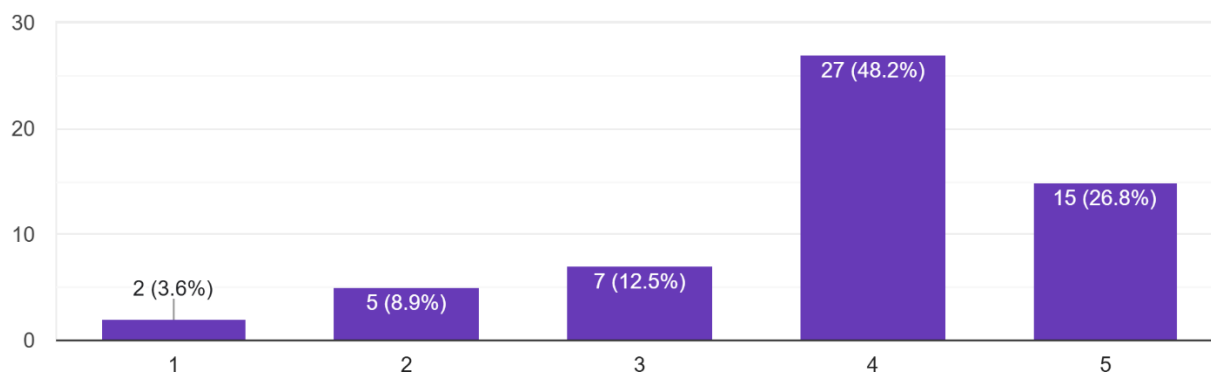
VII. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Q1. Do you read online reviews before purchasing a product?



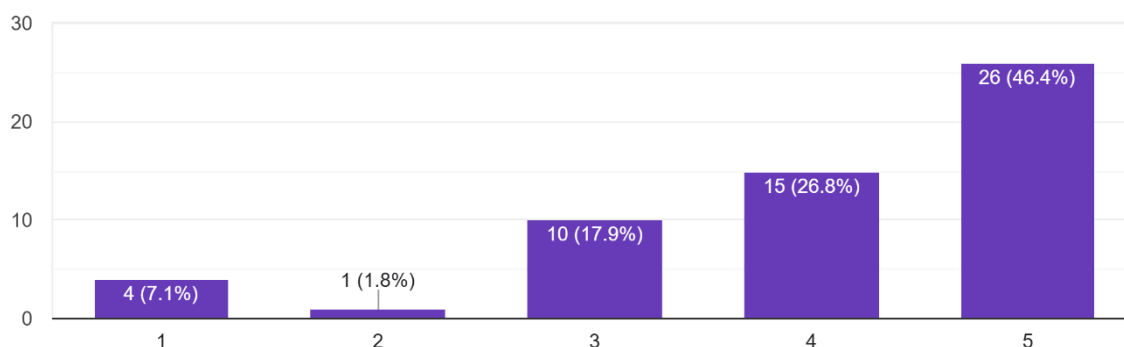
The data shows that **98.2% of respondents** read online reviews before making a purchase, while a very small percentage do not. This clearly indicates that online reviews play a crucial role in the consumer decision-making process and have become an essential step before purchasing a product.

Q2. I rely on online reviews before making a purchase



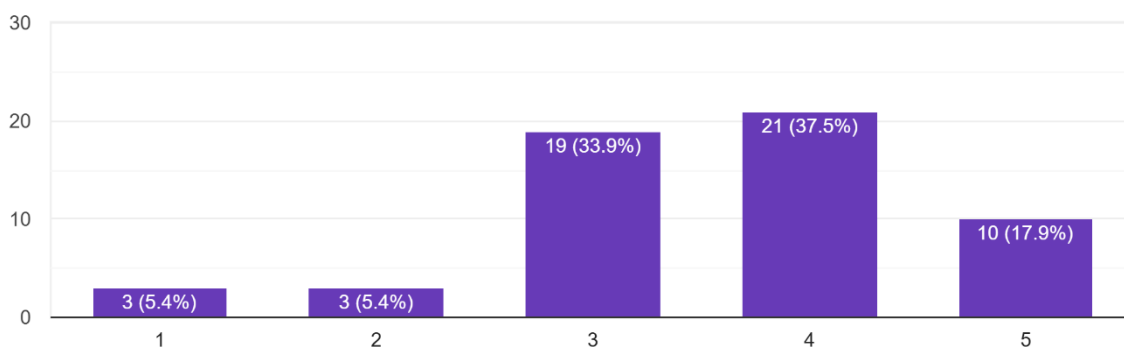
The responses indicate that a majority of respondents rely on online reviews before making a purchase. Around **48.2% of respondents agreed** and **26.8% strongly agreed** with the statement. This suggests that online reviews are widely trusted and significantly influence consumer buying decisions.

Q3. Higher product ratings influence my buying decision

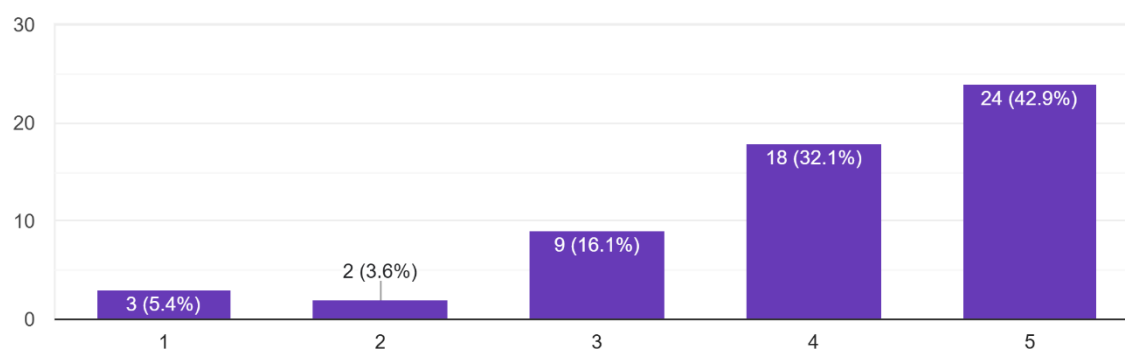


The data shows that **46.4% of respondents strongly agreed** and **26.8% agreed** that higher product ratings influence their buying decisions. This indicates that star ratings serve as an important factor in shaping purchase intentions and help consumers evaluate products quickly.

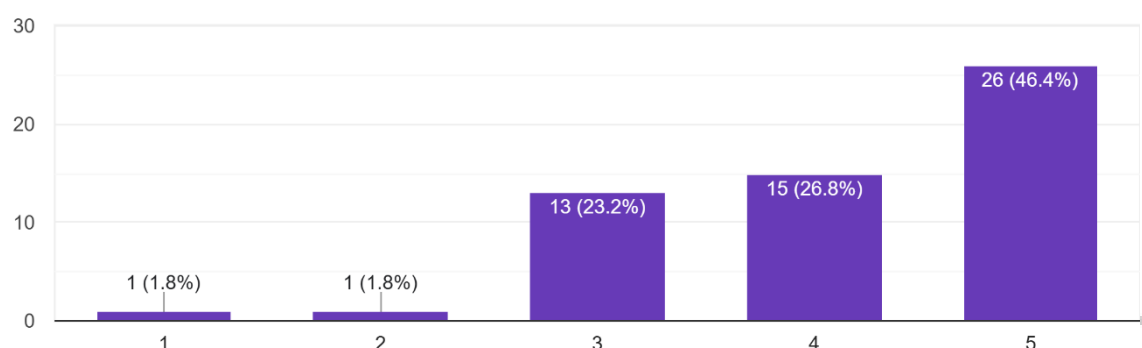
Q4. I trust online reviews given by other users



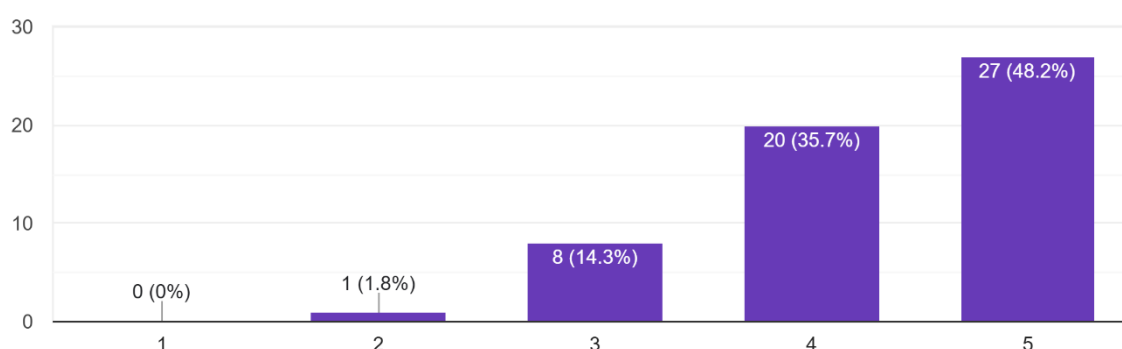
The findings reveal that **37.5% of respondents agreed** and **17.9% strongly agreed** that they trust online reviews provided by other users. However, a notable portion of respondents remained neutral, suggesting that while trust exists, some consumers are cautious about the authenticity of reviews.

Q5. Negative reviews discourage me from buying a product

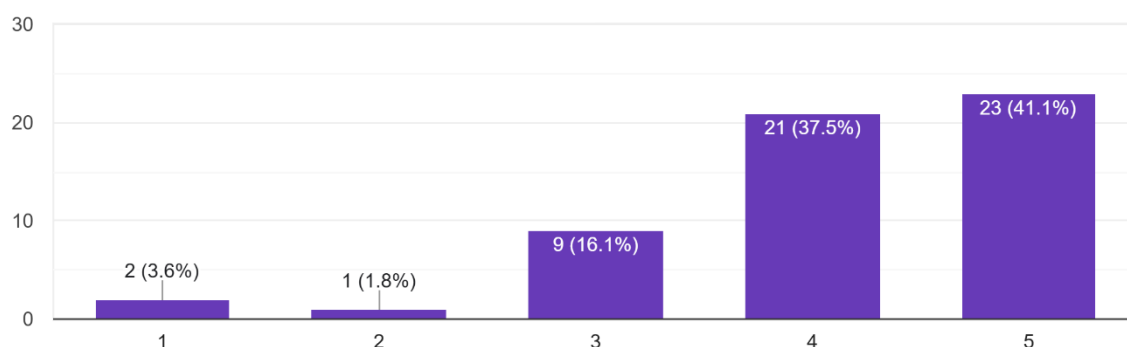
The results show that **42.9% of respondents strongly agreed** and **32.1% agreed** that negative reviews discourage them from purchasing a product. This clearly indicates that negative feedback has a strong impact on consumer behavior and can significantly reduce purchase intention.

Q6. I compare multiple reviews before purchasing

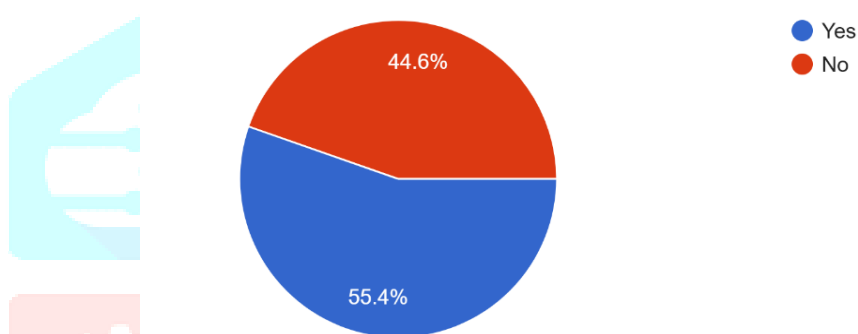
The data indicates that **46.4% of respondents strongly agreed** and **26.8% agreed** that they compare multiple reviews before making a purchase. This suggests that consumers prefer to evaluate different opinions before making a final decision.

Q7. Reviews help me reduce risk while buying online

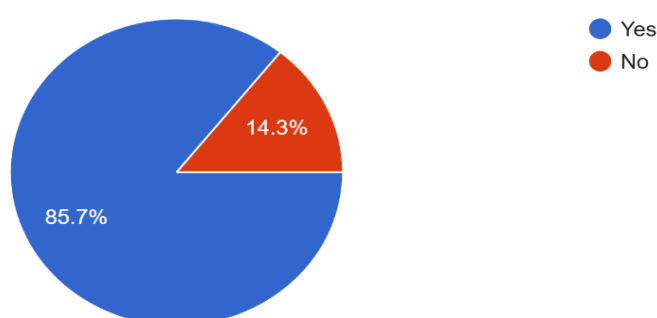
The findings show that **48.2% of respondents strongly agreed** and **35.7% agreed** that reviews help reduce risk while purchasing online. This indicates that online reviews play an important role in minimizing uncertainty and increasing consumer confidence.

Q8. I have purchased a product based on positive reviews

The data reveals that **41.1% of respondents strongly agreed** and **37.5% agreed** that they have purchased products based on positive reviews. This highlights the strong influence of positive feedback in encouraging purchase behavior.

Q9. Have you ever regretted a purchase despite good reviews?

The responses show that **55.4% of respondents answered "Yes"**, while **44.6% answered "No"**. This indicates that although reviews are influential, they do not always guarantee satisfaction.

Q10. Do you think some online reviews are fake?

The data shows that a significant majority, **85.7% of respondents**, believe that some online reviews are fake, while only **14.3% do not**. This suggests that consumers remain skeptical about the authenticity of online reviews.

VIII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- A large majority of respondents (98.2%) read online reviews before making a purchase, indicating that reviews are an essential part of the buying process.
- Online reviews and ratings have a strong influence on consumer behavior, with most respondents relying on them to make purchase decisions.
- Product ratings play an important role in influencing buying decisions, as a majority of respondents are affected by higher ratings.
- Online reviews help reduce perceived risk in online shopping, as most consumers use them to gain confidence before purchasing.
- Negative reviews have a strong impact and discourage consumers from buying products, while positive reviews encourage purchase decisions.
- Most consumers compare multiple reviews before making a final decision, showing that they prefer to evaluate different opinions.
- Although consumers rely on reviews, a large number believe that some reviews may be fake, indicating a level of skepticism.
- Detailed and reasoning-based reviews are considered more useful than simple star ratings by many consumers.
- A significant number of respondents have regretted purchases despite positive reviews, showing that reviews do not always guarantee satisfaction.

IX. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that online reviews and ratings have become an essential part of the modern consumer buying process. A large majority of consumers rely on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) as a form of social proof to reduce uncertainty and make informed purchase decisions. While numerical ratings influence consumer choices, many consumers prefer detailed and logical textual reviews, as they provide better insights into product quality and usage.

The findings also highlight that consumers are not completely trusting of online reviews. A significant number of respondents believe that some reviews may be fake, and many have experienced dissatisfaction despite positive feedback. This indicates that although reviews play an important role in influencing decisions, they do not always guarantee satisfaction.

Overall, online reviews mainly strengthen consumer confidence rather than completely changing their decisions. Therefore, businesses should focus on maintaining transparency, encouraging genuine reviews, and actively managing customer feedback to build trust and long-term customer relationships.

X. SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested for businesses and consumers:

- **Ensure authenticity of reviews:** Since a large number of consumers believe that some reviews are fake, businesses should use verified buyer tags and transparency measures to build trust and credibility.
- **Encourage customer feedback:** Companies should motivate customers to provide reviews through reminders or incentives, as many consumers do not voluntarily share their experiences.
- **Manage negative feedback effectively:** Businesses should respond to negative reviews with appropriate solutions, as negative feedback strongly influences consumer decisions.
- **Promote detailed and informative reviews:** As many consumers prefer logical and detailed reviews, businesses should encourage feedback that includes clear explanations and product experiences.
- **Compare multiple reviews:** Consumers should evaluate different reviews before making a purchase to ensure a balanced and reliable decision.
- **Use reviews to reduce risk:** Consumers should use online reviews as a tool to reduce uncertainty and make informed purchasing decisions.

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