

Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumer Trust

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijst.v2i6.107>

Cite this Article: Vishwakarma, P. R. (2026). Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumer Trust. International Journal of Science, Strategic Management and Technology, 02(6). <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijst.v2i6.107>

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ABSTRACT

Online shopping has transformed the way people discover, evaluate, and buy products. At the centre of this transformation sits one quiet but powerful force — the opinions that customers leave behind after a purchase. Online reviews and ratings have become the single most consulted source of information for buyers who cannot touch, try, or inspect a product before spending their money. This study examines how those reviews and ratings shape the trust that Indian consumers place in products, sellers, and e-commerce platforms, and how that trust ultimately guides their buying decisions.

The study was conducted among 200 respondents from three North Indian cities — Dehradun, Roorkee, and Saharanpur — covering a demographic that is young, digitally active, and deeply familiar with platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Meesho. A structured questionnaire was distributed through online channels, and the responses were analysed using descriptive statistical methods including frequency counts, percentage analysis, and cross-tabulations. The sample was drawn primarily from students and working professionals between the ages of 18 and 35, which reflects the segment of the Indian population most engaged in regular online shopping.

The findings paint a clear picture. An overwhelming majority of respondents — over 84% — said they read reviews before making a purchase, and 76.5% confirmed that those reviews directly influence what they end up buying. This is not passive reading for curiosity; consumers are using reviews as a decision-making tool, weighing the experiences of previous buyers before committing their own money. Among the different types of reviews available, customer reviews written by ordinary buyers were trusted most, ranked well above expert opinions, social media posts, and influencer endorsements. This preference for peer voices over professional or promotional content reflects a broader awareness that people who have nothing to gain from a review are more likely to be honest about it.

Star ratings proved equally significant. Eight out of ten respondents said they trust higher-rated products more, confirming that numerical scores function as a quick but powerful signal of product quality. Negative reviews were found to carry particular weight — 67% of respondents said they had changed a purchase decision after reading critical feedback, a figure that underlines how strongly the fear of a bad experience drives consumer behaviour. When it came to format, written text reviews remained the most preferred way to receive product information, though video reviews are steadily gaining ground among younger buyers.

The study also found that fake reviews are widely recognised and deeply damaging. Over 81% of respondents said that dishonest reviews reduce their trust in a product or platform, highlighting the responsibility that both businesses and platforms carry in maintaining the integrity of their review systems. At the same time, 88.5% of respondents said genuine reviews help them make better decisions, and 80% said reviews have increased their confidence before purchasing.

Taken together, the study concludes that online reviews and ratings are not a supplementary feature of e-commerce — they are a core pillar of consumer trust. For businesses operating in the Indian digital marketplace, earning and maintaining authentic customer feedback is no longer optional. It is the foundation on which trust, credibility, and long-term growth are built.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction of the study

Online reviews and ratings are user-generated evaluations published on digital platforms, where consumers who have purchased or experienced a product or service voluntarily share their opinions, assessments, and numeric scores for others to read before making a similar decision. They operate as aggregated, publicly accessible feedback systems that sit at the intersection of peer recommendation and digital information sharing. Unlike promotional content produced by brands, these reviews are authored by ordinary buyers and platform users, which gives them a character that no paid advertisement can replicate — they are perceived as relatively honest accounts of real experiences. Star ratings compress this qualitative feedback into a numeric shorthand, typically on a scale of one to five, allowing prospective buyers to form rapid judgments about quality, reliability, or value. Together, the combination of textual narrative and a numeric score forms what researchers now widely describe as electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM — a digital evolution of the oldest form of commercial communication that humans have always relied on (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The roots of this behaviour stretch back well before the internet. Consumers have always sought the opinions of people they trust before spending money, and this informal exchange of product and service information between individuals was for decades confined to face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, and written letters. Merchants in earlier commercial eras understood that a satisfied customer who told three neighbours was more persuasive than a storefront sign, and a dissatisfied one who told ten was a threat no advertising budget could easily neutralize. Formal channels like customer suggestion boxes, postal feedback cards, and telephone complaint lines emerged in the mid-twentieth century as businesses attempted to manage and respond to consumer sentiment in a more structured way. These mechanisms, however, were private by design — the feedback reached the brand but no other consumers. The shift to digital communication changed that arrangement entirely. When platforms such as Amazon began soliciting product reviews from buyers in the mid-1990s, they created something genuinely new: a publicly visible, permanent, and searchable record of collective consumer experience that any visitor to the site could read before deciding whether to buy. The commercial significance of this shift was demonstrated empirically by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), who studied book sales across two major online retailers and found that improvements in a book's average review score produced measurable increases in sales, with the effect of negative reviews being particularly pronounced in influencing consumer decisions.

The growth of this review ecosystem over the past two decades has been shaped by several technological and social forces, but nowhere has the acceleration been as compressed and dramatic as in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. When physical retail became inaccessible during lockdowns across India and much of the world, consumers who had previously relied on in-store experiences and face-to-face recommendations were pushed online in large numbers and at significant speed. Smartphone penetration in India, which has reached hundreds of millions of users across both urban and rural populations, provided the access layer for this migration. The concurrent expansion of mobile data at affordable rates, driven by the competitive pricing of major telecom providers, meant that e-commerce was no longer a metro-centric phenomenon. Shoppers from tier-two and tier-three cities began interacting with platforms

like Flipkart, Amazon India, Meesho, and Myntra, and they brought with them the same uncertainty that any first-time digital buyer carries — doubt about whether what they would receive matched what the screen showed them. The impact of online reviews on e-commerce sales in India has since been examined in the context of exactly these buyers, and research indicates that positive and negative reviews affect consumer decision-making differently depending on whether the buyer is in a large city or a smaller one, suggesting that the psychological weight of peer feedback is especially strong where prior digital trust has not been established (Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2021).

The range of sectors and platforms that now rely on consumer-generated ratings as a functional part of their service interface has expanded well beyond product retail. Food delivery applications such as Zomato and Swiggy present restaurant ratings and review summaries as standard elements of their ordering interface, and a restaurant's aggregate score on these platforms has become a credibility signal that directly affects whether a user chooses to place an order. Travel portals including MakeMyTrip, Goibibo, and global platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com present hotel and experience ratings as primary sorting criteria. In the hospitality sector, the influence of these ratings is particularly well-documented: research by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) demonstrated through an experimental study that exposure to online hotel reviews significantly affected consumer consideration of hotels, and that positive reviews improved attitudes toward properties, especially lesser-known ones — a finding with direct relevance to the Indian hospitality sector, where the market includes a large proportion of independent and regional hotels competing for consumer attention against better-known chains. Beyond hospitality and food, healthcare aggregators, domestic services platforms like Urban Company, and personal finance comparison portals have all incorporated review systems as default features. In each case, the rationale is consistent: user-generated feedback reduces the perceived risk of choosing a service provider or product that the consumer cannot inspect or test before committing money.

This risk-reduction function is, from a marketing perspective, perhaps the most commercially significant thing that online reviews actually do. Classical information economics holds that markets work most efficiently when buyers and sellers have roughly equal access to relevant information about a product or service. In practice, this is rarely true, and the gap between what a seller knows about their offering and what a prospective buyer can independently verify is what economists call information asymmetry. Traditional advertising narrows this gap partly, but it carries an obvious credibility problem — the seller has a financial interest in the message being positive, and consumers are broadly aware of this. A published review by a previous buyer who has no financial stake in the outcome represents a qualitatively different kind of information. It is not perfectly reliable, and the literature acknowledges problems of fake reviews, incentivized testimonials, and selective presentation, but in aggregate it serves to bring the buyer closer to an informed position than promotional material alone would allow. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) examined this dynamic by analyzing a large sample of customer reviews on Amazon.com and found that review depth — the amount of detailed, substantive information contained in a review — significantly predicted how helpful consumers found it, and that this effect varied depending on whether the product was a search good (one whose attributes can be evaluated before purchase) or an experience good (one that must be consumed to be assessed). Experience goods, which include most services, restaurant meals, hotel stays, and a wide range of fashion and personal care products, are precisely the categories that dominate high-growth e-commerce segments in India, making the review system's role in providing pre-purchase evaluative information especially important in this market context. The psychological mechanism through which this information translates into consumer trust is not a simple linear process. A buyer reading reviews on a platform is not just accumulating data points; they are engaging in what behavioural researchers describe as a process of social proof, drawing inferences about appropriate or safe choices from the observed behaviour and reported experiences of others. Filieri (2016), in a study examining what makes online consumer reviews trustworthy, found that authenticity perceptions and the perceived helpfulness of reviews significantly shaped the degree of trust consumers placed in them, and through that trust, their purchase intentions. The implication for brands and platforms is significant: it is not the mere presence of reviews that builds consumer confidence, but the perceived credibility of those reviews. A product with two hundred reviews averaging 4.2 stars may be trusted more readily than one with ten reviews averaging 4.8 stars, not because the aggregate score is higher, but because the volume and distribution of feedback signals that real, varied people have formed opinions about it. This is a form of trust construction that operates through quantity, variety, and perceived authenticity rather than through the persuasive messaging of the brand itself.

Within the Indian consumer context, the relationship between online reviews and trust carries dimensions that are shaped by local behavioural patterns, cultural tendencies, and the specific structure of the domestic e-commerce market. Research by Aeron et al. (2019), conducted in collaboration with management institutions in Delhi and Gurgaon and published in the *Journal of Internet Commerce*, examined the primary drivers of trust between Indian consumers and e-retailers. Their findings indicated that despite the growing scale of Indian e-commerce, consumer trust in online platforms remained lower than the market's potential would suggest, and that this gap was influenced by cultural factors and local elements that distinguish Indian buyers from those in more mature digital markets. In a retail environment where cash-on-delivery has historically been the preferred payment mode and where product returns remain a source of anxiety for many buyers, the credibility signal provided by a large volume of genuine reviews carries particular weight. An Indian consumer evaluating a mid-range electronics product or an unfamiliar clothing brand on Flipkart is likely to scroll through multiple reviews, read both positive and negative ones, and form a judgment not just about the product but about whether the seller is trustworthy. The review is serving, in this scenario, as a substitute for the physical inspection and social recommendation that traditional retail formats made available.

The present study is built directly around this dynamic. The research examines the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust specifically within the Indian market, and it attempts to understand both the extent of that impact and the behavioural and psychological channels through which it operates. The study is concerned with how consumers evaluate reviews — what signals of authenticity or helpfulness they respond to, whether they weight negative reviews more heavily than positive ones, how star ratings as numerical proxies of satisfaction affect confidence in the absence of textual detail, and what kinds of prior experience with a platform or product category moderate the relationship between review exposure and trust formation. It is also concerned with the inverse: the conditions under which reviews provoke skepticism rather than confidence, and how the Indian consumer's awareness of fake or manipulated reviews — a concern that has grown with media coverage of fraudulent review practices on major platforms — affects their overall reliance on this form of feedback. The study thus sits at the intersection of consumer psychology, digital marketing, and information behaviour research, and it engages with a demographic that is large, growing, economically diverse, and underrepresented in the global academic literature on eWOM and trust.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond academic interest. As Indian e-commerce continues to expand and as the competition among platforms intensifies, the management of consumer-generated feedback has become a strategic marketing priority. Brands and platform operators need to understand not just whether reviews matter, but how they matter, for whom they matter most, and under what conditions

they can fail to perform the trust-building function that justifies their central place in the consumer interface. This study is designed to contribute answers to those questions, drawing on primary data collected from Indian consumers across age groups and purchase categories, and situating those findings within the existing international literature on eWOM, consumer trust, and online decision-making behaviour.

Chapter – 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the foundational empirical contributions to understanding how online reviews shape consumer purchase decisions comes from Fernandes et al. (2022), who developed and validated a measurement scale for this relationship. Conducted across Indian institutions, including Symbiosis International University, Xavier Institute of Management Bhubaneswar, and Management Development Institute, the study collected data from 431 young online shoppers. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, the researchers identified four key dimensions: source credibility, volume of reviews, language and comprehension quality, and review relevance. The study concluded that consumer trust in both the seller and the product is directly contingent on how credible and relevant they perceive the reviews to be, and that these four dimensions together account for the bulk of variation in purchase decisions. The authors noted that their scale was developed within a general e-commerce context and called for future research to apply it to specific product categories and consumer segments.

Building on how consumer-generated content interacts with brand perception, Khan et al. (2023) examined Indian consumers of branded apparel, surveying 303 respondents and analysing the data through structural equation modelling

using SPSS v24 and AMOS v23. Published in the *Research Journal of Textile and Apparel* by Emerald, the study found that electronic word of mouth has a statistically significant positive influence on both brand equity and purchase intention, with brand equity partially mediating the eWOM–purchase intention relationship. The research demonstrated that positive online reviews and peer endorsements are a cost-efficient mechanism for influencing Indian consumers' purchase decisions for branded clothing. A key limitation was that the dataset was drawn from respondents specifically interested in branded apparel, which constrains generalisability across unbranded or commodity products.

A follow-up study by the same author group, Khan et al. (2025), extended this inquiry by examining how social media usage and eWOM jointly influence purchase intention through brand equity as a mediator. Surveying 317 Indian consumers of branded apparel and using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4, the study, published in the *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences* by Emerald, confirmed that both variables have significant positive effects on purchase intention while simultaneously building brand equity. The findings reinforced the argument that trust established through online opinions does not operate independently of brand perception — it works through it. The authors noted the sample was again limited to branded apparel consumers, with category-specific factors potentially moderating results differently in other contexts.

From a user-generated content and perceived usefulness perspective, Sahai et al. (2024) examined how these variables influence consumer trust and, through it, online purchase decisions among Indian digital shoppers. Using snowball sampling and Smart PLS 3.0, the researchers found that both perceived usefulness and UGC consistently predict higher consumer trust, which in turn positively drives buying decisions. Published in the *International Journal of Business Excellence* by Inderscience, the study offered practical implications for digital marketing teams designing trust-building platform strategies. A limitation identified was that snowball sampling may introduce self-selection bias, and the study did not control for demographic differences in how consumers process user-generated content.

At the direct intersection of online ratings and consumer trust, a study published in *Advances in Consumer Research* (2025) conducted in Kerala offers one of the most focused Indian examinations of the dynamic this dissertation addresses. Using a cross-sectional survey, the researchers captured perceptions of review valence, average star ratings, consumer trust, and purchase intention among adult online shoppers who had made purchases in the previous six months. The analysis, conducted through regression and mediation procedures, found that both positive review valence and higher star ratings are strongly associated with greater consumer trust, which in turn shows a large positive relationship with purchase intention. The Kerala context reveals that consumers with strong digital connectivity still rely heavily on peer ratings before committing to purchases, suggesting the psychological link between star ratings and trust is robust across income and education groups.

Staying within India but shifting to a Tier-2 setting, a study published in *JETIR* (2025) investigated consumer trust in online reviews and ratings in Erode District. The research found that trust is significantly shaped by three variables: whether purchases are verified, the perceived credibility of the reviewer, and whether businesses actively respond to negative feedback. The study emphasised that high ratings alone are insufficient to build trust when consumers suspect manipulation, and that verified purchase badges and visible business responsiveness now function as secondary trust signals. The limitation flagged was the localised geographic scope and the absence of cross-platform comparison between major e-commerce players.

Jain et al. (2023), writing in *ShodhKosh* published by Granthaalayah, examined how online reviews influence purchase decisions in the online food delivery industry. Grounding their analysis in Information Processing Theory and social proof, the researchers found that a credible review environment on food delivery platforms positively affects perceived reliability and drives higher conversion rates. They argued that reviews in food delivery operate differently from general e-commerce because delivery time and food quality are intangible until experienced, making peer reviews the dominant pre-purchase information source. Pattanshetty and V (2024), in a related *ShodhKosh* study from Bengaluru, found that restaurants

with higher ratings are algorithmically ranked higher on Swiggy and Zomato, directly determining platform visibility and order volumes. The study established that digital ratings in food delivery are active commercial inputs rather than passive feedback, though a limitation was its focus on the seller side rather than consumer trust formation.

Sood and Taneja (2024), from DAV University Jalandhar and published in *ShodhKosh*, took a qualitative approach to online product reviews by applying topic modelling to Indian consumer-generated review content. Their analysis identified three dominant themes: functional utility, sensory experience, and detailed product attributes. The study found that the structural characteristics of reviews — specificity, length, and expressed consumer context — determine perceived helpfulness more than valence alone, adding qualitative nuance to an otherwise quantitative literature on review impact.

A broader consumption and social media marketing study by Kaurabhathi and Shrivastava (2024), published in *ShodhKosh* and conducted among Indian online consumers from Indore, found that consumer-generated content carries more persuasive weight than brand-initiated advertising among younger demographics. The study noted that female consumers and younger shoppers showed greater responsiveness to negative reviews, echoing gender-moderated findings in the broader review literature.

Reading across this body of work, a recognisable set of concentrations becomes visible. The majority of Indian research on online reviews and consumer trust has focused on general e-commerce platforms — primarily Amazon and Flipkart — or on category-specific studies involving branded apparel. Fernandes et al. (2022) and Sahai et al. (2024) address broad digital shopping environments. Khan et al. (2023, 2025) focus on branded clothing. Food delivery studies by Jain et al. (2023) and Pattanshetty and V (2024) approach the question from the platform and seller perspective. Very few studies have examined trust formation in product categories where quality is difficult to verify before purchase — such as unbranded fashion, cosmetics, or third-party-sold electronics — and where the consumer relies almost exclusively on ratings and reviews to resolve their uncertainty about the product.

The gap this leaves is specific and addressable. While Indian research has established that reviews influence trust and that trust influences purchase intention, the mechanisms through which different types of ratings — verified versus unverified, text-heavy versus star-only, high-volume versus low-volume — differentially affect trust formation remain underexplored. No Indian study has examined these variations empirically across a mixed demographic sample spanning multiple product categories and age groups simultaneously. This is the space this dissertation occupies. By focusing specifically on how the nature and presentation of reviews and ratings affect the depth of consumer trust — rather than simply whether they affect it at all — this study contributes a more granular understanding of digital trust dynamics within India's rapidly growing e-commerce market.

CHAPTER – 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

3.1.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a Descriptive Research Design. The purpose of adopting this design is to observe, record, and describe the existing trends, preferences, and behavioural patterns of consumers in relation to online reviews and ratings and how these influences trust, without introducing any manipulation or intervention into the variables being studied. A descriptive approach is appropriate here because this research does not aim to test a causal hypothesis in an experimental sense; it aims to capture what is actually happening among a defined group of consumers at a given point in time. In the context of this study, that phenomenon is the degree to which Indian young consumers rely on reviews and ratings when deciding whether to trust an online seller or product. No variables have been artificially altered, and the study aims only to describe what consumers report doing and believing.

3.1.2 Nature of the Study

This study adopts a Mixed Methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection within a single research framework. The quantitative aspect of the study captures measurable, numeric indicators such as how frequently respondents read reviews before purchasing, what minimum rating threshold they typically require before completing a transaction. These closed-ended responses allow for statistical tabulation and percentage analysis across

the entire sample of 215 respondents. The qualitative aspect, meanwhile, captures the reasoning and sentiment behind those patterns through open-ended questions in the questionnaire where respondents describe in their own words what makes a review trustworthy or what would cause them to doubt a rating's authenticity.

3.1.3 Data Types

This study draws on two categories of data: primary and secondary. Primary data forms the core empirical foundation of the research and has been collected directly from first-hand consumer respondents through a structured questionnaire designed specifically for this study. Secondary data has been used to build the theoretical and contextual background of the study. This includes peer-reviewed academic journal articles sourced from Google Scholar, published market research reports such as those from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), and consumer affairs updates issued by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Government of India.

3.1.4 Data Collection Method

The primary data for this study was collected through a structured online questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was built using Google Forms and contained multiple-choice questions. The Google Form link was distributed digitally across communication groups on WhatsApp and Telegram, academic networks on LinkedIn, and direct sharing within college student communities in the selected geographic areas. This digital distribution method was chosen because the target demographic — digitally active young consumers — is most readily accessible through these channels, and the format of an online questionnaire reduces geographic and logistical barriers that a pen-and-paper survey would involve.

3.1.5 Target Respondents

The respondents for this study consist of digitally active young consumers across all genders, including undergraduate college students, postgraduate students, and early-career salaried professionals who actively engage in online shopping through smartphone-based applications. The study deliberately focuses on respondents who own and regularly use smartphones for digital commerce, as the research context — online reviews on mobile-first platforms — is directly relevant to this group. Geographically, the study is confined to consumers residing in three specific North Indian cities.

3.1.6 Sampling Design

- **Sample Technique:** The sampling technique employed is the non-probability sampling technique – Convenience sampling which involves selecting a sample of persons who are most accessible and willing to participate. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the convenience sampling is often used in exploratory and descriptive studies where the main aim is to collect sufficient data in a time and budget that is reasonably feasible.
- **Sample Size:** The Google Form link was sent out to a population of 300-350 eligible respondents in the regional network of Dehradun, Roorkee and Saharanpur regions. Of these, 200 were valid and completed responses and these were retrieved and retained successfully for analysis. Responses completed by people outside of the age range were not included or were incomplete.
- **Sample Unit:** The sampling unit is the individual young consumer living in these selected cities of North India and the results of this study do not necessarily reflect the attitudes and behaviours of a representative cross-section of the Indian youth as a nation

3.1.7 Analytical Tools

The collected raw data from the 200 completed responses was downloaded from Google Forms and saved as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to clean and manipulate. Responses were evaluated for fullness and consistency and any missing or off-topic responses were excluded from the analysis. The analysis used is descriptive in nature. Raw frequency counts

were converted to proportional values by percentage analysis for easier interpretation of the distribution of responses across the categories of questions. Frequency distributions illustrate the number of responses for each answer. Cross-tabulations examine the differences in demographic characteristics and usage patterns, including, for example, the differences between the frequency of use of deferred payment options among students and young professionals. The findings are presented using bar charts, pie charts and structured data tables, making the interpretations clearly and easily communicated.

3.1.8 Ethical Consideration

This study has been conducted with careful attention to research ethics throughout the data collection and analysis process. Prior to completing the questionnaire, all 200 respondents were shown an introductory consent note at the beginning of the Google Form, clearly explaining the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and that participation was entirely voluntary. No respondent was pressured or incentivized to participate. Complete anonymity has been maintained — the questionnaire did not collect any personally identifying information such as full names, phone numbers, home addresses, or financial details. Respondents were asked only for general demographic information such as age bracket, gender, educational level, and city of residence. The collected data has been used solely for the academic purposes of this dissertation and has not been shared with any third party. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that informed consent and participant anonymity are foundational obligations of the ethical researcher, and this study has treated both as non-negotiable conditions of its design.

3.1.9 Objective of the Study

1. To analyse the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust.
2. To study the influence of customer feedback on online purchase decisions.
3. To examine the role of online reviews in building trust in e-commerce platforms.

3.1.10 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is defined by its geographic, demographic, and subject matter boundaries, all of which flow directly from the descriptive research design adopted. Geographically, the study is limited to consumers in Dehradun, Roorkee, and Saharanpur — three cities in North India representing a mix of educational, technical, and commercial urban environments within the broader Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh region. The study makes no claim to represent the entire Indian population of online consumers; its findings are specific to the youth demographic within this defined geographic area. Demographically, the scope covers young consumers between approximately eighteen and thirty years of age, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and early-career professionals who regularly use smartphones and digital commerce platforms. The subject matter scope is focused specifically on the relationship between online reviews and ratings and consumer trust — how exposure to peer-generated textual reviews and numeric star ratings shapes the confidence levels of these consumers before making a purchase. The study does not extend to post-purchase behaviour, brand loyalty, or the supply-side practices of platforms in managing reviews, though these are acknowledged as related areas for future research.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

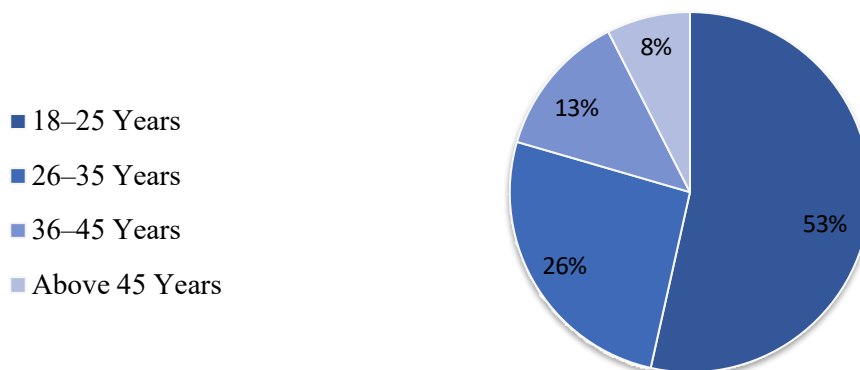
4.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Section A: Respondent Profile

Q1. Age Group of Respondents

Response	Count	Percentage
18–25 Years	107	53.5%
26–35 Years	52	26.0%
36–45 Years	26	13.0%
Above 45 Years	15	7.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Age Group of Respondents

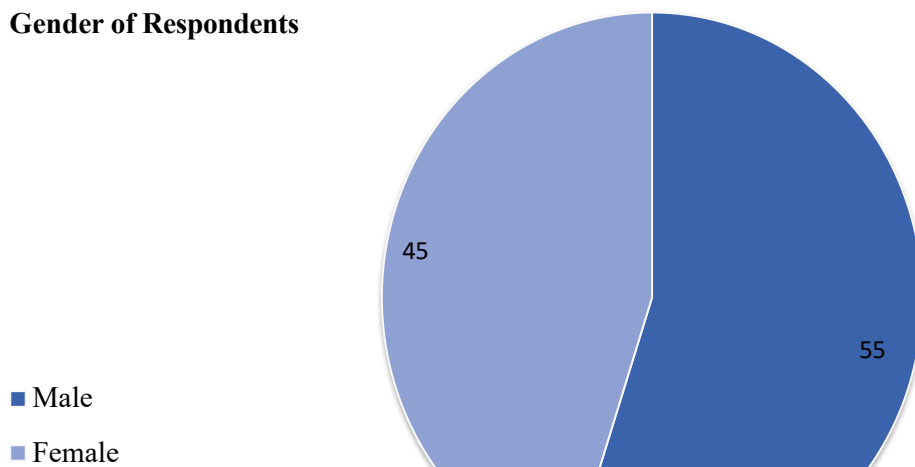


The majority of participants fall within the 18–25 age group, making it the dominant segment in this survey. The 26–35 age group is the second largest. Older respondents (36–45 years and above 45 years) are represented in smaller numbers. This age distribution reflects the general trend in India where younger consumers are more active online shoppers and more likely to engage with digital platforms.

Q2. Gender of Respondents

Response	Count	Percentage
Male	110	55.0%
Female	90	45.0%
Total	200	100.0%

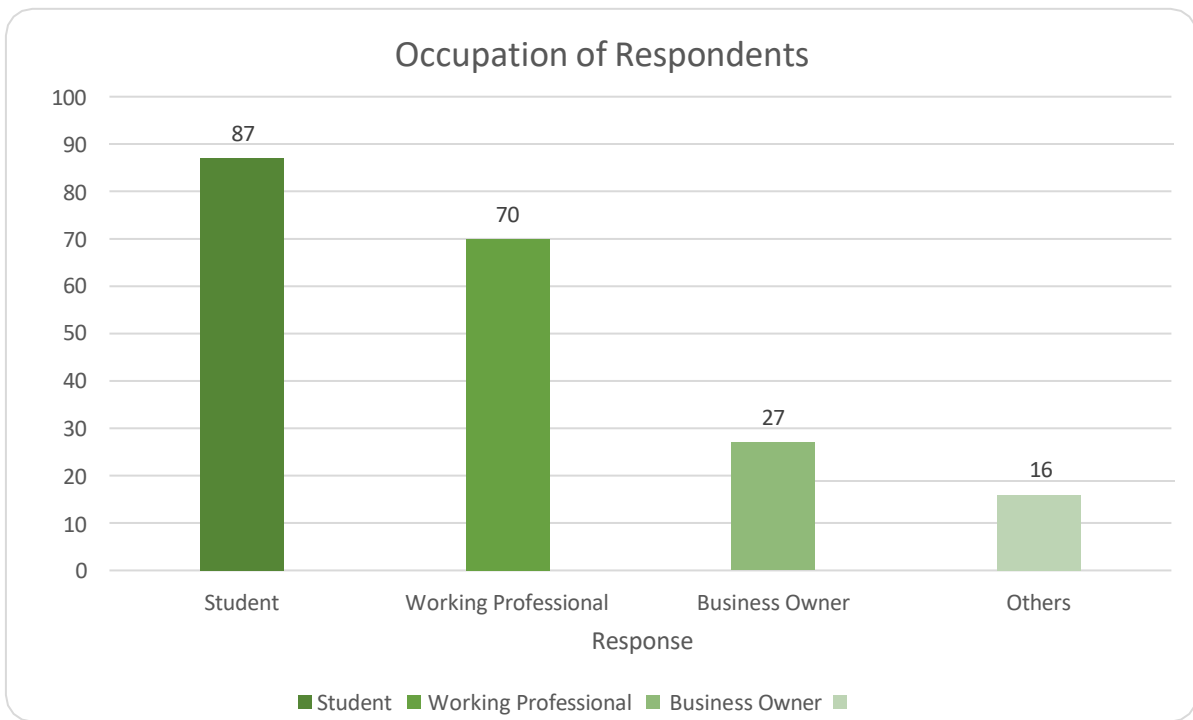
Gender of Respondents



Male respondents slightly outnumber female respondents in this survey. The distribution is reasonably balanced, which strengthens the reliability of findings across gender groups. This near-equal representation allows for a fair comparison of how different genders perceive and interact with online reviews

Q3. Occupation of Respondents

Response	Count	Percentage
Student	87	43.5%
Working Professional	70	35.0%
Business Owner	27	13.5%
Others	16	8.0%
Total	200	100.0%

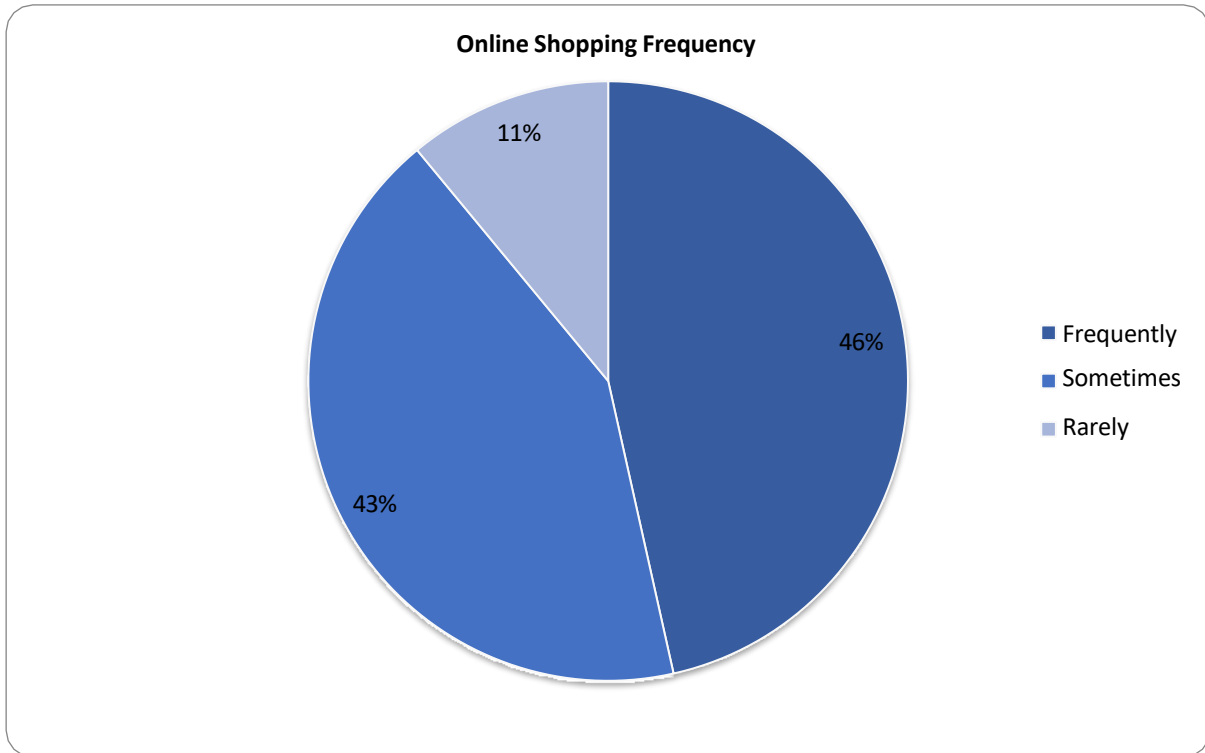


Students form the largest occupational group in this survey, followed by working professionals. Business owners and those who selected "Others" (such as freelancers or homemakers) constitute a smaller proportion. The high representation of students and working professionals is consistent with the demographics of active online shoppers in urban India.

Section B: Online Shopping Behaviour

Q4. Online Shopping Frequency

Response	Count	Percentage
Frequently	93	46.5%
Sometimes	85	42.5%
Rarely	22	11.0%
Total	200	100.0%



The majority of respondents shop online either "Frequently" or "Sometimes", together accounting for the bulk of the sample. Very few respondents said they shop "Rarely", which confirms that this survey captures the experiences of regular online shoppers. This is important as it means most respondents have repeated exposure to online reviews as part of their buying process.

Q5. Most Used Online Shopping Platform

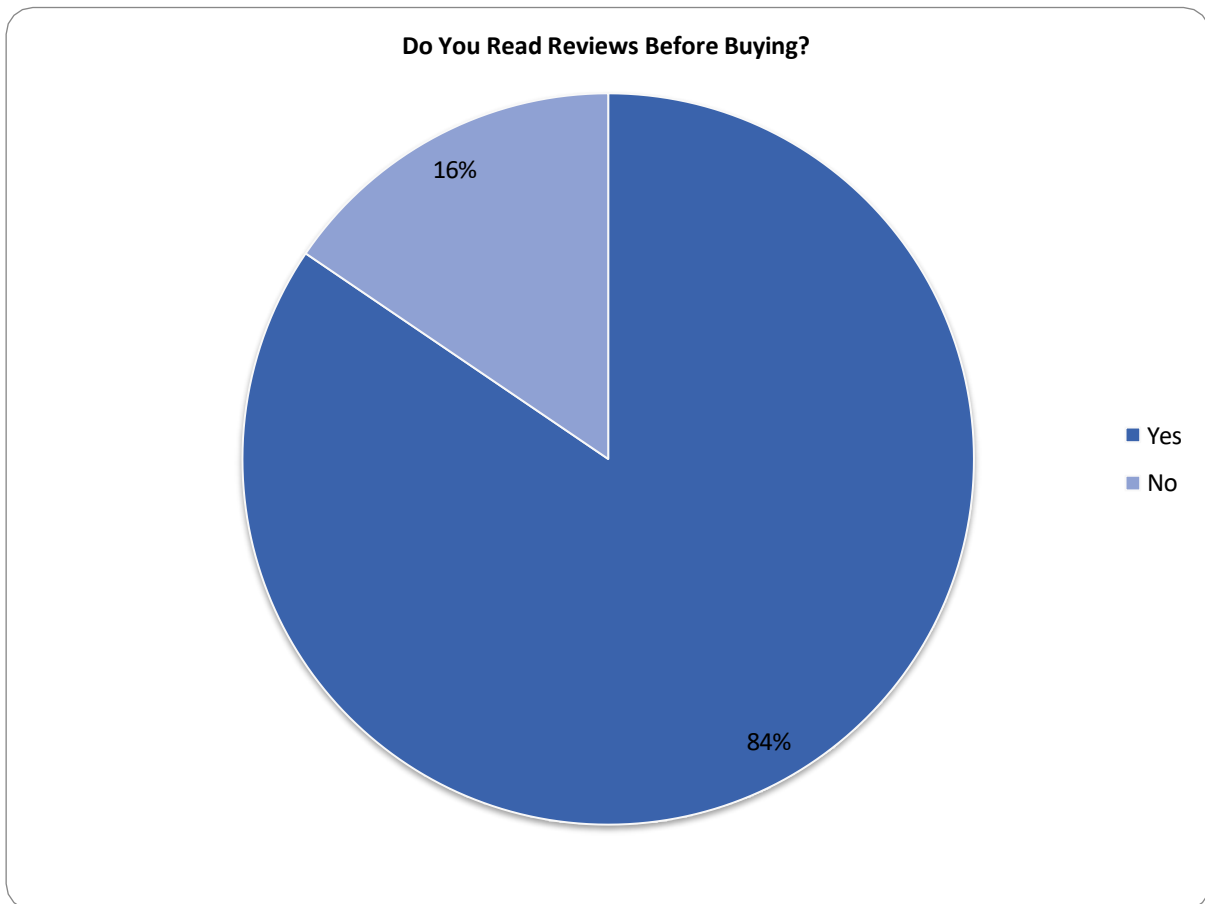
Response	Count	Percentage
Amazon	91	45.5%
Flipkart	50	25.0%
Myntra	25	12.5%
Meesho	21	10.5%
Others	13	6.5%
Total	200	100.0%



Amazon emerged as the most widely used platform, used by a clear majority of respondents. Flipkart is the second most preferred platform, followed by Meesho, Myntra, and a small group using other platforms. This finding aligns with Amazon and Flipkart's dominant positions in the Indian e-commerce market.

Q6. Do you read reviews before buying?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	169	84.5%
No	31	15.5%
Total	200	100.0%

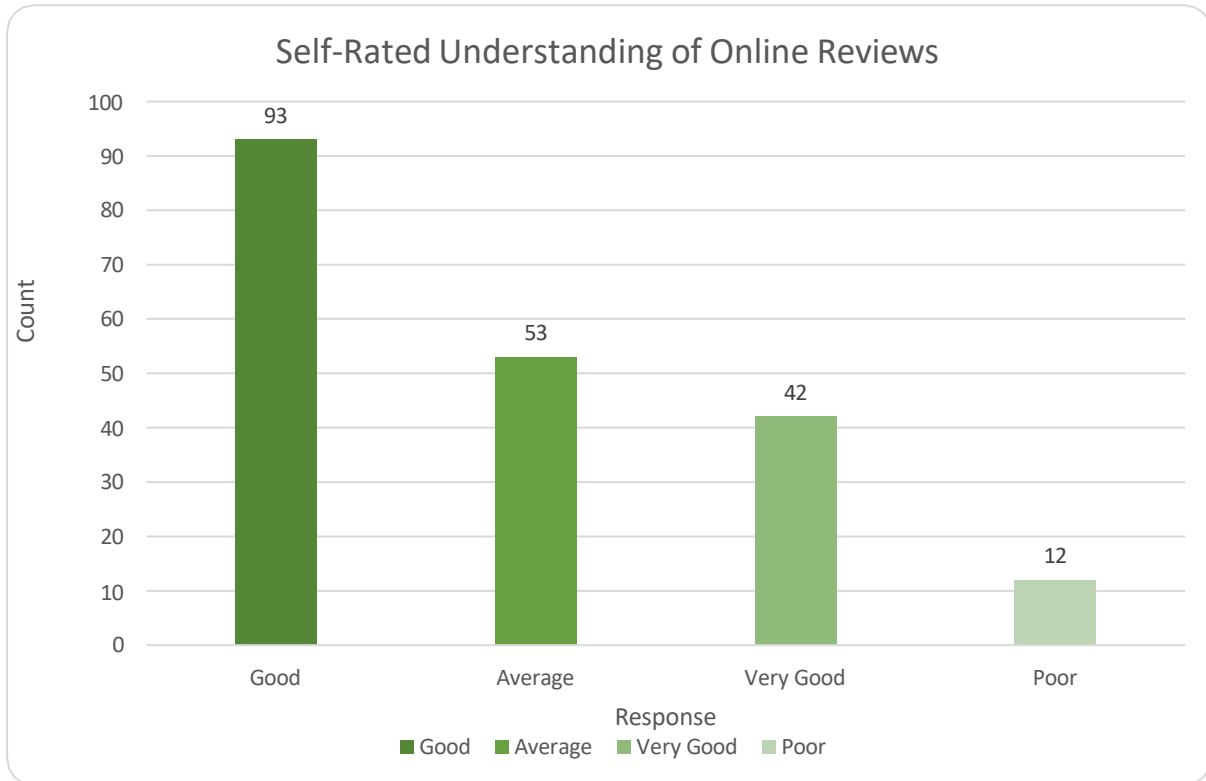


An overwhelming majority of respondents — over 90% — confirmed that they read reviews before making a purchase. Only a very small number said they do not. This is one of the most significant findings of this study, as it directly supports the premise that online reviews play a central role in the pre-purchase behaviour of modern consumers.

Section C: Understanding and Influence of Reviews

Q7. Self-Rated Understanding of Online Reviews

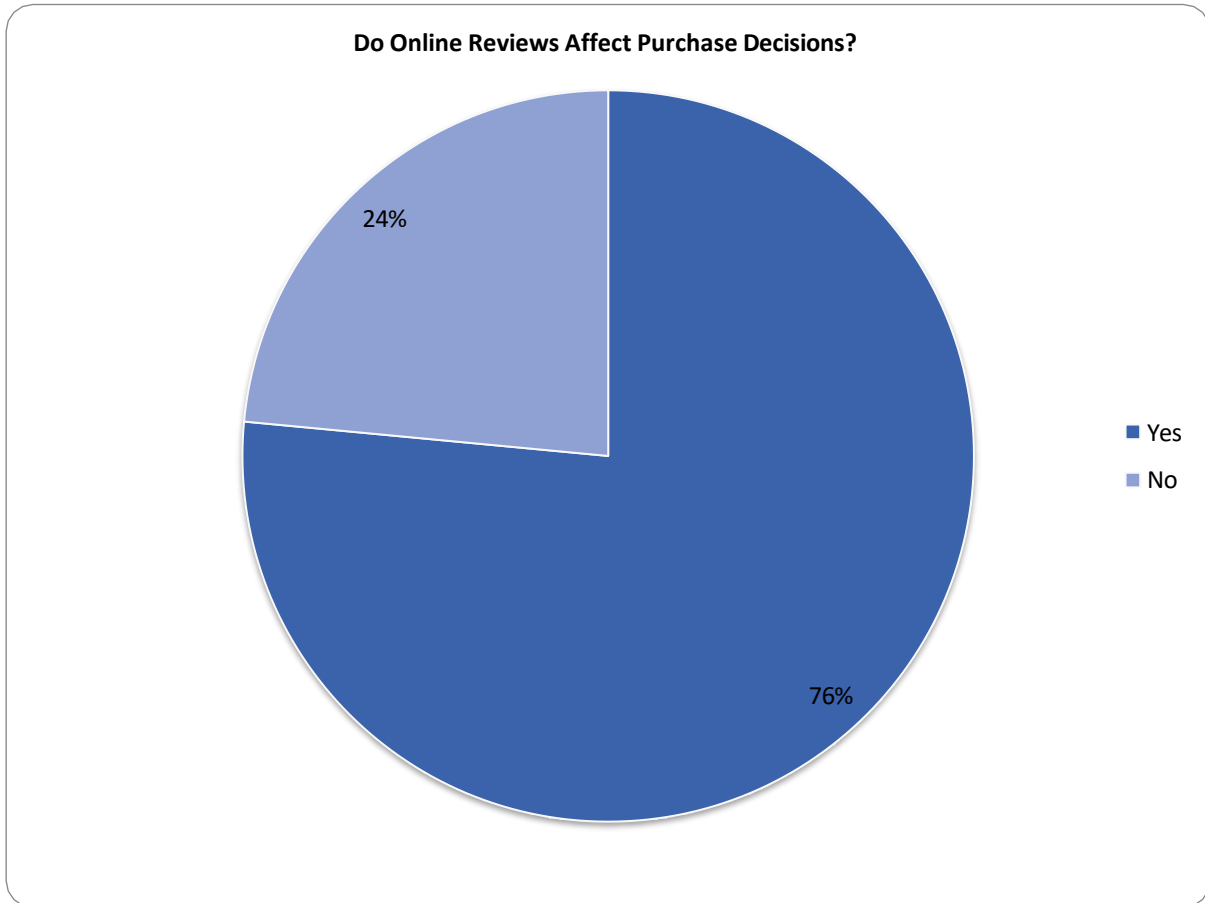
Response	Count	Percentage
Good	93	46.5%
Average	53	26.5%
Very Good	42	21.0%
Poor	12	6.0%
Total	200	100.0%



Most respondents rated their understanding of online reviews as "Good" or "Average", indicating a moderate to solid level of comprehension. A smaller group selected "Very Good", while only a few chose "Poor". This suggests that while most consumers engage with reviews meaningfully, there is room for platforms to improve how reviews are presented so that more users can interpret them accurately.

Q8. Do online reviews affect your purchase decisions?

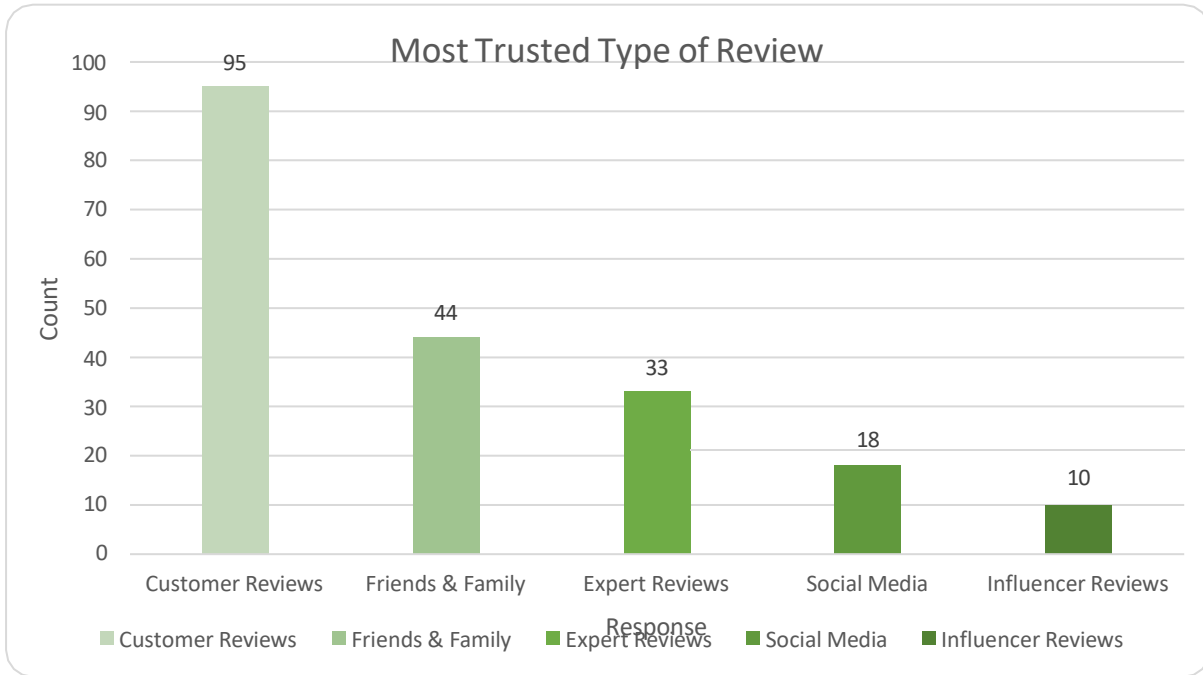
Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	153	76.5%
No	47	23.5%
Total	200	100.0%



A large majority of respondents confirmed that online reviews do affect their purchase decisions. Only a small fraction said they do not. This strongly supports the central argument of this dissertation — that online reviews are not just consumed passively but actively shape consumer choices.

Q9. Most Trusted Type of Review

Response	Count	Percentage
Customer Reviews	95	47.5%
Friends and Family Recommendations	44	22.0%
Expert Reviews	33	16.5%
Social Media Reviews	18	9.0%
Influencer Reviews	10	5.0%
Total	200	100.0%

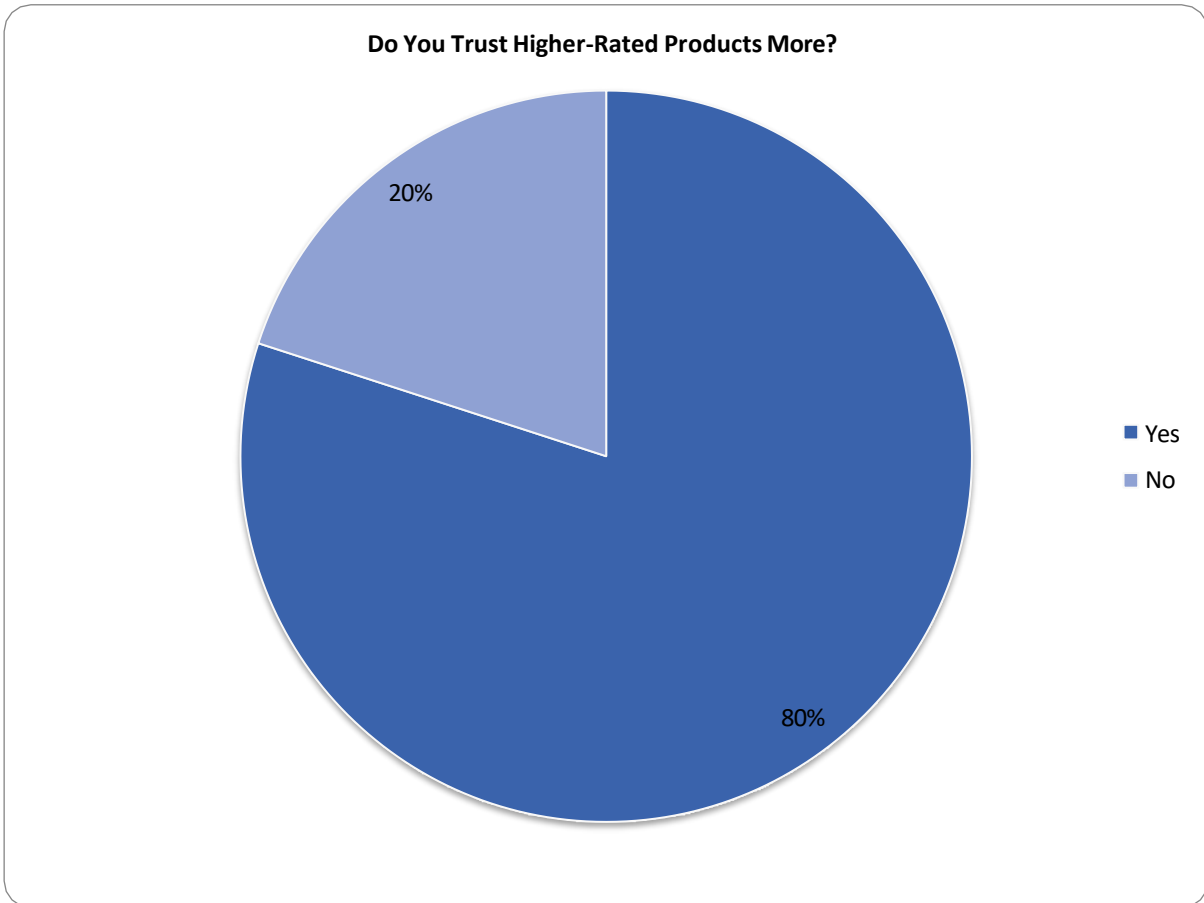


Customer Reviews (written by fellow buyers) were identified as the most trusted type by the largest share of respondents. Friends and Family Recommendations came in second, followed by Expert Reviews. Social Media Reviews and Influencer Reviews received relatively less trust. This suggests that peer-to-peer feedback holds the highest credibility in online shopping contexts, more so than professionally curated or promotional content.

Section D: Trust Indicators

Q10. Do you trust higher-rated products more?

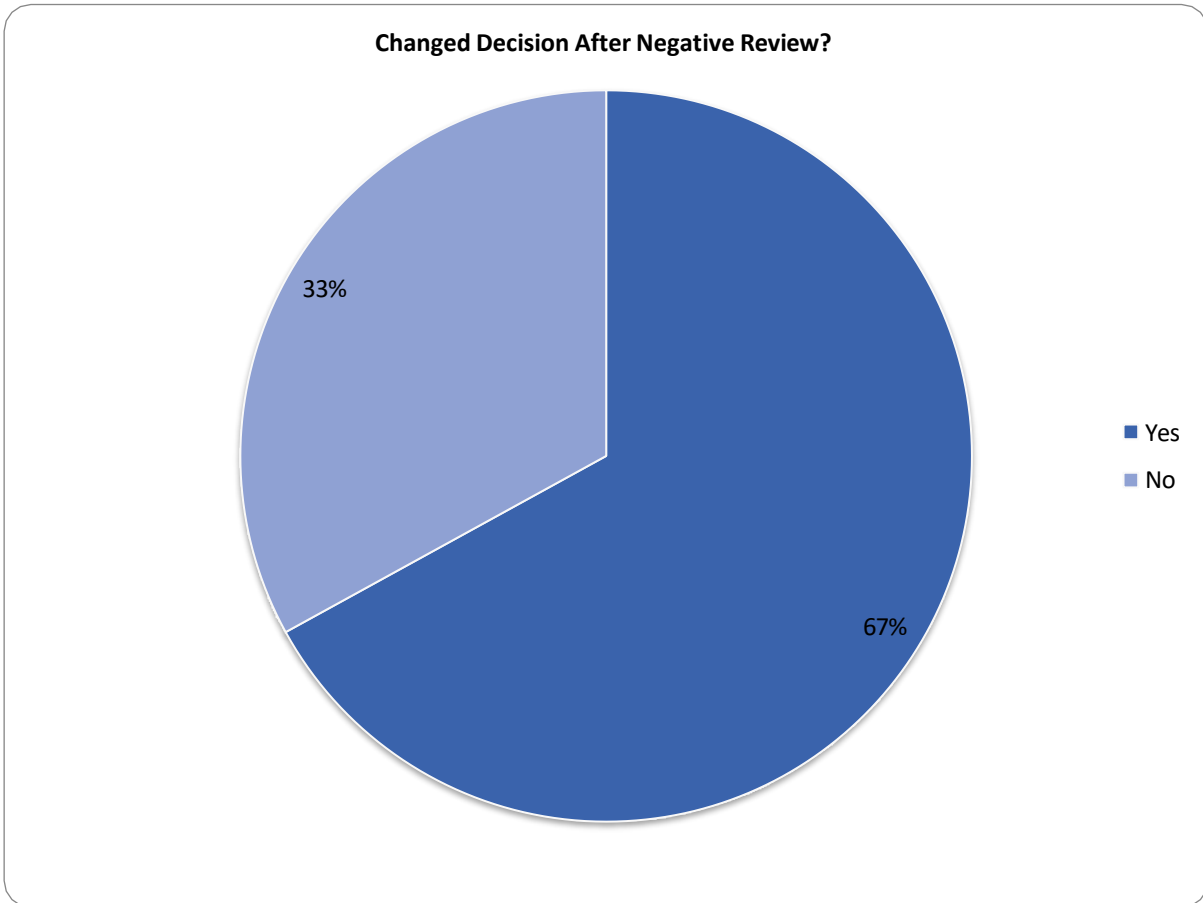
Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	160	80.0%
No	40	20.0%
Total	200	100.0%



A strong majority of respondents agreed that they trust products with higher ratings more. A small proportion disagreed. This confirms the significant psychological role that star ratings and numerical scores play in shaping consumer perceptions of quality and reliability.

Q11. Have you changed a decision after reading a negative review?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	134	67.0%
No	66	33.0%
Total	200	100.0%

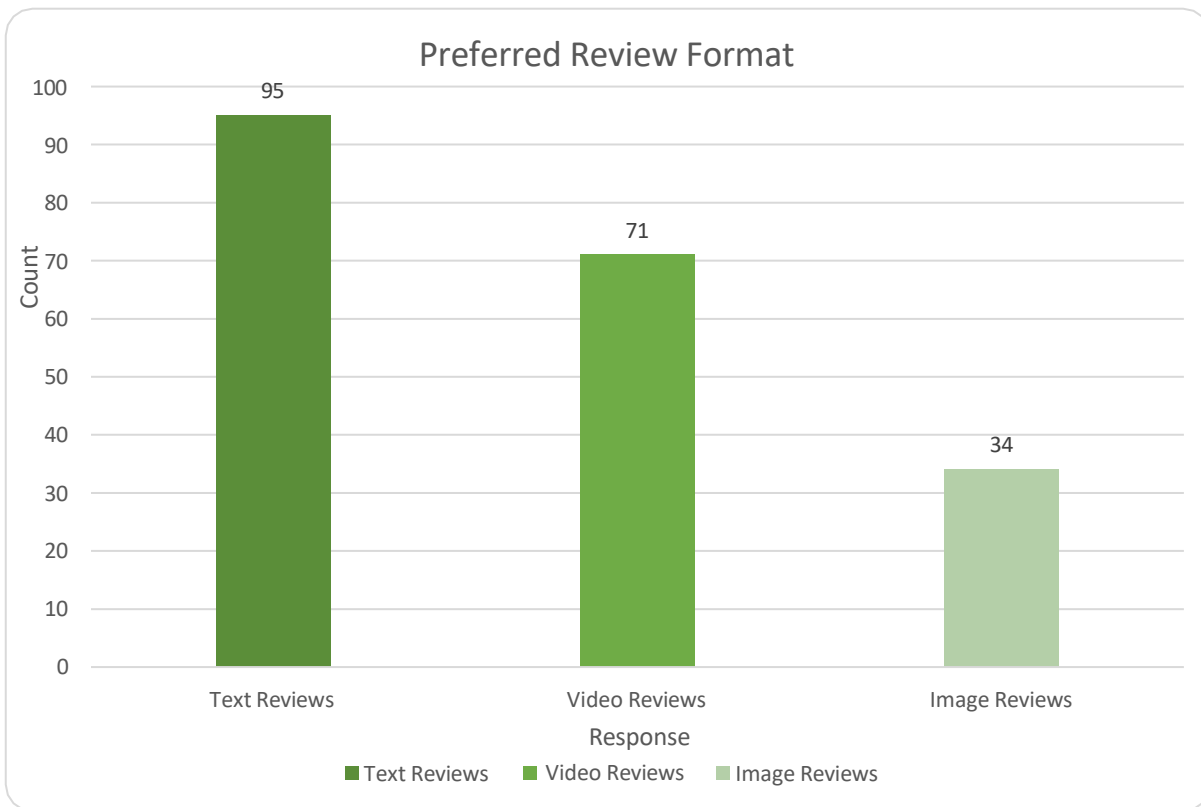


A clear majority of respondents reported that they have changed a purchase decision after reading a negative review. This illustrates that negative reviews carry considerable weight — often more than positive ones — in the final decision-making stage. This "loss aversion" effect is a well-recognised aspect of consumer behaviour.

Section E: Review Format Preferences

Q12. Preferred Review Format

Response	Count	Percentage
Text Reviews	95	47.5%
Video Reviews	71	35.5%
Image Reviews	34	17.0%
Total	200	100.0%

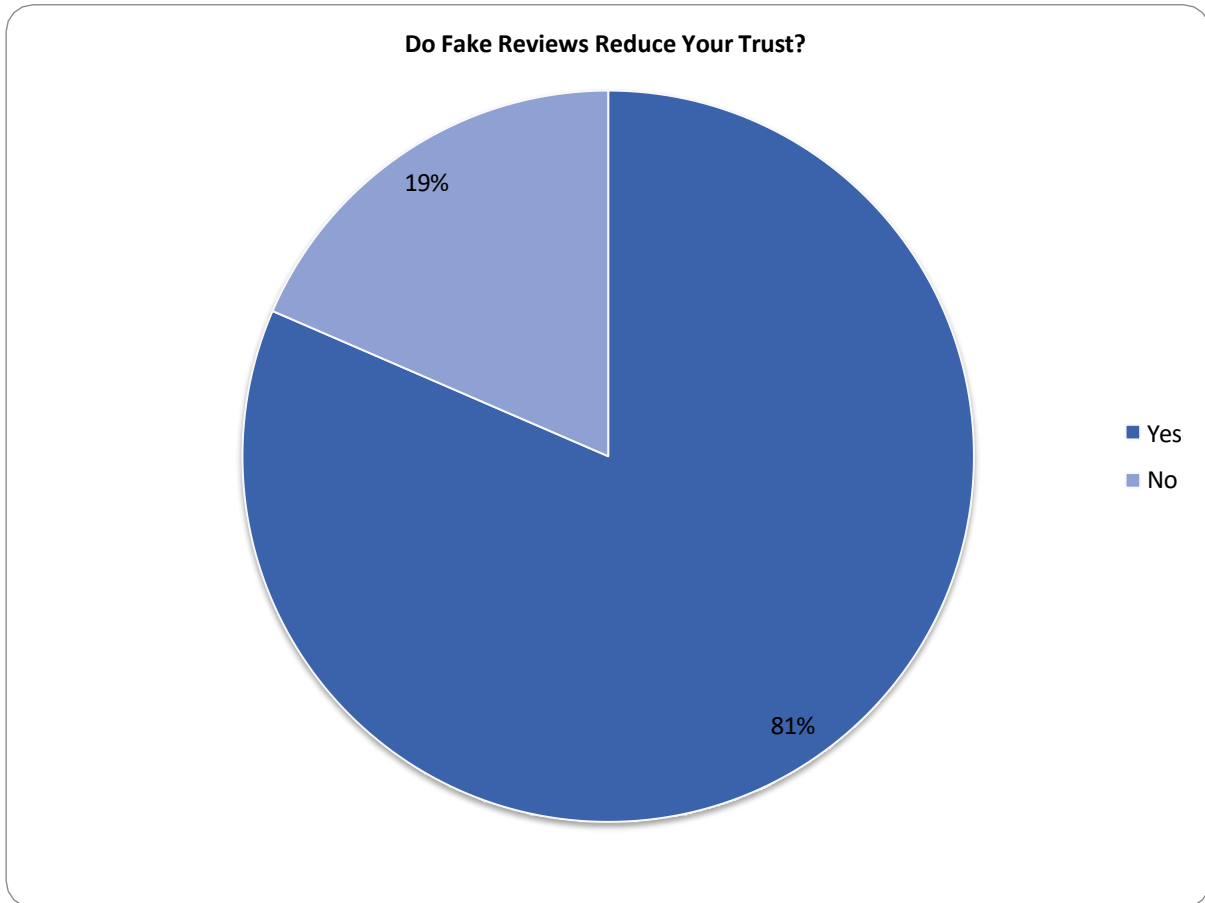


Text reviews were preferred by the largest share of respondents, followed by video reviews and image reviews. This finding indicates that despite the growing popularity of visual content, written reviews remain the primary format consumers rely on for detailed product information. Video reviews, however, are gaining ground, especially among younger demographics.

Section F: Impact on Trust and Business Growth

Q13. Do fake reviews reduce your trust in a product?

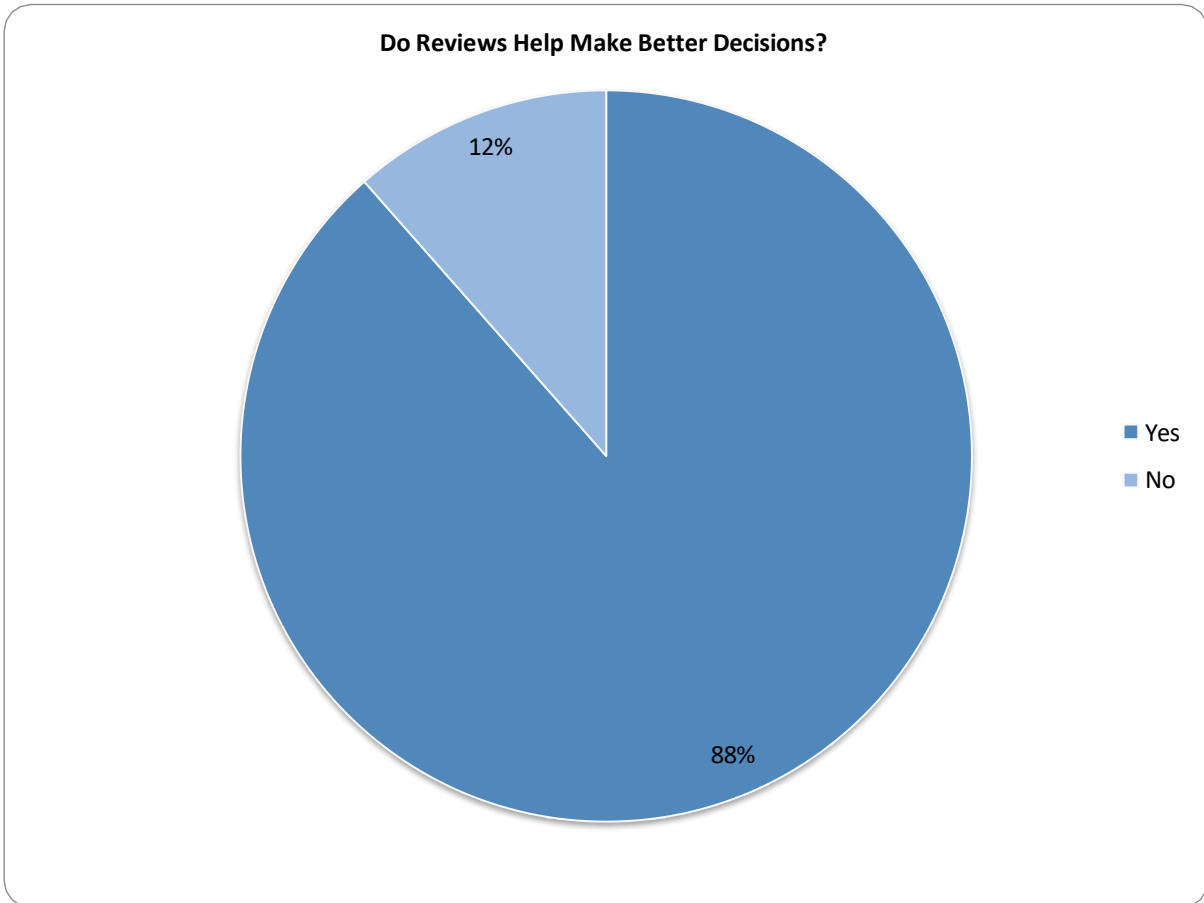
Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	163	81.5%
No	37	18.5%
Total	200	100.0%



The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that fake reviews reduce their trust. This is a significant finding for businesses and platforms alike. Fake or incentivised reviews are widely recognised by consumers, and their presence can undermine the overall credibility of a brand or platform.

Q14. Do reviews help you make better purchase decisions?

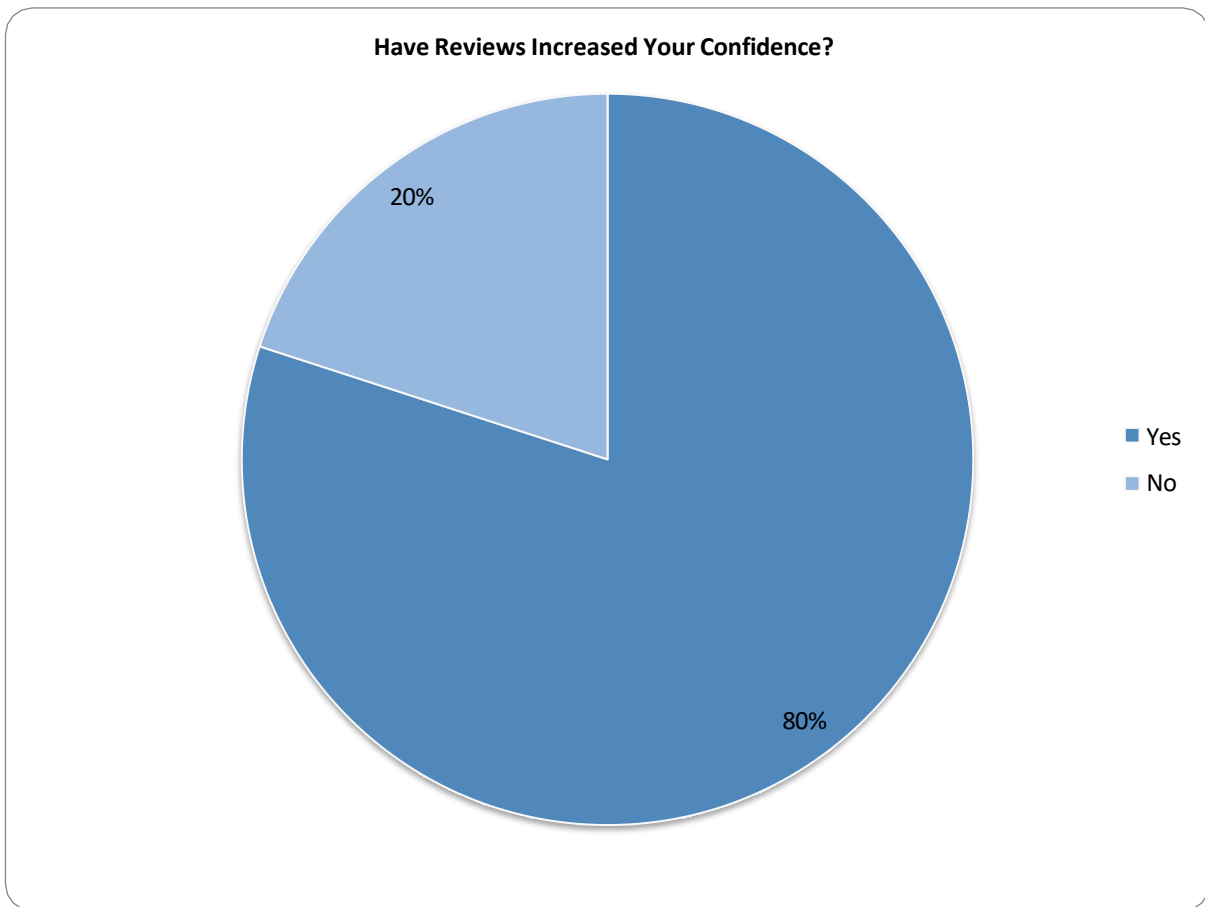
Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	177	88.5%
No	23	11.5%
Total	200	100.0%



Most respondents agreed that reviews help them make better purchase decisions. A small minority selected "No". This confirms the practical value consumers place on review systems — they are not merely informational but are genuinely considered decision-support tools in the online shopping journey.

Q15. Have reviews increased your confidence before purchasing?

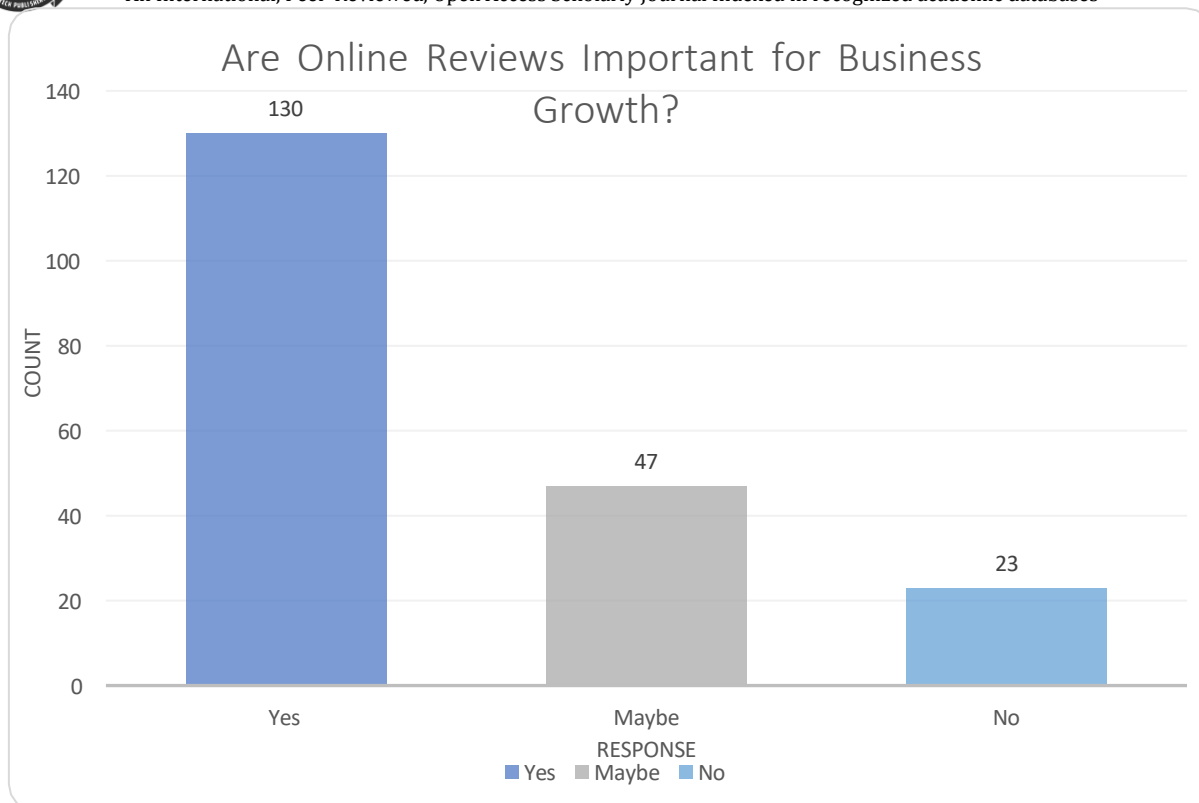
Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	160	80.0%
No	40	20.0%
Total	200	100.0%



A large proportion of respondents said that reviews have increased their confidence before making a purchase. A smaller share selected "Maybe", suggesting conditional trust depending on review quality or consistency. Very few said "No". This finding reinforces the trust-building function of online reviews.

Q16. Are online reviews important for business growth?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	130	65.0%
Maybe	47	23.5%
No	23	11.5%
Total	200	100.0%



The vast majority of respondents believe that online reviews are important for business growth. A smaller share selected "Maybe" or "No". Even from the consumer side, there is a broad awareness that reviews contribute to a brand's visibility, credibility, and ultimately its commercial success.

Overall interpretation:

The study of collected data provides a clear picture of the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust. The demographic data shows that the majority of the respondents belong to the 18–21 age group. This means that the survey is more representative of young consumers who are highly active on digital platforms and frequently rely on online information before making purchase decisions (Kothari, 2004). With regard to gender, the number of male respondents is larger than female respondents. This indicates that the findings are more influenced by the perspectives of male consumers, although female participation is also evident.

On looking at the occupation profile, it is found that most respondents are students, followed by working professionals and self-employed individuals. This suggests that the study largely focuses on digitally engaged consumers who regularly interact with online shopping platforms and review systems. The income distribution further reveals that a significant proportion of respondents fall within the lower-income category. This indicates that many consumers may depend on online reviews and ratings to minimize purchase risks and make informed decisions within their financial constraints (Malhotra, 2017).

The statistics suggest that the majority of respondents frequently check online reviews before purchasing a product or service. This indicates that online reviews have become an important source of information in the consumer decision-making process. Consumers increasingly seek the experiences and opinions of previous buyers to evaluate products and services before making a purchase commitment. Such behaviour reflects the growing importance of digital word-of-mouth in the modern marketplace (Saunders et al., 2019).

In terms of review platforms, many respondents rely on e-commerce websites and social media platforms for review information. This shows that these platforms play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing behaviour. Consumers often consider these sources convenient and accessible, making them highly effective channels for building trust and credibility among potential buyers.

The study also highlights that most respondents read multiple reviews before making a decision. This proves that consumers generally do not depend on a single review but prefer to compare different opinions before forming a judgment. Such behaviour helps reduce uncertainty and increases confidence in purchasing decisions. It also demonstrates the importance of having a sufficient number of reviews available for consumers to evaluate product quality and reliability.

The data further indicates that consumers trust online reviews when making purchase decisions. Many respondents agreed that reviews influence their buying choices and help

them assess products more effectively. Similarly, respondents reported that star ratings help them quickly judge the quality of a product or service. This suggests that ratings act as a simple and efficient tool that assists consumers in evaluating alternatives and making informed choices (Kothari, 2004).

Another important finding is that most respondents believe online reviews are genuine. This perception of authenticity increases consumer confidence and encourages greater reliance on reviews during the purchase process. At the same time, respondents indicated that verified buyer reviews are more trustworthy than unverified reviews. This highlights the significance of transparency and authenticity in strengthening consumer trust and reducing concerns about misleading or fake reviews (Malhotra, 2017).

The study also reveals that negative reviews influence consumers more than positive reviews. Many respondents pay closer attention to negative feedback because it helps them identify potential problems and risks associated with a product or service. As a result, negative reviews often have a stronger impact on trust and purchase intentions than positive comments. This finding demonstrates the importance of maintaining customer satisfaction and effectively addressing complaints in the online environment (Saunders et al., 2019).

The overall perception of online reviews and ratings is highly positive. Most respondents consider them valuable tools that help reduce uncertainty, improve decision-making, and increase confidence in purchases. Online reviews provide consumers with detailed information based on real experiences, making them an important factor in establishing trust between businesses and customers.

The study found that online reviews and ratings have a significant impact on consumer trust. They help consumers evaluate products and services, reduce perceived risks, and make informed purchasing decisions. While concerns regarding authenticity still exist, features such as verified buyer reviews and multiple customer opinions enhance trust and reliability. Overall, online reviews and ratings are powerful influences on consumer behaviour and play an essential role in the digital marketplace.

Chapter 5

LIMITATIONS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Limitations

Like every research study, this study on the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust also has some limitations. Although the study provides useful information about consumer behaviour and online shopping, there are certain factors that may affect the accuracy and overall findings of the research.

1. Small Sample Size: One of the main limitations of the study is the small sample size. The research is based on responses from only 215 respondents, which may not fully represent the opinions of all online consumers. Since consumer behaviour differs from person to person, the findings may not apply to everyone. Therefore, the results should be understood carefully.

2 Use of Convenience Sampling: Another limitation is the use of convenience sampling. Respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the survey. Because of this, the selected respondents may not represent all types of consumers. The opinions collected may reflect the views of only a particular group of people.

3 Geographically limitation: The study is limited to a specific area and selected respondents only. Consumer behaviour may differ in different cities, states or countries due to differences in education, income, internet access and digital awareness. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable everywhere.

4 Data Collection Method: The study is based on a structured questionnaire. Sometimes respondents may give answers according to their personal opinions or experiences, which may not always be completely accurate. Some respondents may also not fully understand all the questions properly, which can affect the reliability of the data collected.

5. Limited Time: Time was also a limitation during the study. Due to limited time, it was not possible to collect data from a larger number of respondents or conduct a more detailed analysis. More time could have helped in collecting better information.

5.2 Research Findings

The analysis of collected data reveals several important findings regarding the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer trust. The study clearly shows that online reviews play a major role in influencing consumer behaviour and online purchase decisions. One of the major findings is that most consumers check online reviews and ratings before purchasing products or services. This indicates that customer feedback has become an important source of information in online shopping. Consumers usually trust products that have positive reviews and higher ratings. The study also found that positive reviews increase consumer confidence and encourage online purchases. Consumers believe that products with good ratings and positive customer experiences are more reliable and trustworthy. On the other hand, negative reviews reduce consumer trust and create doubts regarding product quality and seller credibility. Another important finding is that consumers prefer products with a larger number of reviews because they consider them more popular and authentic. Products with very few reviews are often viewed with uncertainty. Therefore, both review quality and quantity influence consumer trust. The research additionally shows that detailed and informative reviews have a stronger impact on consumers compared to short or unclear reviews. Consumers trust reviews that explain real experiences, advantages and disadvantages of products. Genuine customer feedback helps buyers make informed decisions. The study also found that fake reviews and manipulated ratings negatively affect consumer trust. Many respondents expressed concern about the authenticity of online reviews. Consumers may lose confidence in platforms if they believe reviews are misleading or dishonest. Another important finding is that social media platforms and influencer recommendations strongly affect consumer behaviour. Many consumers rely on social media opinions and online communities before making purchase decisions. This shows the growing importance of digital influence in modern marketing. The research additionally indicates that businesses with positive online reputations generally attract more customers and achieve better customer satisfaction. Good customer service and positive feedback help businesses build trust and long-term customer relationships. Overall, the findings show that online reviews and ratings significantly influence consumer trust, online purchase behaviour and business reputation. Businesses need to maintain transparency, authenticity and customer satisfaction to build strong online trust in the digital marketplace.

5.3 Conclusion

The overall analysis of the study shows that online reviews and ratings have a strong impact on consumer trust and online shopping behaviour. In today's digital world, consumers depend heavily on customer feedback before purchasing products or services. Reviews and ratings have become important tools that help consumers reduce uncertainty and make better purchase decisions. One of the most important conclusions of the study is that positive reviews and higher

ratings increase consumer trust and encourage online purchases. Consumers usually prefer products and businesses that have good customer feedback because they are considered more reliable and trustworthy. Positive online reputation helps businesses attract customers and improve brand image. The study also concludes that online reviews act as a modern form of electronic word-of-mouth communication. Consumers trust reviews written by other buyers more than company advertisements because they are viewed as genuine experiences. Therefore, customer opinions strongly influence buying behaviour and consumer confidence. Another major conclusion is that detailed and authentic reviews have a greater influence on consumer trust. Consumers prefer reviews that clearly explain product quality, delivery service and customer experience. Businesses that maintain transparency and respond positively to customer feedback are more successful in building long-term trust. The study additionally highlights the negative impact of fake reviews and manipulated ratings. Misleading reviews reduce the credibility of online platforms and create confusion among consumers. Therefore, maintaining honesty and authenticity in review systems is very important for online businesses. The research also shows that social media platforms and influencer recommendations have become important factors influencing consumer behaviour. Many consumers depend on online communities and digital opinions before making purchase decisions. This indicates the increasing role of digital communication in modern marketing strategies. Overall, the study concludes that online reviews and ratings play a very important role in shaping consumer trust and online purchase behaviour. Businesses need to focus on customer satisfaction, transparency and ethical practices to maintain positive online reputations. Proper management of customer feedback systems can help businesses improve trust, customer loyalty and long-term growth in the digital marketplace.

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ANNEXURE

Q1 Age Group

- 18–25 Years
- 26–35 Years
- 36–45 Years
- Above 45 Years Q2 Gender
- Male
- Female Q3 Occupation

- Student
- Working Professional
- Business Owner
- Others

Q4 How often do you shop online?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely

Q5 Which online shopping platform do you use the most?

- Amazon
- Flipkart
- Myntra
- Meesho
- Others

Q6 Do you read online reviews before buying a product?

- No

Q7 How would you rate your understanding of online reviews and ratings?

- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

Q8 Do online reviews affect your purchase decisions?

- Yes
- No

Q9 Which type of reviews do you trust the most?

- Customer Reviews
- Influencer Reviews

- Social Media Reviews
- Expert Reviews
- Friends and Family Recommendations Q10 Do you trust products with higher ratings?
 - Yes
 - No

Q11 Have you ever changed your decision after reading negative reviews?

- Yes
- No

Q12 Which type of review do you prefer the most?

- Text Reviews
- Video Reviews
- Image Reviews

Q13 Do fake reviews reduce your trust in online shopping platforms?

- No

Q14 Do you think online reviews help consumers make better purchase decisions?

- Yes
- No

Q15 Have online reviews increased your confidence in online shopping?

- Yes
- No

Q16 Do you think online reviews and ratings are important for business growth?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe