

Customer Decision-Making Towards the Purchase of Products Through the Influence of Online Reviews with Reference to Coimbatore City

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ABSTRACT

The increased e-commerce has revolutionized the purchasing decision making process by the consumer with online reviews being one of the key factors influencing the decision making process. This paper examines how online reviews affect customer decision-making in Coimbatore City, which is a major commercial center in India. The study is intended to know the impact of various demographics of age, income, and gender on the value attached to online reviews in the process of buying products. In an extensive manner, the analysis of the data obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire uses Descriptive Statistics, Cross-Tabulation, and Correlation Analysis in order to determine patterns and relationships. The results indicate that online reviews have a greater chance of influencing younger consumers and those with higher incomes with price and brand reputation also influencing the decision-making process. The research has valuable information to any business wishing to improve its presence online, and be in a better position to satisfy the demands of its clients in the era of the digital market.

Keywords: Customer Decision-Making, Online Reviews, Consumer Behaviour, Influence of Reviews, Brand Reputation, Consumer Insights, etc.,

INTRODUCTION

The shopping methods in the modern digital age have experienced a radical change. As online stores have started becoming more popular, consumers can now be acquainted with a huge number of products and services at their fingertips. Online reviews have been noted to be one of the most influential factors in this new paradigm of shopping. As written reviews by other consumers, they offer a critical insight and information that could go a long way in influencing a purchasing decision.

Coimbatore, the city of the so-called Manchester of South India, is a booming city with a developed economy. With the growth of the internet penetration and the growth of digital literacy, consumers of the city are turning to online shopping more and more. The ability to comprehend the decision-making process of these consumers, particularly when they are driven by online reviews, would be important to businesses in this competitive space.

This paper aims at exploring how consumers in Coimbatore City make their decisions with particular reference to the influence of online reviews. Through a review of the different variables that affect the purchasing behaviour, including age, income and gender, the study will offer a holistic view of how online reviews affect consumer buying decisions. The results of the present study will play a crucial role in assisting the businesses to work out the more efficient marketing strategies, to optimize the online presence, and, finally, to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The study is relevant in the current body of literature about consumer behaviour in the digital era, and especially its relevance to the Indian environment is achieved through a synthesis of both quantitative analysis and interpretative knowledge. The experiences that will be learned during this study will not only be useful to businesses in Coimbatore but also offer a model that can be used in other markets similar to the one in Coimbatore in the entire country.

Statement of the Problem

During the digital commerce era, online reviews have a huge impact on the purchase process of consumers. Little research has however been done on the influence of demographic variables such as age, income, and gender on this influence especially in Coimbatore City which is an emerging economic hub in South India.

This study aims to fill this gap by the following questions:

- How do age, income, and gender impact the importance of online reviews in consumer decision-making?
- What is the relationship between online reviews and purchasing behavior in Coimbatore?
- How do online reviews compare to other factors, such as price and brand reputation, in shaping consumer choices?

The findings will help businesses in Coimbatore better understand and leverage online reviews to enhance their marketing strategies and customer engagement.

Scope Of the Study

This paper analyzes the impact of the online review on the consumer decision-making in Coimbatore City and how demographic variables such as age, income, and gender can influence the impact of the online review. It discusses the way reviews of the online product rank with other aspects like price, and brand name. The research will employ the Descriptive Statistics, Cross-Tabulation, and Correlation Analysis techniques, which involve the use of a structured questionnaire, to furnish actionable information to businesses in Coimbatore to help them build a more improved online review management and marketing strategy. The research is limited to Coimbatore and fails to deal with the other geographical areas or non-digital factors.

Research Objectives

- To examine the extent to which online reviews influence consumer purchasing decisions in Coimbatore City.
- To identify the key factors that make online reviews credible and trustworthy.
- To analyse the relationship between the frequency of reading online reviews and the likelihood of making a purchase.
- To assess the impact of negative versus positive reviews on consumer behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ibrahim, S. A. N. S. (2023)¹. Online review effects on the consumer purchase behaviour in e-commerce sites. In his study analyzes the influence of online reviews on customers in e-commerce websites. It points out that positive and negative feedback contribute towards the development of consumer trust. The reviews with in-depth analysis are especially useful in gaining confidence as evidence of the increasing role of user reviews in the purchasing process.

Jayakumar, K. (2024)². Online consumer review effects on the buying behavior: Coimbatore shoppers case study. This paper examines the influence of online consumer reviews on the buying behavior of the customers. It concludes that trust is important and depends greatly on the authenticity of the reviews, particularly when it comes to high value products. Also, there is the effect of reviews between demographic profiles like age and employment status.

Krithika, S., & Kavitha, D. (2022)3. Role of e-commerce review in consumer behaviour formation in South India. This paper discusses the impact of review on buying behavior in South India. The authors have identified that customers depend greatly on product rating and testimonials as decision support tools. They also noted that consumers tend to go through various sources of reviews in order to be credible enough to make purchases.

Kumar, R., & Gupta, A. (2023)4. The effect of user-generated content on consumer decisions: A case study on Indian e-commerce sites. The paper centers on Indian e-commerce websites and user-created content (UGC) such as reviews of customers. It indicates that reviews that are left on websites such as Amazon, Flipkart, affect the choices consumers make. Consumer preferences and choice are further determined by review engagement and helpfulness ratings.

Madhavan, T., & Priya, R. (2023)5. The role of trust in online reviews in customer purchase decisions in the marketplace: an analysis. This article expounds on the role of trust in the reviews, whereby verified reviews and trustworthy reviewer profiles can be used to enhance trust. A consumer will be more inclined to buy a specific product in case he or she can concur in the feedbacks, and this is what the importance of transparency and authenticity in online reviews is all about.

Ramesh, P., & Sharma, M. (2023)6. A local investigation on influence of online shopping behavior by online word-of-mouth. The article explores the impact of digital word-of-mouth on online shopping within a particular area with a particular focus on the importance of peer reviews and recommendations in consumer decision making.

Sharmila, P., & Devi, A. (2022)7. The effect of eWOM on the purchasing behavior of millennials. The study examines how electronic word-of-mouth affects the purchasing choices of millennials. The authors emphasize that positive eWOM can make a strong impact on the probability of making purchases among this group of people because of such aspects as trust and social influence.

Singh, P., & Pandey, S. (2024)8. How the impact of online reviews influences the brand perception and purchase intent of urban consumers. This paper investigates the correlation between the internet reviews and brand perception and the intentions to buy among the urban consumers. The results show that reviews influence consumer purchasing decisions greatly and create the impression of brand credibility.

Chen, T., Samaranayake, P., Cen, X. Y., Qi, M., and Lan, Y. C. (2022) 9. Effect of online reviews on the buying behavior of consumers: A study in the form of eye tracking. This study uses techniques of eye-tracking to analyze how online reviews can impact on consumer buying behavior and the findings indicate that content and form of online reviews can influence consumer attention and decision-making.

Vimaladevi, N., & Dhanabhakaym, M. (2012)10. Consumer purchase decision influence of e-commerce reviews. This article evaluates the impact of online reviews on the purchase of consumers, implying that most customers rely on virtual information to find out the quality of products and make purchases.

Kalia, P., & Paul, J. (2021)11. E-commerce adoption and consumer decision making in India: Perceived trustworthiness and review. Stating the need to study the e-commerce adoption in India, the paper underlines the importance of online reviews and trustworthiness and arrives at a conclusion that the positive reviews increase consumer trust and positively impact purchasing decisions.

Shivakumar, N. (2023)12. Consumer behavior in e-commerce: An online review analysis and trust. The article informs about the consumer behavior in e-commerce, especially the critical role of online reviews in the formation of trust, which mediates their buying behavior.

Kumar, R., & Meena, K. S. (2020)13. E-commerce and decision to purchase: A study of the influence of online review on consumer purchasing behavior in Tamil Nadu. This study evaluates the impacts of online reviews on consumer behavior in Tamil Nadu which demonstrates the sale of user-generated content as an important factor in forming local buying decisions.

Luo, Y., & Ye, Q. (2019)14. Examining the moderating role of review sentiment in consumer online decision making. The authors seek to understand the role of the sentiment of online review in consumer decision-making and are able to establish that positive or negative online review can have great effect on purchasing intentions.

Kim, J., & Gupta, P. (2021)15. Online reviews and their effect on product trust and purchase intention: A meta-analysis. This meta-analysis reviews the impact of online reviews in product trust and purchase intentions such that the positive impact of online reviews on trust increases purchase intentions.

S.A.N. Shazuli Ibrahim. (2023)16. Online review influence on consumers in online purchases. In this article, the general effect of online reviews on the consumer buying decision making in online commerce is analyzed with a great emphasis on the need to control the online reviews to improve the customer satisfaction and sales efficiency.

Fang, X., & Liu, Z. (2022)17. Online reviews credibility and volume: Study on consumer behavior in e-commerce. The paper explores the relationship between credibility and quantity of online reviews with consumer behavior, insinuating that reliability and quantity of online reviews is essential to consumer buying behavior.

Chen, X., & Huang, L. (2020)18. Customer engagement and online review: The impacts on the brand loyalty in online market places. The study illustrates the connection between customer engagement and online reviews, which signifies that positive customer contact with reviews leads to an increase in brand loyalty among the consumers of online marketplaces.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research approach, using a structured questionnaire to collect data from consumers in Coimbatore City. The questionnaire will be distributed both online and offline to ensure a diverse sample.

Sampling

A sample size of 300 respondents will be targeted, with participants selected through a combination of random and convenience sampling. The respondents will include individuals who have made online purchases in the past year.

Research Methods and Tools

Research Design

The study employed descriptive research design in studying the effect of online reviews on consumer decision-making in Coimbatore City. The research was aimed at the acquisition of consumer behaviour, consumer perceptions, and how online reviews influence buying behaviour.

Sampling Method

- **Target Population:** The target population of this study was consumers within Coimbatore City that have experience in the field of online shopping.
- **Sample Size:** 300 respondents were chosen to take part in the study.
- **Sampling Technique:** Sampling technique consisted of a convenience sampling technique to get data. This is because of the ease of accessibility of the non-probability sampling technique where the researcher was able to access participants who were easily accessible and willing to take part in the survey.

Data Collection Methods

- **Primary Data:** The primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire that was given to the interviewees in Coimbatore City. It contained some closed-ended questions as well as Likert scale questions to obtain specific information regarding online review preferences and behaviours of consumers.
- **Secondary Data:** It collected secondary data in the form of literature, such as journal articles, industry reports and available research studies relating to consumer behaviour, and online reviews. This information formed the context and background of the research.

Research Tools

Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was used as the main source of data collection to record different factors regarding the consumer decision-making process based on online reviews. The questionnaire comprised of a demographic section, online shopping behaviour, the impact of online reviews, and other issues which influence purchasing decisions.

Important parts of the Questionnaire:

Demographics: Age, Gender, Income Level.

Online Shopping Behaviour: Online shopping frequency, online opinions.

Effects of Online Reviews: Effect of positive/negative reviews, review credibility.

Purchase Decision Factors: price, brand reputation, purchases.

Likert Scale: A five-point Likert scale was employed to assess the attitude and perceptions of the respondents on the significance and impact of online reviews on their buying choices.

Data Analysis Techniques

- **Descriptive Statistics:** The data were summarized by using descriptive statistics like mean, median, mode, frequencies and percentages to give a clear picture of the respondents characteristics and responses.
- **Cross-Tabulation:** Cross-tabulation was utilized to investigate the correlation between various variables, including how demographic variables affect the effect of online reviews.
- **Correlation Analysis:** To determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the significance of online reviews and purchasing decision, there was correlation analysis.

Interpretation of Results

The analysis results were understood to induct a significant inference into the consumer behaviour within the Coimbatore City. The interpretation was aimed at definition of the essential trends, patterns and connections between online reviews and consumer decision making. The results were put into perspective in the literature that was available and those of similar studies were compared to validate the findings.

Limitations of the Study

- **Sample Size:** Convenience sampling and sample size of 300 can restrict the extrapolation of the results to the rest of the population of Coimbatore City.
- **Self-reported data:** Self-reporting using questionnaires can be biased, since the respondents do not always remember their shopping patterns, or they answer in socially desirable ways.
- **Geographical Restriction:** The research concentrated only on Coimbatore City and the findings could not be extended to other areas where there are varying consumer behaviours.

Data Analysis

Demographics

Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Age (Years)	32.5	30	28	8.3
Income Level (₹)	52,000	50,000	40,000	15,000

The median age of the respondents is 30 and the average age of the respondents is 32.5 years. This implies that the sample is quite young. The mean amount is 52,000 per month with mode of 40,000 which indicates that a significant percentage of the respondents lie in the middle-income range.

Online Shopping Behaviour

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics

Question	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How often do you shop online?	Once a week	40	13.3%
	Once a month	100	33.3%
	Once every few months	90	30%
	Rarely	50	16.7%
	Never	20	6.7%

A majority of the respondents shop online either every month (33.3) or after every few months (30). This implies that most of the sample conducts online shopping on a regular basis.

Table 2.2: Cross-Tabulation

Age Group	Frequency of Online Shopping	Total
	Once a week	Once a month
18-25	10	30
26-35	20	50
36-45	5	10

The youngest age group between 26-35 years is the most common online shoppers with half of them shopping once in a month.

The younger respondents (18-25) have a higher propensity to shop online where 30% of them do so once a month and 25 once in a few months.

Table 2.3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Age vs. Frequency of Shopping	-0.45
Income vs. Frequency of Shopping	0.52

The age and frequency of online shopping have a moderate negative relationship ($r = -0.45$), which indicates that younger respondents shop online more often.

The median positive relation between income and shopping frequency ($r = 0.52$) shows that income is related to the more frequent online shopping.

Influence of Online Reviews

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics

Question	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Importance of online reviews	Extremely important	110	36.7%
	Very important	80	26.7%
	Moderately important	70	23.3%
	Slightly important	30	10%
	Not important at all	10	3.3%

Online reviews are crucial for 63.4% of respondents (combining "Extremely important" and "Very important"), indicating their significant influence on purchase decisions.

Table 3.2: Cross-Tabulation

Income Level	Importance of Online Reviews	Total
	Extremely	Very
Below ₹20,000	5	10
₹20,000 - ₹40,000	20	15
₹40,000 - ₹60,000	30	20
₹60,000 - ₹80,000	35	20

Higher income groups (₹40,000 - ₹80,000) tend to consider online reviews more important, with 65% rating them as "Extremely important."

Table 3.3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Income vs. Importance of Online Reviews	0.35
Age vs. Importance of Online Reviews	-0.30

There is a positive correlation ($r = 0.35$) between income and the perceived importance of online reviews, suggesting that higher income individuals value reviews more.

A negative correlation ($r = -0.30$) with age indicates that younger respondents find online reviews more important in their decision-making process.

Impact of Reviews

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics

Question	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reaction to mixed reviews	Focus on positive reviews	90	30%
	Focus on negative reviews	120	40%
	Look for more information	70	23.3%
	Avoid purchasing	20	6.7%

A significant portion of respondents (40%) focus on negative reviews when encountering mixed reviews, highlighting the caution consumers exhibit when making purchasing decisions.

Table 4.2: Cross-Tabulation

Gender	Reaction to Mixed Reviews	Total
	Focus on Positive	Focus on Negative
Male	50	60
Female	40	50
Other	0	10

Males are slightly more inclined to focus on negative reviews (40%) compared to females (34.5%), while females are more likely to seek additional information (27.6%).

Table 4.3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Gender vs. Reaction to Mixed Reviews	0.15
Age vs. Reaction to Mixed Reviews	0.25

The positive relationship between the gender and the reaction to the mixed reviews ($r = 0.15$) indicates that the gender does not affect the reaction to the mixed reviews significantly. Correlation analysis shows that there is a relationship between age and reaction to mixed reviews ($r = 0.25$), which means that older respondents can be more cautious and concentrate on negative reviews.

Other Factors Influencing Purchase

Table 5.1: Descriptive Statistics

Question	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Other factors influencing purchase	Price	140	46.7%
	Brand reputation	80	26.7%
	Recommendations from friends	50	16.7%
	Product specifications	20	6.7%
	Promotions/Discounts	10	3.3%

Price is the most significant factor influencing purchase decisions, with 46.7% of respondents identifying it as crucial.

Table 5.2: Cross-Tabulation

Income Level	Factors Influencing Purchase		Total
	Price	Brand Reputation	
Below ₹20,000	20	10	
₹20,000 - ₹40,000	30	20	
₹40,000 - ₹60,000	40	30	
₹60,000 - ₹80,000	50	20	

Price remains the dominant factor across all income levels, though brand reputation gains importance in the ₹40,000 - ₹80,000 range.

Table 5.3: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Income vs. Importance of Price	0.42
Income vs. Brand Reputation	0.30

Income and price sensitivity have a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.42$), and higher income groups are more sensitive to price. The lower association between income and brand reputation ($r = 0.30$) indicates that brand reputation is more significant with the increase in income.

FINDINGS

According to the examination of the data done with the help of Descriptive Statistics, Cross-Tabulation, and Correlation Analysis, the following important findings have been identified:

- **Demographics:** The mean age of the respondents is 32.5 years and most of them fall within the 26-35 age range. Its sample size is largely composed of middle-income people, with the average income standing at 052,000.
- **Online Shopping Behavior:** A notable percentage (33.3) of the respondents do their shopping online once per month with the younger age group (18-25 years) and those with higher income shopping more often. Income and frequency of online shopping show a moderate positive relationship, which means that those who have high income are more likely to shop online.
- **Influence of Online Reviews:** Purchase decisions are dependent on online reviews, and 63.4 percent of the respondents rated them as either Extremely important or Very important. Online reviews are more important to higher income people and respondents of younger age. According to the correlation analysis, the perceived importance of the online reviews are positively correlated with the income, and COVID-19 age is negatively correlated, which means the younger consumers are more affected by reviews.
- **Impact of Reviews:** In the case of mixed reviews, 40% of the respondents pay attention to negative reviews, which means that they are very critical when it comes to buying. Males are a bit more likely to concentrate on negative reviews, whereas females would want to get more information. There is a weak positive correlation between age and focus on negative reviews, which implies that older consumers are more reserved.
- **Other Purchase influencing Factors:** The most important issue that affects buying behaviour is the price, then the brand recognition, and friends recommendation. The strength of the brand image is also boosted with the rise in income, but the price is the prevailing factor in all income brackets.

Suggestions

- Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed:
- **Enhance Online Review Systems:** Companies ought to work towards having a sound online review system since a large percentage of the consumers are highly dependent on reviews to make their purchasing decisions. Positive feedback in the form of customer reviews would be encouraged so as to balance the adverse effects of negative customers.
- **Specific Marketing Plans:** Since young consumers and those with greater income levels are the more concerned with online reviews, the marketing approach must be adjusted to such groups. One-on-one content and campaign based on reviews might be an effective solution to maximize the engagement and the conversion rate.
- **Price Optimization:** And as long as price is the most important variable among all income groups, business should put into consideration price competition and provide promotions or discounts to capture price sensitive customers. A brand reputation management program operates within the scope of brand reputation management.
- **Brand Reputation Management:** Due to increasing brand reputation as a factor in demanding higher income, the companies are recommended to invest in brand-building practices and offer consistency in quality and service to maximize brand loyalty.
- **Addressing Mixed Reviews:** Businesses ought to leverage their presence on the internet by ensuring they handle them by responding to both positive and negative feedback in a fast and transparent manner. It would be possible to provide more information or clarifications which would ease the mind of the consumers.

CONCLUSION

The data analysis reveals that online reviews have a great impact on consumer decision-making especially among younger and higher-income consumers within Coimbatore city. Price is the most important aspect to be taken into consideration in the purchasing process, although the brand name and the impact of online critique are essential, particularly regarding certain demographic groups. The strategies that businesses should work on include ensuring that they have good reviews online, use competitive pricing policies and invest in the brand name to bring in and keep customers. Companies can respond to the issues mentioned in the negative reviews and become more transparent, which would help them gain trust and make more frequent purchases. All in all, the paper highlights the importance of businesses keeping up with the evolving nature of consumer behavior

that are driven by online reviews and other digital aspects. Through the matching of their strategies with these understanding, firms can create even more satisfaction to customers and achieve expansion within the competitive online market.

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Questionnaire

Section A: Demographic Information

Age:

Under 18
18-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
Above 55

Gender:

Male
Female

Other

Income Level:

Below ₹20,000
₹20,000 - ₹40,000
₹40,000 - ₹60,000
₹60,000 - ₹80,000
Above ₹80,000

Education:

High School
Diploma
Undergraduate
Postgraduate
Doctorate

Section B: Online Shopping Behaviour

How often do you shop online?

Once a week
Once a month
Once every few months
Rarely
Never

How important are online reviews when you make a purchase decision?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not important at all

What type of online reviews do you trust the most?

- Reviews from verified buyers
- Detailed reviews with pros and cons
- Reviews with high ratings
- Reviews with photos/videos
- None of the above

How often do you read online reviews before making a purchase?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Section C: Influence of Online Reviews

Have you ever decided against purchasing a product because of negative reviews?

- Yes
- No

Have positive reviews ever convinced you to buy a product you were unsure about?

- Yes
- No

What makes an online review trustworthy? (Select all that apply)

- Reviewer's credibility
- Consistency with other reviews
- Detailed explanation
- Verified purchase tag
- High rating

How much do you agree with the statement: "Online reviews reflect the true quality of a product"?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Do you consider the overall rating or individual reviews more important when making a purchase decision?

- Overall rating

Individual reviews

Both equally

How likely are you to leave a review after making a purchase?

Very likely

Likely

Neutral

Unlikely

Very unlikely

Section D: Impact of Reviews

How do you react to a product with mixed reviews (both positive and negative)?

- I focus on the positive reviews
- I focus on the negative reviews
- I look for more information before deciding
- I avoid purchasing the product

Do you think online reviews have become more important over time?

Yes

No

What other factors, besides online reviews, influence your purchase decisions? (Select all that apply)

Price

Brand reputation

Recommendations from friends/family

Product specifications

Promotions/Discounts

In your opinion, how can businesses improve the credibility of online reviews?

By encouraging verified buyers to leave detailed reviews

By responding to reviews, both positive and negative

By ensuring transparency in the review process

By offering incentives for honest reviews