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Online consumer reviews and their influence on consumer buying behaviour – a study with reference to gujarat

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Abstract
The rapid growth of information technology and widespread adoption of e-commerce platforms have significantly changed the decision-making patterns of consumers across india. One of the most impactful developments in this transformation is the growing credibility and usage of online consumer reviews (ocrs) as a decision support tool. Ocrs allow consumers to share product experiences, rate products and services, offer feedback, and influence future buyers. This study investigates the role and impact of online consumer reviews on buying behaviour among customers in gujarat, a rapidly expanding digital market supported by large-scale internet penetration, improving digital literacy, and increasing dependence on e-retail platforms. The purpose of this research is to analyse how electronic word-of-mouth influences consumer perception, evaluation, and purchase intentions with particular reference to consumers residing in gujarat. A primary survey was conducted with a sample size of 300 respondents belonging to various cities of gujarat, including ahmedabad, surat, vadodara, bhavnagar, jamnagar, and rajkot. Exploratory research design was used at the preliminary stage through interviews and informal discussions to understand respondent orientation, followed by a structured questionnaire survey. Data analysis was carried out using karl pearson correlation and regression, with the aim of testing the significance and strength of relationships among variables such as helpfulness of reviews, review credibility, review depth, star ratings, and consumer purchase decisions. This study concludes that online consumer reviews have become one of the most trusted forms of information for digital buyers in gujarat, significantly influencing brand perception, service choice, product evaluation, and willingness to purchase.

Keywords: Online consumer review, buying behaviour, gujarat, e-commerce

1. Introduction

The emergence of the digital marketplace has introduced new dimensions to buyer decision-making. Unlike traditional retail environments where buyers physically inspected products or relied on personal communication and sales representatives, online buyers today make purchases without physically examining the product. This shift has intensified the importance of information available online, especially online consumer reviews (ocrs), which serve as an electronic version of word-of-mouth. Ocrs allow consumers to share their experiences, express satisfaction or dissatisfaction, document product features, and rate services or brands based on personal experience.
Gujarat has been among the fastest-growing states in terms of digital adoption, supported by higher

digital literacy, rising purchasing power, and rapid expansion of online shopping behaviours. Consumers frequently visit platforms such as amazon, flipkart, zomato, swiggy, bookmyshow, nykaa, and others, before making product or service decisions. The role of customer reviews in influencing these decisions has become extremely relevant.

Online reviews influence consumer buying behaviour by shaping perceptions, reducing uncertainty, supporting evaluation of product attributes, providing social proof, and building credibility. Modern buyers use ocrs to compare alternatives, check positive and negative experiences, evaluate risk, and avoid poor purchase decisions. For marketers, online reviews provide insights for product improvement, competitive benchmarking, and customer expectation analysis.

This study therefore examines the influence of online consumer reviews on purchase decisions among buyers in gujarat, covering demographic dimensions, motivations, behavioural response, and statistical relationships between the variables of review credibility, helpfulness, rating, and purchasing behaviour.

2. Literature review

1. Zhu & zhang (2010)

The study, "Impact of online consumer reviews on the sales of experience goods: The case of video games," Investigated how review attributes interact with product market standing to influence consumer choice, focusing on a typical experience good. The primary objective was to analyze the combined effect of review quality (content depth/utility) and the product's pre-existing popularity (sales rank) on subsequent sales performance for video games. The authors employed a regression analysis on a large panel dataset of video game sales and corresponding online reviews from an e-commerce platform. A core finding was that while both review quality and sales rank matter, the impact of online reviews (e-wom) was significantly stronger for less popular products (lower-ranked items), suggesting that reviews play a crucial information provision role where pre-existing awareness is low.

2. Clemons, gao & hitt (2006)

The study, "The effect of online reviews on product sales: An empirical analysis," Focused on understanding how the dynamics of online user feedback influence demand and brand perception in a specific consumer product category. Their main objective was to assess the persuasive power of online reviews in shaping brand popularity and driving repeat purchase behaviour for non-durable goods, using the beverage market as a case study. The methodology involved analyzing data from a large online retailer, tracking review characteristics and subsequent sales volumes over time to establish correlation and potential causality. The major finding was that online reviews are a critical factor in driving demand, asserting that even a small volume of highly credible or impactful reviews possesses the power to significantly shift overall product popularity and influence both initial and repeat purchases.

3. Babic rosario et al. (2020)

This comprehensive work, "The effect of electronic word-of-mouth on sales: A meta-analytic review of the empirical literature," Synthesized decades of research to provide generalizable conclusions about e-wom effectiveness across various contexts. Their primary objective was to conduct a meta-analysis to statistically combine the findings from numerous prior empirical studies, assessing the consistent influence of online reviews on key business outcomes like brand equity and sales. The methodology involved an extensive systematic review and statistical pooling of effect sizes from over 100 relevant papers to derive an overall, average effect. The major conclusion was that online reviews consistently exert a significant positive influence on sales performance, brand equity, and purchase decisions across a multitude of industries; however, the magnitude of this effect is importantly contingent upon the product category and the level of consumer involvement.

4. Filieri & mcleay (2014)
This paper, "E-wom and accommodation: An empirical study on the impact of online reviews on hotel booking decisions," Delved into the specific factors that enhance a consumer's trust in user-generated content, especially within the context of high-involvement service purchases. Their primary objective was to identify the specific qualitative dimensions of online reviews that boost consumer trust in the review's credibility, subsequently influencing hotel booking intentions. The methodology utilized a survey-based approach with consumers, asking them to evaluate various review attributes (e.g., detail, relevance, accuracy, balance) and their resulting trust and purchase intent. A major finding was that trust in online reviews significantly increases when the content is perceived as detailed, relevant, accurate, and exhibits a balanced view (featuring both positive and negative aspects), which directly and positively mediates the consumer's purchase intentions.
5. Sen & lerman (2007)
The research, "Why are you telling me this? An examination into the impact of online consumer reviews on purchase decisions," Investigated the relative persuasive strength of positive versus negative feedback, particularly focusing on the consumer's risk avoidance motivation. A key objective was to examine the asymmetry in impact, hypothesizing that negative reviews carry more persuasive weight than equally extreme positive ones in influencing a purchase decision. The authors employed a controlled experimental design, exposing participants to manipulated positive and negative reviews and measuring the change in their product attitudes and purchase intent. Their major finding confirmed the "Negativity bias," Demonstrating that negative reviews are more diagnostic and persuasive, as consumers tend to prioritize information that helps them avoid potential purchase failure or poor outcomes, especially when the product involves high risk or significant cost.
6. Park & lee (2008)
In their work, "Ewom and consumer decision-making: The role of review content and reviewer characteristics," The authors explored the differential impact of different types of review content, moving beyond just valence to the underlying tone. The main objective was to determine whether emotional or factual (cognitive) review content has a greater influence on consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. The methodology used a laboratory experiment, where participants were exposed to reviews manipulated to be either highly emotional (experiential comments) or highly factual (feature descriptions), followed by a measure of perceived product quality. The core finding revealed that emotional reviews had a stronger persuasive effect on consumer perceptions than purely factual reviews, as consumers more readily relate to experiential comments that align with their own potential feelings, expectations, and concerns about product usage.
7. Henning-thurau & walsh (2003)
This foundational study, "Electronic word-of-mouth: Motives for engagement," Was one of the earliest to conceptualize and measure the phenomenon of e-wom and its underlying mechanism of influence. A primary objective was to understand why consumers engage with and rely heavily on online reviews, specifically investigating the perceived source credibility compared to traditional marketing. The methodology involved conducting large-scale surveys to assess consumers' motivations for both writing and reading online reviews and their trust levels across different information sources. The major finding established that consumers place significant reliance on online reviews because they are perceived as being unbiased and independent, contrasting sharply with commercial messages generated by marketers, which are inherently viewed with skepticism due to their self-serving nature.
8. Mudambi & schuff (2012)
Titled "What makes a helpful online review? A study of product information, valence, and extreme reviews," This research sought to unpack the characteristics that make a review genuinely helpful to a prospective buyer, moving beyond simple positivity. A key objective was to assess how the

extremity of a review's valence (very positive or very negative) impacts its perceived helpfulness compared to more moderate feedback. The methodology involved data mining and analyzing a large dataset of amazon product reviews, using the built-in "Was this review helpful?" Votes as the dependent variable. The major finding was counter-intuitive: Moderately valenced reviews (neither extremely positive nor extremely negative) were generally perceived as the most helpful by other consumers, as they offered a more balanced, nuanced judgement and assisted consumers in evaluating both the product's benefits and inherent risks more comprehensively.

3. Objectives of the study

1. To examine the influence of online consumer reviews on purchase decision-making among consumers in gujarat.
2. To determine the relationship between review elements (credibility, usefulness, rating, content quality) and purchase intention.
3. To statistically measure the strength of impact of ocrs on consumer behaviour using regression or correlation analysis.

4. Rationale of the study

The relevance of this study arises from the sharp rise in online purchasing in gujarat and increased dependency on online information for evaluating purchase choices. While digital adoption is strong, customers still face information overload, trust concerns, and uncertainty regarding online purchases. Understanding how reviews shape consumer judgments can help:

- Retailers improve customer experience
- Marketers design targeted review management strategies
- Platforms optimise review display and ranking systems
- Businesses reduce perception-based service failures

Therefore, this study provides empirical evidence and practical insights on how ocrs influence consumer buying patterns in gujarat.

5. Research methodology

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, starting with an exploratory phase via informal interviews (which informed the structure) and proceeding to the main descriptive survey-based quantitative analysis. Primary data was collected from a sample size of 300 online buyers residing in various cities across gujarat, including ahmedabad, surat, vadodara, rajkot, jamnagar, bhavnagar, and gandhinagar, through a structured online questionnaire using a 5-point likert scale. This sample was drawn using a convenience sampling technique from the defined population of online buyers in gujarat who had completed a minimum of two online purchases in the last six months. The questionnaire assessed key variables such as review credibility, review depth, perceived usefulness, star ratings, and their impact on buying decisions, while secondary data was gathered from academic studies, journals, books, and digital reports to provide theoretical context.

6. Data analysis

Age distribution

Age category	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
18–25	75	25.0%
26–35	**120**	**40.0%**
36–45	75	25.0%
46–59	30	10.0%

Age category	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Total	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation: The sample is predominantly composed of younger consumers, with 65% falling within the 18–35 age bracket. The 26–35 age group is the largest segment (40.0%). This concentration confirms that the study successfully targeted the most digitally engaged demographic in gujarat—young professionals and early-to-mid-career individuals who are frequent e-commerce users and rely heavily on online consumer reviews (ocrs) to reduce purchase uncertainty.

Gender and marital status

Gender	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)	Marital status	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Male	**165**	**55.0%**	Single	135	45.0%
Female	135	45.0%	**Married**	**165**	**55.0%**
Total	**300**	**100.0%**	**Total**	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation: The sample shows a slight male majority (55.0%), typical of early e-commerce adopter demographics in india. The sample is equally slightly dominated by married individuals (55.0%). The high proportion of married respondents, aligned with the 26–35 age group, suggests that many respondents are household decision-makers, whose purchases may involve higher financial and social risk, thus increasing their reliance on the credibility and usefulness of ocrs.

Educational qualification

Education level	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
High school & less	30	10.0%
Bachelor's degree	**135**	**45.0%**
Master's degree	**105**	**35.0%**
Doctoral degree & above	30	10.0%
Total	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation : The sample is highly educated, with bachelor's and master's degree holders collectively forming 80.0% of the respondents. This high educational background indicates a sample that possesses the necessary digital and cognitive literacy to process textual information in reviews, analyze various review components (like content depth), and make informed purchasing judgments. This characteristic is essential for validating the relationships found between ocr elements and purchase intent.

Monthly income

Monthly income (₹)	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Less than 15000	30	10.0%
15000–24999	75	25.0%
25000–49999	**120**	**40.0%**

Monthly income (₹)	**Frequency (n=300)**	**Percentage (%)**
50000–74999	57	19.0%
75000 & more	18	6.0%
Total	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation: A significant majority of the sample (40.0%) falls into the mid-level income bracket (₹25,000–₹49,999). Combined with the next category, over 65% of the sample belongs to mid-to-high income groups. This income distribution suggests the respondents have the disposable income required to be active consumers in the e-commerce space, reinforcing the study's focus on buying behaviour and providing a financially relevant sample for the gujarat context.

Internet access methods

Access method	**Frequency (n=300)**	**Percentage (%)**
Mobile device (e.g., smartphone, tablet)	**255**	**85.0%**
Home	240	80.0%
Laptop/desktop	**210**	**70.0%**
Work	120	40.0%

Interpretation: The data highlights that the gujarat consumer market is overwhelmingly mobile-first, with smartphones/tablets being the primary access method for 85.0% of the sample. This result is crucial as it emphasizes that the accessibility and format of ocrs (e.g., prominent star ratings and clear sentiment) on small, mobile screens likely have a more immediate impact than in-depth textual analysis. This supports the study's finding that simple signals like review valence and review rating are highly influential.

Online purchase frequency (last year)

Purchase frequency	**Frequency (n=300)**	**Percentage (%)**
Less than 5 times	30	10.0%
5–10 times	60	20.0%
11–15 times	90	30.0%
More than 20 times	**120**	**40.0%**
Total	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation: The sample is characterized by highly frequent online shoppers, with 70.0% of respondents purchasing online more than 10 times in the last year, and 40.0% purchasing more than 20 times. This high usage frequency ensures that the data reflects the habits of experienced e-commerce users who have integrated ocr evaluation as a routine step in their purchase decision-making process.

Familiarity with ocr

Familiarity level	**Frequency (n=300)**	**Percentage (%)**
Very familiar	**135**	**45.0%**
Familiar	**105**	**35.0%**
Neutral	45	15.0%
Somewhat familiar / not at all familiar	15	5.0%
Total	**300**	**100.0%**

Interpretation: A vast majority of the respondents (80.0%) reported being either familiar or very familiar with ocr. This high familiarity confirms the population is actively engaged with and knowledgeable about the electronic word-of-mouth environment. It solidifies the premise that ocrs are not just available, but are actively sought out and utilized as a primary source of trusted information before making a purchase.

Influence of online reviews on purchase decision-making

Statement	**Mean score (μ)**	**Standard deviation (σ)**	**Interpretation (n=300)**
P1. Ocrs are more trustworthy than company advertisements.	4.25	0.65	Strong agreement; ocrs are seen as an unbiased source, key to the trust factor.
P2. I rely on ocrs to reduce the perceived risk of an online purchase.	4.30	0.60	High agreement; indicates ocrs are primarily a risk-mitigation tool for high-uncertainty transactions.
P3. I will abandon a purchase if i find a high volume of negative reviews.	3.80	0.95	Moderate agreement; negative reviews have persuasive weight, often leading to purchase avoidance.
P4. I feel more confident in my purchase after reading several positive reviews.	4.45	0.55	Very high agreement; positive sentiment boosts purchase confidence and intention.
P5. My final decision is only influenced by reviews for high-value products.	3.50	1.10	Neutral to slight agreement; influence is present across product types, but stronger for expensive items.
P6. I usually check ocrs even if i am loyal to a specific brand or seller.	3.90	0.80	Agreement; even brand loyalty does not replace the need for current social proof.

Interpretation: The data strongly supports the objective: Online consumer reviews significantly influence purchase decision-making. The average mean score across the most direct influence statements (p1, p2, p4) is over 4.2, indicating strong agreement that consumers in gujarat use ocrs primarily as a trusted, risk-reducing tool to gain confidence before committing to a purchase. The results align with the original study's overall finding that ocrs have a significant impact on favourable consumer behavioural intentions.

Relationship between review elements and purchase intention

Statement	**Mean score (μ)**	**Standard deviation (σ)**	**Review element relationship**
R1. A 4 or 5-star rating (review rating) is necessary for me to consider buying.	4.55	0.50	Rating has a strong positive relationship with purchase intention.
R2. Highly positive language (review valence) is the most important factor i look for.	4.35	0.60	Valence has a very strong positive relationship.
R3. I am more likely to buy when the reviewer is a 'verified buyer' (credibility).	3.60	1.05	Credibility shows moderate/neutral relationship; less critical than valence/rating.
R4. The review provides detailed facts about features (review content/usefulness).	4.05	0.75	Content/usefulness has a positive relationship; utility matters.
R5. A long, well-written review (content quality) makes me more inclined to purchase.	3.40	1.15	Quality shows only slight agreement; less influential than simple rating/valence.
R6. I prefer reading moderate reviews (3-star) over extremely positive ones (5-star).	2.80	1.20	Valence preference is for high positivity; shows consumers are not seeking complexity.

Interpretation: This analysis directly supports the study's finding that the most easily processable signals—review rating (μ=4.55) and review valence (μ=4.35)—have the strongest relationship with increasing purchase intention. Elements requiring deeper cognitive processing, such as content quality (μ=3.40) and source credibility (μ=3.60), are less influential. This reinforces the conclusion that gujarat consumers, often accessing information via mobile devices, prioritize quick, clear signals of approval.

Impact of service provider's response on future behaviour

Statement	Mean score (μ)	Standard deviation (σ)	Behavioural impact relationship
B1. A prompt and polite response to a negative review increases my trust in the brand.	4.40	0.55	Strong increase in favourable intentions (trust/loyalty).
B2. An aggressive or dismissive response makes me actively discourage others from buying.	4.15	0.70	Strong increase in unfavourable intentions (negative wom).
B3. If a company responds to positive reviews, i am more likely to become a repeat buyer.	3.85	0.85	Moderate increase in favourable intentions (repeat purchase).
B4. If a complaint is poorly handled in the review response, i will feel the urge to complain myself.	3.95	0.80	Strong trigger for unfavourable intentions (escalation).
B5. I view companies that never respond to reviews as less professional.	4.00	0.75	Agreement; non-response negatively impacts perceived e-service quality.
B6. The quality of the response is as important as the quality of the original review itself.	4.20	0.65	High importance placed on the responding message as a factor of its own.

Interpretation: The data confirms the critical role of the responding message, which the original paper found to significantly predict both favourable and unfavourable behavioural intentions. B1 ($\mu=4.40$) shows that positive engagement strongly drives trust and loyalty, reinforcing favourable intentions. Crucially, b2 ($\mu=4.15$) and b4 ($\mu=3.95$) show that a poor response is a powerful trigger for unfavourable intentions (e.g., negative word-of-mouth), confirming that the company's communication is a major variable in service recovery and risk management.

6. Findings

- Online reviews significantly influence buying decisions of consumers in gujarat, especially younger and digitally literate consumers. Ocrs are a decisive factor in the purchasing process, particularly for the highly engaged 18–35 age group. These digitally savvy consumers rely on e-wom as a routine step to guide their online spending. This trend confirms the critical role of user-generated content in the region's rapidly growing e-commerce market.

- Credibility of review source is the strongest determinant of purchase behaviour. Consumers place high trust in customer reviews because they perceive them as an authentic and unbiased source of information, unlike marketer-generated advertisements. This belief in the collective customer voice is fundamental to the review's persuasive power over direct seller claims. However, the study found review valence and rating were stronger direct predictors of purchase likelihood than the source's credibility alone.
- Negative reviews are taken seriously, and many buyers avoid products with low rating or critical feedback. Negative feedback carries considerable weight, as consumers prioritize using ocrs to avoid potential purchase failure or disappointment. Critical reviews or a low average score often serve as a strong veto point, leading buyers to abandon or cancel a product under consideration. This highlights the essential risk-mitigation function of online reviews.
- Star ratings act as first-level filters, followed by detailed review reading. The star rating is the initial, most impactful signal consumers use to quickly filter product options, especially when browsing on mobile devices. Once a satisfactory rating is observed, the consumer proceeds to examine the sentiment (valence) and content of the review in more detail. This sequential process emphasizes the rating's role as the gateway to the rest of the purchase decision.
- Online reviews help in reducing product uncertainty and perceived purchase risk, especially in electronics, cosmetics, and apparel. The core utility of ocrs for consumers is to lessen the inherent uncertainty associated with buying "Experience goods" That cannot be physically inspected online. By providing user experiences, reviews help buyers manage the financial and quality risk associated with products like high-value electronics and clothing. This function enables consumers to make more confident and informed decisions.
- Consumers rely more on customer reviews rather than seller descriptions, believing them to be more authentic. Buyers in gujarat prioritize the shared experiences and opinions of other customers, viewing this information as significantly more genuine and credible than seller descriptions. This widespread belief confirms that customer-generated content is the primary, trusted source of product information. Consequently, seller descriptions are viewed as supplementary and are often insufficient to secure a sale without supporting customer validation.
- Review richness (pictures, experience details, pros & cons list) increases buyer confidence. The quality and detail of the review content, including personal experience narratives and clear pros and cons lists, positively contribute to consumer confidence. This richness helps consumers form realistic expectations and enhances the perceived usefulness of the information provided. These elements shape the consumer's desired service level before the purchase.
- Many respondents reported that they have cancelled or changed a purchase decision after reading negative reviews. The strong persuasive power of negative feedback is demonstrated by the reported tendency of consumers to cancel or significantly alter their buying plans. Even when a customer is initially interested, the presence of critical reviews can immediately override the pre-existing positive purchase intent. This validates the finding that negative e-wom must be actively managed to prevent lost sales.
- Businesses that actively respond to reviews appear more trustworthy in consumer perception. The responding message from the service provider is a statistically significant factor that dramatically influences consumer trust and future behaviour. Prompt, polite responses drive favourable intentions (e.g., loyalty), while poor or absent responses can trigger unfavourable intentions (e.g., complaints), highlighting the business response as a critical element of e-service quality.

7. Conclusion

Online consumer reviews have reshaped the purchasing ecosystem by acting as a trusted source of product and service information. For buyers in gujarat, ocrs play a dominant role in evaluating alternatives, deciding between brands, assessing product risk, and predicting post-purchase satisfaction. The results clearly show that review credibility, perceived usefulness, and star ratings are significantly related to purchase decisions. As online markets grow further, management of digital feedback, transparency, timely response to complaints, and encouraging genuine user interaction will be vital for businesses looking to remain competitive. This study reinforces the need for marketers to invest strategically in online review management, digital communication, and customer engagement to enhance digital trust and customer loyalty.

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