

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PURCHASING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING AND TRADITIONAL SHOPPING

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the impact of customer reviews on online purchase versus traditional purchase. A sample of 541 participants was selected for this study. The objectives of the study were two-fold: (1) to examine the impact of customer reviews on product selection, and (2) to assess the importance of published customer reviews on online displayed products and traditional marketing through word-of-mouth (WOM). The findings suggest that customer reviews have a significant impact on product selection, with online shoppers relying heavily on them to make informed purchase decisions. Moreover, published customer reviews are crucial for both online and traditional marketing as they help build trust and credibility among customers. Overall, this study sheds light on the critical role of customer reviews in shaping consumer behavior and offers valuable insights for businesses aiming to improve their marketing strategies.

KEYWORDS: WOM, Customer reviews, participant, product selection, traditional marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What Is E-Commerce?

Electronic commerce or e-commerce refers to a wide range of online business activities for products and services. It also pertains to "any form of business transaction in which the parties interact electronically rather than by physical exchanges or direct physical contact. E-commerce is usually associated with buying and selling over the Internet, or conducting any transaction involving the transfer of ownership or rights to use goods or services through a computer-mediated network.

1.2 Benefits of E-Commerce

Transaction costs. Three cost areas are significantly reduced through the conduct of B2B e-commerce

- First is the reduction of search costs, as buyers need not go through multiple intermediaries to search for information about suppliers, products and prices as in a traditional supply chain. In terms of effort, time and money spent, the Internet is a more efficient information channel than its traditional counterpart.
- Second is the reduction in the costs of processing transactions (e.g. invoices, purchase orders and payment schemes), as B2B allows for the automation of transaction processes and therefore, the quick implementation of the same compared to other channels (such as the telephone and fax). Efficiency in trading processes and transactions is also enhanced through the B2B e-market's ability to process sales through online auctions.

□ Third, online processing improves inventory management and logistics.

1.3 Importance of Online Marketing

The benefits of online marketing are vast. The various reasons behind the online marketing which is imperative for any business to grow successfully are discussed

To Build up Relationship with the Targeted Audience

- To Provide Products or Services According to Customer Preferences
- Cost-effective
- To increase the web traffic
- To keep up with the changing demands
- To build up credibility

1.4 Scope of Online marketing in India

Today, almost everyone is online. With access to cheap data and affordable Smartphone's, the number of people across the globe who have access to the internet has increased exponentially. Businesses today leverage digital channels such as social media, search engines, email, and websites to connect with current and prospective customers. The approximation growth rate in online marketing is shown by chart from year 2015 to 2023.

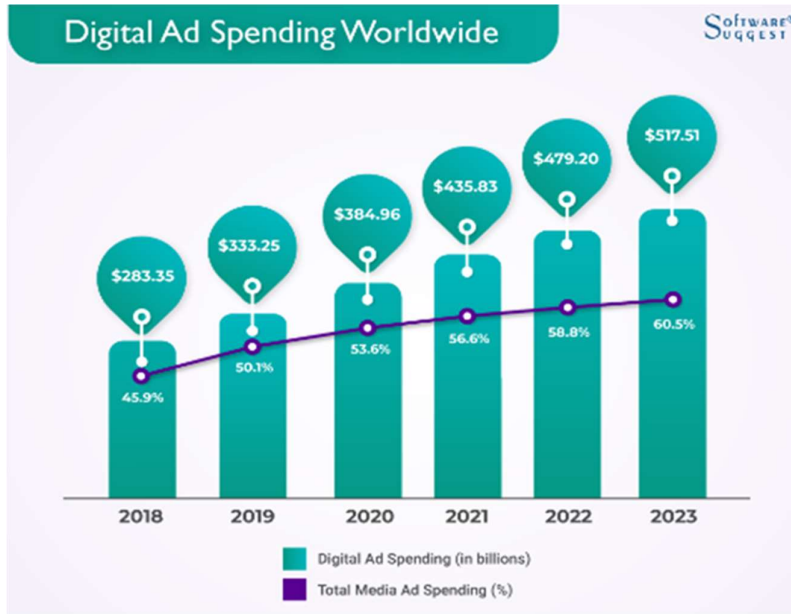


Fig. 1 Digital Ad Spending Worldwide

1.5 Importance of Customer Reviews:

Customer reviews have become an integral part of decision-making process. With the rapid advancement of technology and the excessive use of the Internet, opportunities for gathering and providing product information have been extended. People are no longer limited to face-to-face word of mouth (WOM) interaction; rather, they communicate through blogs, online discussion forums, chat rooms, Web-based opinion platforms and news groups. It has been found that online reviews have a significant and quantifiable impact on purchase decisions – but the degree of that impact depends on a number of factors, such as star ratings, the nature of the review content, the number of reviews, the price of the item, and the source of the review.

1.6 Benefits of customer reviews:

- Free advertising

- Improved search engine results
- Peer recommendations
- Constructive criticism and suggestions
- Relationship with Customers

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers determine how they shop, depending on their desire (Sarkar & Das, 2017). Before pandemics, the majority of consumers still preferred to shop in traditional land-based retail stores in order to have an authentic experience (Sarkar & Das, 2017). Consumers differ from each other in their personal preference of shopping online or offline. Some consumers highly value time-efficient shopping combined with a broad variety of products and alternatives, whereas other consumers favor the personal interaction with sales assistants and the ability to be able to have physical contact with the product (Levin, Levin & Wellner, 2005). Moreover, studies have shown that consumers prefer direct physical evaluation of their desired products prior to a completed purchase (Levin, Levin, Heath, 2003). Compared to online shops brick-and-mortar stores have a greater maturity. Consumers who chose those have fewer expectations of finding a lower price when comparing prices with different stores.

Chang & Wildt (1994) emphasize that a product's perceived value enormously influences consumers purchase intention. If a product appears to have good quality, the consumers tend to have a high purchase intention. Additionally, if the quality is low, the consumer's purchase intention is likewise. Customer online purchase intention can also be defined as the readiness to get involved in transactions that are transmitted online. These transactions involve a process in which information gets transferred in order to purchase a product online (Pavlou, 2003).

Consumers' buying intention are further strongly influenced by the presentation of the product. It has been proven that online stores can enhance consumers' purchase intention by advertising their products with photographs from various angles, including real-life use scenarios (Then & Delong, 1999).

Consumers tend to have less time available for purchasing goods and services due to increased professional responsibilities, which tend to consume more time. Therefore, consumers have to look for new alternatives that enable them to save time (Bhatnagar et al. 2000). The internet provides various options to save time, for instance, through the broad offer of online stores.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWom) can increase the consumers' trust in online retailers, reduce the perceived purchase risk, and therefore increase purchase intention towards the desired item (Jing et al., 2016). Furthermore, the concept of eWom always includes active and passive consumers. The active consumers contribute to the website by providing information about their personal experience with the product/service whereby passive consumers use the active consumer's provided information to find out if the product matches their needs (Khammash and Griffiths, 2011).

Nowadays, consumers are highly influenced by the easy accessibility of information and spend more time researching information in order to maximize their purchase satisfaction (Chowdhury, Ratneshwar, and Mohanty, 2008). Consumers have a different level of information about specific products (Kaas, 1982). In contrast, consumers with just a fair amount of product knowledge spend much of the time researching the product's basic characteristics and potential alternatives. (Kaas, 1982; Sproule & Archer, 2000).

Consumers tend to shop online when the accessibility and density of brick-and-mortar retail stores is comparatively low. Rural areas are more likely to have a lower density of stores compared to urban cities (Frag et al. 2006). Additionally, in case of a low density of retail stores, consumers in rural areas use the internet to overcome the lack of local supply and therefore save the travel to neighboring cities (Ren & Kwan, 2009).

Perceived usefulness refers to the consumer's perceived benefits resulting from the online shopping activities. A benefit of online shopping is for instance the easiness of comparing several websites with each other to find the best match (Barkhi & Wallace, 2007).

Online retailers that manage to provide easy access to useful information can increase consumer purchase intention towards their products and services (Chen & Teng, 2013). Hanjaya, Kenny, and Gunawan (2019) suggest in their study that consumers start to expect personalized content and unique offers from a retailer. If retailers cannot deliver personalized content, consumers tend to switch to competitors (Hanjaya, Kenny and Gunawan, 2019).

Erkan & Evans (2016) analyzed the effects of friends' product reviews on social media and the effects of strangers' product reviews on shopping websites on consumer's purchase intentions. Consumers are more affected by the eWom from strangers on websites than by their friends' eWom owing to the greater quantity of anonymous reviews. Moreover, online website reviews seem to be more detailed than friends' reviews (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Finally, eWom also has a significant impact on the first step of the consumer purchase decision process, in which the consumers seek information. Therefore, reviews of other customers seem to be a great first source of information for further evaluation and information search (Lee et al. 2008).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the role of reviews' impact on Online purchase Vs Traditional Purchase.
- To study about the impact of customer reviews on product selection.
- To study about the importance of Published Customer Reviews on online displayed products and for traditional marketing through WOM.

Table 4.1: Distribution of the Demographic Profile of participants.			
Demographic profile		Number respondents (N=541)	Percentage
Age	18-25 Yrs	514	95.0
	26-35 Yrs	19	3.5
	36-45 Yrs	8	1.5
	45 Above	0	0.0
Gender	Male	278	51.4
	Female	263	48.6
Educational Qualification	10th Pass	1	0.2
	12th Pass	425	78.6
	Graduate	91	16.8
	Post-Graduate	24	4.4
Occupation	Student/Scholar	506	93.5
	Service	14	2.6
	Self-employed	11	2.0
	Others	10	1.8
Monthly Income	Upto 15000	286	52.9
	15000 to 30000	106	19.6
	30000 to 50000	116	21.4

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PURCHASING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING AND TRADITIONAL TRAINING

	50000 Above	33	6.1
Marital Status	Unmarried	510	94.3
	Married	31	5.7
Preference for Brand	Branded	327	60.4
	Non-Branded	214	39.6

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Here is a brief detail about the broad framework with flowchart for this research study using a survey method:

- Identify the research problem and research questions
- Determine the main focus of the research
- Develop research questions that are specific and measurable
- Conduct a literature review
- Gather and review relevant literature on the research topic
- Identify gaps in existing research that the study can address

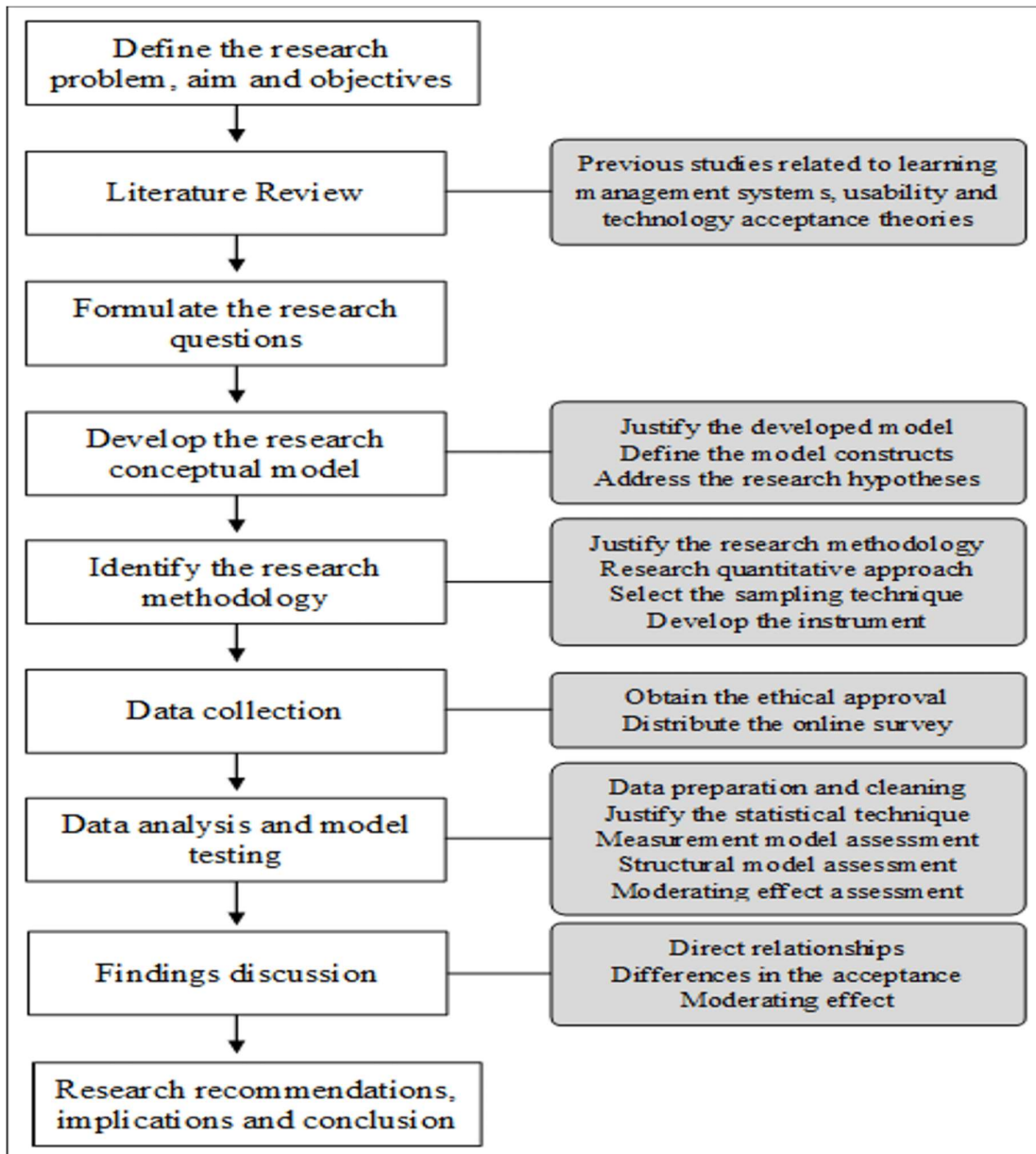


Fig. 2 Broad Framework to show research flow

- Formulate hypotheses
- Develop hypotheses that can be tested through the research study
- Design the survey questionnaire
- Develop a clear and concise survey questionnaire that addresses the research questions and hypotheses
- Ensure that the questions are easy to understand and unbiased
- Conduct a pilot test of the questionnaire to ensure it is effective
- Select the study population and sampling method
- Determine the population that the study will focus on
- Select a sampling method that will provide a representative sample of the population
- Collect data through the survey
- Distribute the survey to the selected sample

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PURCHASING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING AND TRADITIONAL TRAINING

- Ensure the sample is diverse and representative of the population
- Analyze the data
- Code and enter the data into a statistical software program
- Conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the data
- Draw conclusions and make recommendations
- Interpret the results of the analysis in light of the research questions and hypotheses
- Draw conclusions about the research problem and make recommendations for future research

Data representation and Analysis

Obj Objective-1						
Title of the statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Weighted Average
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS [Customer reviews improve my shopping performance.]	148	208	163	12	10	3.87
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS [Customer reviews increase productivity when go through purchasing]	132	242	146	12	9	3.88
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS [Customer reviews are useful in making purchase decision.]	175	186	158	13	9	3.93
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS [Customer reviews make it easier for me to search and find information about products.]	160	198	151	18	14	3.87
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS [Customer reviews allow me to accomplish my task more quickly.]	135	220	161	10	15	3.83
PERCEIVED EASE OF USE [Customer reviews are not complicated.]	118	206	176	29	0	3.70
PERCEIVED EASE OF USE [Customer reviews are not confusing.]	107	221	168	25	0	3.65
PERCEIVED EASE OF USE [My interaction with Customer reviews is clear & understandable.]	129	223	149	23	0	3.75
PERCEIVED CONTROL [Through Customer reviews, I have a direct influence on finding the information I need.]	130	249	137	15	10	3.88
PERCEIVED CONTROL [Customer reviews enable me to get a grip on the necessary information.]	112	247	153	19	10	3.80
PERCEIVED CONTROL [Customer reviews give me more control over the service process.]	121	234	157	11	18	3.79

Objective-2

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PURCHASING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING AND TRADITIONAL TRAINING

Title of the statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Weighted Average
IS [Customer reviews offer suggestions when they are needed]	133	261	127	9	11	3.92
IS [Customer reviews offer information to overcome problems.]	112	262	145	13	9	3.84
IS [Customer reviews help me to discover the cause of problem.]	127	249	141	9	15	3.86
ES[Customer reviews are usually comforting encourage me.]	125	263	126	9	18	3.87
ES[I usually feel Customer reviews are on the side of the customers.]	100	270	142	12	17	3.78
ES[Customer reviews express interest and concern in my well-being.]	119	251	138	19	14	3.82
ES[Customer reviews have a sense of personal feelings.]	105	262	144	15	15	3.79
SofB [I feel a sense of belonging when I use customer reviews.]	128	261	132	8	12	3.90
SofB [I enjoy being a part of the virtual community]	100	258	154	15	14	3.77
SofB [I completely trust others in the virtual community of customer reviews.]	107	226	160	29	19	3.69
SofB [Overall, the virtual community of customer reviews has a high level of morale.]	100	236	167	19	19	3.70
PE[I find the experience of reading customer reviews is enjoyable.]	140	260	126	9	6	3.96
PE[I find the experience of reading customer reviews is pleasant.]	92	282	143	10	14	3.79
PE[Customer reviews are interesting.]	136	245	138	10	12	3.89

Objective-3						
Title of the statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Weighted Average
SE[People who post online reviews are usually knowledgeable about the products being reviewed]	166	224	130	10	11	3.97
SE[People who post online reviews are experts in evaluating the products being reviewed]	112	244	152	15	18	3.77
SP [There is a sense of human contact in customer reviews.]	130	222	159	17	13	3.81

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PURCHASING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING AND TRADITIONAL TRAINING

SP [There is a sense of personal touch in customer reviews]	105	235	161	20	20	3.71
SP [There is a sense of sociability in customer reviews]	112	229	156	20	24	3.71
SP [There is a sense of human warmth in customer reviews]	100	213	169	30	29	3.60
SP [There is a sense of human sensitivity in customer reviews]	112	226	159	20	24	3.71
BRAND [I like to buy products because I can afford]	159	226	125	18	13	3.92
BRAND [I can boast of possessing them as they are of good quality]	143	232	144	11	11	3.90
BRAND [I purchase products for satisfying my personal needs without any attempt to make an impression on others.]	153	221	132	14	21	3.87
BRAND [Price differences do not affect my perception towards Products.]	121	224	144	35	17	3.73
BRAND [Self-actualization is an important motivator in purchasing Products]	142	222	139	19	19	3.83
BRAND [Brand provides a utility and psychological satisfaction in terms of, high self-esteem.]	133	220	156	18	14	3.81
PI [I pay attention to the emotions more than the benefits while Purchasing.]	143	210	146	33	9	3.82
PI [While purchasing I am more affected by visual and aesthetic factors.]	103	223	174	22	19	3.68
PI [I make my decision according to my feelings.]	152	220	137	20	12	3.89
PI [My emotions are as important as the benefits and price of the products]	121	234	153	15	18	3.79
PI [Purchase decision is influenced by my social group.]	107	217	160	36	21	3.65
PI [I would be willing to provide information to retailers that provide customer reviews.]	115	235	151	18	22	3.74
ATTITUDE [I like the idea of using the Internet to shop from vendors that provide customer reviews.]	137	260	120	13	11	3.92
ATTITUDE [I think positively regarding shopping from vendors that provide customer reviews.]	108	257	144	18	14	3.79
ATTITUDE [I enjoy shopping.]	151	234	128	9	19	3.90

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To achieve the accuracy and the strong level of confidence among variables with respect to objectives of the study Chi-square, t-test and Descriptive statistics were applied for Objective-1, Objective 2 and 3 respectively. Brief details about data and its analysis is appended ahead in the paper.

5.1 Findings related to Objective-1

The null hypothesis for the chi-square test is that there is no significant association between age range and shopping mode preference. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a significant association between age range and shopping mode preference.

When the chi-square test was performed using the statistical software SPSS, we get the following results:

The chi-Square test statistic: 178.29

Degrees of freedom: 3

P-value: <0.001

The calculated chi-square value (20.28) is greater than the critical value (16.27), which means that we can reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant association between the impact of customer reviews on online purchase vs traditional purchase.

5.2 Findings for Objective-2

We will perform an independent samples t-test because the two groups are independent of each other.

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perceived usefulness of customer reviews between online and traditional purchase.

H_a: There is a significant difference in the perceived usefulness of customer reviews between online and traditional purchase.

$$t = (3.875 - 3.825) / \sqrt{((0.049^2 / 100) + (0.060^2 / 100))}$$

$$t = 2.26$$

2.26 > 1.96, so we reject the null hypothesis.

Since we rejected the null hypothesis.

The p-value is 0.0037, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of "Product selection influenced by Customer reviews" and "Product selection not influenced by Customer reviews."

5.3 Findings for Objective-3

Overall sentiment towards customer reviews: The weighted average for statements related to customer reviews (SE, SP) is between 3.60 and 3.97, indicating a positive sentiment towards customer reviews. This suggests that people perceive customer reviews as knowledgeable, expert, and having a sense of human contact, personal touch, sociability, human warmth, and sensitivity.

Attitude towards brand: The mean for statements related to brand (BRAND) is between 3.73 and 3.92, indicating a positive attitude towards brands. This suggests that people purchase products based on affordability, good quality, personal needs, and self-actualization, and that brand provides utility and psychological satisfaction in terms of high self-esteem.

Attitude towards purchase intention: The mean for statements related to purchase intention (PI) is between 3.65 and 3.89, indicating a positive attitude towards purchase intention. This suggests that people pay attention to emotions while purchasing, are affected by visual and aesthetic factors, and make decisions based on their feelings. Additionally, purchase decision is influenced by social groups, and people are willing to provide information to retailers that provide customer reviews.

Attitude towards online shopping with vendors that provide customer reviews: The mean for statements related to attitude (ATTITUDE) is between 3.79 and 3.92, indicating a positive attitude towards shopping online with vendors that provide customer reviews. This suggests that people like the idea of using the internet to shop from vendors that provide customer reviews, think positively about shopping from such vendors, and enjoy shopping.

In conclusion, the statistical analysis suggests that published customer reviews are important for online displayed products and traditional marketing through WOM. Positive sentiments towards customer reviews, brands, purchase intention, and online shopping with vendors that provide customer reviews indicate that people value the information provided by customer reviews and consider them as an important factor in their purchase decision-making process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our research findings suggest that customer reviews play a significant role in the purchase decision of customers in both online and traditional shopping. However, online shopping provides more benefits to customers in terms of customer reviews. As online shopping continues to grow in popularity, businesses should pay more attention to customer reviews and ensure that they provide a platform for customers to leave feedback. Traditional stores, on the other hand, can benefit from providing more customer reviews and making them easily accessible to customers.

7. LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to the study that should be taken into consideration:

- **Sample size:** The study may suffer from a small sample size, which can affect the generalizability of the results.
- **Sampling bias:** The study participants were likely from one age group mostly that is 18 – 25 years, which means that they may not be representative of the broader population. Additionally, the sample may be biased towards those who are more likely to write online reviews.
- **Self-report bias:** Participants in the study were asked to provide their opinions about customer reviews, which may be influenced by their own biases and experiences.
- **Limited scope:** The study focused only on the perceptions of customers towards customer reviews and did not explore the impact of these reviews on actual purchase behavior.
- **Cultural bias:** The study was conducted in a specific geographic location, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other cultural contexts.
- **Social desirability bias:** Participants may have provided responses that they believed were socially desirable, rather than their true feelings, which can affect the validity of the results.

Overall, while this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of customers towards customer reviews, it is important to consider these limitations when interpreting the findings. Top of Form

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study analyzing the impact of customer reviews on product selection, there are several future recommendations that can be made.

Firstly, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study on a larger and more diverse sample size to see if the results remain consistent across different demographics. This would help to ensure that the findings are representative of the general population and not just specific groups. Secondly, it would be useful to explore the impact of different types of customer reviews (such as reviews with photos or videos) on product selection. This could help companies to better understand how they can optimize their review sections to provide the most helpful information to potential customers.

Thirdly, the study could be expanded to include a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of customer reviews on other aspects of the purchase process, such as brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. This would provide a more holistic understanding of the role that reviews play in shaping consumers' attitudes towards products and companies.

Finally, it would be interesting to investigate the potential for bias in customer reviews and the impact that this may have on product selection. This could help to identify ways to mitigate any negative effects of biased reviews and ensure that customers are making informed decisions based on accurate information.

Overall, these future recommendations would help to build on the current study and provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of customer reviews on product selection.

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