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Effect Of Online Reviews And Social Media Recommendations On Consumer Purchase Decisions

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Abstract

Purchasing behaviour among consumers has been overhauled by the high rate at which digital technologies and social networking platforms are evolving. This paper investigates the impact of the online reviews and social media recommendations on consumers buying decisions through a descriptive and analytical research methodology based on secondary data collected. The analysis will be organized on a standardized set of 100 digital purchase cases to investigate the relative role of various sources of information, review valence, decision-making stages, and social media types of influence. The results showed that online reviews can and do have the greatest impact on the decision to buy, then social media recommendations, and finally, traditional advertising has a relatively weak influence. Favorable reviews greatly improve the probability of buying and unfavourable reviews discourage consumers to carry out the purchases. It is also found that digital recommendations have the most significant influence on the information search and evaluation phases of the consumer decision-making process. The endorsement of influencers and peer recommendations is more convincing compared to brand-created content, which speaks of the need to be credible and authentic in digital communication.

Keywords; Online Reviews, Social Media Recommendations, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Digital Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

The blistering development of the digital technologies has essentially altered the environment of consumer behaviour and marketing communication. Due to the proliferation of the internet, phones and social networking sites, buying decisions are no longer determined by the conventional means of advertisement. Rather, more consumers depend on online review and social media recommendation as digital forms of word-of-mouth mechanisms to make purchases. Such online interactions have provided a more open, interactive, and informative marketplace with consumers actively seeking peer reviews and mutual experience in an attempt to minimize uncertainty and apparent risk.

The online reviews are usually written on e-commerce websites like Amazon and Flipkart and give a well-explained feedback regarding the quality of the products, their functionality, and the general satisfaction. Equally, social media like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are platforms that make it easy to get recommendations, endorsements made by influencers and peer review, which have a considerable impact on consumer perception. These user-created contents in contrast appear more authentic and credible unlike the traditional advertisements and hence have a greater persuasive power on purchase intentions.

Online reviews in the modern digital market can gain considerable influence on the attitude of consumers to products and brand based on their credibility, valence (positive or negative tone), volume, and timeliness. This effect is further enhanced by social media recommendations that play on social proof, influencer authority, and community involvement.

The reviews, comparison of the ratings, and recommending via social networks usually comes before buying products especially among younger consumers and digitally active populations.

With increased reliance on digital platforms to find and judge information, it is important to comprehend the impact that online reviews and social media suggestions have on the consumer purchase behaviour. This paper will focus on how much these digital influences impact consumer decision making process such as awareness, evaluation, intention and ultimate purchase behaviour. The study aims to offer information to marketers, businesses and policymakers on how to develop effective digital marketing strategies by examining the interaction between electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and consumer psychology.

Digital Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Consumer Decision-Making

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is the transfer of product related information and opinion via digital media. EWOM is more extensive, faster and has longer reach, unlike the traditional word-of-mouth which happens through face-to-face communication. The modern consumers are increasingly involved in the online community, review sites, and social networks where they post product experiences and review them publicly.

Digital feedback plays an important role in the consumer decision-making process, which consists of problem recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. Reviews online influence the information search and evaluation process mostly by offering comparative opportunities but social media recommendations have a greater influence on the emotional involvement and brand perception. Favorable opinions and authentic suggestions may positively influence the purchase intention, and negative comments may discourage and change brand perception.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kwahk, K. Y. and Kim, B. (2017) investigated the impact of social media on the purchasing decision of consumers using empirical data regarding Taobao. Their research established that the level of consumer trust and perceived usefulness as a result of social media interaction greatly affected purchase intention. The two authors indicated that social influence and quality of information had significant roles in determining buying behaviour. The results highlighted that the interactive nature of the social

media sites promoted the customer involvement and the buying decision.

Constantinides, E. and Holleschovsky, N. I. (2016) examined how online product reviews can influence the purchase decisions. Their study proved that online reviews did have a great impact on consumer perceptions especially at the information search and evaluation stages. The research pointed out that credibility of the reviews, quality of arguments and expertise of the reviewers had an influence on consumer trust and purchase intent. They inferred that online reviews operated more as an influential type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to diminish perceived risk and boost decision confidence.

Ibrahim, S. A. N. S. (2023) conducted a study to determine how online reviews affect consumer buying choices of products in online markets. It was found that positive reviews raised the consumer trust and purchase intention, and negative reviews deterred buying behavior. The results showed that the rating of the reviews, the amount of feedbacks, and the recency played a significant role in the process of evaluating the products by consumers. The study highlighted the increased reliance of online consumers on customer content as a pre-purchase factor.

Elwalda, A., and Lu, K. (2016) conducted research on the primary aspects of online customer reviews (OCRs) and their influence on the purchasing decision. The dimensions that were found by their study to be significant in affecting consumer reaction were quality of the reviews, credibility, usefulness and emotional tone. The authors established that well-written and credible reviews had a positive impact on the attitude of customers and their purchase intentions. They concluded that online customer reviews were influential on the decision-making process in consumers to increase the transparency of the information and decrease uncertainty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research design, data sources, analytical framework and methodological procedures to be used to analyze the impact of online reviews and social media recommendations on consumer purchase decisions are described. The methodology is well organized in order to make it clear, reliable and scholarly.

Research Design

The research design of the study is descriptive and analytical. The descriptive method is in place to provide the distribution and patterns of digital influences on purchase decisions in a systematic manner whereas the analytical one

assists in analyzing the influence of online reviews on social media recommendations on various levels of consumer decision-making.

Nature of the Study

The research is not survey based but is based on the secondary data that is compiled based on the general trends in consumer behavior in the digital world. The primary data collection (questionnaires, interviews, and so on) is not taken. The data-driven analysis is conceptual and organized based on a standardized base of 100 purchases made on the internet in the form of percentages and comparative interpretation of the model.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The research itself is based on the notion of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Consumer Decision-Making Process Model that consists of:

- Information Search
- Evaluation of Alternatives
- Purchase Decision
- Post-Purchase Behavior

The few online reviews and recommendations on social media are regarded as independent variables whereas consumer purchase decision is taken as the dependent variable.

Sample size

To maintain a uniformity in analysis, the data has been organized on a base of 100 digital purchase cases. This standard base enables the interpretation of percentages and comparative analysis that is easier and clearer in the aspect of various factors that influence them.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data employed in this paper is developed on the basis of the compiled secondary data within general tendencies of the digital consumer behaviour in the format of a standardized analytical foundation of 100 purchase cases to increase the clarity of percentages. The aim of the analysis is to study the role of online reviews and recommendations on social media in influencing consumer buying decisions in various aspects, such as source of information, sentiment (valence) of the review, decision-making stage, as well as, social media influence. The analysis of the frequency and percentage distribution of the data gives a clear picture on the relative significance of different channels of digital communication on consumer behaviour. The tables presented below are systematic

interpretations of the influence of purchasing results by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media communication in the modern digital market.

Table 1: Distribution of Purchase Decisions Influenced by Information Source

Information Source	Frequency (Out of 100 Cases)	Percentage (%)
Online Reviews (Ratings & Comments)	45	45%
Social Media Recommendations	30	30%
Brand Website/Product Description	15	15%
Traditional Advertising	7	7%
Others	3	3%
Total	100	100%

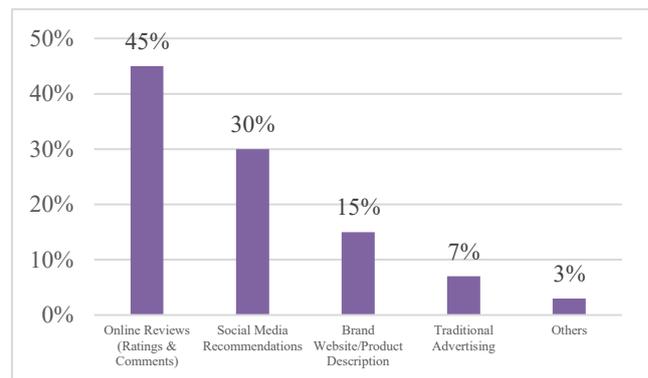


Figure 1: Graphical presentation of Distribution of Purchase Decisions Influenced by Information Source

Table 1 denotes online reviews (45%) as the most powerful resource that influences purchase decisions, and then there is social media recommendations (30%). These two digital sources taken together have 75% of the overall impact, indicating the prevalence of electronic word-of-mouth in the contemporary market. Brand websites and product descriptions provide 15% implying that although the information provided by a company is important, it is not as compelling as the one provided by users. The use of traditional advertising (7%) and other (3%) are relatively little in terms of impact, as these are clear evidence of a huge transfer of traditional promotion tools to online and peer-to-peer information avenues.

Table 2: Impact of Review Valence on Purchase Outcome

Review Type	Frequency (Out of 100 Cases)	Percentage (%)
Positive Reviews	58	58%
Mixed Reviews	24	24%
Negative Reviews	18	18%
Total	100	100%

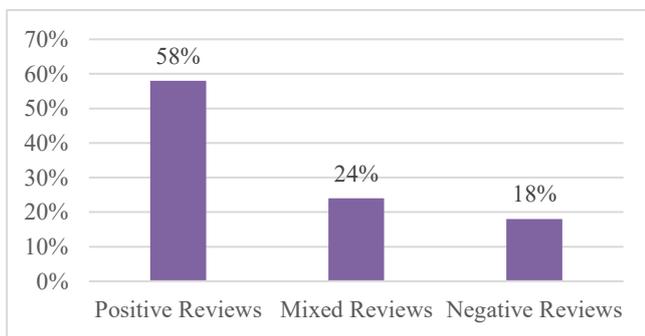


Figure 2: Graphical presentation of Impact of Review Valence on Purchase Outcome

Table 2 proves that positive reviews produce the most significant influence on the purchases with 58% having impact. This implies that good customer experiences would greatly boost consumer confidence and loyalty to purchase. Mixed reviews affect 24% of the purchasing decisions meaning that the consumers are keen when it comes to analyzing the positive and negative sides before making a purchase. The negative reviews take 18% and this indicates their significant discouraging impact on purchasing behaviour. In general, the evidence confirms that the review sentiment (valence) is one of the most important factors in the perception formation and ultimate purchases.

Table 3: Stage of Decision-Making Most Influenced by Digital Recommendations

Decision Stage	Frequency (Out of 100 Cases)	Percentage (%)
Information Search	40	40%
Evaluation of Alternatives	32	32%
Final Purchase Decision	18	18%
Post-Purchase Behavior	10	10%
Total	100	100%

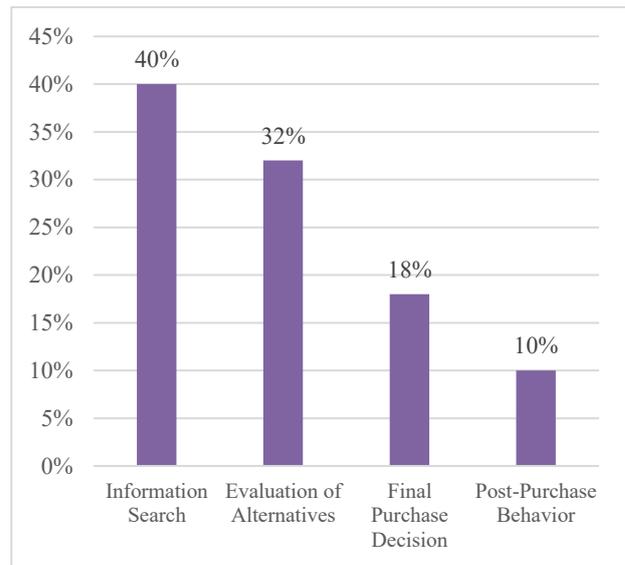


Figure 3: Graphical presentation of Stage of Decision-Making Most Influenced by Digital Recommendations

Table 3 discloses that the most impactful effects are exhibited by the digital recommendations in the search information stage (40%), evaluation of alternatives (32%). It denotes that consumers turn to the internet and social media postings in large numbers when collecting information and contrasting products. The impact also diminishes at the last point of purchase decision (18%), which indicates that computer-based content is more supportive at the earlier stages of the decision-making process, but not at the very time of the purchase. It also impacts post-purchase behaviour (10%), where digital interactions still determine consumer satisfaction and subsequent interaction. Therefore, online reviews and recommendations are especially effective during the stages of decision-making process that are pre-purchase.

Table 4: Type of Social Media Influence Affecting Purchase Decisions

Type of Social Influence	Frequency (Out of 100 Cases)	Percentage (%)
Influencer Endorsements	34	34%
Peer/Friend Recommendations	29	29%
User Comments & Discussions	22	22%
Sponsored Advertisements	10	10%
Brand-Generated Content	5	5%
Total	100	100%

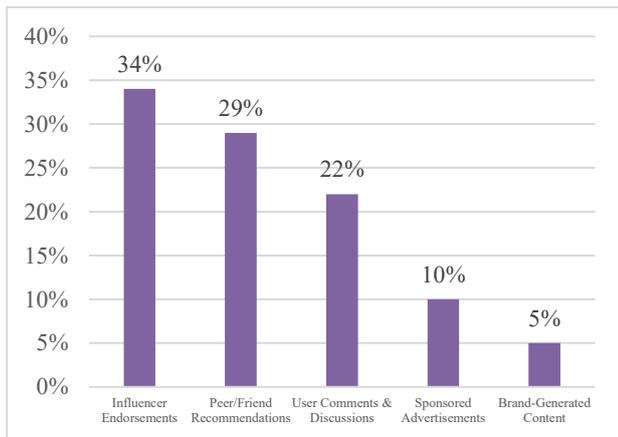


Figure 4: Graphical presentation of Type of Social Media Influence Affecting Purchase Decisions

Table 4 indicates that influencer endorsements (34%) are the most influential social media influencers followed by peer or friend recommendations (29%). This underscores the significance of credibility, relatability and trust in the consumer decision process. Interactive digital communities have a role to play in purchase behaviour and this is evidenced by user comments and discussions (22%). Sponsored advertisements (10%), and brand-generated content (5%) are less impactful, as the users seem to trust more the user-created and authentic content much more than direct promotion messages. All in all, the results highlight the increase in the strength of social proof and influencer marketing in online consumer markets.

Conclusion

The paper finds that online reviews and social media recommendations are an important and determining factor in customer purchasing behavior in the modern digital market. It has been analyzed that online reviews are the most dominant source of purchase influence, which indicates that consumers are highly dependent on user-generated content, as opposed to traditional advertisements and communication that vehicles are controlled by the brand. The results also show that the review valence has a significant influence on buying behaviour, where positive reviews increase the likelihood of purchase and negative reviews are strong discounting factors. It was found that digital recommendations had the most impact on the stages of information search and assessment of the decision-making process, which proves that consumers are keen on online validation prior to making the final purchases. Also, it was found that influencer endorsements and peer recommendations are more convincing than sponsored advertisements and brand-generated content, which is why

authenticity, credibility, and social proof have a greater impact on consumer perceptions. On the whole, the paper points out the fact that electronic word-of-mouth is now becoming a crucial factor of consumer behaviour and companies have to manage online reputation, elicit praise updates and use believable social media interaction strategically to stay afloat in the dynamic digital world.

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