THE IMPACT OF ONLINE REVIEWS AND RATINGS ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS

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Abstract: Online reviews and ratings play a major role in influencing what people buy. This study looks at how four key factors—review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust—affect a consumer's intention to purchase a product. When reviews are seen as trustworthy, detailed, recent, and posted on a reliable platform, consumers are more likely to consider buying the product. To understand this better, data will be collected through a survey of online shoppers. The study will analyze how these review factors influence people's decisions before making a purchase. The findings are expected to help businesses and online platforms improve how they manage customer reviews and build consumer trust. This will also help researchers better understand online buying behavior.

Key words: Online Review, Review Quality, Platform Trust, Shoppers

1.INTRODUCTION

In today's digital marketplace, online reviews and ratings have become crucial components of consumer decision-making. With the growing popularity of e-commerce and online shopping platforms, consumers now rely heavily on peer-generated content to assess product quality, performance, and value before making a purchase. According to several studies, online reviews serve as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) that significantly influences consumer trust and buying behavior (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Filieri et al., 2015). These reviews offer real-life experiences, which help reduce perceived risk and uncertainty associated with online purchases. Among the various dimensions of online reviews, four key factors have emerged as particularly influential: review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust. Review credibility refers to the extent to which consumers perceive reviews as truthful, unbiased, and reliable. Reviews that come from verified users or those perceived as genuine tend to have a stronger impact on purchase decisions (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Similarly, review quality—characterized by clarity, depth, and informativeness—can enhance consumer understanding of the product and influence their purchase intention (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Recent reviews are also more valued than older ones, as they reflect up-to-date consumer experiences, especially in rapidly changing markets (Park & Lee, 2008). Platform trust plays a moderating role in this process. Consumers are more likely to rely on reviews when they trust the e-commerce platform hosting them. Trustworthy platforms provide mechanisms to verify reviews, manage fake content, and ensure transparency, which in turn enhances the influence of reviews on consumer behavior (Gefen et al., 2003). Together, these factors create a digital environment where consumers feel confident in making informed purchasing decisions based on the experiences and opinions of others. This study aims to explore how review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust affect consumer purchase intentions. By examining these variables collectively, the research intends to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which online reviews and ratings shape consumer behavior.

The findings are expected to benefit online retailers, marketers, and researchers by highlighting strategies to enhance consumer trust and engagement in the digital buying process.

2.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the digital age, online reviews and ratings have become essential tools for consumers when making purchase decisions. As traditional word-of-mouth shifts to electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Google, and social media channels have emerged as dominant sources of product and service evaluation. Consumers now rely not only on the presence of reviews but also on their quality, credibility, timeliness, and the trustworthiness of the platforms that host them. These elements form the basis of consumer trust, especially in e-commerce settings where direct product experience is absent before purchase. Review credibility plays a vital role in shaping purchase intentions as consumers often judge the trustworthiness and honesty of the review source before accepting the information (Cheung et al., 2009). Likewise, review quality, including detailed descriptions, structured content, and the presence of visual evidence, affects how consumers perceive the usefulness of the information provided (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Review recency also matters, as recent feedback is often viewed as more relevant and accurate, especially for products with changing quality or frequent updates (Zhu et al., 2014). Finally, platform trust— the belief that the website or app hosting the review maintains integrity and safeguards authenticity— significantly enhances the impact of reviews on consumer decisions (Gefen et al., 2003). This study aims to investigate how these four factors influence purchase intentions, contributing to the growing body of knowledge in digital consumer behavior. Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn (2008) emphasized that review credibility is a key determinant in whether consumers accept online opinions. Reviews from verified users or those perceived as honest and unbiased are more likely to influence purchasing behavior. Building on this, Filieri (2016) found that credible reviews increase trust in the product and the platform, thereby directly enhancing purchase intention. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) highlighted the role of review quality, suggesting that detailed, informative, and well-written reviews have a greater influence on consumer decision-making. They noted that consumers value depth and specificity, especially when reviews include personal experiences and product comparisons. Similarly, Schindler and Bickart (2012) pointed out that narrative-style reviews engage users better than brief or generic comments. The recency of reviews has also been studied extensively. Park and Lee (2008) argued that recent reviews are perceived as more accurate and relevant, especially in technology and fashion-related purchases. Zhu, Yin, and He (2014) reinforced this view, stating that consumers perceive newer reviews as more reflective of current product performance, which strongly affects their intention to purchase. Platform trust significantly moderates the impact of reviews. Gefen et al. (2003) found that users' trust in an e-commerce platform enhances their willingness to rely on the information it presents, including reviews. Kim and Peterson (2017) added that platforms that ensure transparency, like showing verified purchases and moderating fake reviews, create stronger consumer trust and brand loyalty. Banerjee, Bhattacharyya, and Bose (2017) examined the combined influence of review quality and platform trust and found that high-quality reviews on trusted platforms lead to higher conversion rates. Luo, Wang, and Zhang (2020) further noted that when reviews are both recent and credible, they reinforce consumer confidence and reduce perceived risk. Moreover, Ismagilova et al. (2020) reviewed literature across industries and concluded that the interaction of credibility, quality, and recency together provides a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer reliance on online reviews. They emphasized the importance of cross-factor synergy in shaping effective e-WOM. Xu and Yao (2015) demonstrated that perceived usefulness of reviews, influenced by their quality and source trustworthiness, has a strong positive relationship with consumer attitude and purchase intention. Senecal and Nantel (2004) had earlier found that consumers who rely on online reviews are more likely to follow through with purchases compared to those who rely on product descriptions alone. In another study, Lee and Shin (2014) discovered that review helpfulness, a function of quality and relevance, increases the impact of a review on consumer choice. Additionally, Fan and Miao (2012) examined trust transfer from platforms to individual reviews, suggesting that consumers extend their trust in the platform to the reviews it hosts, especially when security features and moderation policies are visible. Chen and Xie (2008) explained how online consumer opinions influence product sales and identified review valence and reviewer identity as additional components that interplay with credibility and quality. Finally, Hajli (2015) emphasized that social influence and community trust also support the acceptance of online reviews, particularly in social commerce settings.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ➢ To examine the impact of review credibility, review quality, and review recency on consumer purchase intentions in an online shopping context.
- ➢ To analyse the moderating role of platform trust in the relationship between online reviews (credibility, quality, and recency) and consumers' intention to purchase.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- ✓ The study focuses on how online review characteristics—specifically review credibility, quality, and recency—influence consumer purchase intentions across various e-commerce platforms.
- ✓ It explores the moderating effect of platform trust on the relationship between online reviews and consumers' decision-making processes in digital marketplaces.
- ✓ The research is limited to understanding consumer behaviour in online shopping contexts and aims to provide actionable insights for businesses and online platforms to improve review management and enhance consumer trust.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- ✓ The study relies primarily on existing literature and theoretical frameworks, which may limit its ability to capture real-time changes and emerging trends in consumer behavior related to online reviews.
- ✓ The conceptual nature of the study means it does not include empirical data collection, which restricts the ability to generalize findings across different industries, product types, or demographic groups.
- ✓ The study focuses on key factors like review credibility, quality, recency, and platform trust, but may overlook other influential variables such as cultural differences, consumer personality traits, or the impact of social media influencers on purchase decisions.

6. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In the digital age, online reviews and ratings have become powerful tools influencing consumer purchase decisions. As consumers increasingly turn to e-commerce platforms, they rely heavily on peer-generated content to evaluate products and services before making buying choices. However, not all reviews exert the same level of influence. Factors such as review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust significantly shape how consumers interpret and act upon online feedback. Despite growing research in this area, there is still a lack of comprehensive understanding of how these individual and combined factors affect purchase intentions. Moreover, the moderating role of platform trust in strengthening or weakening the effect of reviews on consumers remains underexplored. This creates a gap in both academic literature and practical business strategies. This conceptual study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the influence of review-related attributes and platform trust on consumer purchase decisions, thereby offering valuable insights for marketers, e-commerce platforms, and researchers interested in online consumer behavior.

7. RESEARCH GAP

While numerous studies have examined the general influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer behavior, much of the existing research tends to focus on isolated factors such as review credibility or quality in silos. There is limited integrated research that simultaneously explores the combined effect of review credibility, review quality, review recency, and the moderating role of platform trust on consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, most prior studies are empirical and context-specific, often limited to certain product categories or demographics, which restricts the theoretical generalization of findings. There is also a noticeable lack of conceptual models that comprehensively address how these variables interact within the online decision-making process, especially in today's rapidly evolving digital environment. This study seeks to bridge this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that captures the

interrelationships among these key variables and provides a more holistic understanding of how online reviews shape consumer intent. This will contribute to both academic theory and practical application in digital marketing and e-commerce.
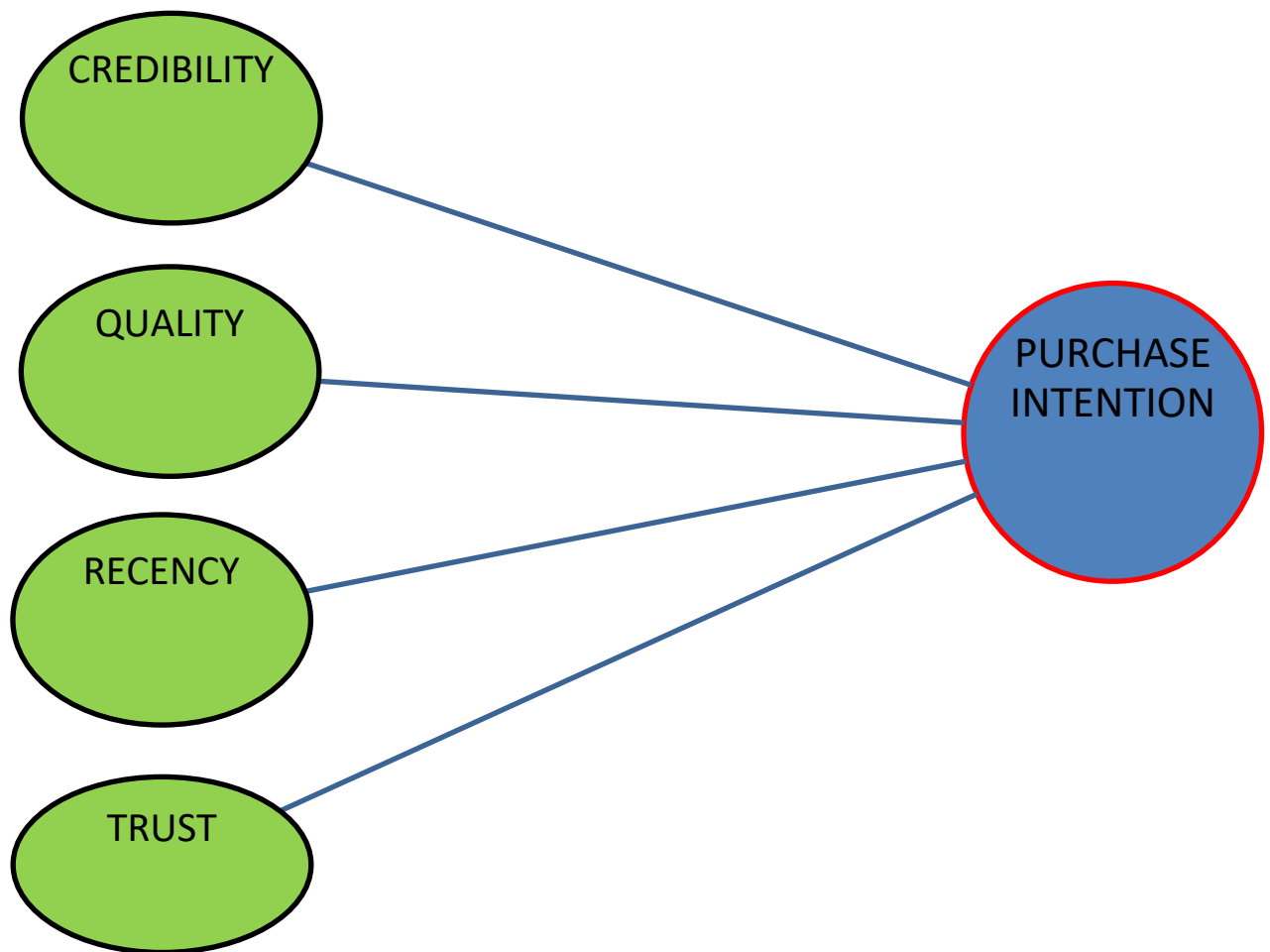
8.FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

Figure 1 – Framework

8.1 The Impact of Review Credibility on Purchase Intention

The credibility of online reviews has been widely recognized as a key determinant of consumers' purchase intentions in the digital marketplace. Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn (2008) were among the earliest to highlight that consumers are more likely to accept online opinions when they perceive the source as credible and the review as unbiased. Filieri (2016) extended this understanding by showing that credible reviews not only foster product trust but also enhance consumer confidence in the e-commerce platform itself. Senecal and Nantel (2004) demonstrated that consumers relying on credible recommendations from others are more likely to exhibit higher purchase intention than those exposed to generic product descriptions. Zhang, Craciun, and Shin (2010) emphasized that credibility influences consumers' cognitive processing, particularly in high-involvement purchases, where reliable information is critical. Similarly, Lee and Koo (2012) found that perceived source expertise and authenticity significantly increase the likelihood of consumers accepting a review as truthful, which in turn positively affects purchase behavior. Forman, Ghose, and Wiesenfeld (2008) noted that identifying details in reviewers' profiles (like location or verified buyer status) increase perceived review credibility, enhancing consumer trust and action. Park, Lee, and Han (2007) suggested that credibility acts as a mediator between online word-of-mouth and purchase intention, indicating that even positive reviews can be ineffective if perceived as inauthentic. Ismagilova et al. (2020) conducted a systematic literature review and emphasized that trust in the review content plays a more significant role than the number of reviews, particularly for first-time buyers. Sparks and Browning (2011) explored hospitality reviews and concluded that review credibility was more influential than review valence in shaping consumer intentions. Salehan and Kim (2016) discussed the role of emotion and linguistic cues in

enhancing review credibility, finding that reviews with a balanced tone and moderate sentiment appeared more believable to consumers. Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) confirmed that source credibility, including reviewer expertise and trustworthiness, directly contributes to purchase decisions in online contexts. Shan, Chen, and Lin (2020) found that credibility becomes especially crucial in cases of conflicting reviews, as consumers tend to rely more on those they perceive as trustworthy. Xie, Miao, Kuo, and Lee (2011) showed that in addition to content, the platform on which the review is posted can impact credibility perception, meaning consumers transfer their trust in the platform to the content it hosts. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) also found that credible reviews on reputable platforms significantly influence product sales, especially for new brands. Wathen and Burkell (2002) suggested that visual elements and design of review pages, such as verified badges or rating systems, can further reinforce the believability of online content. Lastly, Pan and Zhang (2011) revealed that in addition to individual review credibility, aggregate credibility—the overall trust in a set of reviews—can also affect decision-making. This is especially relevant when consumers process multiple sources before making a final judgment.

8.2 The Impact of Review Quality on Purchase Intentions

The quality of online reviews plays a crucial role in influencing consumer purchase intentions, as consumers often rely on detailed and informative reviews to guide their decisions. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) found that the depth and specificity of a review significantly enhance its usefulness, leading to greater trust and higher likelihood of purchase. Similarly, Schindler and Bickart (2012) observed that narrative-style reviews, which share personal experiences and insights, are more engaging and persuasive than short or vague ones. Baek, Ahn, and Choi (2012) examined the impact of review readability and concluded that well-written reviews that are easy to understand significantly boost consumers' perceptions of product value. Park, Lee, and Han (2007) also emphasized that high-quality reviews, especially those with objective information and detailed product descriptions, help reduce consumer uncertainty and enhance purchase confidence. Zhu and Zhang (2010) noted that reviews with technical details and practical usage tips are perceived as more helpful, especially for electronics and tech products. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) reported that review quality has a direct influence on product sales, with high-quality content generating more positive consumer responses. Ghose and Ipeirotis (2011) introduced the concept of review subjectivity and found that reviews that strike a balance between emotional appeal and factual information are most effective in influencing buyers. Liu and Park (2015) highlighted that consumers are more likely to trust and act upon reviews that are both lengthy and informative, especially when supported by data or examples. Filieri and McLeay (2014) explored the antecedents of perceived review helpfulness and found that informativeness and argument quality were major contributors to review effectiveness. Jensen, Averbeck, Zhang, and Wright (2013) revealed that consumers rate high-quality reviews as more helpful, which in turn increases their willingness to purchase. Teng, Khong, and Goh (2014) emphasized that helpful reviews not only influence individual purchase intentions but also affect overall brand perception. Cao, Duan, and Gan (2011) suggested that review helpfulness mediates the relationship between review quality and purchase decision-making. When users find a review helpful, they are more inclined to view the product positively. Lee and Shin (2014) added that the perceived usefulness of a review is enhanced when it includes comparative information with other products, further assisting in informed decision-making. Wang, Yu, and Fesenmaier (2002) stated that reviews containing rich media (such as images or video content) tend to be perceived as higher quality and can significantly increase consumer trust and engagement. Finally, Ismagilova et al. (2020) found through a comprehensive literature review that high-quality reviews influence not just the initial purchase but also post-purchase satisfaction and word-of-mouth intentions. This suggests that review quality is not only vital for immediate consumer response but also for long-term brand loyalty and advocacy.

8.3 The Impact of Review Recency on Purchase Intentions

The recency of online reviews has emerged as a significant factor influencing consumers' purchase intentions in digital environments. Park and Lee (2008) were among the first to highlight that consumers perceive recent reviews as more relevant and reliable than older ones, particularly in fast-changing product categories like fashion and electronics. Building on this, Zhu, Yin, and He (2014) found that newer reviews are considered more reflective of current product performance, thereby increasing their influence on purchasing decisions. Filieri (2016) noted that recent reviews signal up-to-date product information, which reduces perceived risk and improves consumer confidence. Kwon and Lennon (2009) also found that temporal proximity in reviews enhances the consumer's perception of credibility, especially when recent reviews are consistent in tone and experience. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) suggested that review recency

contributes to perceived helpfulness, particularly when users filter reviews based on the most recent experiences. Lu, Ba, and Huang (2013) highlighted that recency strengthens the persuasive impact of reviews by indicating the product's current reliability, especially in service industries like hotels or restaurants. Xie, Miao, Kuo, and Lee (2011) argued that recent reviews are more likely to address the latest version of a product or updated service, making them highly influential for consumers comparing alternatives. Similarly, Dellarocas, Zhang, and Awad (2007) showed that recent feedback increases trust and relevance, especially when there is a large volume of competing information. Li and Hitt (2008) found that the impact of review recency becomes even more critical when consumers are making urgent or time-sensitive purchases. Racherla and Friske (2012) stated that recency enhances the perceived freshness of consumer experiences, which helps new buyers better anticipate current product quality. Cheung, Sia, and Kuan (2012) added that review recency plays a moderating role in the relationship between review valence and purchase intention, with recent negative reviews having a stronger deterrent effect than older ones. Ismagilova et al. (2020) synthesized multiple studies and emphasized that review recency, when combined with review credibility and quality, provides a comprehensive picture of product reliability, which strengthens consumer trust. Moe and Trusov (2011) noted that review timelines also influence how consumers track product trends, often correlating with sales peaks and declines. Kim and Gupta (2012) discovered that consumers exhibit higher engagement with recently posted reviews, especially those with interactive elements like comments or responses from sellers. Tang, Fang, and Wang (2014) observed that users of online travel platforms value recent reviews more highly, as they reflect up-to-date service standards, which significantly influence booking decisions. Lastly, Lim and Van Der Heide (2015) found that recency cues increase cognitive attention, making recent reviews more persuasive even if their content is similar to older reviews.

8.4 The Impact of Platform Trust on Purchase Intentions

Trust in the online platform plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchase intentions, particularly in environments where consumers cannot physically evaluate products. Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003) were among the earliest to assert that trust in an e-commerce platform directly influences users' willingness to engage in online transactions. Their findings revealed that platform trust reduces perceived risk and enhances customer confidence in the purchase process. Building on this, Pavlou and Gefen (2004) noted that when consumers trust a platform, they are more likely to accept the information it presents, including user-generated content such as reviews and ratings. McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002) emphasized that platform trust encompasses both structural assurances (like encryption and refund policies) and perceived benevolence of the platform. These attributes together enhance consumer belief that the platform acts in their best interest. Kim, Xu, and Koh (2004) found that perceived trustworthiness of an online retailer significantly affects the intention to buy, especially in situations where the consumer lacks prior experience with the product or seller. Bart et al. (2005) argued that website design, security cues, and third-party endorsements (such as trust seals) are all vital elements in building platform trust. Chiu, Hsu, Lai, and Chang (2012) demonstrated that platform trust mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and purchase behavior, especially in social commerce settings. Similarly, Ba and Pavlou (2002) established that institutional mechanisms, such as user reviews and seller ratings, indirectly enhance platform trust, which in turn drives purchase intention. Yoon (2002) suggested that emotional trust in the platform also matters—consumers are more likely to buy from a platform they feel comfortable with and emotionally connected to. Kim and Peterson (2017) found that transparency practices, like showing verified purchases and actively moderating fake reviews, contribute to platform trust and, subsequently, customer loyalty. Urban, Amyx, and Lorenzon (2009) discussed the role of trust transfer, where trust in the platform leads consumers to trust third-party sellers hosted on that platform. Chang and Chen (2008) observed that trust in mobile shopping platforms is even more critical, as the smaller interface and limited sensory input increase dependence on perceived platform reliability. Ha and Stoel (2009) explored the apparel sector and found that trust in the online store was the most important factor affecting purchase intention, even more than price or product variety. Wang and Emurian (2005) concluded that interactive features like live chat, secure payment gateways, and customer service responsiveness significantly contribute to building trust. Chen and Barnes (2007) examined the impact of perceived reliability and responsiveness on mobile commerce trust and discovered a strong correlation with consumer willingness to transact. Ismagilova et al. (2020) synthesized various studies and highlighted that trust in digital platforms is not only a driver of purchase intention but also a determinant of long-term customer retention and word-of-mouth. Hajli (2015) emphasized the importance of social commerce and community trust, noting that platforms facilitating peer interaction and transparency enjoy higher trust levels. Lastly, Shin, Chung, and Lee (2013) pointed out that platforms with

strong privacy policies and transparent data practices foster consumer trust and reduce hesitation in sharing personal and financial information, thereby positively influencing purchase intent.

9.DISCUSSION

In the evolving landscape of digital commerce, **online reviews and ratings** have become crucial factors influencing consumer behavior. The present discussion explores how four key dimensions—**review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust**—affect **consumer purchase intentions**. Each element plays a distinct yet interconnected role in shaping consumer decision-making in the online environment.

- ✓ **Review credibility** is a major determinant of whether a consumer believes and acts upon the content of a review. Reviews perceived as genuine, unbiased, and posted by real users hold more persuasive power than anonymous or overly promotional feedback. Verified reviews, use of real names, and consistent reviewer history contribute to building this credibility. When reviews are seen as trustworthy, they reduce uncertainty and perceived risk, particularly for high-involvement or unfamiliar products. Consumers are more likely to base their purchase decisions on credible reviews as they perceive them as reliable substitutes for personal experience.

- ✓ **Review quality** complements credibility by addressing the depth and relevance of the content. High-quality reviews typically include detailed information about product usage, pros and cons, comparisons, and personal experiences. These types of reviews help consumers visualize the actual performance and value of a product. Poorly written or overly generic reviews, on the other hand, fail to inform and often decrease the perceived helpfulness. Review quality has been found to positively influence both the **perceived usefulness** of information and the **attitude toward the product**, thereby strengthening purchase intention.

- ✓ **Review recency** adds a time dimension to the evaluation process. With rapidly changing product designs, especially in technology and fashion sectors, consumers prefer the most recent experiences of others. Recent reviews are seen as more reflective of the current state of the product and relevant to present market conditions. This is particularly true for services like hospitality, where frequent changes in management or staff can directly impact consumer experience. Thus, recency reinforces trust in the relevance of the review and enhances consumer confidence in making timely purchase decisions.

- ✓ **Platform trust** serves as a moderating factor that influences how consumers interpret and respond to reviews and ratings. Consumers are more likely to engage with reviews hosted on platforms they trust. Features such as secure transactions, verified purchase badges, transparent policies, and active moderation contribute to platform trust. When consumers trust the platform, they extend that trust to the user-generated content it hosts, including reviews and ratings. This phenomenon, often referred to as **trust transfer**, highlights the importance of the digital environment in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

- ✓ Collectively, these factors form a synergistic model of online decision-making. A credible, high-quality, and recent review posted on a trusted platform creates the most potent combination for influencing purchase intent. For marketers and e-commerce businesses, this means focusing not only on encouraging customers to leave reviews but also ensuring that the review system is transparent, well-designed, and actively managed. For researchers, it highlights the need for further empirical studies to understand how these variables interact across different industries and consumer segments.

10.CONCLUSION

In today's digital-driven marketplace, online reviews and ratings have emerged as powerful tools that significantly shape consumer purchase decisions. This conceptual study has highlighted the influence of four critical dimensions—review credibility, review quality, review recency, and platform trust—on consumer purchase intention. Each of these factors plays a vital role in reducing uncertainty, building consumer confidence, and ultimately guiding buying behavior. Credible and high-quality reviews offer reliable and detailed information that helps consumers evaluate products more effectively. Recency ensures that the information reflects the current state of the product or service, making it more relevant and actionable. Meanwhile, trust in the platform hosting these reviews strengthens the overall impact by assuring consumers of authenticity and transparency. When these factors work in combination, they enhance the consumer's willingness to rely on reviews and proceed with a purchase. For businesses and e-commerce platforms,

understanding these elements is essential to developing better review systems, promoting genuine customer feedback, and maintaining trustworthiness. For researchers, this opens opportunities to explore how these factors vary across demographics, cultures, and product categories. In conclusion, as consumers increasingly depend on digital feedback before making purchases, the strategic management of online reviews and platform integrity will be crucial in influencing and improving purchase intentions in the competitive online retail environment.

11. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of Interest among authors

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