

A STUDY ON ROLE OF CUSTOMER REVIEWS AND RATINGS IN INFLUENCING ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR — AT AMAZON

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ABSTRACT

Abstract—Customer reviews and ratings have emerged as the most influential form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in digital commerce, shaping consumer purchase decisions with measurable and economically significant impact. Amazon, as the world's largest e-commerce platform with over 300 million active customers and 2.5+ billion monthly website visits, provides an ideal research context for examining how user-generated review content and aggregate star ratings influence online buying behaviour across diverse product categories. This study investigates the role of customer reviews and ratings in influencing online buying behaviour on Amazon, analysing review quantity, quality, recency, reviewer credibility, rating distribution, and sentiment as drivers of consumer purchase intention. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 120 Amazon customers in Hyderabad. Secondary data was sourced from Amazon Seller Central reports, IAMAI e-commerce industry publications, academic eWOM and consumer behaviour literature, and global consumer trust research. The study evaluates how different review characteristics influence purchase decision confidence, product category sensitivity to review impact, and demographic variation in review reliance patterns. Findings indicate that review authenticity perception, average star rating, and review volume are the three strongest purchase intention predictors, while negative review management and verified purchase labelling significantly moderate consumer trust in review content. Recommendations address review solicitation strategies, fake review detection investment, and seller reputation

management practices for optimising review-driven conversion outcomes on Amazon.

Keywords: Customer reviews, star ratings, online buying behaviour, Amazon, eWOM, purchase intention, consumer trust, e-commerce, review credibility, digital marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), manifested primarily through customer reviews and star ratings on e-commerce platforms, has fundamentally transformed consumer decision-making processes in digital retail environments. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth communication limited by geographic and social network constraints, eWOM on platforms such as Amazon reaches millions of potential buyers simultaneously, creating scalable social proof mechanisms that influence purchase behaviour at a scale unimaginable in pre-digital commerce contexts.

Amazon's customer review ecosystem, launched in 1995 as one of the platform's earliest differentiating features, has grown to encompass over 200 million reviews across its global marketplace. Amazon actively solicits reviews through post-purchase email programmes, recognises top reviewers through its Vine programme, and has invested substantially in machine learning-based fake review detection to preserve review ecosystem integrity. Customer reviews and ratings have become so central to Amazon's value proposition that product discovery, search ranking, and conversion rates are directly correlated with review volume and average star rating.

In India, e-commerce has experienced exceptional growth, with Amazon India

ranking as the country's second largest e-commerce platform with approximately 100 million registered users and gross merchandise value exceeding ₹2.5 lakh crore in FY 2023–24. Indian online shoppers demonstrate high review reliance, with 89% reporting that they read reviews before making purchase decisions and 73% stating that reviews are more trustworthy than brand advertising, according to LocalCircles Consumer Trust Survey 2023. Understanding how review characteristics influence purchase intentions in this high-growth, review-sensitive market context is of substantial academic and practitioner relevance.

This study investigates the multidimensional role of customer reviews and ratings in influencing online buying behaviour on Amazon, examining review quantity, star rating distribution, review recency, reviewer credibility signals, and sentiment as purchase intention drivers across diverse product categories and consumer demographic segments.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to identify and analyse the key characteristics of customer reviews and ratings that most significantly influence online purchase intention on Amazon; to examine consumer trust mechanisms in review content and the role of verified purchase labels, reviewer badges, and helpfulness votes in moderating review credibility perception; to assess product category variation in review sensitivity, comparing consumer electronics, fashion, books, and FMCG categories in terms of review reliance and rating threshold requirements; to evaluate demographic variation in online review utilisation patterns including age, gender, and online shopping experience as moderating variables; and to recommend strategies for Amazon sellers and brands to optimise review generation, management, and utilisation for improved conversion and customer acquisition outcomes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

[1] Cheung and Thadani (2012) conducted a systematic review of eWOM literature, establishing a comprehensive framework of eWOM message characteristics (argument quality, sidedness, evidence type), source characteristics (credibility, expertise, trustworthiness), and receiver characteristics (involvement, prior knowledge) as determinants of eWOM persuasiveness and purchase intention impact. Their framework provides the theoretical foundation for customer review influence analysis on Amazon.

[2] Mudambi and Schuff (2010) empirically analysed Amazon customer reviews, finding that review extremity (one-star and five-star ratings) combined with high review depth (word count) generated the strongest helpfulness votes and purchase influence, while moderate ratings with minimal elaboration had the least persuasive impact. Their study established that review quality moderates the impact of star rating on purchase decisions.

[3] Hu, Liu, and Zhang (2008) studied the relationship between online review valence and sales, finding a statistically significant positive relationship between average star rating and product sales volume on Amazon, with each additional star generating an estimated 4.4% sales increase after controlling for review volume and product characteristics. Their findings quantified the commercial value of star rating improvement for Amazon sellers.

[4] Filieri and McLeay (2014) investigated which factors make online reviews adopted as useful by consumers, finding that information quality, information quantity, and reviewer expertise are the three strongest predictors of review adoption in purchase decision contexts, with information quality demonstrating 2.7 times greater influence than quantity alone.

[5] Srivastava and Sharma (2021) examined eWOM effectiveness in the Indian e-commerce context, finding that Indian consumers demonstrate higher review

sensitivity than global averages, with 84% citing online reviews as the most influential information source in purchase decisions, and star ratings below 3.5 creating near-universal purchase avoidance responses across all product categories studied.

[6] Luca and Zervas (2016) documented the prevalence and economic impact of fake reviews on Yelp, finding that approximately 16% of Yelp reviews were flagged as fraudulent, with fake review incentives strongest for businesses near rating thresholds. Amazon faces analogous fake review challenges, with the platform removing 200+ million suspected fake reviews annually.

[7] Pavlou and Fygenon (2006) applied Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to online consumer behaviour, finding that perceived usefulness of review information, ease of review interpretation, and trust in review platform significantly influence purchase intention in e-commerce environments. Platform-level trust in Amazon's review ecosystem is therefore a critical antecedent of individual review persuasiveness.

[8] IMAI and Kantar (2023) published the India Internet Report documenting that 91% of Indian e-commerce shoppers consult product ratings before purchase, with Amazon India's verified purchase review system rated as the most trusted review source by 67% of surveyed online shoppers, establishing the practical relevance of review trust mechanisms in the Indian market context.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted to comprehensively investigate the role of customer reviews and ratings in influencing online buying behaviour on Amazon. Quantitative analysis of structured survey data was combined with secondary source review of Amazon platform analytics, consumer trust research, and academic eWOM literature to provide both statistically measured evidence on review influence patterns and contextual

understanding of consumer review processing behaviour.

4.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed to document consumer review utilisation patterns, review characteristic preference rankings, and product category variation in review sensitivity. Analytical design examined the relationships between specific review attributes (star rating, review volume, recency, verified purchase status, reviewer credentials) and self-reported purchase intention confidence levels. The study is cross-sectional in nature, covering Amazon India customers in Hyderabad during January to March 2024.

4.2 Data Sources

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 Amazon India customers in Hyderabad who had made at least three online purchases on Amazon in the preceding six months. The questionnaire comprised 35 questions covering demographic profile, Amazon usage patterns, review reading behaviour, specific review attribute importance ratings on a 5-point Likert scale, product category review sensitivity, fake review detection awareness, and overall review reliance in purchase decision-making. Secondary data sources included Amazon Seller Central published platform statistics, IMAI India Internet Report 2023, LocalCircles Consumer Trust Survey 2023, Statista e-commerce consumer behaviour data, academic journals on eWOM and consumer behaviour, and McKinsey Consumer Insights reports on digital purchase decision journeys.

4.3 Sample Size

Convenience sampling was used to select 120 Amazon India customers in Hyderabad across age groups 18–55 years with minimum three Amazon purchases in the preceding six months. The sample included 52% male and 48% female respondents, with representation across age groups: 18–25 years (38%), 26–35 years (34%), 36–45 years (18%), and 46–55 years (10%).

Sample size was determined using Cochran's formula at 95% confidence level with 9% margin of error. Respondents were contacted through digital survey distribution across Amazon user communities, college networks, and professional groups in Hyderabad.

4.4 Tools for Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis including mean scores, frequency distributions, and percentage analysis was applied to Likert scale responses measuring review attribute importance and purchase intention influence. Ranking analysis identified priority ordering of review characteristics by purchase decision impact. Cross-tabulation examined demographic variation in review reliance patterns across age, gender, and shopping experience segments. Product category comparative analysis assessed variation in review sensitivity across consumer electronics, fashion, books, and FMCG. Percentage analysis quantified review reading behaviour patterns, fake review awareness, and platform trust levels among survey respondents.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Review Attribute Importance Ratings

Review Attribute	Mean (/5)	% Highly Imp.	Rank
Star Rating (Average)	4.52	91%	1
Review Authenticity	4.48	89%	2
Review Volume (Count)	4.31	83%	3
Review Recency	4.19	77%	4
Verified Purchase Badge	4.12	74%	5
Review Text	3.98	68%	6

Detail			
Reviewer Profile Credibility	3.81	62%	7
Photo/Video Attached	3.74	59%	8
Helpful Votes Count	3.62	54%	9

Table I: Review Attribute Importance Ratings (n=120)

Average star rating (mean 4.52/5.00; 91% rating highly important) and review authenticity perception (mean 4.48; 89%) emerge as the two most influential review attributes in purchase decisions, confirming that consumers prioritise aggregate quality signal and trust credibility above all other review characteristics. Review volume (mean 4.31; 83%) ranks third, consistent with academic research establishing that higher review counts reduce perceived purchase risk by providing greater statistical confidence in rating validity. Verified purchase badge (mean 4.12; 74%) demonstrates significant credibility moderating value, validating Amazon's investment in purchase verification labelling infrastructure.

5.2 Product Category Review Sensitivity

Product Category	Min. Rating Acceptable	% Read Reviews	Reviews Read (Avg)
Consumer Electronics	4.0★	96%	12.4
Fashion / Apparel	3.8★	82%	7.2
Books	3.5★	71%	4.8
FMCG / Grocery	3.5★	64%	3.1
Home Appliances	4.0★	94%	10.8
Health & Personal Care	3.8★	88%	8.3

Table II: Product Category Review Sensitivity Analysis

Consumer electronics (96% review reading rate; minimum acceptable rating 4.0 stars) and home appliances (94%; 4.0 stars) demonstrate highest review sensitivity, attributable to high purchase value, technical complexity, and product failure risk concerns that make peer experience information particularly valuable. FMCG and grocery categories show the lowest review reliance (64%; 3.5 stars minimum), reflecting lower purchase value and higher repurchase frequency that reduces information-seeking intensity. Fashion shows moderate review sensitivity with significant focus on fit, quality, and colour accuracy reviews not captured by aggregate star ratings.

5.3 Purchase Intention by Rating Level

Star Rating Range	% Would Purchase	% Would Consider	% Would Reject
4.5 – 5.0 ★	94%	5%	1%
4.0 – 4.4 ★	78%	18%	4%
3.5 – 3.9 ★	41%	37%	22%
3.0 – 3.4 ★	18%	29%	53%
< 3.0 ★	6%	11%	83%

Table III: Purchase Intention by Average Star Rating Level

Purchase intention declines sharply below 4.0 stars, with the 3.5–3.9 star band representing the critical decision ambiguity zone where only 41% of respondents would proceed to purchase versus 37% requiring further evaluation. Ratings below 3.0 stars generate near-universal purchase avoidance (83% rejection rate), establishing a hard lower threshold consistent with Srivastava and Sharma's (2021) finding of 3.5 stars as the effective purchase consideration floor for Indian e-commerce consumers. The 4.5–5.0

star band generates the highest conversion confidence (94% purchase intent), making achievement of this rating band a critical commercial objective for Amazon sellers.

5.4 Fake Review Awareness and Trust Impact

Fake Review Parameter	Response	%
Aware of fake reviews on Amazon	Yes	84%
Have encountered suspected fake review	Yes	71%
Fake reviews reduced platform trust	Yes	67%
Use tools to detect fake reviews	Yes	29%
Prefer Verified Purchase reviews only	Yes	78%
Trust Amazon's review moderation	Yes	54%

Table IV: Fake Review Awareness and Platform Trust (n=120)

High fake review awareness (84%) combined with significant trust erosion (67% reporting reduced platform trust after encountering suspected fake reviews) establishes fake review management as a critical integrity issue for Amazon's review ecosystem credibility. Despite 84% awareness, only 29% of respondents use external fake review detection tools (such as Fakespot or ReviewMeta), indicating that most consumers rely on Amazon's own moderation signals including verified purchase labelling (preferred by 78%) and reviewer profile credibility indicators. Amazon's trust moderation (rated trustworthy by 54%) leaves significant improvement scope given the platform's stated investment of removing 200+ million suspected fake reviews annually.

5.5 Demographic Variation in Review Reliance

Demographic Segment	High Review Reliance %	Avg Reviews Read
Age 18–25 years	88%	8.4
Age 26–35 years	81%	7.1
Age 36–45 years	74%	5.8
Age 46–55 years	61%	4.2
Female respondents	86%	8.1
Male respondents	77%	6.9
Frequent buyers (>10/yr)	91%	9.6
Occasional buyers (<4/yr)	68%	4.7

Table V: Demographic Variation in Review Reliance (n=120)

Younger age groups (18–25 years: 88% high review reliance) and frequent buyers (>10 purchases/year: 91%) demonstrate highest review dependence, reflecting digital nativity and established review reading habits among high-frequency online shoppers. Female respondents show marginally higher review reliance (86%) than male respondents (77%), consistent with broader consumer research on information-seeking behaviour in purchase decisions. Older age groups (46–55 years: 61% high reliance) show lower review dependence, potentially reflecting greater brand loyalty reliance and lower perceived competence in evaluating large volumes of conflicting review information.

6. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Key Findings

Average star rating and review authenticity perception emerge as the two most critical purchase decision drivers, with 91% and 89% of respondents respectively rating them as highly important. This dual primacy of quality signal and trust credibility establishes that Amazon sellers must simultaneously optimise for rating achievement and review authenticity

assurance—objectives that are complementary when reviews are organically generated but conflict when sellers are tempted to manipulate ratings through fake review procurement.

Purchase intention demonstrates a sharp non-linear decline below 4.0 stars, with the 3.5–3.9 band representing a critical decision ambiguity zone and ratings below 3.0 generating 83% rejection rates. This rating threshold sensitivity establishes specific, actionable commercial objectives for Amazon sellers: achieving and maintaining 4.0+ star ratings represents the minimum viability threshold, while 4.5+ star ratings (94% purchase intent) represent the optimal competitive positioning target for maximising conversion rates.

Consumer electronics and home appliances categories demonstrate highest review sensitivity (96% and 94% reading rates; 4.0 star minimum thresholds), establishing these product categories as highest-priority review management investment areas for sellers. FMCG and grocery categories show lower review dependence, suggesting that seller investment in review generation and management should be proportionate to product category review sensitivity and average purchase value.

High fake review awareness (84%) combined with significant trust erosion (67% reduction in platform trust) and relatively low trust in Amazon's moderation effectiveness (54%) establishes fake review integrity as a systemic risk to Amazon's review ecosystem value proposition. The strong preference for verified purchase reviews (78%) demonstrates that consumers have developed platform-specific credibility heuristics that sellers and Amazon can leverage through verified purchase review prioritisation and labelling enhancement.

6.2 Suggestions

Amazon sellers should implement systematic post-purchase review solicitation programmes through Amazon's Request a Review feature within the 5–30 day post-

delivery window, which generates verified purchase reviews—the most trusted review type among 78% of surveyed consumers. Review solicitation should be personalised by product category, with high-sensitivity categories (electronics, appliances) prioritised and review request messaging emphasising the specific product features most important to buyers in that category. Targeting a minimum 50 verified reviews and 4.2+ star rating before major promotional investments maximises review ecosystem contribution to conversion outcomes.

Proactive negative review management should be institutionalised as a core seller operational practice. Sellers should monitor all reviews within 48 hours of posting, provide professional public responses to 1–3 star reviews acknowledging specific concerns and offering resolution, and use negative review content as a structured product improvement feedback mechanism. Academic research consistently demonstrates that professional seller responses to negative reviews can recover 20–30% of potential conversion loss from negative review exposure by demonstrating customer service responsiveness to prospective buyers evaluating the review thread.

Amazon should invest in advanced AI-based review authenticity signalling beyond current verified purchase labelling, including reviewer purchase history credibility scoring, review language authenticity confidence indicators, and community helpfulness validation scores displayed prominently in review interfaces. Enhanced authenticity signalling would address the 67% trust erosion from suspected fake reviews, restore the 46% of consumers who do not currently trust Amazon's moderation effectiveness, and strengthen the platform's foundational review ecosystem competitive advantage against emerging marketplace competitors.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has comprehensively investigated the role of customer reviews and ratings in influencing online buying behaviour on Amazon, providing empirical evidence on review attribute importance, product category sensitivity, rating threshold effects, fake review trust implications, and demographic variation in review reliance among Amazon India customers in Hyderabad. Customer reviews and ratings represent the most powerful purchase decision influence mechanism in the Amazon marketplace ecosystem, with average star rating (91% highly important) and review authenticity (89%) identified as the dominant purchase intention drivers.

Purchase intention demonstrates a critical non-linear threshold effect below 4.0 stars, with the 4.5–5.0 star band generating 94% purchase intent and ratings below 3.0 stars generating 83% rejection rates. This rating sensitivity establishes concrete and actionable commercial objectives for Amazon sellers, making review generation, rating management, and fake review avoidance core business performance priorities rather than optional marketing activities.

High fake review awareness (84%) and resulting platform trust erosion (67% reporting trust reduction) represent the most significant systemic risk to Amazon's review ecosystem integrity and commercial effectiveness. Strong consumer preference for verified purchase reviews (78%) and relatively low trust in Amazon's moderation (54%) establish clear investment priorities for both Amazon platform governance and individual seller review management practices.

As India's e-commerce market continues its rapid growth trajectory and Amazon India expands its customer base, the review ecosystem will become an increasingly critical commercial infrastructure determining product discoverability, conversion rates, and brand reputation. Sellers, brands, and the Amazon platform

itself that invest most effectively in review quality, authenticity, and customer trust will generate the most durable competitive advantages in an increasingly review-mediated digital marketplace.

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