

Effect of Online Customer Reviews on Consumer Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT:

Reviewers' comments and information from consumer reviews are essential influencing factors on consumer purchase intention. This study examined the effects of online customer reviews on consumer purchase intention in Nigeria, focusing on review credibility and valence, and leveraging the Theory of Planned Behaviour. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire from a sample of 285 respondents selected via simple random sampling. The findings revealed that online customer reviews have a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Similarly, review credibility was found to significantly influence consumer purchase intention, indicating that consumers are more likely to rely on trustworthy and authentic reviews when making purchase decisions. In addition, valence was found to have a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention, indicating that positive reviews increase the likelihood of purchase intention, while negative reviews reduce it. The study concluded that online customer reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria. It was recommended that businesses should encourage positive reviews, improve credibility mechanisms on digital platforms, and actively manage customer feedback to enhance consumer trust and purchase intention.

KEYWORDS: *Online customer reviews, review credibility, review valence, consumer purchase intention.*

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INTRODUCTION

The way consumers search for information and make purchasing decisions has changed as digital technology and internet-enabled communication have developed (Chaffey, 2020). Before making a purchase decision, consumers now rely heavily on online platforms such as e-commerce websites, social media pages, blogs, and review forums (Solomon, 2020). These digital information sources, online customer reviews, have become one of the most influential factors affecting consumer buying behaviour because they provide consumers with experiences and opinions from previous users. Evidence shows that online reviews have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions in digital marketplaces (Ahn & Lee, 2024). Comments, ratings, opinions, and feedback that consumers post about products or services on digital platforms are known as "online customer reviews." These reviews help potential buyers evaluate product quality, reliability, and performance before making purchasing decisions. According to Wang & Shahzad (2024), consumers perceive online reviews as more trustworthy and realistic than traditional advertising. This is because online reviews are written by actual customers rather than businesses. Purchase intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of consumers to buy a particular product or service after evaluating available information and alternatives. It represents an important stage in the consumer decision-making process and is widely used as a predictor of actual buying behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to recent research, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), review credibility, review quality, and trust in online information significantly impact purchase intention in digital environments (Cuong, 2024). Recent empirical studies show that positive online reviews increase consumer confidence and

encourage purchase intention, while negative reviews may discourage purchase. Ahn and Lee (2024) found that online reviews significantly influence consumer purchase intention through social influence and group similarity effects. Similarly, Cuong (2024) reported that when perceived risk is low, electronic word of mouth positively influences purchase intention. Kwakye et al. (2024) also found that reviewer comments, trust, and perceived risk significantly shape purchase intention in digital environments.

In addition, recent research reveals that the authenticity, quantity, valence, and credibility of reviewers significantly impact how consumers interpret online information. Kakaria et al. (2024) found that both intrinsic and extrinsic review cues influence consumer purchase intention in e-commerce environments. In a similar vein, Wang and Shahzad (2024) concluded that online purchase intention is significantly influenced by social and technological factors on social commerce platforms. Online reviews written by past customers enhance information about products and service providers in the online shopping environment (Zhang & Piramuthu, 2018). If this is the case, buyers will be extremely sensitive to negative online reviews of the products or services they intend to purchase. Consumers typically interpret negative internet reviews as warning flags from early adopters or other consumers who have already used the product or service and had a negative experience. Zhang et al. (2014), Keh & Sun (2018), Hussain et al. (2020), and Zhong et al. (2021) are just a few examples of empirical studies on the impact of online reviews on consumers' purchase intent. However, these studies were conducted in other countries. Nigerian researchers have yet to delve into this field of study. As a result, this study is ideally positioned to evaluate the impact of unfavourable internet reviews on consumers' purchase intentions in Nigeria (Wu et al., 2020; Mariani et al., 2019).

In Nigeria, the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms and social media marketplaces has increased consumers' dependence on online customer reviews before making purchase decisions. However, consumers' lack of trust in online transactions, fake reviews, misleading information, and other issues continue to cause uncertainty. Recent evidence suggests that fake or manipulated reviews may undermine trust and distort consumer decision-making in online markets. Therefore, this study examines the effect of online customer reviews on consumer purchase intention, with particular attention to review credibility and Review Valence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) served as the foundation for this paper. One of the most widely used theories for explaining and predicting human behaviour, including consumer purchasing decisions, is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which was developed by Ajzen (1991). According to this theory, a person's behaviour is directly influenced by their behavioural intention, which is influenced by three main factors: their attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a particular action is referred to as attitude toward the behaviour. In the context of online customer reviews and affiliate marketing, consumers are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward purchasing a product when they perceive reviews as credible, useful, and favourable. Subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure from others to perform or not perform a behaviour. Online reviews, influencers, peer recommendations, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) have a significant impact on subjective norms in digital environments. When consumers observe that others have positive experiences with a product, their intention to purchase increases.

Perceived behavioural control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. In online shopping, this includes factors such as access to digital platforms, payment systems, delivery services, and internet availability. When consumers believe they can easily complete an online purchase, their purchase intention is strengthened.

According to TPB, these three factors jointly influence behavioural intention, which is the immediate antecedent of actual behaviour. In this study, purchase intention is shaped by online customer reviews, review credibility, trust, engagement, and exposure to affiliate marketing. Because it explains how online information, such as customer reviews and affiliate marketing content, affects consumer decision-making, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is extremely relevant to this study. Positive reviews and credible affiliate recommendations influence consumer attitudes, while social media influence and peer opinions shape subjective norms. At the same time, ease of access to online platforms enhances perceived behavioural control, thereby increasing purchase intention.

In the Nigerian context, TPB is particularly useful in explaining consumer behaviour in digital markets. Although consumers are increasingly exposed to online marketing and affiliate promotions, their purchasing decisions are often moderated by trust, perceived risk, and digital accessibility. This means that even when attitudes and social influence are positive, low perceived risk (such as payment insecurity or delivery concerns) may reduce actual purchase intention. The Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a strong theoretical foundation for this study, as it explains how attitudes, social influence, and perceived control

combine to shape consumer purchase intention in response to online customer reviews and affiliate marketing activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Customer Reviews

According to Cheung & Thadani (2012), "online customer reviews" are user-generated evaluations, ratings, and written feedback about goods, services, or brands that are shared on digital platforms like e-commerce websites, social media networks, blogs, and review forums. According to Wang & Shahzad (2024), these reviews are a crucial part of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, in which customers voluntarily share their post-purchase experiences in order to inform and influence other potential buyers. In contemporary digital marketing environments, online customer reviews are considered one of the most powerful sources of product information because they are perceived as more credible and trustworthy than firm-generated advertising (Fileri, 2015). This is because reviews come from independent customers with no financial stake in persuading others, which makes them appear more genuine and less suspicious (Ahn & Lee, 2024). When evaluating product quality and brand dependability, customers frequently rely on reviews as social proof. Online customer reviews typically include several dimensions such as review valence (positive or negative ratings), review volume (number of reviews), review credibility, and review depth (detailed explanations of user experience). These elements collectively determine how persuasive a review is in influencing consumer perception and decision-making (Kakaria et al., 2024), but this work is limited to review valence (positive or negative ratings) and review credibility.

Review valence

Review valence refers to the overall sentiment expressed in online customer reviews, specifically whether the feedback is positive, negative, or neutral (Ahn and Lee 2024). It represents the emotional tone or evaluative direction of a review and is one of the most influential dimensions of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. In digital marketing environments, review valence helps potential buyers quickly assess the overall satisfaction of previous consumers with a product or service (Wang & Shahzad, 2024).

When customers express satisfaction, approval, or positive experiences with a product, or when they frequently highlight its quality, performance, and value, this is known as positive review value. Such positive ratings tend to strengthen brand image, increase consumer confidence, and enhance purchase intention. Conversely, negative review valence reflects dissatisfaction, complaints, or unfavourable experiences, which can reduce trust, increase perceived risk, and discourage potential buyers from completing a purchase (Ahn & Lee, 2024).

From a consumer behaviour perspective, review valence plays a crucial role in the information adoption process, as consumers often rely on the balance of positive versus negative opinions to form judgments about a product. When positive reviews dominate, consumers are more likely to perceive the product as reliable and high-quality. However, even a small number of strongly negative reviews can significantly influence perceptions due to negativity bias, in which consumers tend to give more weight to negative information than to positive information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Based on the above, the study hypothesizes that:

H01: Online reviews valence does not have any significant effect on consumer purchase intention

Review credibility

Review credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive online customer reviews as trustworthy, believable, and reliable when evaluating products or services (Wang & Shahzad, 2024). It reflects the extent to which users believe that the information provided in a review is accurate, unbiased, and based on genuine personal experience. In digital marketing environments, review credibility is a critical factor because consumers are often exposed to large volumes of user-generated content, some of which may be misleading, exaggerated, or even fabricated (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Credibility of reviews is seen as a major factor in how persuasive online reviews are in influencing purchase decisions in contemporary consumer behaviour research. When consumers perceive reviews as credible, they are more likely to accept the information they contain and use it to reduce decision-making uncertainty. Conversely, low credibility reduces the persuasive power of reviews and may lead consumers to ignore or distrust online feedback, regardless of its content quality (Ahn & Lee, 2024). Review credibility is often shaped by several factors, including the trustworthiness of the reviewer, the consistency of the message, the level of detail provided, and the perceived authenticity of the review source. Reviews written in a balanced and detailed manner are generally perceived as more credible than overly positive or overly negative comments. Additionally, verified purchase indicators and reviewer profiles also contribute to credibility perception in many online platforms (Kakaria et al., 2024). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H02: Online review credibility does not have any significant effect on consumer purchase intention.

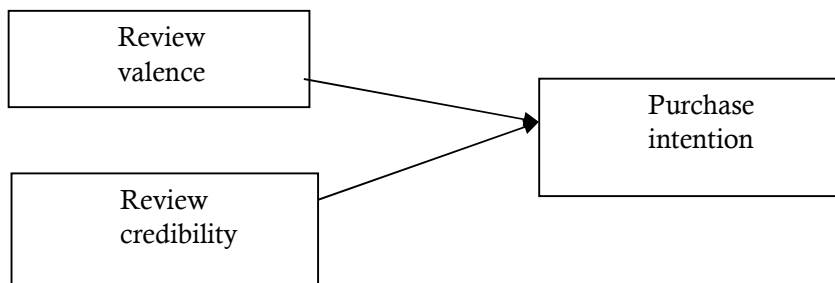
Concept of Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious plan, willingness, or likelihood to buy a particular product or service after evaluating available information, alternatives, and marketing stimuli (Kotler and Keller 2016). It represents a key stage in the consumer decision-making process and is widely used in marketing research as a strong predictor of actual purchasing behaviour. In digital marketing environments, purchase intention is shaped by a combination of psychological, social, and informational factors, such as attitudes, trust, perceived value, and exposure to online content (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Solomon, 2020). From a behavioural perspective, purchase intention is rooted in the idea that individuals do not make buying decisions randomly but rather follow a structured decision-making process. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all influence a consumer's decision to purchase (Ajzen, 1991). This implies that when consumers develop positive attitudes toward a product, often shaped by online reviews, advertising, and social influence, their intention to purchase increases.

In contemporary digital marketing literature, purchase intention is strongly influenced by online information sources, including social media content, influencer recommendations, affiliate marketing messages, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Consumers are more likely to develop purchase intentions when they perceive information as credible, useful, and trustworthy. This is because digital environments reduce physical product interaction, making consumers rely more on informational cues to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk (Wang & Shahzad, 2024).

Purchase intention is also closely linked to emotional and cognitive responses. Cognitive responses involve how consumers evaluate product attributes such as quality, price, and usefulness, while emotional responses relate to feelings of trust, satisfaction, and attraction toward a brand. When both cognitive and emotional evaluations are positive, consumers are more likely to form strong purchase intentions (Solomon, 2020).

Based on the explanations of the online customer reviews and purchase intention, a research paradigm is developed, as depicted in Fig. 1.



METHODOLOGY

To ascertain the effect of online customer reviews on consumer intention to purchase in Umuahia, this method provides a systematic framework for data collection and analysis. This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine the effect of online customer reviews on consumer purchase intention in Umuahia. The design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data on respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding online reviews and their influence on purchasing decisions. The study focuses on online consumers in Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria, who are exposed to digital platforms such as e-commerce websites and social media marketplaces. It is considered infinite due to the large and difficult-to-determine online consumer population. Sample size was determined using the Cochran formula, and respondents were selected using a convenient sampling technique. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed in a three-section format: review credibility, review valence, and consumer purchase intention. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The validity of the research instrument is ensured through expert review (face and content validity), while reliability will be tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable value of 0.70. Through physical distributions, data were gathered. For data analysis, the study employed inferential statistics (simple regression analysis) using EViews. The hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Two hypotheses were projected for this study and were tested

Test of Hypothesis I

Test 1 is based on hypothesis 1 projected in null form, thus:

H01: Online reviews valence does not have any significant effect on consumer purchase intention. This test was executed using the simple (regression) linear model. The result is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Simple regression analysis results on the effect of online reviews valence on consumer purchase intention.

Dependent Consumer intention	Variable: Dependent purchase Consumer intention	Variable: Dependent purchase Consumer intention	Variable: purchase
Independent Review Valence	Variable: Independent Review Valence	Variable: Independent Review Valence	Variable:
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic Prob.
RV (Review Valence)	0.641	0.046	5.239 0.0000
C	0.812	0.214	3.794 0.0002
R-squared	0.681	Mean dependent var	Mean dependent var 3.982
Adjusted R-squared	0.677	S.D. dependent var	S.D. dependent var 0.748
S.E. of regression	0.402	Akaike info criterion	Akaike info criterion 0.987
Sum squared resid	41.210	Schwarz criterion	Schwarz criterion 1.045
Log likelihood	-112.345	Hannan-Quinn criter.	Hannan-Quinn criter. 1.010
F-statistic	182.45	Durbin-Watson stat	Durbin-Watson stat 1.98
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000		

The EViews regression output shows that Review Valence (RV) has a positive, statistically significant effect on Consumer Purchase Intention (PI). The coefficient of 0.641 indicates that a unit increase in positive review valence is associated with a corresponding increase in consumer purchase intention. The t-statistics of 5.239 indicate that review valence is statistically significant, and the p-value of 0.0000 confirms that the effect is highly significant at the 5% level. The R-squared value of 0.681 shows that 68.1% of the variation in consumer purchase intention is explained by the model, while the F-statistical probability (0.000000) confirms that the overall model is statistically significant. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.98 indicates the absence of autocorrelation, confirming the reliability of the regression estimates.

Test of Hypothesis II

Test II is based on hypothesis II projected in null form, thus:

H02: Online review credibility does not have any significant effect on consumer purchase intention.

This test was executed using the simple (regression) linear model. The result is shown in Table 2 below:

The regression results indicate that review credibility (RC) has a positive, statistically significant effect on consumer purchase intention (PI) in Nigeria. The coefficient of 0.687 indicates that greater credibility of online customer reviews increases consumers' purchase intention. The t-statistic value of 5.857 and the probability value of 0.0000 ($P < 0.05$) confirm that the effect is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that review credibility significantly influences consumer purchase intention. The R-squared value of 0.673 indicates that 67.3% of the variation in purchase intention is explained by the model, while the remaining 32.7% is attributed to factors not captured by the model. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.95 indicates that the model is free from autocorrelation, confirming the reliability of the estimates.

Table 2: Simple regression analysis results on the effect of online reviews credibility on consumer purchase intention.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
RC (Review Credibility)	0.687	0.049	5.857	0.0001
C	0.790	0.210	3.762	0.0002
R-squared	0.673	Mean dependent var	Mean dependent var	3.975
Adjusted R-squared	0.668	S.D. dependent var	S.D. dependent var	0.756
S.E. of regression	0.410	Akaike info criterion	Akaike info criterion	1.012
Sum squared resid	43.620	Schwarz criterion	Schwarz criterion	1.070
Log likelihood	-118.430	Hannan-Quinn criter.	Hannan-Quinn criter.	1.035
F-statistic	175.32	Durbin-Watson stat	Durbin-Watson stat	1.95
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			

Discussion

The analysis found that Review Valence has a significant effect on consumer Purchase Intention. This implies that when consumers are exposed to more favourable online reviews, their willingness to purchase a product increases. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which explains that consumers' intentions are shaped by attitudes and social influence. Positive review valence enhances consumer attitudes toward a product, thereby increasing purchase intention.

The empirical finding aligns with that of Ahn and Lee (2024), who found that social influence and trust formation are two mechanisms through which positive online reviews significantly increase purchase intention. Kakaria et al. (2024) reported that review valence is a key cue consumers use to evaluate product quality and reduce uncertainty in online environments. Furthermore, Wang and Shahzad (2024) emphasized that positive sentiment in online reviews strongly predicts purchase intention in social commerce platforms. According to their meta-analysis, positive user-generated content increases consumers' likelihood of purchasing. Cuong (2024) also found that positive electronic word of mouth increases purchase intent in e-commerce environments by boosting consumer confidence and reducing perceptions of risk.

The implication of this finding is that firms should focus on delivering superior products and services that generate positive customer experiences and favorable reviews. Positive review valence can enhance brand image, attract new customers, and improve sales performance. Conversely, negative review valence leads to a decline in consumer purchase intention, as unfavorable reviews can raise doubts about product quality and discourage potential buyers. Therefore, organizations should actively manage customer satisfaction and promptly address customer complaints to maintain positive online evaluations.

The analysis found that Review credibility has a significant effect on consumer Purchase Intention. This suggests that customers are more likely to have stronger purchase intentions when they perceive reviews as genuine, trustworthy, and dependable. This result aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence consumer intentions. In this context, reputable online reviews boost consumer intent to buy by fostering favourable attitudes toward a product. The result aligns with Ahn and Lee (2024), who found that review credibility significantly influences purchase intention by fostering trust and social influence in online environments. According to their research, customers are more likely to act on reviews they believe to be genuine. Similarly,

Kakaria et al. (2024) reported that reviewer credibility is a key determinant of consumer decision-making, as consumers rely heavily on trusted sources when evaluating product quality online.

In addition, Wang and Shahzad (2024) found that trust in online information significantly increases purchase intent, demonstrating that credibility is an important factor in online consumer behaviour. Furthermore, Cuong (2024) found that credible electronic word of mouth reduces perceived risk and increases consumer confidence, thereby strengthening purchase intention in e-commerce settings.

The implication of this finding is that businesses should encourage genuine customer reviews and establish transparent review systems that promote trust among consumers. Companies are more likely to improve customer confidence, brand reputation, and sales performance if they maintain credible review environments. Online platforms should also implement verification mechanisms to minimize fake reviews and ensure the authenticity of customer feedback.

Consumers are less likely to trust reviews and, as a result, are less likely to make a purchase. When consumers suspect reviews to be manipulated or deceptive, they may disregard the information entirely and become reluctant to purchase the product. Such skepticism can negatively affect consumer purchase intention and customer retention. Therefore, maintaining review credibility is essential for building long-term consumer trust and encouraging favorable purchasing behavior.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that online customer reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer purchase intention in Umuahia. Specifically, review credibility and review valence are key determinants that influence how consumers interpret online information and make purchase decisions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour, which explains that consumer intention is influenced by attitudes and external social information, is also supported by the findings. In this context, online reviews serve as an important source of social influence, guiding consumer behaviour.

Overall, the study establishes that consumers in Umuahia rely heavily on online reviews when making purchasing decisions, especially on digital marketplaces and social media platforms.

Based on the findings, the authors recommend that businesses should actively encourage positive customer reviews. This will help firms build value and improve customer experience. Firms should improve product quality and customer experience to generate favourable reviews and thereby increase consumer purchase intention. In addition, there is a need to enhance review credibility systems: E-commerce platforms should implement verification measures, such as "verified buyer" tags, to reduce the prevalence of fake reviews and build customer trust.

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