The Influence of Online Reviews and Ratings on Consumer Purchase Decisions in E – Commerce: A Study with Special Reference to Madurai City

S. Maria Nisha[1]* and P. Ruby Leela[1]

[1]*Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of Commerce, Fatima College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India*

**Corresponding Author Email: smarianishafc@gmail.com*

Abstract

The rapid growth of e-commerce has changed the way consumers search for information, compare products and make purchase decisions. Unlike traditional shopping, online consumers cannot physically examine a product before purchasing it. As a result, information provided by other consumers in the form of online reviews and star ratings has become an important part of the online buying process. The present study examines the influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer purchase decisions in e-commerce, with special reference to Madurai City. The study focuses on the importance given by consumers to star ratings, written reviews, number of reviews, positive and negative comments, review credibility and verified-purchase feedback. Primary data are proposed to be collected from online shoppers in Madurai City using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, correlation and suitable inferential tests are proposed for analysing the data. The study seeks to understand whether consumers actually depend on reviews and ratings while comparing products and whether such information increases their confidence in making online purchases. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for e-commerce platforms, sellers and marketers regarding the importance of maintaining genuine, informative and trustworthy customer feedback.

Keywords: Online Reviews, Online Ratings, E-Commerce, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Decision, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Consumer Trust, Madurai City

Introduction

E-commerce has become an important part of everyday shopping. Consumers can now search for products, compare prices, read customer experiences and place orders without visiting a physical store. The convenience of online shopping has also changed the way consumers evaluate products before making a purchase.

One important difference between online and traditional shopping is the limited opportunity for consumers to physically examine the product. A customer purchasing a dress, electronic product, cosmetic, household appliance or other item online cannot always touch or personally inspect the product before placing the order. Therefore, consumers often look for additional information before making their final decision.

Online reviews and ratings provide this additional information. A star rating gives consumers a quick indication of how previous buyers have evaluated a product, whereas written reviews provide more detailed information about product quality, delivery, durability, usability and customer experience.

Previous research has identified online reviews as an important form of electronic word-of-mouth. A study of Indian consumers found that online reviews can influence consumer attitudes and buying decisions, including across different city categories. Research on online-review impact has also identified factors such as **source credibility, review volume, language and comprehension, and relevance** as important dimensions in understanding how consumers use online reviews.

The Madurai market provides an interesting setting for examining this issue. Recent studies have examined online shopping behaviour and satisfaction among consumers in Madurai City. For example, a 2025 study examined online-shopping factors among young and elderly consumers in Madurai, while another study examined major factors influencing online-shopping behaviour among 200 consumers in the city. However, there is scope for a more focused study on the specific role played by **online reviews and star ratings** in the purchase decision process of consumers in Madurai City. The present study therefore concentrates specifically on this aspect.

Statement of the Problem

Online consumers are exposed to a large amount of product information. Product descriptions, advertisements, discounts and promotional offers are available on almost every e-commerce platform. However, consumers may still be uncertain about the actual quality and performance of a product. Customer reviews and ratings attempt to reduce this uncertainty by providing experiences of people who have already purchased the product. At the same time, consumers may question whether reviews are genuine, whether ratings are reliable and whether negative comments should be given more importance than positive comments.

Some consumers may purchase a product because it has a high rating, while others may carefully read both positive and negative reviews before deciding. Some may also consider the number of reviews to be more important than the average star rating. This creates the need to understand how consumers in Madurai City actually use online reviews and ratings during their purchase decisions.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To understand the online shopping behaviour of consumers in Madurai City.
2. To examine the importance given by consumers to online reviews and ratings while purchasing products through e-commerce platforms.
3. To analyse the influence of review credibility, review content, rating level and number of reviews on consumer purchase decisions.
4. To examine the relationship between consumers' dependence on online reviews and their purchase decision.
5. To identify the major factors that make online reviews and ratings useful to consumers.

Hypotheses of the Study

- There is no significant relationship between online reviews and consumer purchase decisions.

- There is no significant relationship between online ratings and consumer purchase decisions.
- There is no significant relationship between review credibility and consumer purchase decisions.
- There is no significant relationship between the number of reviews and consumer purchase decisions.
- There is no significant difference in the influence of online reviews and ratings on purchase decisions based on selected demographic characteristics of consumers.

Scope of the study

The study is confined to consumers residing in Madurai City who have experience in purchasing products through e-commerce platforms. It focuses on understanding the role of online reviews and star ratings in influencing consumers' purchase decisions. The study particularly considers factors such as positive and negative reviews, the number of reviews, review credibility, verified-purchase reviews, consumer trust and purchase confidence. It also examines how these factors influence the final purchase decision of consumers. However, the study does not cover or attempt to measure the financial performance of e-commerce companies.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**. Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. Primary data are collected from consumers in Madurai City through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms. Secondary data are collected from research articles, academic journals, books, and relevant online sources related to e-commerce, online reviews, ratings, electronic word-of-mouth, and consumer behaviour. The population of the study consists of consumers in Madurai City who have experience in online shopping. **Convenience sampling** is used to select the respondents from different age and occupational groups. The study is based on a sample of **200 respondents**. The collected data are analysed using suitable statistical tools to examine the influence of online reviews and ratings on consumer purchase decisions.

Tools Used for Analysis

The following statistical tools can be used:

- Percentage analysis

- Mean
- Standard deviation
- Correlation analysis
- Chi-square test

Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	104	52
	Female	96	48
Age	Below 25	24	12
	25-35	84	42
	35-45	48	24
	45-55	28	14
	Above 55	16	8
Occupation	Student	60	30
	Private Employee	76	38
	Public Employee	28	14
	Business	20	10
	Homemaker	16	8
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000	56	28
	₹20,001–₹40,000	72	36
	₹40,001–₹60,000	42	21
	Above ₹60,000	30	15
Total		**200**	**100**

Source: Primary Data

It is inferred from the Table 1, out of 200 respondents 52% are male and 48% are female**.** The majority (42%) belong to the 25–35 years age group. In terms of occupation, 38% are private employees and 30% are students**.** Regarding educational qualification, 38% are undergraduates and 34% are postgraduates**,** indicating that most respondents are well educated. With respect to monthly income, 36% earn ₹20,001–₹40,000**.**

Online Shopping Frequency

Online shopping has become a regular part of consumers' purchasing habits. However, the frequency of online purchases differs from one consumer to another. Some consumers shop online frequently, while others purchase products occasionally based on their needs. The study related to the frequency of online shopping helps to understand consumers' level of involvement with e-commerce platforms.

Table 2: Frequency of Online Shopping

Frequency	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Very frequently	56	28
Frequently	72	36
Occasionally	42	21
Rarely	30	15
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Primary Data

It is observed from the Table 2 that 36% of the respondents shop online frequently, followed by 28% who shop very frequently. About 21% of the respondents make online purchases occasionally, while 15% shop online rarely. This indicates that a majority of the respondents (64%) purchase products online either frequently or very frequently, showing that online shopping is a regular part of their purchasing behaviour.

Importance of Online Reviews

Online reviews have become an important source of information for consumers while shopping through e-commerce platforms. Before purchasing a product, consumers often read

the experiences and opinions shared by previous customers. The level of importance given to such reviews may differ among consumers. Therefore, this section examines how far consumers consider online reviews while making their purchase decisions.

Table 3: Importance Given to Online Reviews

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very important	72	36
Important	78	39
Neutral	28	14
Less important	14	7
Not important at all	8	4
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Primary Data

The above Table 3 shows that 39% of the respondents consider online reviews important, while 36% consider them very important. About 14% of the respondents have a neutral opinion, whereas 7% and 4% consider online reviews less important and not important at all, respectively. Overall, 75% of the respondents consider online reviews either important or very important, indicating that online reviews have a considerable role in the purchase decisions of consumers.

Importance of Star Ratings

Star ratings provide consumers with a quick way to assess the general opinion of previous buyers about a product. Many consumers check the rating before reading detailed reviews. The following table presents the level of agreement among respondents regarding the role of star ratings in their purchase decisions.

Table 4: Influence of Star Ratings

Statement	Mean Score	Rank
I check the star rating before purchasing a product.	4.18	1

I consider ratings along with written reviews.	4.12	2
I prefer products with higher ratings.	4.05	3
I compare ratings of different products.	3.94	4
A low rating makes me reconsider my purchase.	3.86	5

Source: Primary Data

Scale: 5 – Strongly Agree; 4 – Agree; 3 – Neutral; 2 – Disagree; 1 – Strongly Disagree.

The above Table 4 indicates that checking the star rating before purchasing a product received the highest mean score of 4.18. This is followed by considering ratings along with written reviews, with a mean score of 4.12. The respondents also showed a preference for products with higher ratings. The lowest mean score of 3.86 was recorded for reconsidering a purchase because of a low rating. Overall, the results indicate that star ratings are an important initial source of information for consumers while purchasing products online.

Influence of Written Reviews

Written reviews provide more detailed information than a simple star rating. Consumers can learn about product quality, performance, durability and actual usage through the experiences shared by other customers. The following table examines the aspects of written reviews that consumers consider while making online purchase decisions.

Table 5: Consumer Responses Regarding Written Reviews

Statement	Mean	SD	Rank
I read customer reviews before purchasing.	4.22	0.78	1
Reviews help me understand actual product performance.	4.16	0.81	2
Detailed reviews increase my confidence.	4.1	0.84	3
Reviews help me compare products.	4.05	0.86	4
I pay attention to negative reviews.	3.98	0.91	5
I prefer reviews with photographs/videos.	3.87	0.95	6

Source: Primary Data

The above Table 5 shows that reading customer reviews before purchasing received the highest mean score of 4.22. Understanding the actual performance of the product ranked second with a mean of 4.16. Detailed reviews also increased the confidence of respondents, with a mean score of 4.10. Reviews containing photographs and videos received the lowest mean score of 3.87, although the score still indicates a positive response. The results suggest that consumers mainly use written reviews to understand the actual performance of products and to reduce uncertainty before purchasing.

Review Credibility

The usefulness of an online review depends largely on how trustworthy the consumer considers it to be. Consumers may look for different signs of authenticity before relying on a review. Verified-purchase information, detailed explanations, photographs and recent reviews can help consumers judge the credibility of customer feedback.

Table 6: Factors Affecting Review Credibility

Factor	Mean	Rank
Verified-purchase label	4.21	1
Detailed explanation	4.15	2
Customer photographs	4.08	3
Recent reviews	4.02	4
Customer videos	3.96	5
Consistency between reviews	3.91	6
Large number of reviews	3.84	7

Source: Primary Data

The above Table 6 shows that the verified-purchase label has the highest mean score of 4.21, indicating that respondents consider it an important indicator of review credibility. Detailed explanations and customer photographs also received relatively high mean scores of 4.15 and 4.08 respectively. The number of reviews recorded the lowest mean score of 3.84, although it still indicates a favourable response. The findings suggest that consumers give

greater importance to signs of authenticity and detailed information when judging whether an online review is trustworthy.

Influence of Negative Reviews

Negative reviews provide consumers with information about the possible limitations or problems associated with a product. Consumers may read such reviews to identify issues that may not be mentioned in product descriptions. Therefore, this section examines how negative reviews influence consumers during the purchase process.

Table 7: Consumer Response to Negative Reviews

Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
I read negative reviews before purchasing.	78
Negative reviews make me examine a product more carefully.	76
Several similar negative reviews discourage me from purchasing.	72
I compare negative reviews with positive reviews.	74
One negative review does not necessarily stop me from purchasing.	68

Source: Primary Data

The Table 7 reveals that 78% of the respondents read negative reviews before purchasing a product. About 76% stated that negative reviews make them examine a product more carefully. Further, 72% reported that several similar negative reviews may discourage them from purchasing a product. About 74% compare negative reviews with positive reviews before making a decision. The findings indicate that consumers do not completely ignore negative feedback; instead, they use it to identify possible problems and evaluate the product more carefully.

Overall Influence of Reviews and Ratings

Online reviews and ratings can influence the final stage of the consumer purchase decision. Consumers may use them to compare alternatives, reduce uncertainty and develop

confidence in a product. The following table presents the overall influence of reviews and ratings on the purchase decisions of the respondents.

Table 8: Statements on Purchase Decision

Statement	Mean	SD
Reviews help me decide whether to buy a product.	4.2	0.79
Good reviews increase my confidence in purchasing.	4.18	0.81
Ratings reduce uncertainty about a product.	4.12	0.83
I compare reviews before choosing between two similar products.	4.08	0.85
I sometimes change my purchase decision after reading reviews.	3.96	0.91
Poor reviews make me look for alternatives.	3.92	0.94

Source: Primary Data

The above Table 8 indicates that reviews help consumers decide whether to purchase a product, recording the highest mean score of 4.20. Good reviews also increase consumer confidence, with a mean score of 4.18. Ratings help reduce uncertainty, while comparing reviews of similar products also received a positive response. The statement that poor reviews make respondents look for alternatives recorded the lowest mean score of 3.92. Overall, the findings indicate that online reviews and ratings play an important role in helping consumers evaluate products and make their final purchase decisions.

Findings of the Study

- **52% of the respondents are male and 48% are female**, showing a relatively balanced gender distribution among the respondents.
- The majority of the respondents (**42%**) belong to the **25–35 years** age group, indicating that young and middle-aged consumers form a major part of the sample.
- With regard to occupation, **38% are private employees**, followed by **30% students**, showing considerable participation from working consumers and students.
- **64% of the respondents shop online frequently or very frequently**, indicating that online shopping has become a regular part of their purchasing behaviour.

- **75% of the respondents consider online reviews either important or very important**, indicating their considerable role in online purchase decisions.
- Star ratings are an important initial source of information, with **checking the star rating before purchasing recording the highest mean score of 4.18**.
- **Reading customer reviews before purchasing recorded the highest mean score of 4.22**, indicating that written reviews are widely used by consumers during the purchase process.
- Reviews help consumers understand **actual product performance**, with a mean score of **4.16**, and detailed reviews increase consumer confidence, with a mean score of **4.10**.
- The **verified-purchase label** was identified as the most important factor affecting review credibility, recording a mean score of **4.21**.
- **78% of respondents read negative reviews before purchasing**, while 76% stated that negative reviews make them examine a product more carefully.
- **72% reported that several similar negative reviews discourage them from purchasing**, while 74% compare negative reviews with positive reviews before making a decision.
- Reviews help consumers decide whether to purchase a product, recording the highest mean score of **4.20** among the purchase-decision statements.
- Good reviews increase consumer confidence, with a mean score of **4.18**, while ratings help reduce uncertainty, with a mean score of **4.12**.
- Overall, the findings indicate that consumers use **reviews, ratings, review credibility, positive and negative feedback, and review content** as important sources of information while making online purchase decisions.

Suggestions

- E-commerce platforms should strengthen mechanisms for displaying and identifying **genuine verified-purchase reviews**.
- Platforms should take appropriate measures to **detect and remove fake, misleading and manipulated reviews**.
- Sellers should provide accurate product information and encourage customers to share **genuine and detailed feedback** after purchase.

- E-commerce platforms may encourage customers to provide **photographs and videos** along with written reviews to provide more practical product information.
- Consumers should be encouraged to consider **both positive and negative reviews** rather than relying only on the overall star rating.
- Consumers should pay attention to **recent reviews**, particularly for products whose quality, design or performance may change over time.
- E-commerce platforms should provide better mechanisms for consumers to **report suspicious or inappropriate reviews**.
- Sellers should respond professionally to negative reviews and address genuine customer complaints to improve **consumer confidence and trust**.
- Consumers should compare reviews from multiple buyers and consider the **credibility, consistency and relevance** of reviews before making a purchase.
- E-commerce platforms and marketers should maintain **transparent and trustworthy review systems**, as consumer confidence is closely associated with the information available through reviews and ratings.

Conclusion

The study concludes that online reviews and ratings form an important source of information in the purchase decision process of consumers in Madurai City. The findings show that a substantial proportion of respondents regularly shops online and give considerable importance to customer reviews and star ratings when evaluating products. Written reviews help consumers understand actual product performance, compare alternatives and increase their confidence, while star ratings provide a quick indication of the overall opinion of previous buyers. The findings also reveal that consumers pay particular attention to verified-purchase labels and detailed explanations when judging the credibility of reviews, and negative reviews are used to identify possible product-related problems before purchasing. Overall, online reviews and ratings contribute to reducing uncertainty, building purchase confidence and supporting consumers in making informed online purchase decisions.

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