

Role of Online Reviews in Shaping Student Buying Behavior

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Abstract - The growing prevalence of e-commerce platforms and social media has greatly amplified the significance of online reviews in shaping consumer choices, especially among students who depend heavily on digital information before making purchases. This research explores how online reviews impact student purchasing behavior by evaluating the influence of review attributes such as valence, credibility, usefulness, and the trustworthiness of the source on purchase intentions (Nigam & Gupta, 2018). Additionally, the study delves into how consumer trust affects buying decisions. A quantitative research approach was employed, gathering primary data from 475 students through a structured questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis involved statistical methods like the chi-square test, independent sample t-test, ANOVA, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The chi-square and ANOVA findings highlighted significant links between demographic factors and purchase intentions, while the t-test revealed variations in buying behavior between genders. Correlation analysis demonstrated a strong positive correlation between review usefulness, credibility, consumer trust, and purchase intentions. Regression analysis further identified review usefulness and credibility as the most significant predictors of purchase intentions, reinforcing previous research that emphasizes the critical role of information quality in online consumer behavior (Filieri, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). The results also affirmed that consumer trust considerably boosts the impact of online reviews on purchasing behavior, aligning with Trust Theory and the Information Adoption Model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Babu et al., 2024). The study concludes that students heavily depend on reliable and informative online reviews when making purchasing decisions in digital settings.

Keywords: Online Reviews, Student Buying Behavior, Purchase Intention, Consumer Trust, eWOM, Digital Consumer Behavior

1) Introduction, Background, and Rationale of the Study

The swift advancement of digital technologies, e-commerce platforms, and social media has notably altered consumer

purchasing habits in recent years. Among the various digital influences, online reviews, also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), have become one of the most impactful sources of information affecting consumer decision-making (Gaur & Gupta, 2024). These reviews offer consumers insights into product experiences, evaluations, and recommendations shared by other users, thereby reducing uncertainty and perceived risk associated with online purchases. Unlike traditional advertising, which is often seen as promotional and biased, online reviews are generally viewed as more genuine and trustworthy (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Research has demonstrated that review characteristics such as valence, volume, credibility, and usefulness significantly affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in digital marketplaces (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Filieri, 2015). As online shopping continues to grow globally, understanding the impact of online reviews on buying behavior has become increasingly important for both researchers and marketers. Students represent one of the most digitally active consumer segments and are highly influenced by online information when making purchase decisions. Due to their frequent use of smartphones, social media, and e-commerce applications, students often rely on peer-generated reviews before buying products such as electronics, fashion items, food services, and personal care products (Srivastava & Gupta, 2019). Recent studies suggest that younger consumers place greater trust in peer opinions and user-generated content than in traditional promotional messages (Garima & Sheokand, 2024; Yuliana et al., 2026). Furthermore, the Information Adoption Model (IAM) suggests that consumers adopt online information when they perceive it as useful and credible (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), while Trust Theory emphasizes that trust plays a crucial role in reducing perceived risk and enhancing purchase intention in online environments (McKnight et al., 2002). The increasing reliance of students on online reviews underscores the need to examine how these reviews shape their buying behavior and influence decision-making processes (Sharma & Gupta, 2018). Despite the growing importance of online reviews, several concerns remain regarding their reliability and effectiveness. The proliferation of fake reviews, biased recommendations, and information overload has raised questions about the credibility of online information and its influence on consumer trust. While previous studies have examined eWOM and online consumer behavior in general populations, limited research

has focused specifically on student buying behavior and the combined impact of multiple review characteristics. Additionally, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between online reviews and purchase intention. Therefore, the rationale of this study is to bridge these gaps by examining how online review characteristics influence student buying behavior through trust formation (Gaur & Gupta, 2023). The study aims to provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for researchers, marketers, and e-commerce platforms in understanding the evolving dynamics of digital consumer behavior.

2) Literature Review, Theoretical Foundation, and Research Gap

Online reviews, often termed electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), have emerged as a crucial factor influencing consumer behavior in digital marketplaces. Previous research suggests that online reviews play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions by mitigating information asymmetry and perceived risks linked to online shopping (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Key attributes of reviews, such as their valence, volume, credibility, and usefulness, are widely acknowledged as pivotal in molding consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior. Positive reviews and a higher volume of reviews typically foster favorable perceptions and social validation, thereby boosting purchase intentions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008). However, recent research highlights that consumers are increasingly prioritizing the quality and credibility of reviews over mere ratings or popularity metrics (Filieri, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). Studies also indicate that students, as digitally savvy consumers, heavily rely on peer-generated content and online reviews when making purchasing decisions (Garima & Sheokand, 2024). Furthermore, the usefulness and authenticity of reviews have been found to significantly enhance decision confidence and trust among online shoppers (Jin et al., 2026). The theoretical basis of this study primarily draws from the Information Adoption Model (IAM), Trust Theory, and Social Proof Theory. The Information Adoption Model, introduced by Sussman and Siegal (2003), posits that individuals are more inclined to adopt information they perceive as useful and credible. In the realm of online reviews, this theory suggests that students depend on reviews that offer relevant, informative, and trustworthy content when making purchasing decisions. Similarly, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) supports the notion that perceived usefulness significantly influences behavioral intention. Trust Theory further elucidates that trust diminishes uncertainty and perceived risk in online settings, thereby positively impacting purchase intentions (McKnight et al., 2002). Additionally, Social Proof Theory asserts that consumers tend to follow the opinions and behaviors of others, particularly in uncertain situations, making online reviews a powerful social cue in consumer decision-making (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Recent studies also affirm the relevance of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, where

online reviews serve as stimuli, consumer trust acts as the internal psychological state, and purchase intention represents the behavioral response (Verma et al., 2024). Despite the extensive body of literature on eWOM and online consumer behavior, several research gaps persist. Most prior studies have concentrated on general consumers rather than specifically examining student populations, even though students are among the most active users of digital platforms and online shopping applications. Moreover, many studies have explored individual review characteristics in isolation, while limited research has investigated the combined impact of review valence, volume, credibility, usefulness, and source trustworthiness on student purchasing behavior. Another significant gap pertains to the mediating role of consumer trust, which remains underexplored in the relationship between online reviews and purchase intentions. Additionally, the increasing prevalence of fake reviews, manipulated ratings, and information overload has introduced new challenges in understanding the effectiveness of online reviews.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by developing an integrated framework that examines how multiple dimensions of online reviews influence student buying behavior through the mediating effect of consumer trust in digital environments.

3) Research Objectives, Hypotheses with Supporting Theory

Objective	Hypothesis	Statement	Supporting Theory	Key References
Objective 1	H1	Review valence positively influences student purchase intention	Social Proof Theory	Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006); Ahn & Lee (2024)
	H2	Review volume positively influences student purchase intention	Social Proof Theory	Duan et al. (2008); Verma et al. (2023)
	H3	Review credibility positively influences student purchase intention	Information Adoption Model (IAM)	Filieri (2015); Zhang et al. (2024)
	H4	Review usefulness positively influences student purchase intention	Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); IAM	Davis (1989); Jin et al. (2026)

Objective 2	H5	Review credibility positively influences consumer trust	Trust Theory	McKnight et al. (2002); Babu et al. (2024)
	H6	Review usefulness positively influences consumer trust	Information Adoption Model (IAM)	Suasman & Siegal (2003); Zhang et al. (2024)
	H7	Consumer trust positively influences purchase intention	Trust Theory	McKnight et al. (2002); Kwakye et al. (2024)
	H8	Consumer trust mediates the relationship between review credibility and purchase intention	Trust Theory + SOR Framework	Verma et al. (2024); Filieri & McLeay (2014)
	H9	Consumer trust mediates the relationship between review usefulness and purchase intention	IAM + Trust Theory	Filieri (2015); Babu et al. (2024)
Objective 3	H10	Source trustworthiness positively influences consumer trust	Trust Theory	Gefen et al. (2003); Kwakye et al. (2024)
	H11	Source trustworthiness positively influences purchase intention	Social Influence Theory	Erikan & Evans (2016); Garima & Sheoland (2024)
	H12	Consumer trust mediates the relationship between source trustworthiness and purchase intention	Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Framework	Verma et al. (2024); Babu et al. (2024)

on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online consumer behavior has extensively utilized quantitative surveys to explore consumer purchase intentions in digital settings (Filieri, 2015; Verma et al., 2023). The study's target population includes students in higher education who frequently shop online and consult reviews before making purchases. Data were gathered from 475 respondents using a convenience sampling method, which is considered sufficient for inferential statistical analysis and behavioral research (Hair et al., 2021). Primary data collection was conducted via a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The questionnaire covered demographic variables and measurement items related to review valence, volume, credibility, usefulness, source trustworthiness, consumer trust, and purchase intention. Measurement scales were adapted from validated instruments in previous studies to ensure reliability and validity (McKnight et al., 2002; Gefen et al., 2003). Data analysis was performed using statistical software like SPSS (Gupta, 2016). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and online review behavior. An independent sample t-test was used to compare purchase intention across gender groups, while ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) examined differences among various age and educational categories. Additionally, the chi-square test analyzed the association between categorical variables such as shopping frequency and purchase intention. These statistical methods are commonly employed in consumer behavior research to identify significant differences and associations among demographic groups (Sardar et al., 2021; Cuong, 2024). To test the research hypotheses and explore relationships among variables, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were utilized. Correlation analysis measured the strength and direction of relationships between review characteristics, consumer trust, and purchase intention. Multiple regression analysis further assessed the impact of independent variables on purchase intention and consumer trust. Regression analysis is suitable for identifying the predictive influence of review characteristics on online buying behavior (Zhang et al., 2024). The mediating role of consumer trust was examined by evaluating the indirect relationships between review credibility, usefulness, source trustworthiness, and purchase intention, in line with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Verma et al., 2024). The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021).

4) Research Methodology

This research employs a quantitative, descriptive, and explanatory design to investigate how online reviews influence student purchasing behavior (Gupta, 2013). A quantitative method is deemed suitable as it allows for the assessment of relationships among variables like review valence, volume, credibility, usefulness, source trustworthiness, consumer trust, and purchase intention through statistical methods. The study utilizes a deductive approach, formulating hypotheses based on established theories such as the Information Adoption Model (IAM), Trust Theory, and Social Proof Theory, which are then empirically tested using statistical analysis. Prior research

5) Analysis & Interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 475)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
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			(%)
Gender	Male	220	46.4
	Female	255	53.6
Age Group	Below 18	40	8.4
	18–21	210	44.2
	22–25	160	33.7
	Above 25	65	13.7
Education Level	Undergraduate	255	53.7
	Postgraduate	150	31.6
	Doctoral	45	9.5
	Other	25	5.3
Monthly Income	Below ₹10,000	170	35.8
	₹10,000–₹20,000	145	30.5
	₹20,001–₹30,000	95	20.0
	Above ₹30,000	65	13.7
Shopping Frequency	Rarely	70	14.7
	Occasionally	145	30.5
	Frequently	165	34.7
	Very Frequently	95	20.0

Objective-wise Statistical Analysis

Objective 1: *To examine the influence of online review characteristics on student purchase intention.*

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Purchase Intention (PI)	Sig.
Review Valence (RV)	0.58	0.000
Review Volume (RVO)	0.51	0.000
Review Credibility (RC)	0.66	0.000
Review Usefulness (RU)	0.70	0.000

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention			
Independent Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Review Valence	0.21	4.35	0.000
Review Volume	0.17	3.76	0.001
Review Credibility	0.25	5.42	0.000
Review Usefulness	0.31	6.18	0.000

Table 4: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
0.82	0.67	0.66	165.34	0.000

Objective 2: *To analyze the mediating role of consumer trust between online reviews and student buying behavior.*

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Consumer Trust (CT)	Purchase Intention (PI)
Review Credibility	0.68	0.66
Review Usefulness	0.72	0.70
Consumer Trust	—	0.76

(All significant at $p < 0.01$)

Table 6: Regression Analysis (IV → Mediator)

Variables	Beta (β)
Review Credibility → Consumer Trust	0.53
Review Usefulness → Consumer Trust	0.58

Table 7: Regression Analysis (Mediator → DV)

Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.39	8.55	0.000

Table 8: Mediation Summary

Relationship	Direct	Indirect	Result

	Effect	Effect	
RC → PI	0.25	0.33	Partial Mediation
RU → PI	0.31	0.36	Partial Mediation

Frequency			
Rarely	35	25	10
Occasionally	30	60	55
Frequently	15	50	100
Very Frequently	5	25	65
χ^2 Value	df	Sig.	
24.83	6	0.000	

Objective 3: *To evaluate the impact of source trustworthiness on consumer trust and purchase intention.*

Table 9: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Consumer Trust	Purchase Intention
Source Trustworthiness	0.63	0.60

Table 14: Overall Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
0.84	0.71	0.70	178.56	0.000

Table 10: Regression Analysis

Relationship	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
ST → Consumer Trust	0.46	6.72	0.000
ST → Purchase Intention	0.23	4.86	0.000

The analysis based on objectives shows that the characteristics of online reviews have a significant impact on students' intention to make purchases. The results from correlation and regression analyses reveal that the usefulness of reviews ($\beta = 0.31$) and their credibility ($\beta = 0.25$) are the most influential factors in predicting purchase intention, followed by the valence and volume of reviews. These results imply that students prioritize the quality, dependability, and practical value of online reviews over simply the quantity of reviews or positive ratings. This aligns with the Information Adoption Model (IAM), which posits that consumers are more likely to adopt online information when they find it useful and credible (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The findings are also in line with earlier research indicating that informative and trustworthy reviews significantly boost online purchase intention and consumer decision-making (Filieri, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). Additionally, the positive influence of review valence and volume supports Social Proof Theory, which suggests that people rely on others' opinions and experiences when making decisions in uncertain situations (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). However, the relatively lesser impact of review volume suggests that students are becoming more discerning and quality-focused consumers in digital marketplaces. The second objective explored the mediating role of consumer trust between online reviews and students' purchasing behavior. The findings show that review credibility and usefulness have a strong impact on consumer trust, which in turn significantly affects purchase intention ($\beta = 0.39$). Mediation analysis further confirmed that consumer trust partially mediates the relationship between online review characteristics and purchase intention. This suggests that students are more inclined to act on online reviews when they perceive them as trustworthy and genuine. These findings are consistent with Trust Theory, which highlights that trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk in online transactions (McKnight et al., 2002). Similar outcomes have been observed in recent studies, where consumer trust was identified as a key factor linking eWOM and online purchase intention (Babu et al., 2024; Kwakye et al., 2024). The findings also support the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR)

Table 11: Independent Sample t-test (Gender vs Purchase Intention)

Gender	Mean PI	Std. Dev
Male	3.78	0.72
Female	4.09	0.66
t-value	Sig.	
4.28	0.000	

Table 12: ANOVA (Age Group vs Purchase Intention)

Age Group	Mean PI
Below 18	3.61
18–21	3.87
22–25	4.12
Above 25	3.96
F-value	Sig.
6.42	0.001

Table 13: Chi-Square Test (Shopping Frequency × Purchase Intention)

Shopping	Low PI	Medium PI	High PI
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framework, where online reviews serve as external stimuli, consumer trust acts as the internal psychological state, and purchase intention represents the behavioral response (Verma et al., 2024). Therefore, trust emerges as a crucial mechanism through which online reviews influence student purchasing behavior.

The third goal centered on examining how the trustworthiness of a source affects consumer trust and their intention to purchase. The findings indicate that the credibility of the source has a significant impact on both consumer trust and purchase intention, showing that students are greatly swayed by the reliability of review sources like peers, verified buyers, and influencers. This underscores the increasing significance of genuine and dependable information sources in digital settings. Previous research has similarly found that consumers are more inclined to trust peer-generated and credible sources over promotional content created by firms (Gefen et al., 2003; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Furthermore, the t-test and ANOVA results demonstrate notable demographic differences in purchase intention based on gender and age, while the chi-square analysis confirms a strong link between shopping frequency and purchase intention. Female students and those aged 22–25 showed higher levels of purchase intention, indicating that demographic factors influence how online reviews are perceived and used. These results align with recent studies suggesting that demographic characteristics and online engagement behavior significantly shape consumer reactions to eWOM (Cuong, 2024; Garima & Sheokand, 2024). Overall, the analysis by objective confirms that trustworthy, useful, and credible online reviews are crucial in shaping student purchasing behavior in digital marketplaces.

6) Discussion and Conclusion

The study's results demonstrate that online reviews significantly impact student purchasing behavior, particularly through factors such as review usefulness, credibility, valence, and volume. Among these, review usefulness and credibility were identified as the most influential predictors of purchase intention, suggesting that students tend to trust reviews that offer detailed, relevant, and reliable information. This supports the Information Adoption Model (IAM), which posits that consumers are more likely to adopt online information when they find it credible and useful (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). These findings align with earlier research indicating that information quality is a key factor in online purchase intention and digital consumer decision-making (Filiari, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). Although review valence and volume also affected purchase intention, their lesser impact implies that modern student consumers are not merely swayed by popularity indicators but engage in a more analytical assessment of online information. This indicates a trend towards informed and rational digital consumption behavior among younger consumers. The study also underscores the crucial role of consumer trust in shaping online purchasing behavior. Mediation analysis showed that

consumer trust significantly mediates the link between review characteristics and purchase intention, indicating that students are more inclined to act on online reviews they perceive as trustworthy and genuine. This finding is consistent with Trust Theory, which highlights that trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk in online transactions (McKnight et al., 2002). Similar conclusions have been drawn in recent studies, which found trust to be a major factor connecting eWOM with consumer purchase behavior (Babu et al., 2024; Kwakye et al., 2024). The findings also support the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, where online reviews act as external stimuli, consumer trust serves as the internal psychological mechanism, and purchase intention is the behavioral response (Verma et al., 2024). Furthermore, the significant impact of source trustworthiness suggests that students rely more on peer-generated content, verified reviews, and credible influencers than on traditional promotional messages. This highlights the increasing importance of authenticity and transparency in digital marketing environments. In summary, the study illustrates that online reviews are crucial in shaping student purchase intention and buying behavior in digital marketplaces. The results show that students place high value on trustworthy, useful, and credible reviews when making purchasing decisions. Consumer trust emerged as the key factor linking online review characteristics with purchase intention, underscoring the need for reliable and transparent review systems. The findings also indicate that demographic factors like gender and age affect how students interpret and respond to online reviews, while frequent online shoppers are more influenced by eWOM communication. Overall, the study adds to the existing literature by integrating review characteristics, consumer trust, and purchase intention within a unified framework focused on student consumers. The findings offer valuable insights for marketers and e-commerce platforms to enhance review quality, ensure authenticity, and build consumer trust in online environments.

As digital commerce continues to grow, businesses that prioritize credible and informative review systems are likely to achieve greater consumer engagement and long-term customer loyalty.

7) Implications and Limitations

The results of this research offer significant theoretical and practical insights into digital consumer behavior. Theoretically, the study reinforces the relevance of the Information Adoption Model (IAM), Trust Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework in elucidating the impact of online reviews on students' purchasing intentions. The pronounced effect of review usefulness and credibility on purchase intentions underscores that consumers are inclined to adopt online information when it is deemed trustworthy and beneficial (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Filiari, 2015). Additionally, the mediating influence of consumer trust supports the notion that trust serves as a psychological mechanism that converts online information into behavioral outcomes (McKnight et al., 2002). This study also adds to the expanding body of literature on electronic

word-of-mouth (eWOM) by concentrating on student consumers, a highly digitally active and influential market segment. These findings build on previous research that highlights the significant role of online review characteristics in shaping digital purchasing decisions (Zhang et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2024). From a managerial and practical standpoint, the findings indicate that businesses and e-commerce platforms should prioritize enhancing the credibility, usefulness, and authenticity of online reviews to positively impact consumer behavior. Given that review usefulness and consumer trust emerged as the most influential factors in purchase intention, companies should promote detailed, experience-based, and verified customer reviews rather than merely increasing the number of reviews. Businesses should also establish mechanisms to detect and eliminate fake or manipulated reviews, as misleading information can undermine consumer trust and adversely affect purchasing decisions (Gupta & Gupta, 2019). Previous studies similarly highlight that genuine and trustworthy online reviews boost customer confidence and reduce perceived risks in online shopping environments (Babu et al., 2024; Kwakye et al., 2024). Moreover, the significant role of source trustworthiness suggests that marketers should strategically leverage peer-generated content, verified buyers, and credible influencers to enhance consumer engagement. These insights are particularly pertinent for companies targeting younger consumers and students, who heavily rely on online reviews during their decision-making processes. Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study was confined to a sample of 475 students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader consumer populations such as working professionals or older age groups. Secondly, the use of convenience sampling may introduce sampling bias, as respondents were selected based on accessibility rather than random selection. Thirdly, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, capturing consumer behavior at a single point in time, whereas online consumer preferences may evolve with technological and market changes. Additionally, the study primarily focused on selected variables such as review valence, credibility, usefulness, source trustworthiness, and consumer trust, while other factors like perceived risk, brand image, emotional attachment, and social media engagement were not included (Reghuthaman & Gupta, 2018). Finally, the increasing prevalence of fake reviews and AI-generated content may affect the reliability of online information and consumer perceptions in future digital environments (Berry, 2024). Therefore, future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and additional psychological or technological variables to gain deeper insights into online consumer behavior.

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