

Impact of Customer Reviews and Ratings On Online Purchasing Decisions And Conversion

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Abstract

Now days, understanding how people make purchasing decisions in digital era are of growing importance for researchers and marketers. Customer's reviews and ratings are important for better understanding of customers and improving services. Whereas, Consumer's reviews and ratings are available online for wide range of products and services. This Study investigated how average consumer ratings, product attributes, and consumer reviews influenced on the online purchasing decisions of buyers. In line with previous research, study found that buyers use all types of information on online purchasing; they clearly preferred products with better attributes and with higher average consumer ratings. It has been found that the buyer preferences can be changed for the higher-rated products, if the product is overridden by a rich negative or positive review.

Key words:

Online purchase decisions, customer reviews, ratings and conversion.

1. Introduction

Online consumer's reviews are peer generated evaluations and posted on relevant company's website or on any other website. Customer's reviews are playing the role of star rating and open ended comments from end users. Many online retailers have already enabled their consumers to submit reviews for their products and services[25]. Due to increase in competition, customer faces difficulty in finding the best product or services. In order to try the new brand, customers have to pass through different step that strengthen his/her decision. So he/she use various techniques or ways to get to the final decision. Information from other consumers i.e. Word of mouth is considered to be more persuasive because it is written or spoken by other customers rather than brands itself and is therefore sensed as being more trustworthy and credible before taking any decision. Similarly, the emerging use of internet and smartphones has connected the people, customers in a drastic way. You can get suggestion or feedback reviews by just searching on Google or social media.

Advancement in technology and Internet speed has changed the world into global village. Where a consumer has the very easy access to the information. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) 3G and 4G users ranking in Pakistan, the number of 3G and 4G subscribers in Pakistan was 56.08 million on June 2018." Whereas, the number of mobile users in Pakistan has touched 150.23 million on June 2018 observed by PTA. About 59 million people in Pakistan are smartphones user, out of which 83 percent have android devices. Fall in smartphone prices and mobile internet data is directly related to number of smartphone users. Google reaches almost 80% of the internet users worldwide. With ref to recent Facebook audience insights, Pakistan insights: 200M - 250M monthly active people.

In Pakistan, where the launch of 4G technology has enhanced the communication but also have changed the way of businesses and customer buying pattern. The younger consumers are dominating E-commerce at averaged, but due to trust issues and less physical interaction, buyer faces a lot of difficulty in making purchase decisions. It has become important to understand, how buyers make on-line purchasing decisions? What information do they consider if price factor is not so much sensitive? Including the use of this research for decision making and obviously the product sale? For this purpose, two products have been presented simultaneously and sequentially to know, whether the decision varies or not. Study will also clear the emerging trend of online reviews in Pakistan and how it affects customer purchasing behavior and probability.

This research first presents relevant literature of reviews and ratings of consumer's influence on their purchase decision; and secondly on how advancement in technology and communication system is influencing decision making processes. Latter research discusses empirical studies investigating how buyer use various factor i.e. reviews, rating, products attribute in online purchasing. At the end, research results and findings are discussed for develop such a e-commerce systems which

is really helpful for E-commerce industry in general and specific to Pakistan.

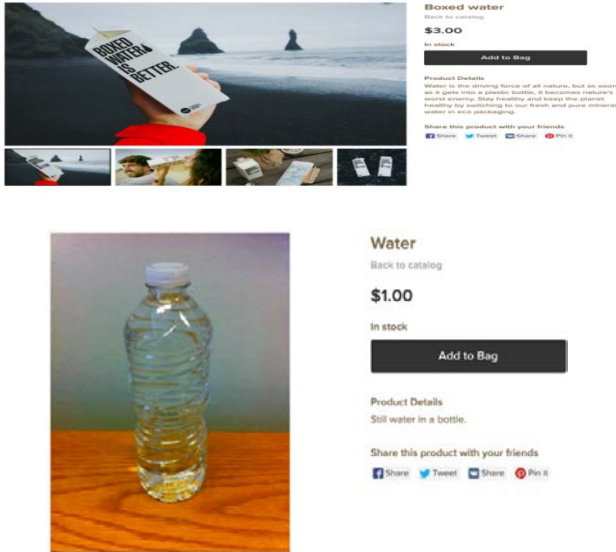
2. Literature Review

Consumer reviews influence the on attitudes and purchasing intentions of consumers:

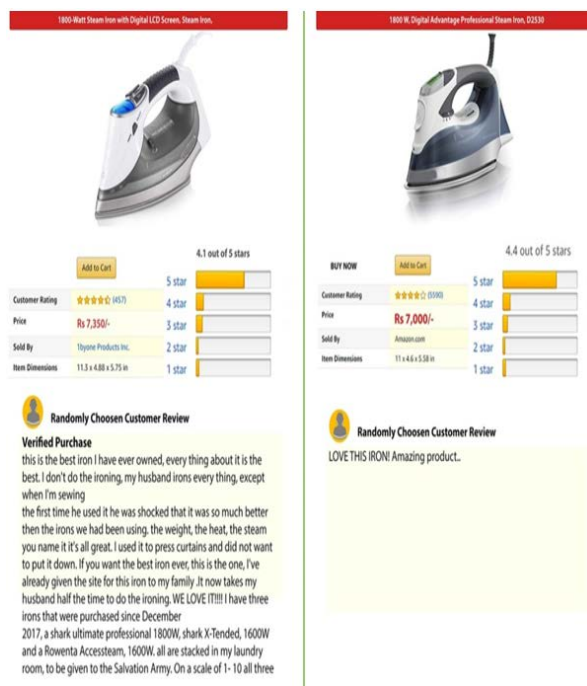
The Effects the customer's negative and positive reviews and ratings on online decisions are mostly recognized and acknowledged phenomena. Many researches have stated that ratings and reviews of the consumers have impact on buying intentions and the behavior, Consumers reviews and ratings also develop attitudes positive towards the products and retailers. The most important characteristics influencing sales and attitudes of consumers are the experience of the buyer with the product, According to recent studies [5,7]. Generally speaking, higher number of positive reviews increases chances of conversion for particular product. Whereas, the higher number of negative reviews reduces the chances of conversion [5, 8]. Reviews effect; however this also depends on the source of the review and the review exposure [9]. The reviewer characteristics also effect, which means a tech person sharing a review about the technical product has more influence on user rather than news expert [10,5]. The both the positive reviews and the negative reviews can influence consumer's behavior. Some researchers have mentioned that positive and negative reviews differ in their strength of influence. The negative reviews had the strongest effect on buyer's attitudes and usefulness as compare to positive reviews stated by Purnawirawan et al [7]. The negative reviews of users may carry more weight as compare to positive reviews, it is narrated [11,12]. This is also finding in the area of communication [13,14]. Some studies reveal that consumer's negativity bias is limited to hedonic good [12]. The consumers may not give too much importance to negative reviews but they also receive and consider such views as more informative reviews, stated by Wu[15]. Beside this, along the reviews the format of information also matter for consumers. Mostly online formats provide reviews into two formats; first are overall reviews with perceived quality, and the second are individual reviews that include only personal narratives. There is how much importance of the both types of information is still an ongoing process and a debate. Consumers give value to the average ratings also as important, according to current researches [16]. The narrative and statistical information are equally convincing and important, according to Hong and Park [17]. Average ratings have its importance but a single review could conquer average ratings, stated by Weber and Ziegel[18]. It has been found that ratings and reviews are also considered to be important in Health sector, while making choices [19-21]. General discussion related to how

much single reviews influence the consumer behavior is also important because sometimes consumers read only a small number of reviews before making actual purchase decision. During this process consumers may be are considering only most recent reviews as important [16]. In the end it can be assumed that, consumer's decisions are more influenced by average consumer ratings. The ratings of a product will lose influence on actual decisions if there are no well written reviews [18]. Further, few studies have found that negative reviews are more impact than the positive reviews [7] so it clear that single positive review has less value than a negative single review. It is also saying that business need more negative reviews are compare to positive reviews for improvements. Although, Business are striving for getting five star reviews as much as possible. It is also a fact before purchasing we are checking reviews and if there are negative reviews we don't purchase and if there are positive reviews mostly we will purchase. This should not be your goal if you wish to improve your business. You may not believe but earning positive reviews may not critical for your business. Negative reviews can help your business in many ways. So do not put your all efforts in avoiding negative reviews, if you do then you are going wrong. You may find this all as hard but it is fact, which you must not ignore.

Option Presentation: During decision process product cards are mostly shown side by side and simultaneously. Consumers during purchasing online products consider points sequentially. The decision task is the same as simultaneous or sequential presentations can be, after the decision process. Presenting sequentially can result in higher order effects and can make positive way for the first option [55]. The simultaneous presented options make more satisfied to the peoples [56]. The decision processes may change depending on the presentation with the simultaneous presentation and facilitating attribute-wise comparisons may cause change in decision process. Mentioning a single option usually leads to more alternative-wise comparisons of products or services [57]. The positive purchase experience can make the difference in making choice to buy from your and from your rivals. The presentation of products can make the big difference. For example take these folioing products. Here first product is cheap and you also can see it is water, but is not only thing that is appealing. The second is expensive and you cannot clearly see it is water. But what is important that it is trendy and engaging. These both are functionally identical products but one is more attractive than others. This attraction is the real presentation. Human desires more orders and online shopping is not different. Customers need patters and logic in presentations [26]



Presenting the type and price is not focus of this research, but it is not clear whether products were presented sequentially or simultaneously to ensure the effects of average ratings and reviews.



The above picture shows an exemplary product’s card. It is showing a choice between two irons in the positive review condition. In this figure the rich and positive reviews are shown for the lower rated product on the left. The short baseline reviews are for higher rated product on the right side.

Further it is also important to note here, for many products and services online reviews are available. These reviews

are playing the role of supplementary information beside other information given for online products available. Many researchers have already demonstrated that presence of reviews is beneficial for products and online stores or sellers as well for buyers. During the product search process these reviews are playing important role in making decision about a particular product and add value to prospective customers. Previous researches have extremely evaluated and examined these experts’ reviews and online recommendations [25]. Online retailers are considering online reviews as primary source measuring the consumer’s evaluations. Customers are also evaluating reviews according to their level of helpfulness; but past research has not provided a helpful theoretical ground. Helpfulness can be measured as perceived value n a decision making process of any product.

3. Methods

During this research respondents were presented with pairs of household products i.e. the pair of Vacuum Cleaner, Drill machine & Hand free. Consumers had to choose one out of the two options they would prefer to buy from given options. Pairs of Products were presented on cards and described by four relevant attributes, price, rating and reviews. In addition to the products' attributes, an average consumer rating was shown for each product with varied reviews. All average ratings were positive but one product was always rated somewhat better than the other product. A better rated product with low price and low rated product in comparison with rich review were shown to the participants’ tested three product cards on buyer. In the “no single review condition”, participants only received information about average consumer ratings and in comparison the product have high price but rich review. This condition allowed us to test whether participants relied on average consumer rating in their choices. The scale adopted was previously conducted by the Polish Japanese Academy of Information Technology (PJAIT). They were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of Basel.

4. Data Analysis

	Which drill machine will you purchase?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
[How much the product attributes/features are important to you]	Blue - Positive rich review	25	5.56	1.446	.289
	Red Drill - No review but low cost	13	5.23	1.536	.426

	Which Hands Free will you purchase?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
[How much the product attributes/features are important to you]	Red - Low rating but detailed review	26	5.42	1.501	.294
	Black with high rating single line review	12	5.50	1.446	.417

	Which Iron will you purchase?	NN	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
[How much the product attributes/features are important to you]	First one - Detailed review with low rating	21	5.43	1.502	.328
	Second one - single line review with high rating	17	5.47	1.463	.355

Which drill machine will you purchase=1 and
Which Hands Free will you purchase=1 and
Which Iron will you purchase=2 (FILTER)
Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent

Valid	Selected	2	100.0	100.0	100.0
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For Reviews

Which drill machine will you purchase=1
Which Hands Free will you purchase=1
Which Iron will you purchase=2 (FILTER)

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
Valid	Selected	2	100.0	100.0	100.0

For Ratings

Which drill machine will you purchase A=2
Which Iron will you purchase A=2
How much the product attributes features are important to you=2 (FILTER)

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
Valid	Selected	1	100.0	100.0	100.0

Its shows that both ratings and review affect the online consumer purchasing decision making.

Which Hands Free will you purchase=1
Which Iron will you purchase=1 (FILTER)
Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent

Valid	Selected	20	100.0	100.0	100.0
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Which Hands Free will you purchase=1
Which drill machine will you purchase=1 (FILTER)
Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent

Valid	Selected	21	100.0	100.0	100.0
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It shows that if we see the two out of three product cards than almost 20-21 people out of 38 value the review to make their decision making while 10-11 people value the ratings.

Descriptive Statistics
N Minimum Maximum Mean Std. Deviation

Review	38	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
Product Attribute	38	2	7	5.45	1.465
Ratings importance	38	2	7	4.74	1.703
Review imp in decision	38	1	7	5.42	1.703

Reviews usefulness	38	1	7	5.42	1.840
Decision Diff	38	2	5	3.71	.802
Prod knw	38	1	5	2.68	1.165
Valid N (list wise)	38				

		Correlations						
		Review	Product	Ratings	Review	Reviews	Decision	Prod
		w	Attribute	gs imp	w imp	usefulness	n Diff	knw
Review	Pearson Correlation	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a
	Sig. (2-tailed)
Product Attribute	Pearson Correlation	.a	1	.503*	.183	.189	-.025	.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.001	.273	.256	.882	.823
Ratings importance	Pearson Correlation	.a	.503**	1	-.222	-.205	-.295	.366*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.	.181	.217	.073	.024
Review imp in decision	Pearson Correlation	.a	.183	-.222	1	.813**	.468**	.490*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.273	.181	.	.000	.003	.002
Reviews usefulness	Pearson Correlation	.a	.189	-.205	.813*	1	.451**	.352*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.256	.217	.000	.	.004	.030
Decision Diff	Pearson Correlation	.a	-.025	-.295	.468*	.451**	1	-.216
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.882	.073	.003	.004	.	.192
Prod knw	Pearson Correlation	.a	.038	.366*	.490*	-.352*	-.216	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.823	.024	.002	.030	.192	.
N		38	38	38	38	38	38	38

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

a. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

		Model Summary								
		R	Adjusted R	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
Model	1	.716a	.512	.418	.387	.512	5.427	66	31	.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prod knw, Product Attribute, Decision Diff, Reviews usefulness, Ratings importance, Review imp in decision

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.867	6	.811	5.427	.001b
Residual	4.633	31	.149		
Total	9.500	37			

Dependent Variable: Which Hands Free will you purchase=1 , Which drill machine will you purchase=1 , Which Iron will you purchase=1 (FILTER)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Prod knw, Product Attribute, Decision Diff, Reviews usefulness, Ratings importance, Review imp in decision

Model	Coefficients ^a		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	.273	.475		.575	.569
Product Attribute	.035	.054	.101	.647	.522
Ratings importance	-.146	.049	-.490	-2.947	.006
Review imp in decision	-.008	.071	-.026	-.109	.914
Reviews usefulness	.094	.061	.343	1.557	.130
Decision Diff	.086	.093	.136	.925	.362
Prod knw	-.023	.066	-.053	-.349	.729

a. Dependent Variable: Which Hands Free will you purchase=1 and Which drill machine will you purchase=1 and Which Iron will you purchase=1 (FILTER)

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	38	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	38	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.380	7

5. Discussion

It was found that buyers give more importance to both the ratings and reviews. The buying behavior is also affected by attributes of products even reviews of the product may be negative or positive. Influence of product attributes: For users, the quality index of product’s attributes is strongly influenced choice in both cases; when no reviews were presented and also even when the single review was present. Influence of average consumer ratings with detailed review: Users were strongly influenced by aggregated consumer ratings with detailed review. Two products were shown to the buyers and both were having the reviews. But users preferred the product with detailed and rich review. Influence of sequential and simultaneously: The products were shown simultaneously and sequentially to the buyers and it was found that decision has not been affected by simultaneously and sequentially reviews but respondents selected product with reviews as the purchasing option.

Limitations

There is no any effect of gender on choices only in some cases it partly influenced product knowledge. It suggests that the results are not influenced on the basis of gender. Further, as in Pakistan the ecommerce industry is in growing phase so, there are the chances that buyer behaviors in future shift to one particular rating or reviews.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This support of product rating and reviews on purchase will help the E-commerce businesses to understand the importance of ratings and reviews on the conversions. It will also help the future researcher to carry out the research in future to analyze the shift in trend with the growth in Ecommerce sector in Pakistan.

6. Conclusions

This study has provided theoretical and empirical understanding of online reviews and ratings. Results shows that both ratings and reviews have strong impact on the buyer’s online purchase decision, and it has also been found that details rich review has more positive affect as compared to single line or two words review. So the Ecommerce industry in Pakistan should focus on both rating and review to convert the website visitor in to conversion/purchase. In initial phase of getting information customer is more concerned about the ratings, and in latter phases he/she is more interested in purchase than she/he goes for the reviews and ratings. This study contributes in theory as well in practices as it is helpful in providing theoretical framework for better understanding the online reviews and ratings for online purchase decisions and conversions.

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