



Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumer Buying Behaviour in India

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Abstract: The rapid growth of e-commerce and digital platforms has significantly changed consumer buying behaviour in India. Online reviews and ratings have emerged as important sources of information that help consumers evaluate products and services before making purchasing decisions. This review-based paper examines the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying behaviour in the Indian context. The paper synthesises existing literature on online reviews, ratings, electronic word-of-mouth, consumer trust, perceived risk, purchase intention, and digital decision-making. The review highlights that review credibility, quality, quantity, valence, recency, reviewer characteristics, and rating consistency influence the extent to which consumers rely on online information. Positive reviews and higher ratings generally strengthen consumer confidence, improve perceptions of product quality, reduce uncertainty, and increase purchase intention, while negative reviews can highlight potential risks and influence consumers towards alternative products. The study also identifies the importance of trust and perceived authenticity, particularly in the context of fake reviews and manipulated ratings. The Indian digital marketplace presents additional dimensions due to its diverse consumer population, growing internet penetration, regional differences, and increasing use of social media and mobile commerce. The paper concludes that genuine and credible online reviews and ratings can significantly support informed consumer decision-making and influence purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: Online Reviews, Online Ratings, Consumer Buying Behaviour, E-Commerce, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology, internet connectivity, smartphones, and e-commerce has significantly changed consumer buying behaviour. Unlike traditional shopping, where consumers mainly depended on personal experience, family recommendations, advertisements, salespersons, and physical inspection, digital consumers can compare products, prices, features, sellers, and customer experiences before making a purchase. Among the various sources of online information, online reviews and ratings have become particularly important. Reviews provide detailed opinions and experiences of previous users, while ratings offer a quick numerical or star-based indication of overall satisfaction. Together, they influence consumer perceptions, product evaluation, purchase intention, and buying decisions.

Online reviews reduce the uncertainty associated with online purchases because consumers cannot physically examine or test products before buying them. Reviews provide information about product quality, performance, usability, durability, delivery, packaging, customer service, and value for money. Positive reviews can increase confidence, while negative reviews can highlight potential problems and encourage consumers to consider alternatives. The usefulness of reviews depends not only on whether they are positive or negative but also on their credibility, relevance, detail, clarity, authenticity, and recency. Ratings similarly help consumers quickly compare alternatives, although consumers often examine written reviews to understand the reasons behind a particular rating. Online reviews and ratings are closely related to electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Digital platforms allow consumers to share their experiences with a much larger audience than traditional word-of-mouth communication. A single review can potentially influence hundreds or thousands of prospective consumers and remain available for a long period. As a result, consumer-generated content has become an important part of the



digital decision-making process. Consumers may consider information from other users more trustworthy than direct advertising because it is perceived as being based on actual experience. However, this depends strongly on the credibility and authenticity of the information.

Several factors determine the influence of reviews and ratings. Review quality, review quantity, rating score, review valence, reviewer credibility, consistency, helpfulness, and recency can affect how consumers interpret online information. A large number of reviews may create social validation, while a high rating can generate an immediate positive impression. However, consumers may be suspicious if reviews appear exaggerated, repetitive, or unrealistic. A balanced combination of positive and negative reviews may sometimes appear more genuine than a product with only extremely positive feedback. Recent reviews can also be more useful because product quality, sellers, prices, and services may change over time.

The impact of online reviews also depends on product type and consumer involvement. Reviews may be particularly important for products and services whose quality is difficult to assess before purchase, such as electronic products, clothing, beauty products, hotels, restaurants, and household appliances. Consumers making expensive or high-risk purchases are generally more likely to conduct detailed information searches and examine several reviews before deciding. In low-involvement purchases, consumers may rely more heavily on simple indicators such as ratings, price, brand familiarity, or a limited number of reviews.

The Indian context is particularly significant because of the rapid expansion of e-commerce, digital payments, social media, and smartphone usage. Consumers across metropolitan cities as well as smaller cities and towns increasingly use digital platforms to purchase products and services. India's diverse population means that consumer responses to online reviews may differ according to age, income, education, language, geographical location, digital literacy, and previous online shopping experience. Regional-language content and social media reviews may become increasingly important as digital participation expands.

Trust remains a major factor in determining the effectiveness of online reviews. Genuine reviews can reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in products, sellers, and brands. In contrast, fake reviews, manipulated ratings, exaggerated feedback, and artificially generated content can mislead consumers and reduce trust in digital platforms. Businesses therefore need to encourage genuine feedback, respond to customer complaints, monitor online reputation, and maintain transparent review systems. Consumers should also critically evaluate reviews instead of depending on a single rating or comment.

2. Conceptual Understanding of Online Reviews and Ratings

Online reviews and ratings have become important sources of information in the digital marketplace. Online reviews are opinions, evaluations, experiences, or feedback shared by consumers about products, services, brands, sellers, or organisations through e-commerce websites, social media, review platforms, mobile applications, travel portals, food delivery platforms, and other digital channels. They generally communicate the actual experiences of consumers and may provide information about product quality, performance, durability, design, price, packaging, delivery, customer service, and overall satisfaction. Unlike traditional advertising, reviews can contain both positive and negative experiences and are therefore often considered a form of consumer-generated information and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).

The usefulness of an online review depends on several characteristics. Review quality, credibility, relevance, detail, clarity, authenticity, and recency influence whether consumers consider a review useful and trustworthy. Detailed and experience-based reviews may provide information that is not available in formal product descriptions. Reviews can also include photographs, videos, comparisons, and responses to questions from other consumers. Positive reviews may create favourable attitudes and increase purchase confidence, while negative reviews may highlight potential risks. Balanced reviews can sometimes appear more realistic because they present



both strengths and weaknesses. Consumers often examine several reviews and identify common themes rather than relying on a single opinion.

Online ratings represent another major form of consumer-generated information. Ratings provide a numerical, star-based, percentage-based, or symbolic indication of consumer satisfaction. Their main advantage is simplicity because consumers can quickly compare products without reading every review. A high rating may create an immediate positive impression and act as an initial screening mechanism when consumers face many alternatives. However, the average rating alone does not explain why consumers are satisfied or dissatisfied. Therefore, consumers commonly combine rating scores with written reviews to understand the reasons behind the overall assessment.

The meaning of a rating also depends on the number and distribution of ratings. A high score based on only a few ratings may be interpreted differently from a slightly lower score supported by thousands of ratings. Consumers may examine whether ratings are consistently positive or whether they include a large number of extreme positive and negative scores. A large volume of ratings can create social proof and suggest greater market acceptance, but it does not automatically guarantee product quality. Similarly, high seller ratings can increase confidence in the reliability of sellers and service providers, provided that consumers believe the ratings are genuine.

Online reviews and ratings are closely related but perform different functions. Ratings provide a quick answer about the level of satisfaction, while reviews explain the reasons behind that satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For example, a product with a 4.5-star rating may initially appear attractive, but consumers may read reviews to determine whether the high rating relates to product quality, price, delivery, customer service, or another factor. Consistency between written reviews and overall ratings can strengthen credibility, whereas major differences between them may create suspicion and encourage consumers to search for additional information.

In consumer decision-making, online reviews and ratings help reduce the uncertainty associated with online purchases. Since consumers cannot physically examine or test many products before buying, experiences shared by previous customers can help them evaluate quality, reliability, seller performance, and potential risks. They can also reduce the time and effort required for information search by helping consumers identify suitable alternatives. Their influence can be especially strong for unfamiliar brands, experience-based products, services, and high-involvement purchases.

In the Indian context, online reviews and ratings are increasingly important because of the rapid growth of e-commerce, smartphone use, internet connectivity, digital payments, and social media. Consumers can purchase products and services from sellers located across different cities and regions and may depend on previous customers' experiences when direct physical evaluation is difficult. However, Indian consumers differ in age, income, education, language, digital literacy, and online shopping experience, which may influence how they interpret and use reviews and ratings.

Overall, online reviews and ratings have become an important part of digital consumer decision-making. Reviews provide detailed and experience-based information, while ratings provide quick numerical signals of overall satisfaction. Together, they can influence consumer trust, perceived quality, perceived risk, product evaluation, purchase intention, and final buying decisions. However, their effectiveness depends heavily on credibility and authenticity. Fake reviews, manipulated ratings, biased opinions, and promotional content can reduce consumer trust and weaken the usefulness of digital feedback. Therefore, transparent, genuine, relevant, and reliable review and rating systems are essential for informed consumer decision-making and a trustworthy digital marketplace.

3. Consumer Buying Behaviour in the Digital Environment

Consumer buying behaviour refers to the process through which individuals identify their needs, search for information, evaluate alternatives, make purchasing decisions, use products or services, and assess their



experiences after purchase. The rapid development of digital technology has transformed this process from traditional, seller-driven purchasing into a more information-driven, interactive, convenient, and dynamic process. Consumers can now access product information, compare prices and features, examine ratings and reviews, watch demonstrations, check seller reputation, and compare alternatives through e-commerce websites, mobile applications, search engines, and social media.

The digital buying process generally begins with need recognition, which may be influenced not only by personal requirements but also by online advertisements, social media content, influencer recommendations, and personalised product suggestions. This is followed by information search, where consumers can quickly collect information from multiple sources. Online reviews and ratings are especially important at this stage because they provide experiences of previous customers. Consumers may use ratings to identify suitable products and then read detailed reviews to understand product quality, usability, durability, delivery, customer service, and value for money.

During the evaluation of alternatives, consumers compare products on the basis of price, brand, features, ratings, reviews, seller reputation, warranty, delivery, and return policies. Digital platforms make such comparisons easier but also expose consumers to a very large amount of information. Therefore, consumers may face information overload and need to determine which information is credible and relevant. Individual differences such as income, experience, expectations, product knowledge, involvement, and perceived risk also influence how consumers interpret the same information.

Trust and perceived risk are central elements of digital buying behaviour. Since consumers cannot physically inspect or test most online products, they must depend on information provided by sellers and other users. Genuine reviews and high-quality ratings can reduce uncertainty and provide social proof, while fake reviews, misleading descriptions, online fraud, and poor service can weaken trust. Consumers may therefore examine several reviews, compare positive and negative opinions, and evaluate the credibility of reviewers before making a final decision.

Convenience and price transparency have also become major features of digital purchasing. Consumers can shop at any time, compare prices across sellers, access discounts, use digital payments, and receive products at home. However, price is not always the only consideration. Consumers may prefer a slightly more expensive product if it has better ratings, stronger reviews, greater brand reputation, or lower perceived risk. Thus, reviews and ratings interact with price, quality, brand image, and other factors in shaping purchase decisions.

Social influence and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) have become increasingly important. Consumers can observe the experiences of large numbers of other users through reviews, comments, social media posts, videos, blogs, and online communities. Positive feedback can strengthen product and brand perceptions, while negative experiences can discourage potential buyers. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, digital opinions can reach a large audience and remain accessible for long periods.

Consumer behaviour continues after the purchase through post-purchase evaluation. Satisfied consumers may provide positive ratings, write reviews, recommend products, and make repeat purchases. Dissatisfied consumers may post negative reviews, request refunds, complain, or shift to competing brands. Thus, every purchase can generate new information that influences future consumers. Online reviews can also shape expectations before purchase, which may subsequently affect customer satisfaction.

The importance of reviews and ratings varies according to consumer involvement and product type. High-involvement or high-risk purchases generally encourage more extensive information searches and greater attention to detailed reviews. Reviews are also particularly important for products and services whose quality is difficult to evaluate before purchase, such as electronics, hotels, restaurants, beauty products, and travel services.



The Indian digital marketplace provides an important context for understanding these changes. Growing internet access, smartphone use, e-commerce, digital payments, and social media have encouraged consumers from metropolitan areas as well as smaller cities and towns to participate in online markets. However, Indian consumers differ in age, income, education, language, digital literacy, geographical location, and online experience. These differences can affect how consumers search for information, interpret reviews, and make purchasing decisions.

4. Factors Affecting the Influence of Online Reviews and Ratings

The influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying behaviour is not uniform across all consumers, products, or situations. Consumers may respond differently to the same review or rating depending on the credibility of the information, quality of the review, number of reviews, rating score, nature of the comments, timing of the review, characteristics of the reviewer, type of product, level of consumer involvement, and level of trust and perceived risk. Therefore, simply having a large number of reviews or a high rating does not automatically guarantee that consumers will make a purchase. The effectiveness of online reviews and ratings depends on how consumers interpret the available information and how relevant, reliable, and useful they perceive it to be.

Review Credibility

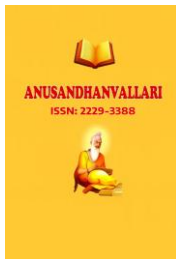
Review credibility is one of the most important factors determining whether consumers will accept and use information provided through online reviews. Credibility refers to the extent to which a consumer considers a review to be trustworthy, believable, genuine, and reliable. Consumers are more likely to be influenced by reviews when they believe that the reviewer has actually used the product and has provided an honest assessment. A review perceived as genuine can reduce uncertainty and increase consumer confidence, whereas a review perceived as fake, exaggerated, or commercially motivated may have little influence or may even create distrust. The credibility of a review can be influenced by the reviewer's apparent experience, the level of detail provided, the consistency of the information, and whether the reviewer appears to have a genuine purchase history. Consumers may also compare a particular review with other reviews to determine whether similar experiences are commonly reported. In the Indian online marketplace, where consumers increasingly depend on digital information before purchasing unfamiliar products, review credibility is particularly important. Concerns regarding fake reviews and manipulated ratings make consumers more cautious and may encourage them to evaluate several sources before making a decision.

Review Quality

Review quality refers to the usefulness, clarity, relevance, accuracy, and level of detail contained in a review. A high-quality review generally provides specific information about the product or service rather than simply stating that it is good or bad. Detailed reviews can help consumers understand actual product performance and identify characteristics that may not be clearly communicated through official product descriptions. The quality of a review can be especially important when consumers are purchasing products that require careful evaluation. A detailed review may discuss product strengths, weaknesses, usability, durability, performance, packaging, delivery, and customer service. Such information can assist consumers in comparing alternatives and deciding whether a product is appropriate for their specific requirements. Consequently, review quality can influence perceived usefulness, trust, product evaluation, and purchase intention.

Review Quantity

The number of reviews available for a product can influence consumer perceptions. A product with a large number of reviews may appear to have greater market acceptance because many consumers have already purchased or used it. Consumers may interpret high review volume as a form of social validation, particularly when they are unfamiliar with the product or brand. However, review quantity should not be considered independently of review



quality. A large number of reviews may provide greater information, but consumers may still question their usefulness if the comments are repetitive, extremely short, or appear suspicious. Similarly, a product with a small number of highly detailed and credible reviews may sometimes be more useful than a product with thousands of low-quality comments. Therefore, consumers may consider both the number and quality of reviews when assessing the reliability of online information.

Rating Valence

Rating valence refers to whether the overall rating associated with a product is positive, negative, or neutral. Rating valence can strongly influence the initial perception of a product. A high average rating may create a favourable impression and increase purchase intention, while a low rating may create doubts and encourage consumers to consider alternatives. Positive ratings can act as signals of customer satisfaction and product acceptance. However, consumers may also pay attention to negative ratings because they provide information about potential weaknesses or risks. Negative reviews may have a stronger effect when they describe serious problems related to product safety, quality, performance, delivery, or customer service. At the same time, the presence of a limited number of negative reviews among many positive reviews may not necessarily discourage a purchase. Consumers may evaluate the overall pattern rather than focusing on one isolated opinion.

Rating Consistency

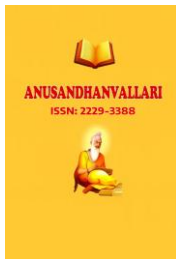
The consistency between numerical ratings and written reviews can influence perceived credibility. Consumers may compare the overall star rating with the content of individual reviews. When a high rating is supported by numerous positive comments, consumers may perceive the information as more reliable. However, if the rating appears highly positive while many detailed reviews report serious problems, consumers may question the authenticity or reliability of the rating system. Consistency can therefore help consumers interpret online information. When different forms of consumer feedback communicate similar messages, uncertainty may be reduced. When ratings and written reviews provide conflicting information, consumers may conduct additional information searches before making a decision. This makes consistency an important factor in the effectiveness of online review systems.

Reviewer Characteristics

The characteristics of the reviewer can influence how consumers evaluate a review. Consumers may be more interested in reviews written by people who appear to have similar needs, experiences, preferences, or circumstances. For example, a consumer purchasing a technical product may value a review written by an experienced user who provides detailed information about performance and features. Similarly, a traveller may pay greater attention to reviews from people with similar travel requirements. Reviewer expertise can also influence credibility. A reviewer who demonstrates knowledge about a particular product category may be perceived as more capable of providing useful information. Reviewer identity, previous contributions, purchase verification, and the quality of earlier reviews may also influence perceptions. Therefore, consumers do not necessarily treat all reviews as equally informative; they may assess who provided the information before deciding how much importance to give it.

Recency of Reviews

The date on which a review was posted can affect its usefulness. Consumers may consider recent reviews more relevant because products, sellers, services, prices, and business practices can change over time. A review posted several years ago may not accurately represent the current product version or service experience. Recency is especially important in categories where products are frequently updated. Electronic products, software, mobile applications, fashion products, and online services may change significantly over time. Consumers may therefore give greater attention to recent reviews when evaluating current performance. Businesses can also benefit from



monitoring recent reviews because they provide information about current customer experiences and emerging problems.

Product Type

The influence of online reviews and ratings can vary according to the type of product or service being purchased. For products that consumers can easily evaluate through objective characteristics, reviews may play a supporting role. For products and services where quality is difficult to determine before purchase, consumer experiences may become more important. For example, consumers choosing a hotel or restaurant cannot completely evaluate the actual experience before using the service. Reviews can provide information about cleanliness, service quality, food, location, staff behaviour, and other characteristics. Similarly, consumers purchasing electronic products may use reviews to understand practical aspects such as battery performance, durability, ease of use, and actual product performance. Thus, the importance of online reviews depends partly on how much information consumers require to evaluate a product before purchase.

Consumer Involvement

Consumer involvement refers to the level of personal importance or interest associated with a purchase. High-involvement purchases generally involve greater financial value, personal importance, perceived risk, or complexity. In such situations, consumers are more likely to search for detailed information and carefully evaluate online reviews and ratings. For low-involvement purchases, consumers may spend less time evaluating alternatives and may rely on simple indicators such as brand familiarity, price, or overall rating. For high-involvement purchases, consumers may read numerous reviews, compare different rating distributions, watch product demonstrations, and search for information from multiple platforms. Therefore, the influence of reviews and ratings can increase when consumers perceive the purchase as important or risky.

Trust and Perceived Risk

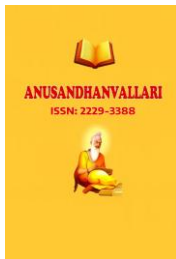
Trust and perceived risk are closely connected to the influence of online reviews and ratings. Consumers generally need confidence that the information provided by other users is genuine and that the seller or platform will fulfil its obligations. A credible review can reduce uncertainty by providing information about the actual experience of previous consumers. Perceived risk may involve concerns about product quality, financial loss, delivery problems, privacy, payment security, return difficulties, or poor customer service. Negative reviews may increase awareness of these risks, while reliable positive reviews may reduce uncertainty. Therefore, reviews can influence consumer behaviour by changing the perceived level of risk associated with a purchase. When trust is high and perceived risk is low, consumers may be more willing to proceed with a purchase.

Review Valence and Balance

The overall balance between positive and negative reviews can affect consumer perceptions. Consumers may be suspicious when almost all available reviews are extremely positive, particularly when there is no discussion of any limitations. A combination of positive, neutral, and negative reviews may sometimes appear more authentic because real products are unlikely to satisfy every consumer equally. Balanced reviews can provide consumers with a more realistic understanding of a product. Consumers can determine whether the identified weaknesses are important to their own needs. For example, a product may receive criticism for being expensive but may still be attractive to consumers who prioritise quality. Therefore, the influence of negative information depends on the specific characteristics of the product and the consumer's personal priorities.

Helpfulness of Reviews

Consumers often face a large amount of review information and may not have sufficient time to read every review. The perceived helpfulness of a review therefore becomes important. A helpful review generally provides



information that assists consumers in making a better-informed decision. Factors such as detail, clarity, relevance, objectivity, supporting photographs or videos, and practical experience can increase perceived helpfulness. Reviews that answer common consumer questions may be particularly valuable. Some digital platforms also allow users to indicate whether a review was helpful, allowing subsequent consumers to identify reviews that have received greater recognition from the community.

Review Presentation and Visibility

The way reviews and ratings are displayed can influence consumer attention. Reviews placed prominently on a product page may receive greater attention than reviews that require several additional steps to access. Similarly, platforms may highlight highly rated reviews, recent reviews, critical reviews, or reviews containing photographs and videos. The design of the digital platform can therefore influence which information consumers notice first. A highly visible average rating may create an immediate overall impression, while highlighted reviews can direct consumers toward particular experiences. Consequently, the influence of reviews depends not only on their content but also on how digital platforms present and organise them.

Platform Reputation

The reputation and perceived reliability of the platform on which reviews are published can influence consumer trust. Consumers may be more willing to accept information from platforms that they consider established, secure, and transparent. A well-known e-commerce or service platform may provide additional signals such as verified purchases, reviewer profiles, return policies, and mechanisms for reporting inappropriate reviews. Platform reputation can therefore strengthen or weaken the influence of reviews. If consumers trust the platform's review-management system, they may place greater confidence in the information displayed. If the platform is perceived as allowing manipulation or fraudulent reviews, consumers may become sceptical of both ratings and written feedback.

Verified Purchase and Authenticity Indicators

Indicators of authenticity can increase the credibility of online reviews. A verified-purchase label may signal that the reviewer actually purchased the product through the platform. Although such indicators do not necessarily guarantee that the review is completely unbiased, they can provide consumers with additional evidence regarding the reviewer's actual experience. Other authenticity indicators may include photographs, videos, detailed product descriptions, purchase history, reviewer profiles, and consistent contributions over time. These features can help consumers distinguish potentially genuine reviews from low-quality or suspicious content. As concerns regarding fake reviews increase, authenticity indicators are becoming increasingly important in digital consumer decision-making.

Fake Reviews and Rating Manipulation

Fake reviews represent one of the major challenges facing online review systems. Fake reviews may be created to artificially increase the reputation of a product or seller or to damage the reputation of a competitor. Similarly, ratings may be manipulated through artificial positive or negative evaluations. Such practices can mislead consumers and reduce confidence in online marketplaces. The presence or possibility of fake reviews can have two effects. First, genuine positive reviews may be less effective if consumers suspect that the overall rating has been manipulated. Second, consumers may become more careful and compare information from multiple sources before purchasing. Therefore, maintaining the authenticity of online reviews is essential for ensuring that review and rating systems continue to influence consumer decisions in a meaningful and trustworthy manner.



5. Impact of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumer Buying Behaviour

Online reviews and ratings have become important components of consumer decision-making in the digital marketplace. The growth of e-commerce, mobile applications, social media, and digital platforms allows consumers to access the experiences and opinions of previous buyers before purchasing products or services. Reviews and ratings can influence consumers from the initial stage of product awareness and information search to alternative evaluation, purchase intention, actual purchase, satisfaction, repurchase, and loyalty. Therefore, they are no longer simply feedback mechanisms but important sources of consumer-generated information.

Online reviews and ratings first influence product awareness and information search. Highly rated products and products with a large number of reviews may attract greater attention and appear more popular. Consumers can discover unfamiliar products through customer recommendations, reviews, and online discussions. Ratings provide a quick overview of consumer satisfaction, while written reviews provide detailed information about product quality, performance, durability, usability, delivery, packaging, and customer service. This can reduce the time and effort required to collect information from different sources.

During evaluation of alternatives, consumers commonly compare price, brand, features, seller reputation, ratings, reviews, delivery, warranty, and return policies. Positive reviews and high ratings can improve perceptions of product quality and increase the likelihood that a product will be included in the consumer's consideration set. Negative reviews can highlight possible weaknesses and encourage consumers to compare alternative products. The influence of reviews is particularly important for products and services whose actual quality is difficult to assess before purchase.

Online reviews and ratings also influence purchase intention and actual purchase decisions. Positive and credible feedback can reduce uncertainty, increase confidence, and create social validation. Before completing a purchase, consumers may revisit reviews and ratings to confirm that their chosen product is reliable. A serious negative review concerning quality, authenticity, delivery, or service may cause consumers to reconsider their decision. Thus, reviews can act as a final validation mechanism before purchase.

Trust and perceived risk are major factors connecting online reviews with consumer behaviour. Online shopping involves financial, product-performance, delivery, privacy, and service-related risks. Genuine reviews can reduce these risks by providing information based on previous customer experiences. However, fake reviews, manipulated ratings, exaggerated claims, and biased content can have the opposite effect by reducing consumer confidence in sellers and platforms. Therefore, review credibility and authenticity are essential for influencing consumer behaviour.

Reviews and ratings can further affect brand preference, seller selection, and price perception. Brands receiving consistently positive feedback may develop stronger digital reputations, while repeated negative reviews can encourage consumers to shift towards competitors. Similarly, consumers may select sellers based on ratings, delivery experiences, customer service, and return-related feedback. Positive reviews can also increase perceived value and make consumers more willing to consider a higher-priced product when they believe it offers better quality or lower risk.

The impact continues after purchase through customer satisfaction, repurchase intention, loyalty, and electronic word-of-mouth. Accurate reviews can help consumers develop realistic expectations, increasing the likelihood of satisfaction when actual performance matches those expectations. Satisfied customers may provide positive ratings, recommend products, and make repeat purchases, whereas dissatisfied consumers may post negative reviews and move to competing brands. This creates a continuous cycle in which one consumer's experience becomes information for future consumers.



Negative and positive reviews may influence consumers differently. Negative reviews can attract considerable attention because they reveal potential risks, especially when several consumers report the same problem. However, a small number of genuine negative reviews may sometimes increase perceived authenticity because consumers may consider completely positive feedback unrealistic. Positive reviews generally strengthen confidence, particularly when they are detailed, specific, and supported by photographs or videos. The influence of both types depends on credibility, relevance, severity, frequency, and consistency.

In the Indian digital marketplace, these effects are increasingly significant because of rapid growth in e-commerce, smartphones, digital payments, and social media. Consumers from metropolitan cities as well as smaller cities and towns can purchase products from distant sellers and therefore may depend heavily on previous customers' experiences. However, differences in age, income, education, language, digital literacy, product category, and online shopping experience can affect how consumers use reviews and ratings.

Overall, online reviews and ratings influence consumer buying behaviour through a connected process: information → product evaluation → perceived quality and trust → reduced or increased risk → purchase intention → actual purchase → satisfaction → repurchase and loyalty. Genuine and credible reviews can reduce information gaps and empower consumers to make better decisions, whereas fake or manipulated reviews can create confusion and weaken trust. Thus, the effectiveness of online reviews and ratings depends largely on their credibility, quality, quantity, relevance, recency, authenticity, and transparency, making them an important factor in contemporary consumer buying behaviour in India.

6. Conclusion

The present review-based paper examined the impact of online reviews and ratings on consumer buying behaviour in India. The rapid growth of e-commerce, smartphones, internet connectivity, social media, digital payments, and online service platforms has significantly changed the way consumers search for information and make purchasing decisions. In the traditional marketplace, consumers mainly depended on personal experience, family and friends, advertisements, salespersons, and physical inspection of products. In the digital environment, consumers can access the experiences and opinions of a large number of other users before making a purchase. As a result, online reviews and ratings have become important components of the contemporary consumer decision-making process.

The review of existing concepts indicates that online reviews and ratings perform different but complementary functions. Written reviews provide detailed information about actual consumer experiences, while ratings provide a quick indication of overall satisfaction. Consumers can use ratings to identify potentially suitable products and then examine reviews to understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of those products. The combination of numerical ratings and qualitative reviews can therefore provide consumers with a more comprehensive understanding of product and service performance.

The literature also indicates that online reviews and ratings can influence several stages of consumer buying behaviour. Their influence begins with product awareness and information search and continues through alternative evaluation, purchase intention, final purchase decision, customer satisfaction, repurchase intention, and loyalty. Positive reviews and high ratings can create favourable perceptions, increase confidence, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen purchase intention. Negative reviews can draw attention to potential risks and discourage consumers from purchasing products that may not meet their expectations. Thus, online reviews and ratings can influence consumers both positively and negatively depending on the nature and credibility of the information available.

One of the most important findings emerging from the conceptual and literature-based discussion is that the influence of online reviews and ratings does not depend simply on their presence or quantity. Consumers consider several characteristics when evaluating digital feedback. Review credibility, review quality, review volume, rating score, rating consistency, review valence, recency, reviewer characteristics, and perceived helpfulness can



determine whether consumers consider a particular review useful and trustworthy. Similarly, product type, consumer involvement, previous product knowledge, digital literacy, trust, and perceived risk can influence the extent to which reviews and ratings affect the final decision.

Trust emerges as a particularly important factor in the relationship between online reviews and consumer buying behaviour. Consumers are more likely to depend on reviews when they believe that the information is genuine and unbiased. Credible reviews can reduce uncertainty and perceived risk, particularly when consumers are purchasing unfamiliar products or services. However, fake reviews, manipulated ratings, exaggerated claims, and commercially motivated content can weaken consumer confidence. Therefore, the effectiveness of online review systems depends greatly on their authenticity and transparency.

The Indian context makes this issue particularly significant. India's rapidly expanding digital marketplace has increased the number of consumers who depend on online platforms for purchasing products and services. Consumers from metropolitan cities as well as smaller cities and towns are increasingly participating in digital commerce. Online reviews and ratings can help consumers overcome geographical limitations and information gaps, particularly when products or sellers cannot be physically examined before purchase. At the same time, differences in age, income, education, language, digital literacy, geographical location, and online shopping experience may influence how Indian consumers interpret and use online information.

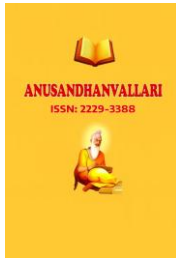
The review also highlights the growing importance of social media, influencer content, video reviews, and electronic word-of-mouth in shaping consumer perceptions. Consumers no longer depend only on the review sections of e-commerce websites. They can access product experiences through social networking platforms, video-sharing platforms, online communities, blogs, and other digital channels. This has created a broader digital information environment in which consumer opinions can reach large audiences quickly. Businesses therefore have less control over their online reputation and need to pay greater attention to genuine customer experiences and digital feedback.

For businesses and e-commerce platforms, the findings emphasise the importance of maintaining transparent and reliable review and rating systems. Organisations should encourage genuine customer feedback, respond appropriately to negative experiences, monitor recurring complaints, and avoid practices that artificially influence ratings. Platforms should strengthen mechanisms for identifying fraudulent reviews, verifying purchases, and protecting the credibility of consumer-generated content. Reliable review systems can benefit both consumers and businesses by improving information quality and strengthening trust in digital marketplaces.

For consumers, the findings suggest that online reviews and ratings should be used as important sources of information but should not necessarily be accepted without critical evaluation. Consumers should consider the overall pattern of reviews rather than depending on a single comment or rating. Examining recent reviews, detailed experiences, reviewer credibility, positive and negative feedback, and consistency between ratings and written comments can support better decision-making. Such critical evaluation is particularly important when purchasing expensive or high-risk products and services.

The review further indicates that online reviews and ratings are becoming increasingly important as artificial intelligence and other digital technologies transform the online information environment. AI-generated content, automated review summaries, personalised recommendations, and sophisticated rating systems may provide greater convenience but may also create new concerns about authenticity and manipulation. Future digital marketplaces will therefore need effective mechanisms to distinguish genuine consumer experiences from artificial or misleading content.

Overall, online reviews and ratings have transformed the traditional relationship between consumers, businesses, and market information. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of information provided by companies; they actively search for, evaluate, create, and share information. Every consumer purchase can potentially generate a



new review or rating that influences future buyers. This creates a continuous cycle in which consumer experiences become part of the decision-making environment for other consumers.

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