

Trust in the Digital Age: The Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Purchase Intent


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Abstract

In the digital age, online reviews and ratings have become powerful determinants of consumer purchase decisions. This study explores how digital trust is formed through user-generated content, including star ratings, textual reviews, and review authenticity cues. Drawing on consumer behavior theories, the research examines the psychological processes influencing how consumers interpret online information, the perceived credibility of reviewers, and the role of social proof in shaping purchase intent. The study also investigates the impact of negative versus positive reviews, the influence of review volume and recency, and the moderating effects of product type, platform design, and consumer skepticism. Findings suggest that trust in online reviews significantly enhances purchase intention, but the presence of fake or manipulated reviews can weaken consumer confidence and lead to decision uncertainty. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for transparent review systems, platform accountability, and digital literacy among consumers to ensure informed and reliable decision-making e-commerce environments

Key words: Digital Trust, Customer Ratings, Purchase Intention, and Consumer Behaviour.

Introduction

In the contemporary digital landscape, the rapid growth of internet technologies and e-commerce platforms has significantly transformed the way consumers make purchasing decisions. Traditional word-of-mouth communication has evolved into electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), where online reviews and ratings play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. Platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Google Reviews have become primary sources of information, enabling consumers to evaluate products and services before making a purchase.

Trust has emerged as a critical factor in this digital environment, as consumers often rely on information provided by unknown individuals rather than direct personal experience. The credibility, quantity, and quality of online reviews influence how consumers perceive product reliability and brand authenticity. Positive reviews can enhance trust and encourage purchase intentions, whereas negative reviews may create skepticism and discourage potential buyers.

Moreover, the increasing prevalence of fake reviews and manipulated ratings has raised concerns about the reliability of online information. This makes it essential to understand how consumers interpret and trust digital feedback while making purchasing decisions. Factors such as reviewer expertise, review consistency, and platform reputation further contribute to the formation of trust in online environments.

This study aims to explore the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer purchase intention, with a particular focus on the role of trust. By examining how digital feedback influences decision-making, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for businesses to enhance their online presence and build stronger relationships with consumers in the digital age.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of online reviews on consumer purchase intention.
2. To analyze the impact of online ratings on consumer decision-making behavior.
3. To evaluate the role of trust in shaping consumer responses to online reviews and ratings.

4. To identify the factors affecting the credibility and reliability of online reviews.
5. To study the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and consumer trust.

Literature Review

The growing importance of digital platforms has significantly increased academic interest in understanding how online reviews and ratings influence consumer purchase intention. Online reviews, a key component of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), are considered one of the most influential sources of product-related information in the digital marketplace.

Several studies highlight that online reviews serve as an important informational and social influence tool in consumer decision-making. Consumers often perceive online reviews as more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising because they are generated by fellow users based on real experiences. Positive reviews tend to create favorable attitudes, enhance trust, and increase purchase intention, whereas negative reviews can deter consumers from making a purchase .

Research has consistently shown that review valence (positive vs. negative reviews) plays a dominant role in shaping purchase intention. A large-scale meta-analysis found that review valence has a strong and significant impact on consumer buying decisions, indicating that consumers are highly influenced by the overall tone of reviews . Additionally, factors such as review quantity, quality, and format (text vs. image-based reviews) also affect how consumers interpret and trust online information.

Trust is another central construct in the literature. Studies suggest that the credibility of e-WOM significantly influences consumer trust, which in turn directly impacts purchase intention. When consumers perceive reviews as credible and reliable, they are more likely to develop trust toward the product or brand, leading to higher purchase likelihood . Furthermore, trust often acts as a mediating variable between online reviews and purchase intention.

The role of social influence is also widely discussed in prior research. Online reviews create both informational influence (providing product knowledge) and normative influence (shaping social acceptance). Star ratings, in particular, act as quick heuristics that simplify decision-making and strongly influence consumer choices .

Moreover, theoretical frameworks such as the Uses and Gratification Theory and Consumer Culture Theory have been applied to explain how consumers engage with online reviews. These studies confirm that online reviews positively affect purchase intention through perceived usefulness and trust in digital platforms .

Recent research also emphasizes moderating factors such as perceived risk, cultural differences, and consumer experience. For instance, trust and perceived risk jointly influence how consumers interpret online reviews, while experienced online shoppers may rely less on reviews compared to new users .

Despite extensive research, some inconsistencies remain in the literature regarding the strength and direction of these relationships. This indicates the need for further investigation into how different factors—such as review authenticity, platform credibility, and individual consumer characteristics—interact to influence purchase intention.

Research Gap

Despite the extensive body of literature on online reviews, ratings, and purchase intention, several important gaps still exist that require further investigation.

Firstly, many previous studies have focused on **individual factors** such as review credibility, usefulness, or rating scores in isolation. However, there is limited research that integrates multiple dimensions—such as trust, review authenticity,

platform credibility, and consumer psychology—into a single comprehensive framework . This creates a gap in understanding how these factors interact collectively to influence purchase intention.

Secondly, while trust is widely recognized as a key variable, **its mediating and moderating role** between online reviews and purchase intention is not fully explored across different contexts. Existing studies highlight trust as important, but lack consistency in explaining how it develops and varies among different consumer groups .

Another significant gap is related to **review authenticity and fake reviews**. With the increasing presence of manipulated or biased reviews, there is insufficient empirical research examining how consumers detect fake reviews and how this affects their trust and buying decisions.

Hypothesis

H1: Online reviews have a significant positive impact on consumer purchase intention.

H2: Online ratings have a significant positive influence on consumer purchase intention.

H3: The credibility of online reviews positively affects consumer trust.

H4: Consumer trust has a significant positive impact on purchase intention.

Mediating Hypothesis

H5: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between online reviews and purchase intention.

Research Methodology :

1. Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer purchase intention. The design helps in understanding relationships between variables such as trust, review credibility, and buying behavior.

2. Research Approach

A **quantitative research approach** is used, as the study focuses on collecting measurable data and analyzing it statistically to test the proposed hypotheses.

3. Data Collection Method

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire.
- **Secondary Data:** Gathered from research journals, articles, websites, and previous studies related to online reviews and consumer behavior.

A **structured questionnaire** is designed using Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire includes sections on:

- Demographic details
- Online review usage behavior
- Trust in reviews
- Purchase intention

The study uses **convenience sampling**, selecting respondents who frequently use online platforms for shopping and reading review.

A sample of **150 respondents** is considered appropriate for this study to ensure reliable analysis.

The target population includes:

- Online shoppers
- Users of e-commerce platforms
- Individuals who rely on online reviews before purchase

4. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical tools such as:

- Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Percentage)
- Correlation Analysis
- Regression Analysis
- Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

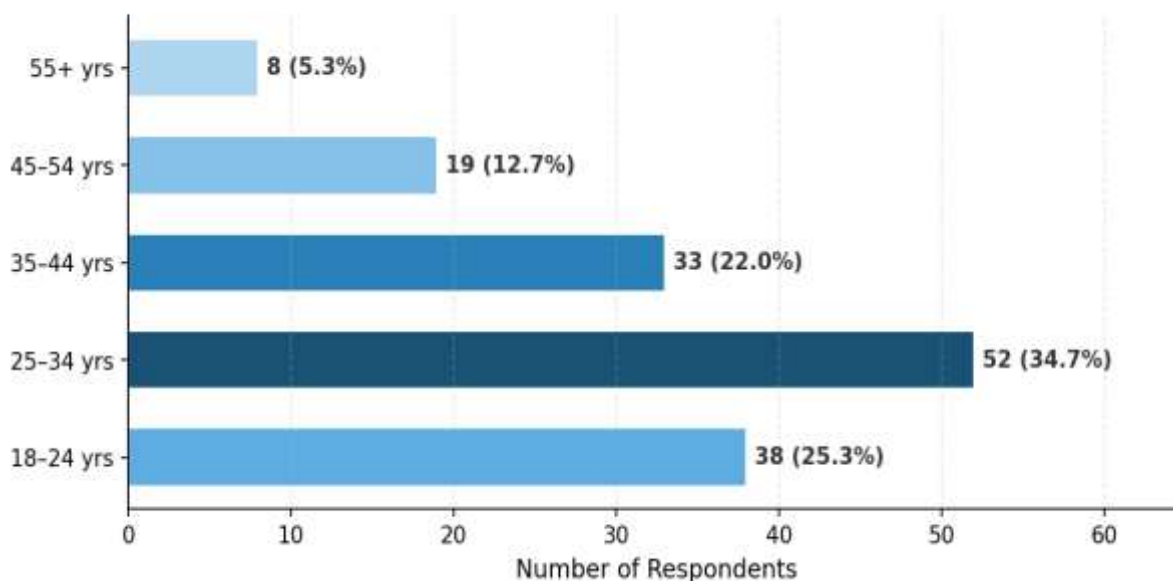
5. Data Analysis and Discussion

Q1. What is your age group?

Age Group Distribution of Respondents

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18–24 years	38	25.3%
25–34 years	52	34.7%
35–44 years	33	22.0%
45–54 years	19	12.7%
55 years and above	8	5.3%
Total	150	100%

Q1: Age Group Distribution of Respondents (n=150)



Interpretation: The largest proportion of respondents (34.7%) falls in the 25–34 age bracket, reflecting the dominance of young adults in online shopping activity. Together, the 18–34 age group constitutes 60% of the sample, consistent with

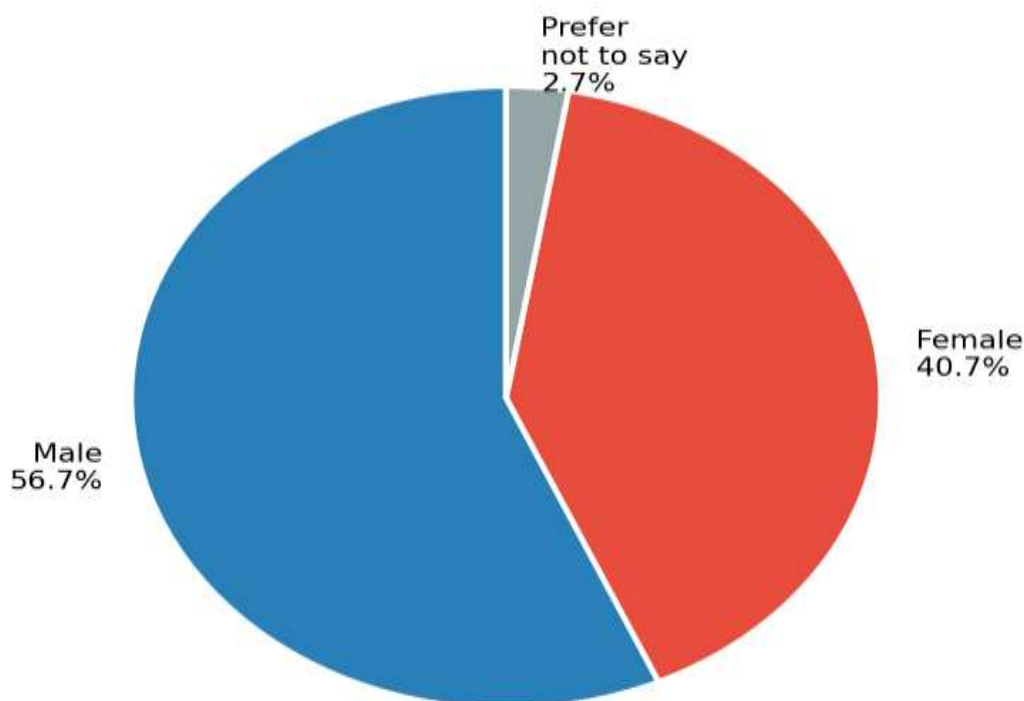
national data on digital commerce adoption. Respondents aged 55 and above represent only 5.3%, indicating the relatively lower penetration of e-commerce among older demographics.

Q2. What is your gender?

Gender Distribution

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	85	56.7%
Female	61	40.7%
Prefer not to say	4	2.7%
Total	150	100%

Q2: Gender Distribution (n=150)



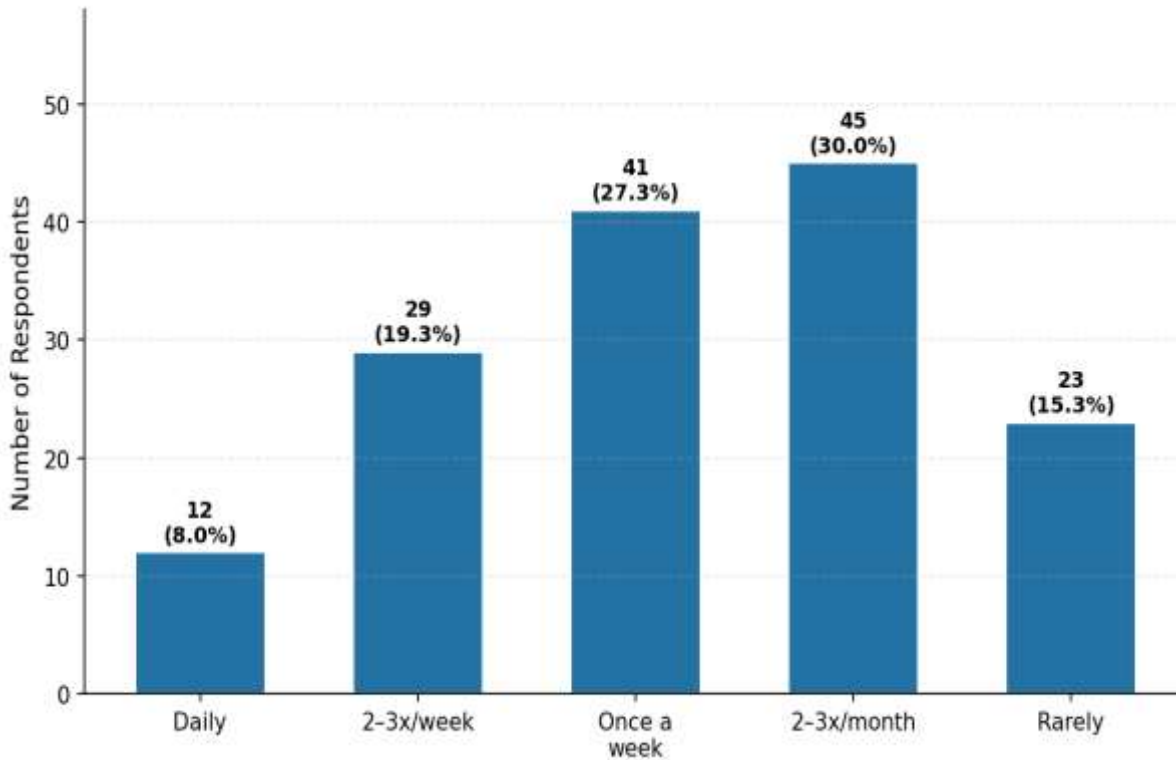
Interpretation: Male respondents constitute 56.7% of the sample, with female respondents at 40.7%. The gender distribution is broadly reflective of national online shopping patterns, though the gap is narrowing as female participation in digital commerce grows. The 4 respondents (2.7%) who preferred not to disclose gender are included in total analysis.

Q3. How frequently do you shop online?

Online Shopping Frequency

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily	12	8.0%
2–3 times a week	29	19.3%
Once a week	41	27.3%
2–3 times a month	45	30.0%
Rarely (once in few months)	23	15.3%
Total	150	100%

Q3: Online Shopping Frequency (n=150)



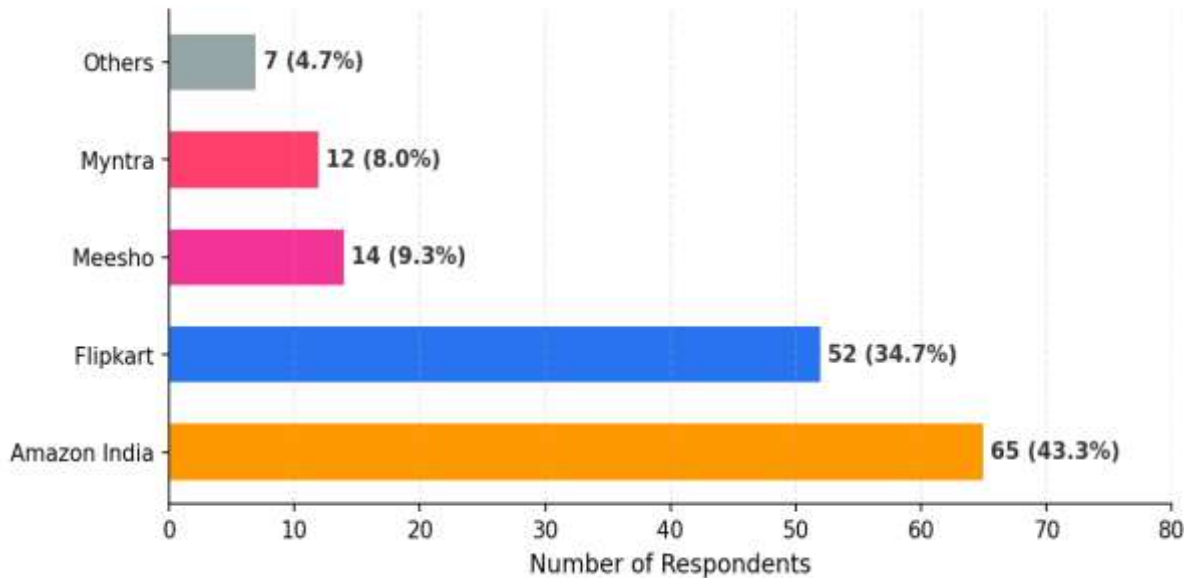
Interpretation: The majority of respondents (30%) shop online 2–3 times per month, followed by once a week (27.3%), indicating a high level of engagement with e-commerce platforms. Only 8% shop daily, while 15.3% shop rarely, suggesting a predominantly regular but not impulsive purchasing pattern in the sample.

Q4. Which e-commerce platform do you primarily use?

Preferred E-Commerce Platform

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Amazon India	65	43.3%
Flipkart	52	34.7%
Meesho	14	9.3%
Myntra	12	8.0%
Others	7	4.7%
Total	150	100%

Q4: Preferred E-Commerce Platform (n=150)

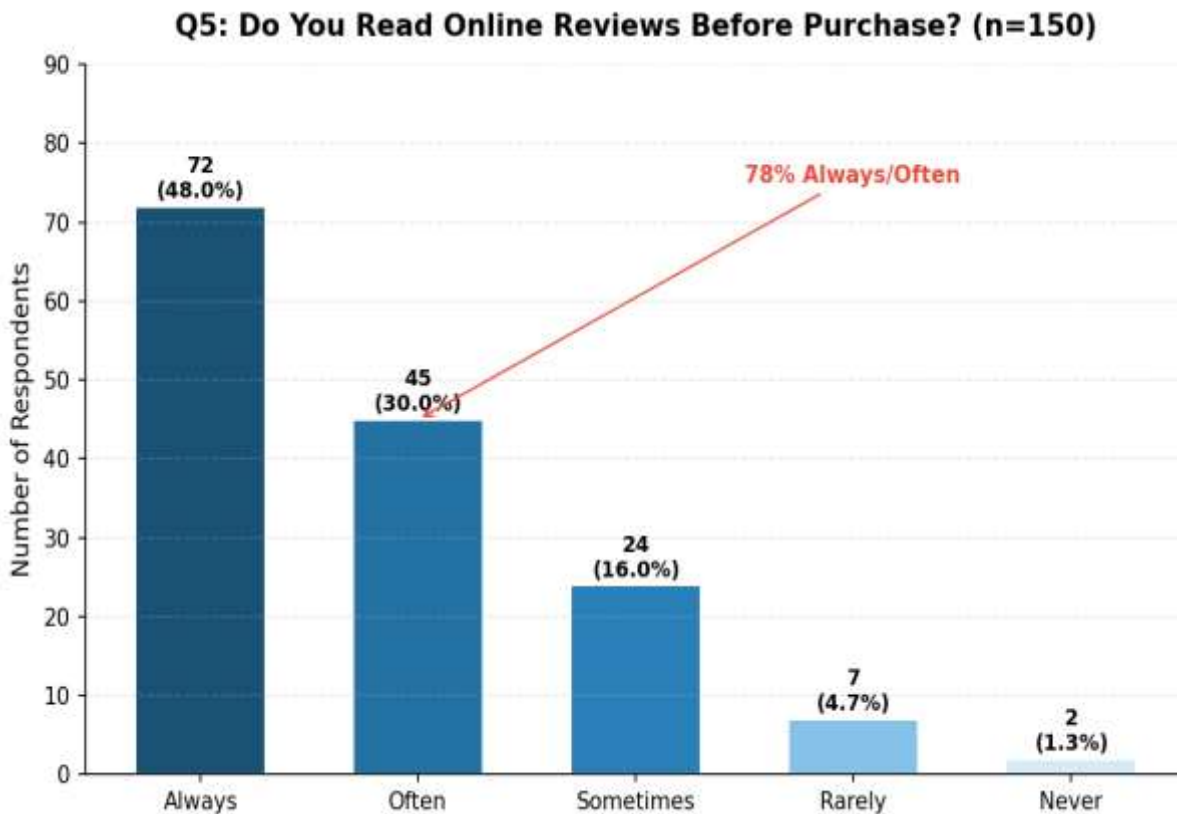


Interpretation: Amazon India dominates platform preference with 43.3% of respondents, followed closely by Flipkart at 34.7%. Meesho and Myntra, while growing rapidly, are preferred by 9.3% and 8% respectively. This distribution influenced subsequent analysis, as Amazon and Flipkart have the most sophisticated review ecosystems among Indian platforms.

Q5. Do you read online reviews before making a purchase?

Review Reading Behaviour

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	72	48.0%
Often	45	30.0%
Sometimes	24	16.0%
Rarely	7	4.7%
Never	2	1.3%
Total	150	100%



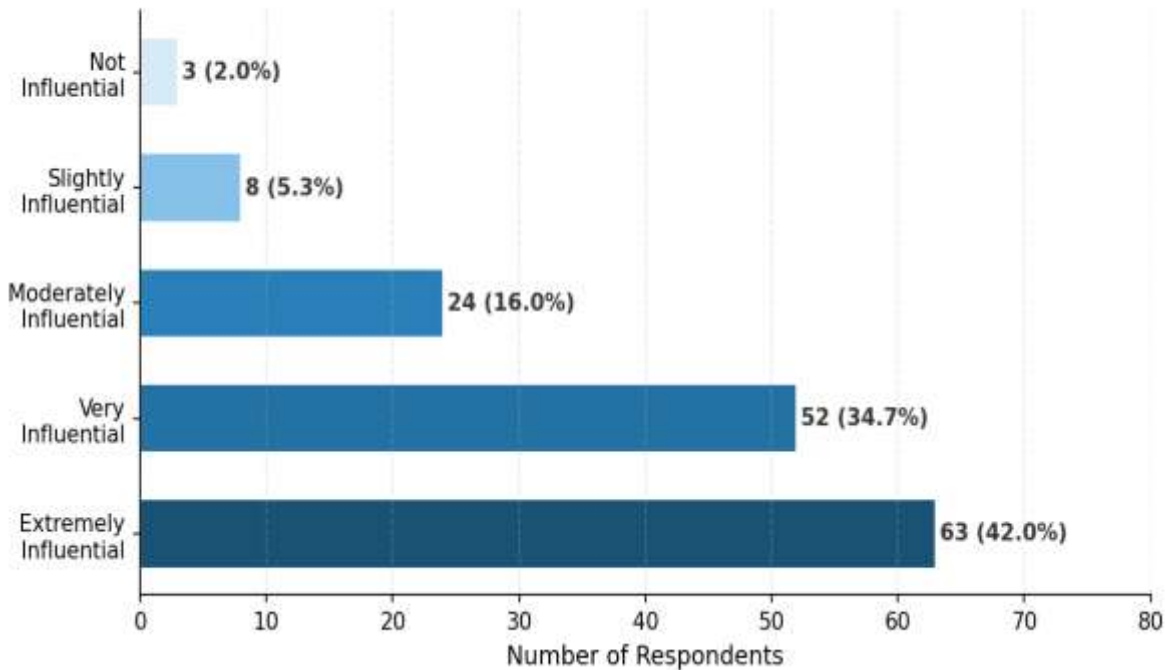
Interpretation: An overwhelming 78% of respondents report always or often reading online reviews before purchase, strongly supporting H1. Only 9 respondents (6%) rarely or never read reviews, confirming that review consultation is a near-universal behaviour among active online shoppers. This finding underscores the central role of reviews in the e-commerce purchase journey.

Q6. How much do star ratings influence your purchase decision?

Influence of Star Ratings

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Extremely influential	63	42.0%
Very influential	52	34.7%
Moderately influential	24	16.0%
Slightly influential	8	5.3%
Not influential	3	2.0%
Total	150	100%

Q6: How Much Do Star Ratings Influence Purchase Decisions? (n=150)



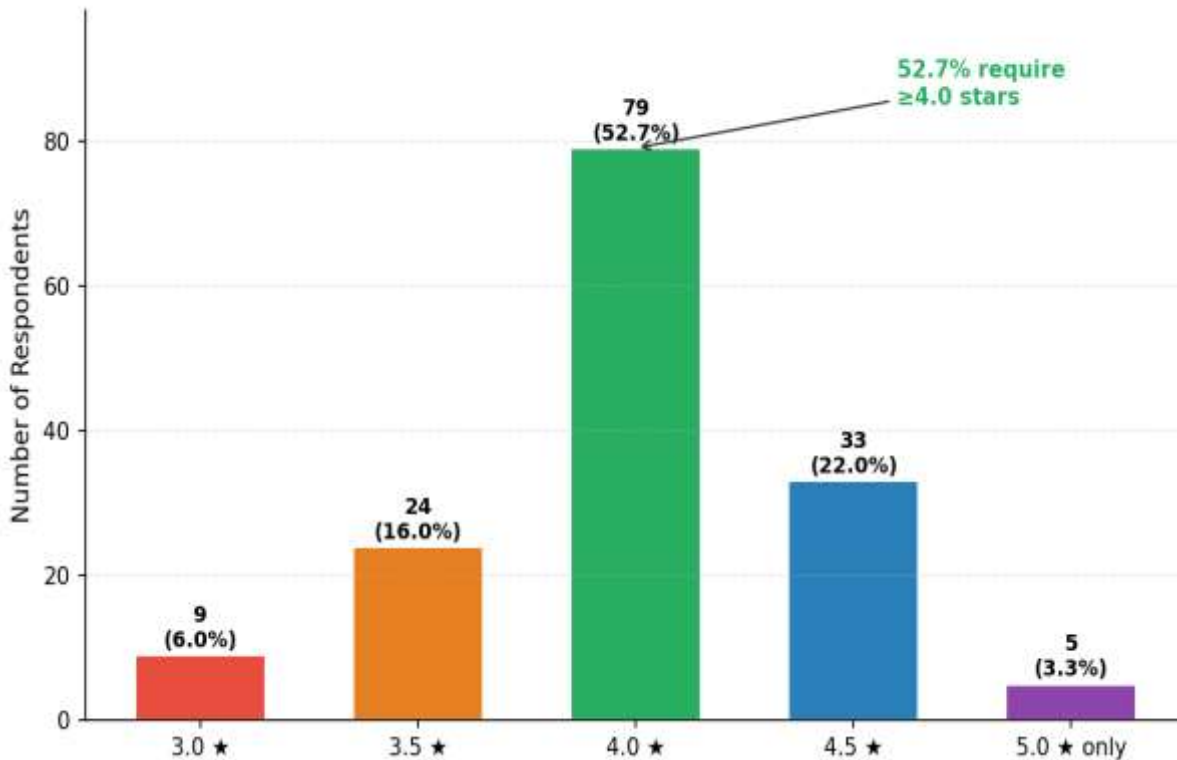
Interpretation: 77% of respondents rate star ratings as extremely or very influential in their purchase decisions, providing strong empirical support for H1. The star rating, a simple numerical heuristic it functions as a powerful cognitive shortcut, reducing decision complexity in information-dense online environments. Only 2% find ratings non-influential.

Q7. What is the minimum acceptable star rating for a product you would purchase?

Minimum Acceptable Star Rating

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
3.0 stars	9	6.0%
3.5 stars	24	16.0%
4.0 stars	79	52.7%
4.5 stars	33	22.0%
5.0 stars only	5	3.3%
Total	150	100%

Q7: Minimum Acceptable Star Rating for Purchase (n=150)



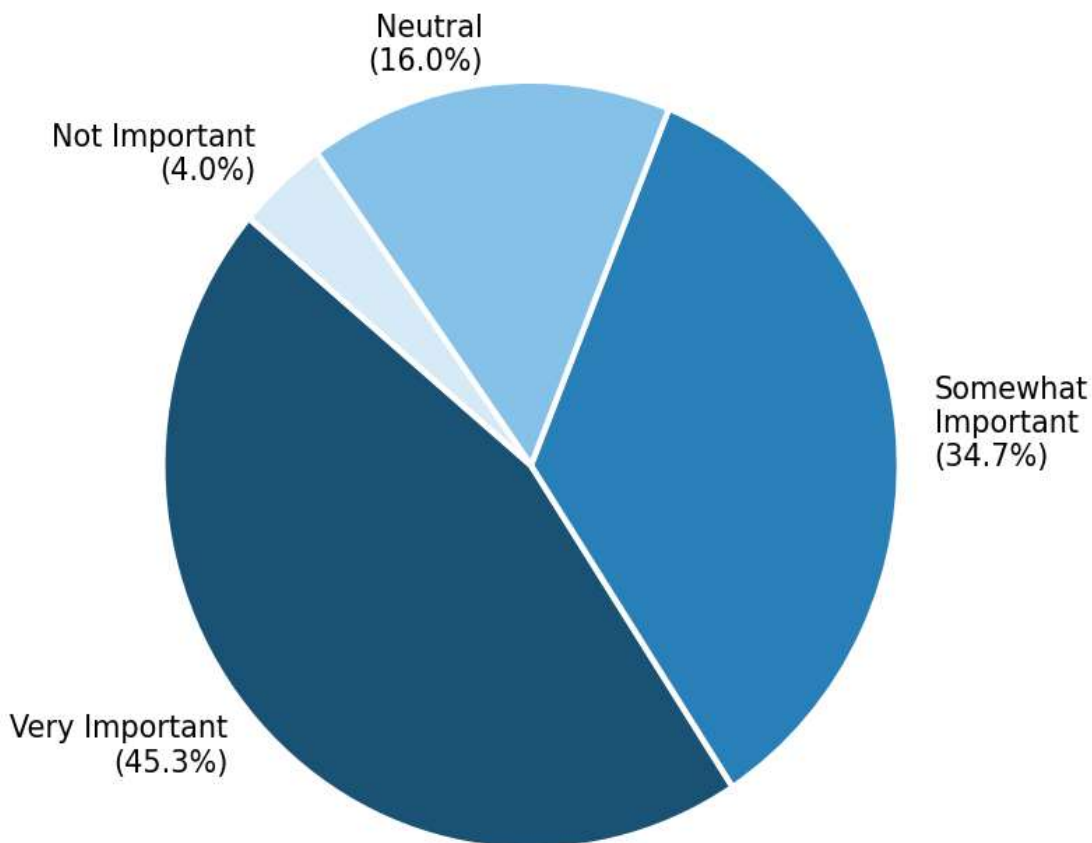
Interpretation: 52.7% of respondents require a minimum of 4.0 stars before considering a purchase, and 22% require 4.5 stars. This finding is consistent with Maslowska et al. (2017), who identified the 4.2–4.5 star range as the optimal purchase-inducing zone. Products rated below 3.5 stars are effectively considered unacceptable by 88.7% of respondents.

Q8. How important is the number (volume) of reviews to you?

Importance of Review Volume

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very important – high volume increases trust	68	45.3%
Somewhat important	52	34.7%
Neutral – quality matters more	24	16.0%
Not important	6	4.0%
Total	150	100%

Q8: Importance of Review Volume/Quantity (n=150)



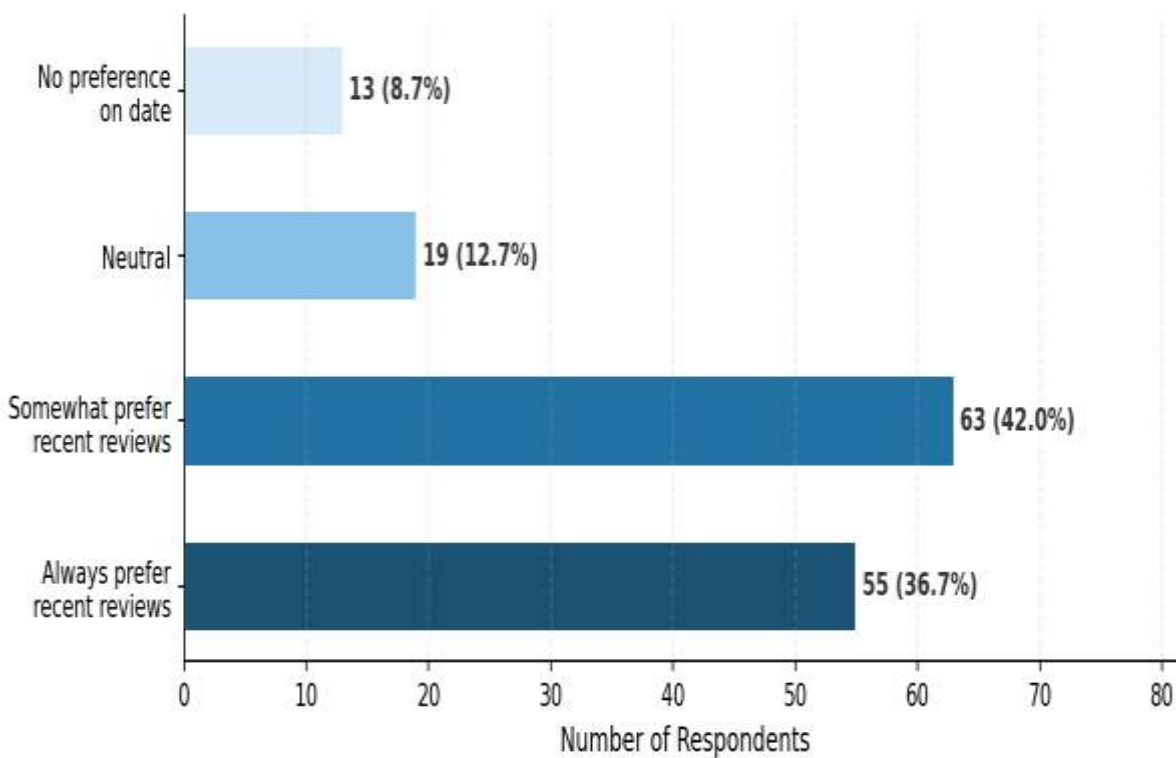
Interpretation: 45.3% consider review volume very important for trust building, and 34.7% consider it somewhat important together 80% indicating that volume matters. This supports H2. A higher number of reviews reduces uncertainty and increases the statistical reliability of the aggregate rating in consumers' perception, functioning as a social proof mechanism.

Q9. Do you pay attention to the recent (date) of reviews?

Attention to Review Recent

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, always – I only trust recent reviews	55	36.7%
Yes, somewhat – I prefer recent but read older ones	63	42.0%
Neutral	19	12.7%
No, I read all reviews regardless of date	13	8.7%
Total	150	100%

Q9: Do You Pay Attention to Review Recency/Date? (n=150)



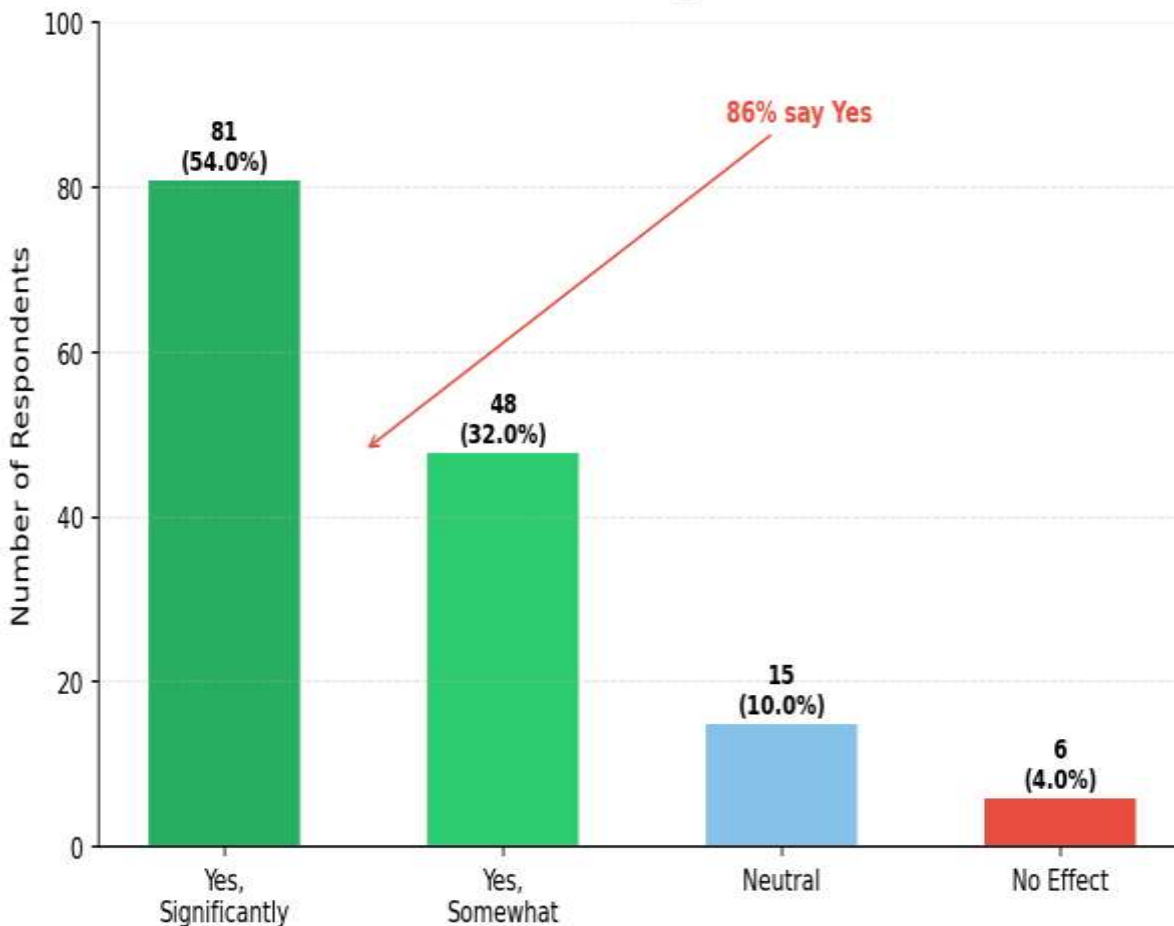
Interpretation: 78.7% of respondents actively consider the recent of reviews, with 36.7% trusting only recent reviews. This indicates that consumers are aware of product evolution, manufacturing changes, and service quality fluctuations over time. Review recent is thus a critical trust signal that platforms should prominently display and prioritise in their display algorithms.

Q10. Do 'Verified Purchase' badges increase your trust in a review?

Impact of Verified Purchase Badge

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, significantly	81	54.0%
Yes, somewhat	48	32.0%
Neutral – I don't notice badges	15	10.0%
No, it doesn't matter to me	6	4.0%
Total	150	100%

Q10: Do "Verified Purchase" Badges Increase Trust? (n=150)



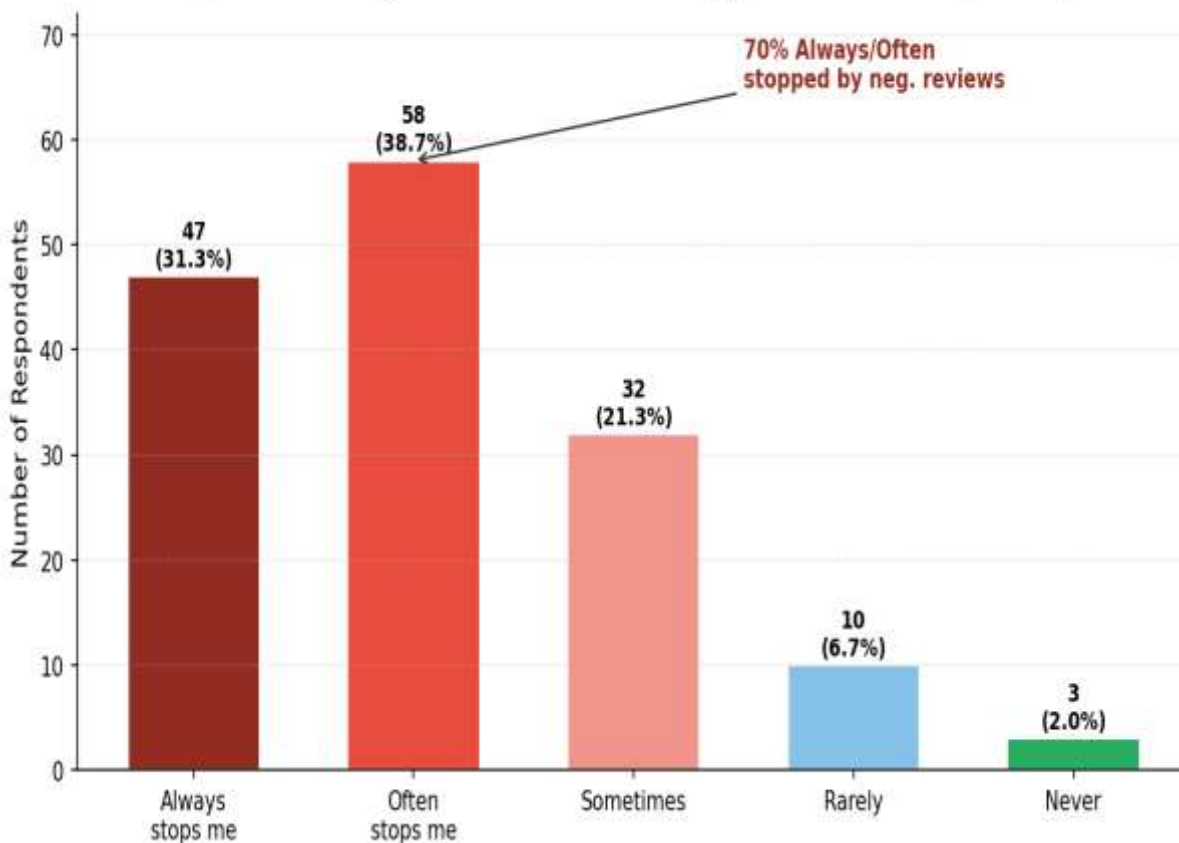
Interpretation: 86% of respondent’s report that verified purchase badges increase their trust in reviews to some degree, with 54% reporting a significant trust enhancement. This finding strongly supports H4, confirming that platform-provided authenticity signals are highly effective trust signals. Unverified reviews are implicitly discounted by the majority of consumers.

Q11. Have negative reviews ever stopped you from making a purchase?

Impact of Negative Reviews on Purchase Abandonment

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, always – negative reviews stop me from purchasing	47	31.3%
Yes, often	58	38.7%
Sometimes	32	21.3%
Rarely	10	6.7%
Never	3	2.0%
Total	150	100%

Q11: Have Negative Reviews Ever Stopped a Purchase? (n=150)



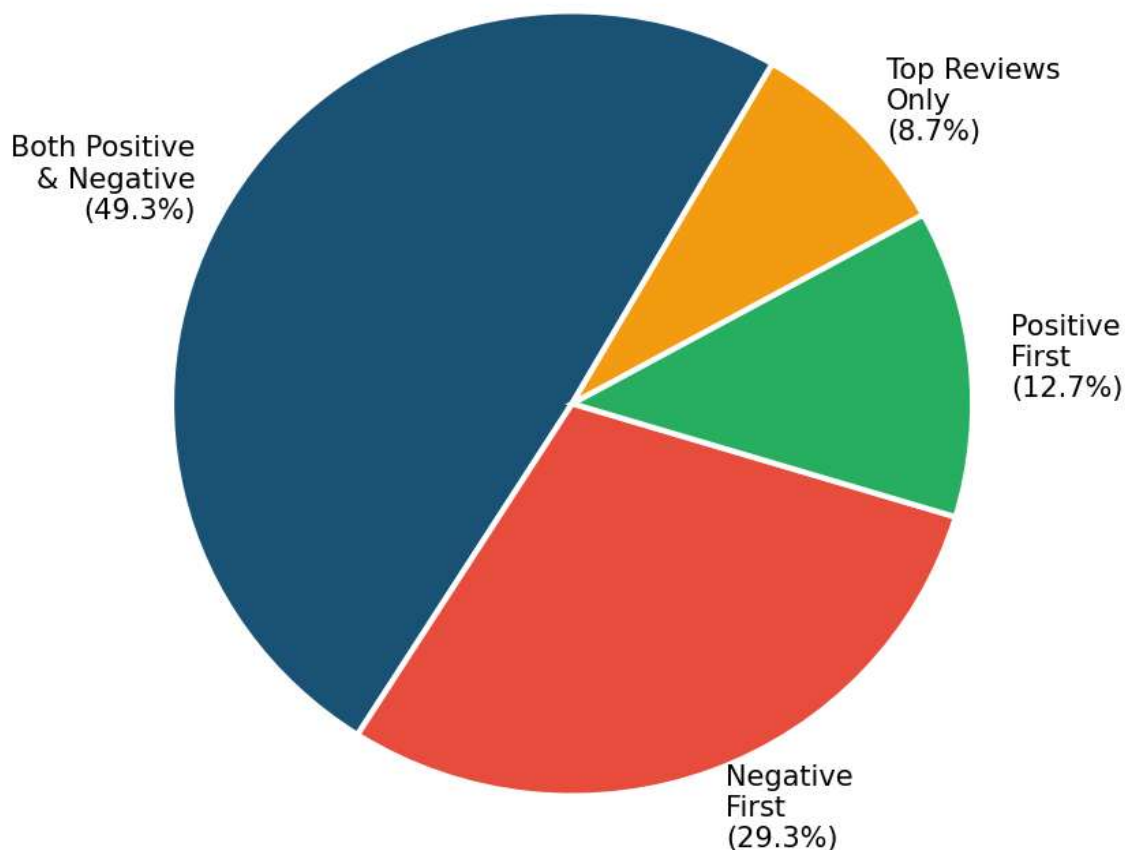
Interpretation: An overwhelming 70% of respondents report that negative reviews always or often deter them from making purchases, with only 13 respondents (8.7%) rarely or never affected. This provides strong empirical support for H3 (negativity bias hypothesis). The deterrent effect of negative reviews significantly outweighs the encouragement provided by positive reviews of equivalent volume.

Q12. Do you read both positive and negative reviews, or only one type?

Review Reading Preference

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I read both positive and negative reviews	74	49.3%
I primarily read negative reviews first	44	29.3%
I primarily read positive reviews first	19	12.7%
I only read the top reviews shown	13	8.7%
Total	150	100%

Q12: Which Reviews Do You Read? (n=150)



Interpretation: 74 respondents (49.3%) read both positive and negative reviews, indicating a balanced information-seeking approach. Notably, 29.3% read negative reviews first, more than those who read positive reviews first (12.7%) further demonstrating the outsized cognitive salience of negative feedback in online review consumption behaviour.



Conclusion:

In the digital age, online reviews and ratings have become essential elements in shaping consumer purchase decisions. This study clearly demonstrates that consumers heavily rely on user-generated content to evaluate products and services before making a purchase. Reviews act as a modern form of word-of-mouth communication, significantly influencing perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately purchase intention.

The findings indicate that both the quality and quantity of reviews, along with overall ratings, play a crucial role in building consumer trust. Positive reviews and higher ratings increase confidence and encourage purchases, while negative reviews can deter potential buyers. However, the presence of a balanced mix of reviews can enhance authenticity and make the information more credible.

Trust emerges as a key factor in this relationship. Consumers are more likely to act on reviews when they perceive them as genuine, detailed, and unbiased. On the other hand, fake or manipulated reviews reduce trust and negatively impact purchase intention. Therefore, trust acts as a mediating variable between online reviews and consumer decision-making.

Overall, the study concludes that online reviews and ratings have a significant and direct impact on purchase intention, with trust serving as a critical link. For businesses, maintaining transparency and encouraging honest customer feedback is essential to build long-term credibility and customer loyalty in the digital marketplace.

Suggestions:

For Businesses

1. Companies should encourage genuine customer reviews after purchase to build trust and credibility.
2. Businesses must actively respond to both positive and negative reviews to show transparency and customer care.
3. Focus should be given to improving product quality and service, as negative reviews directly impact purchase intention.
4. Brands should avoid unethical practices like fake reviews, as they damage long-term reputation.

For E-commerce Platforms

1. Platforms should implement strict verification systems to identify and remove fake or spam reviews.
2. Introduce “verified purchase” labels to increase credibility of reviews.
3. Provide filter and sorting options (e.g., most helpful, latest reviews) for better user experience.
4. Use advanced technologies like AI-based detection systems to monitor review authenticity.

For Consumers

1. Consumers should analyze multiple reviews rather than relying on a single opinion.
2. Focus on detailed and balanced reviews instead of only star ratings.
3. Be cautious of extremely positive or repetitive reviews, which may be fake.
4. Compare reviews across different platforms before making a final decision.

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