

UNRAVELING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in technology have led to drastic changes in consumer behaviour. Consumers have become more aware and make purchase decisions after gathering information from various online platforms. An E-commerce shopping website is one such platform that influences the purchase decision of consumers through online reviews and ratings. Customers can share their experiences with a multitude of consumers by posting their reviews in comments, images, or videos of products. Thus, Online Consumer Reviews (OCRs) are a great way to get insight into products from experienced people. The transformation has helped consumers make correct choices and buy products valued for money. But all this evolution didn't happen overnight. The present paper aims to study the rise and popularity of online consumer reviews and how they impact consumer buying behaviour. The study examines the central and peripheral cues using The Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion as a referent theory. After an extensive literature review, the variables have been identified in the study and a conceptual model has been proposed to show the effect of online consumer reviews (OCRs) on consumer buying behaviour which can help researchers and marketers in the future to understand its intricacies and to use it effectively. For a comprehensive assessment of previous research work on OCRs, the TCCM (Theories, Contexts, Characteristics, and Methodology) review framework has been adopted to identify the research gap and suggest future research directions. Thus, it can be concluded that online consumer reviews have been revolutionized and play a major role in the decision to purchase products.

Keywords: Online consumer reviews (OCRs), e-commerce websites, Consumer Behaviour, Elaboration Likelihood Model, TCCM

INTRODUCTION

According to research on Word-of-Mouth (WOM) impacts, a satisfied customer can talk about his good experience with some people, but a dissatisfied customer would tell everyone he/she meets (Cheung et al., 2009). Advancements in technology have changed the way of communication among consumers. The easy access to the internet and various online platforms has allowed consumers to voice their opinions and feedback to others and has widened their interpersonal communication (Akdin, K., 2021). Online consumer reviews (OCRs) on different e-commerce websites are one such way that is popularly used by consumers to spread or obtain information about brands, products, or services (Farki et al., 2016; Sutanto & Aprianingsih, 2016; Roman et al., 2022). It strongly impacts consumer buying behaviour and is growing significantly every year. A Statista poll on the use of product reviews and ratings on e-commerce websites in India in 2022 found that 64% of respondents always read reviews and ratings before making a purchase. Comparatively, 3% of respondents said they never read product reviews or ratings when making an online purchase (Statista, 2022).

Consumers purchasing products from brick-and-mortar stores (offline) also consult online reviews to make purchase decisions (Dellarocas, 2003). It is a great source of information for both consumers and marketers (Park et al., 2007). It can assist consumers in making purchase decisions while helping marketers get valuable feedback about their products or services. The communication style, credibility, argument quality, valence (positive or negative comments), and the number of reviews read are some important factors of OCRs that impact consumer buying behaviour (Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Fang, 2014; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Source credibility is a factor that helps in persuading and accordingly, the consumer builds attitudes toward products or services and consequently their behaviour (Forman et al., 2008). Consumer ratings are equally important and play a major role in decision-making (Farki et al., 2016). OCRs have become so popular as they can persuade readers and have become a strong choice for consumers to refer to them before making a purchase (Chiou et al., 2018). The psychological process has been explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which helps us to understand how people can be persuaded to change their attitudes (Petty & Brinol, 2008). This theory of persuasion works on the idea of elaboration. Elaboration is the effort required to comprehend, analyze, and remember a message before accepting

or rejecting it (Hooper, 2019). There are two levels of elaboration -- a higher level of elaboration where people use central route processing (things they thoroughly consider before making a decision), and a lower level of elaboration where people are easily influenced by some simple cue in the persuasion context without scrutinizing the message (Petty et al., 1981).

The study is divided into eight sections. The first section states the research objective which is to identify various factors of OCRs that influence consumer buying behaviour. The second section conducts an extensive literature review of online consumer reviews along with the ELM theory of persuasion. The third section adopts the TCCM review framework as the research methodology to identify the research gap and propose future directions. The fourth section shows the results of the analysis and findings showing the three major credibility factors: online reviews, sources, and platforms as important components that bring a change in the attitude and decision-making of consumers. No study has ever discussed factors from all three categories, so the findings can contribute to the development of a general theory of OCRs.

The fifth section concludes OCRs are an important tool for all companies as they influence consumer buying behaviour. Consumers are sharing their experiences on virtual platforms with strangers. Companies should leverage the vast potential of OCRs to increase sales of their products. The sixth section provides the theoretical framework and practical implications. The study extends the existing knowledge and offers insights to researchers and marketers. The seventh section acknowledges its limitations as the findings are derived from only a thorough literature review. Lastly, the study suggests directions for future research in the area of fake online reviews and the different formats of OCRs like images and videos along with texts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Online consumer reviews play a large role in consumers' online and offline shopping behaviour. Although many studies have been conducted on online consumer reviews, and have found various independent and dependent variables, the current study attempts to find all possible variables of OCRs that influence consumer buying behaviour. The novel contribution is to identify the various important factors influencing consumer buying behaviour and can be divided into three main categories: online reviews credibility, source credibility and platform credibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH

Since the beginning of humanity, Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been acknowledged as one of the most powerful sources of information transmission. Before the advent of the Internet, customers communicated their product-related experiences to one another through traditional WOM (such as conversations with friends and family) (Sundaram et al, 1998). With the invention of the web, the effect of WOM has widened, bringing new platforms for customers to seek and disseminate information about products. The social web has thus empowered consumers to voice out their opinions and feedback to a large audience through social media websites, e-commerce websites, online discussion forums, blogs, etc. (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Thus, Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) was introduced allowing interaction between consumers virtually which influences purchase decisions. When compared to traditional WOM, e-WOM has the advantages of extensiveness in information dissemination, speed, volume, anonymity, and saving time (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ali et al., 2019). The research community is paying close attention to eWOM research because of the great potential and difficulties involved with it (Hussain et al. 2016).

Consumers and marketers both frequently generate eWOM, which is known as user-generated content and marketer-generated content, respectively. Organization-controlled websites are used by marketers to disseminate information, while social networking sites are used by customers to share their product experiences (Ali et al., 2019). Companies now interact with customers on social networking sites to receive valuable feedback on their goods and services. This interaction signifies a shift in the conventional business model.

Companies now place high importance on customer engagement, therefore significant developments have been made in online consumer reviews by giving voice and much-needed power to consumers to share their product experience (Chen and Xie, 2008). One of the most important forms of Electronic Word-of-Mouth is the online consumer review, which includes either favourable or unfavourable comments made by customers about a product available for purchase online (Bae & Lee., 2011). Consumers frequently rely on this e-WOM transfer to reduce risks related to product quality and the seller's honesty when they are unable to evaluate a product in person (Ali et al., 2019). Many studies show that people refer to online consumer reviews on various e-commerce websites before

making online as well as offline purchases (Cheung et al., 2012; Roman et al., 2022). Thus, OCRs are a great way to gather information about products with ease and comfort just by going through them at any place and at any time.

HISTORY OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS

Before the invention of the internet, people had to personally ask others about a company's or product's reputation and quality. The inquiry of products was time-consuming and sometimes fruitless. With the expansion of the internet, consumers can collect information about the company or its products from a large domain. Various online review websites emerged making it easier for consumers to make purchase decisions. Online review services have been available for more than 20 years. The first was established in 1999 and the three main contenders were: Epinions, RateltAll, and Deja. All three were later purchased by other larger companies (Kim, 2021)

As the online review process continued to evolve, five main companies emerged as apparent leaders in online business. Yelp, Amazon, Google, Facebook, and TripAdvisor gained widespread influence and have had a tremendous impact on the evolution of online reviews. (Sprague, 2019).

Gradually online consumer reviews became popular word-of-mouth which disseminates information widely and is a highly trusted source of information (Nielsen, 2013). Thus, there is a significant development in the perceptions of online reviews which are referred to as “Electronic Word-of-Mouth,” “Consumer-Generated Information,” “User-Generated Content,” and “Consumer Feedback.” (Bae & Lee., 2011)

DEFINING ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS (OCRS)

Online Consumer Reviews are voluntarily user-generated content about the distinctive features of brands, products, or services by internet users who have purchased, used, or consumed them. OCRs generally refer to the criticism, evaluation, opinion, or comments generated about an object, service, business or experience that is posted on e-commerce websites and is used as a form of online customer feedback (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). A grade or rating may be issued in addition to written comments and assessments to convey the experience of the consumer. Past literature shows that it is more credible and useful than any other Electronic Word of Mouth (Rangsang and Millayani, 2021). Customers can get in-depth inputs about products and services from other consumers while businesses and producers can get feedback from consumers about the benefits and drawbacks of their goods to better understand consumer needs and identify possible improvement areas.

Table 1- Definitions of Online Consumer Reviews**Source:** The Authors

S.No	Definition	Authors
1.	“Online consumer comments are defined as positive or negative statements about products made by potential, actual or former customers, which are available to many people and institutions via the Internet.”	Stauss, 2000
2.	“Online consumer reviews are regarded as a new type of recommender which is the same as the messenger of conventional communication through word-of-mouth.”	Chatterjee, 2001
3.	“Online consumer reviews often describe product attributes in terms of usage situations and measure product performance from a user’s perspective.”	Bickart and Schindler, 2001
4.	Online consumer reviews can be deployed as a new element in the marketing communications mix and work as an online seller’s free “sales assistant” to help consumers identify products that best match their needs.	Chen and Xie, 2008
5.	“Online consumer comment as a type of product information made by individuals based on their personal experience in using a product.”	Yubo and Jinhong, 2008
6.	Online reviews as “peer-generated product evaluations, posted on company or third-party websites”	Mudambi and Schuf., 2010
7.	“Online consumer reviews are a form of eWOM, which is generated and delivered by consumers who have purchased and used products.”	Bae and Lee, 2011
8.	The concept of online product reviews is defined “as a kind of electronic word-of-mouth written and released by consumers on the Internet, which enables people to easily obtain the opinions and personal experiences of different products from unknown individuals.”	Purnawirawan et al., 2012
9.	“Online consumer review is a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) which refers to user-generated content posted on online sites and third-party websites.”	Farki et al., 2016
10.	“Online consumer review is a medium for other consumers to find and obtain information that will influence purchasing decisions.”	Sutanto and Aprianingsih, 2016
11.	“Online consumer reviews are information written online about a product by other consumers who have bought and used the product.”	Rangsang and Millayani, 2021
12.	“Online consumer reviews (OCRs) are an informal type of commercial communication in which information about products, services, or firms are created by consumers, instead of the firm, and shared through different online platforms.”	Roman et al., 2022

Table 1 shows the definitions of Online Consumer Reviews from various authors.

According to a survey by Statista conducted in the year 2021, reviews have a powerful effect on audience behavior. The reviews written on a service or product are like friends’ recommendations, despite being published by complete strangers. In 2021, nearly 70 per cent of online shoppers typically read between one and six customer reviews before making a purchasing decision (Statista, 2021). Less than one in 10 shoppers did not have a habit of reading customer reviews before buying. In recent years, it has become increasingly important to the consumer to read up on a product, business, or service before spending any money (Statista, 2023). Thus, customers’ dependency on online consumer reviews is increasing exponentially every passing year.

THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL (ELM)

American psychologists John Cacioppo and Richard Petty developed the elaboration-likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion in 1986. It emphasizes the cognitive processes that underline people's responses to persuasion. Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) adopts a more comprehensive perspective on how two different persuasion techniques affect attitudes. When a consumer's motivation or capacity to evaluate the attitude object is high that is, when the consumer actively seeks out information pertinent to the attitude object itself, the central route is extremely relevant to attitude change (Hooper, 2019). On the other hand, when a consumer's motivation or assessment abilities are low (for example, when they are uninterested or unmotivated) -- that is when they are less likely to concentrate on information pertinent to the attitude object itself -- the attitude change tends to occur via the peripheral route (Hooper, 2019).

Many researchers in the past have considered the Elaboration Likelihood Model when seeking to explain whether high-involvement and low-involvement consumers adopt primarily central or peripheral cues to information processing. (Park et al., 2007; Park & Lee, 2008; Filieri, 2014;). It was found that both central (review quality dimensions like long, relevant, current, and factual OCRs) and peripheral cues (source credibility, overall ranking scores) affect information processing. (Chen et al., 2017).

Argument quality, which denotes the adoption of a central route of information processing, is understood as the quality level of the arguments available in a consumer review as assessed by a consumer (Park et al., 2007), whereas source credibility (i.e., perceived expertise and trustworthiness of a reviewer) and ranking scores are information shortcuts and thus denote a peripheral route of information processing (Filieri, 2018).

Consumers process the information and make assessments given by others to find the right product. The assessment of consumers is influenced by various factors including quality, quantity, credibility, and ratings that were identified as important influencers, transforming their opinion by the reviews of others. Consumer's attitude is influenced by online reviews' persuasion which is a prominent part of information processing. ELM model thus emphasizes the persuasion outcomes of online consumer reviews on individuals.

PROCESS OF PERSUASION AND CHANGE IN THE ATTITUDE OF CONSUMERS

Persuasion is a process by which a person's attitude or behaviour is influenced by communications from other people (Cheung, 2012). There is a progression of sequential stages that a person takes to become persuaded. The communication is delivered to the recipient first, and they pay attention to and understand its contents (including the basic conclusion being urged and perhaps also the evidence offered in its support). The person must accept the argument being made or agree with it to be persuaded, and unless just the most immediate consequences are relevant, they must hold onto this new belief long enough to take action on it (Petty et al., 2006). The ultimate aim of the persuasion process is to get people (or a group) to act in the way that the new attitudinal perspective implies.

Persuasion is affected by both direct and indirect routes to persuasion. A person's motivation and capacity for elaboration are taken into account while calculating elaboration likelihood in the ELM. Ability is demonstrated in the individual's cognitive competency or past skill with the attitude object, whereas motivation speaks to the person's relevance to the persuasive message. People differ in their motivation. (Sher & Lee, 2009). Motivation takes the form of involvement, which determines whether the central or peripheral paths to attitude modification are used or not. The consumer's path during communication processing determines whether a given message changes attitudes or not.

There are several comments present for a product or service and due to scarcity of time or interest, consumers do not go through each one of them. In such cases, it is the source or writer's identity or rating that influences the decision-making or attitude of a consumer which is spontaneous, peripheral, or heuristically. When we merely process information spontaneously, consumers' emotions are more likely to be significant; yet, when consumers carefully process information, cognition dominates. On the other hand, when a consumer finds a review relevant and takes time to process the communication more deliberately and carefully, it is the message strength and argument quality that influences the decision-making or attitude which is thoughtful or central (Petty & Briñol, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study uses the existing literature review to synthesize the impact of online consumer reviews on consumers' buying behaviour. For this purpose, the articles of Web of Science are analyzed in the study. The articles on OCRs of the past two decades 2002- 2022 are identified in this paper through search engines using keywords.

Then the articles that are relevant to the title of this paper have been selected and analyzed, focusing on the motivations and components of OCRs. For article identification, a pool of keywords has been used for the initial search, as online consumer reviews are also used as online recommendations, electronic word of mouth, and user-generated content in the literature. The present study adopted a Theory-Context- Characteristics-Methodology (TCCM) review framework to develop a deep understanding of the theories (i.e., key theories like ELM theory), contexts (i.e., industries), characteristics (i.e., key components and their influence) and methodologies (i.e., research approach and analytical techniques) of the earlier contributions made by various authors.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The existing literature review has assisted in better understanding the changing attitude of consumers on reading online reviews and identifying the components of online consumer reviews which strongly influence consumer buying behaviour.

COMPONENTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS

The significance of OCRs and how they influence customers' buying decisions have been extensively studied. Important components of OCR that can impact consumer buying behaviour are divided into three categories: Online Review credibility, Source/Reviewer Credibility, and Platform credibility. Online Review credibility includes argument quality, review quantity, review valence, review consistency, review sidedness, review format, review length, and review rating. Source/Reviewer credibility includes source identity, source homophily, source transparency, and reviewer expertise. Platform credibility includes reputation and trust on online platforms.

ONLINE REVIEW CREDIBILITY

Online review credibility is defined as 'the extent to which one perceives online reviews as believable, true, or factual (Fang, 2014). Review credibility is an important factor as it helps consumers make decisions by reducing uncertainties (Cheung et al. 2009; Hussain et al. 2016). Extracting information from online consumer reviews is a challenging task especially when many reviews are available. Reviews are positive, negative, and neutral depending on the consumers' experience (Thomas et al. 2019). Information processing of the comments is not easy. The following are the factors that make online reviews credible:

1. Argument Quality

Written comments are an essential source of collecting information about the product or services. Consumers' comments generate a stronger impact than ratings on consumers' buying behaviour (Tsang & Prendergast, 2009). The purchase decision is influenced by the quality of the message written by the reviewer. Depending upon the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, and rightness of the message, the argument quality is considered as high or low (Chakraborty and Bhat, 2017).

According to existing studies, accuracy plays an important role when consumers thoughtfully process the information (i.e. central route) (Filiari and McLeay, 2014). Accuracy refers to the correctness of online reviews. A reviewer should be able to communicate the experience accurately otherwise the information cannot be considered credible. Like accuracy, completeness of online reviews has also been examined by researchers (Filiari and McLeay, 2014; Cheung, 2014). Review completeness makes it comprehensive and strengthens the quality of the argument. Timeliness refers to the review being outdated or recently posted. The recent reviews make it more credible as they provide updated information about the product or service. Past reviews are less significant and do not catch the attention or trigger the attitude of consumers. Rightness is also closely connected with accuracy as wrong information provided by the reviewers can lead to unsatisfactory decisions.

2. Review Quantity

Review quantity is considered less significant in influencing consumers' buying decisions (regarded as a peripheral cue). Review quantity refers to the number of online reviews available on e-commerce websites. The larger the number of reviews, the greater the chance of grabbing attention and generating a positive impact on consumers, as a large number of reviews depicts the popularity of the product or service. A significant review quantity facilitates the observation of online reviews and aids in their verification (Cheung and Thadani, 2010).

3. Review Valence

Review can be positive, negative, or neutral depending upon the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of consumers. Existing studies have already investigated the impact of both positive and negative reviews on the purchase

decisions of consumers (Purnawirawan et al., 2012; Pentina et al., 2018; Hong and Pittman 2020). Positive online reviews encourage the reader to purchase while negative reviews discourage them (Aggrawal et al., 2022). Researchers have analyzed that negative reviews have a stronger influence than positive reviews on consumers (Lee and Koo 2012; Chiou et al. 2018). Neutral reviews are less impactful as the information is not clear and does not influence the buying decisions of consumers (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010).

4.Review Consistency

The E-commerce website is an online platform that provides access to consumers to read others' experiences and compare. When comparing comments, consumers consider high consistency as an important factor. If reviews are consistent with most other reviews, it makes them more credible. By contrast, inconsistency makes it skeptical and consumers build an unfavourable attitude towards the product (Zhang & Watts, 2008; Luo et al., 2015). Review consistency has been considered a peripheral cue by researchers (Cheung et al., 2012; Thomas et al, 2019).

5.Review Sidedness

Previous studies have shown that a two-sided review is more convincing than a one-sided review (Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2012). One-sided reviews provide either positive or negative aspects of the product, which are considered vague, biased, and inaccurate. Two-sided reviews are more comprehensive, detailed, and persuasive as they provide the product's positive and negative aspects. Studies have shown that it is more truthful, and reviewers perceive it as factual and accurate (Cheung et al., 2012). Thus, it makes the online review complete and reliable and helps the reviewer in purchase decisions.

6.Review Format

Consumer disseminates information verbally as well as by posting comments along with images and videos. Technological advancements have revolutionized the presentation format and have been categorized as text-based, image-based, and video-based formats. Past studies have examined that visual display strengthens the credibility of reviews and has a stronger and more positive impact on consumer behaviour (Lin et al., 2011)

7.Review Length

Review length indicates the detailed information of the product explaining the attributes that persuade the consumers. The description makes it believable and subsequently affects their behaviour. The length of review can improve the diagnostic ability of information as detailed information matters when consumers are willingly looking for and comparing the attributes and functionality of the product. Longer reviews provide in-depth product details like how and where the product was used in specific contexts, which facilitates the purchase decision of consumers (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010).

8.Review Rating

Review rating refers to the overall assessment of a product or service in the form of a star icon made by users (Farki et al., 2016). Rating is considered a visual cue that is conceptualized as peripheral due to less cognitive effort required in processing such information. Online customer reviews often have star ratings that range from one to five. A very low rating of one star denotes a very unfavourable opinion of the product whereas a very high rating of five stars denotes a very positive opinion of the product. A rating of three stars denotes a moderate opinion.

9.Review Helpfulness

Mudambi and Schuff, 2010 have defined review helpfulness as “a peer-generated product evaluation that facilitates the consumer’s purchase decision process.” Review helpfulness has been used to measure consumers’ evaluation of a review (Tandon et al., 2021). E-commerce websites ask “Was this review helpful to you? and place the reviews that are most helpful higher on the product information page.

SOURCE/REVIEWER CREDIBILITY

Source credibility is an important factor as consumers are exposed to a large number of reviews available on e-commerce websites (Upadhyaya and K, 2022). It becomes difficult to trust the reviews as many companies pay individuals to write fake reviews. In such cases, assessing the credibility of sources is hard. Source credibility is influenced by other factors like trustworthiness, tie strength, homophily, and knowledge of the reviewer.

1.Source Identity

Researchers have examined the source identity as a factor that influences the purchase decision. Source identity can be defined as an individual's real name, age, and gender specifications which increase the credibility of the reviews (Chakraborty and Bhat, 2017). According to Liu and Park (2015), reviews with a real name, address, and photo are considered as being more credible than others. Customers, who use this information to make their purchasing decisions, will find reviewers' comments to be more helpful if they share more of their personality (Forman et al., 2008).

2.Source Homophily

The large and easy availability of information on online platforms makes it challenging to trust reviewers. If reviews come from people sharing the same interests, attitudes, beliefs, and thinking or maybe demographic profiles like age or gender, then it fosters a positive attitude towards the review (Wei and Liu, 2020). Furthermore, recent studies show that higher levels of homophily between the consumer and the website result in a positive attitude towards the website and online reviews available on the website (Chawdhary and Weber, 2021)

3.Source Transparency

Source transparency refers to the extent to which users can independently verify the information provided by a source, increasing both the credibility of the source and users' perceptions of the information (Watts and Wyner, 2011). One of the most crucial elements of online transparency is that the information provided must be accurate, simple to understand, and available to Internet users.

4.Source Expertise

Reviewer's expertise is defined as the knowledge of the person regarding a particular topic which is built on his experience and skill. Reviews from experts are more persuasive than from strangers or anonymous users. Experts can communicate well and motivate the viewers by alluring them with their content and style. It has also been seen in a few studies that source experience and source expertise are the same (Jacoby et al., 1986; Baber et al., 2015). Source experience indicates that a person has used that product before sharing the experience with others. He knows the pros and cons, its functionality and characteristics which motivate him to voice his opinion with others.

PLATFORM CREDIBILITY

The E-commerce website is an online platform to disseminate information about products and services to a wide geographical area. Through OCR consumers can voice their opinion on these websites through comments, images, and videos (Lee et al. 2012).

1.Platform Reputation

The popularity or perception of an online review website among consumers is referred to as website reputation (Hsiao et al., 2010). Customers may judge the quality of an online review and its accompanying credibility based on the website's perceived reputation. A reputed website always gives due importance to the voice of the consumers and answers the queries and doubts of the consumers (Tandon et al., 2020). The accurate and prompt information available on e-commerce websites helps consumers to make purchase decisions. Past research has shown platform reputation as a peripheral cue in assessing the information by consumers.

2.Platform Trustworthiness

A trustworthy website is determined by features including accessibility, dependability, convenience, correctness, and security. The importance of trust in e-commerce websites is an important issue. One of the main advantages for every online business must be the use of secure technology for data transfers. But it shouldn't be expected that the customer is a technical expert. Hence, a requirement that is both essential and sufficient is the clear declaration of the use of secured protocols (Tsygankov, 2004).

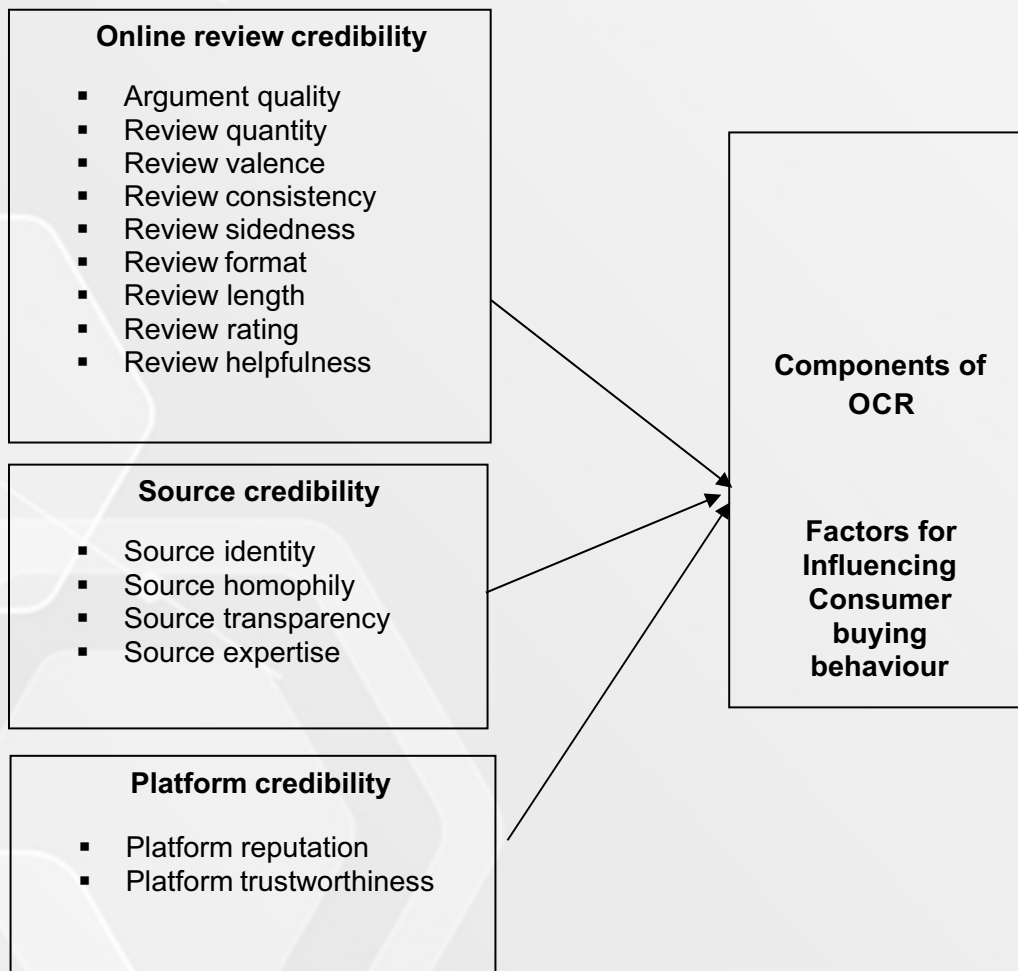


Figure 1: Conceptual Model for Components of Online Consumer Reviews influencing consumer buying behaviour

Source: The Authors

Figure 1 explains various factors or components of OCRs which influence consumer buying behaviour and the study of these factors has assisted in identifying various variables for the study. Although there are several empirical studies on the credibility of online consumer reviews, the findings are limited and contradictory. Therefore, in this paper, after an extensive literature review, three broad groups of components are provided namely, Online Review Credibility, Source Credibility, and Platform Credibility which influence consumer buying behaviour. The insights gained through this conceptual model will assist researchers in future.

CONCLUSION

The present study identified the factors that bring change in consumer buying behaviour through the influence of online consumer reviews and deepen the knowledge of the popular electronic word of mouth. It is undeniable that OCRs have changed how a product is voiced and promoted. Online consumer reviews can express satisfaction or complaints which is an effective tool to persuade customers to purchase a product. The study also examined the central and peripheral cues in the evaluation of online consumer reviews through the ELM model which suggests that the attitude of consumers is formed by the persuasive nature of OCRs which consequently affects the decision-making of consumers. Finally, it is anticipated that this research will spark additional theoretical and practical studies on online consumer reviews.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests several theoretical and practical implications. Previous studies have determined credibility factors as the important variable for influencing consumers' buying behaviour. The present study has identified 15 variables under three broad factors -- Source Credibility, Online Reviews Credibility and Platform Credibility -- that have a strong and significant influence on consumers' buying behaviour. The authors believe that conceptually, this

study adds to the existing literature on OCRs. As a result, a conceptual framework was created to show the components of effective OCRs to extend and enrich earlier contributions. The study's findings are consistent with earlier findings, reiterating the importance of credibility in influencing consumers' decisions on online evaluations before making final purchase choices.

The current study has some practical implications also. It is observed that negative reviews have a stronger impact than positive or neutral reviews. People tend to change their buying decisions when they encounter negative comments posted by consumers on e-commerce websites. Thus, companies or sellers must take steps to avoid negative word of mouth and adopt effective marketing strategies, recognizing the power and growth of OCRs.

Thus, this paper not only shows previous studies of OCR but also provides a roadmap for future marketers and researchers.

LIMITATIONS

The current research enriches a theoretical framework and practical contributions for the various factors identified that influence consumer buying behaviour, but still has certain limitations. The first limitation is that the variables were identified by only a thorough literature review. By creating a questionnaire and then using a statistical tool to analyse the results, more thorough research can be carried out. The second limitation is that not much discussion was done on how these factors can impact consumer buying behaviour for specific products or services, industries, or countries.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although there is a lot of study on the impact of online consumer reviews, there are many gaps in our understanding of how to evaluate online reviews for credibility and address these difficulties. Very few discussions have been held on fake online reviews and the methods to curb them. There is a need to examine the various formats like images and videos to express consumers' experiences. From the perspective of marketers, there should be research on the effective strategies for OCR that marketers might employ to win consumers' trust.

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