

The Impact of Online Reviews on Student Purchase Decisions: A Case Study of Nigerian Students at Lagos State University

Associate Professor Udegbe Scholastica Ebarefimia, PhD., Usman Tijani Moyosore, Lawal Ademola Ibraheem

Lagos State University, Faculty of Management Sciences, Department of Marketing, Nigeria.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.12030037>

Received: 20 February 2025; Accepted: 24 February 2025; Published: 06 April 2025

ABSTRACT

In today's digital world, online reviews significantly influence consumer behavior. This research investigates how online reviews affect the purchasing choices of students at Lagos State University (LASU) in Nigeria. The study uses both primary and secondary data, gathering information through surveys completed by LASU students. By combining numerical data with personal insights from focus group discussions, the research evaluates how online reviews shape student buying habits. A total of 300 surveys were distributed, resulting in 288 completed forms, with 282 deemed valid, achieving a high response rate of 94%. The survey's reliability was strong, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.8956, well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Experts in management and marketing confirmed the content's validity. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, percentages, and t-tests. Findings indicate that many students at LASU rely on online reviews for their purchasing decisions. Reviews that seem credible, featuring detailed comments and positive ratings, have a significant effect on these choices. There is a clear link between students' likelihood to buy and their views on the trustworthiness of online reviews. Additionally, more positive reviews lead to higher chances of purchase among LASU students. These insights are valuable for researchers and practitioners in Nigeria's economy.

Keywords: Online reviews, Students, Purchase decisions, Lagos State University, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Customers often leave reviews after buying products online. These reviews are becoming increasingly important for shoppers. Research shows that they greatly affect buying decisions. Reviews and ratings serve as key information sources, shaping choices, reducing risk, and boosting trust in purchases, Bae and Lee (2011); Beak et al 2012; Changchit, and Klaus (2020); Chen and Ku (2021); Filieri (2016); Floh et al (2013); Guo et al (2020).

Buyers consider online reviews when deciding what to buy Guo et al (2020). This process blends information processing and perception. While many studies have examined the influence of online reviews on purchasing, little is known about how these factors affect student buyers in developing countries.

Students searching for information on popular products are likely to trust community reviews. Such reviews resonate because they reflect personal experiences, making them easier for others to accept. This aids consumers in their decision-making Kaur et al (2017); Kaushik et al (2020); Lackermair et al (2013); Mumuni et al (2020); Ruiz-Mafe et al (2018).

This study investigates the impact of online reviews on students' purchase decisions at Lagos State University (LASU) in Nigeria. It seeks to understand their importance in the local consumer market, where research on this topic is limited, particularly among tech-savvy students. The findings will reveal how online reviews affect students' buying choices, addressing a gap in understanding the dynamics of this issue in a

developing nation. The study also aims to provide useful insights for both academic discussions and practical business strategies.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the degree to which LASU students' purchasing decisions are influenced by online reviews.
2. To determine which aspects of online reviews are most important to students.
3. To look into the relationship between students' purchasing decisions and the reliability of online reviews.
4. To investigate the relationship between students' purchasing behavior and the number of online reviews.

Research Questions

1. What effect do online reviews have on the purchasing decisions of LASU students?
2. Which aspects of online reviews do students believe to have the biggest impact on their decision to purchase?
3. Do students' tendency to purchase, and their perception of the reliability of online reviews correlate?
4. Is there a relationship between the quantity of online reviews and the purchase behavior of students?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form were formulated and tested to achieve the objectives of this study.

H01: LASU students' purchasing decisions are not significantly influenced favorably by online reviews.

H02: Students believe that online reviews perceived as authentic, with detailed comments and good ratings, do not significantly influence their purchasing decisions.

H03: Students' tendency to buy is not positively correlated with the reliability of online reviews.

H04: The more positive online reviews there are, the less likely LASU students are to make a purchase.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online reviews are user-generated content that share how customers interact with products, Vimaladevi and Dhanabhakaym (2012); Von Helversen et al (2018); Wu et al (2021); Bae and Lee (2011); Beak et al 2012; Changchit, and Klaus (2020)

They serve as a modern form of word-of-mouth advertising, often seen as more believable than traditional marketing. This authenticity significantly affects buying decisions. Zhang et al (2010). Positive reviews build trust, foster favorable attitudes toward products, and increase the likelihood of purchase, Chen and Ku (2021); Filieri (2016); Floh et al (2013); Guo et al (2020).

Several studies indicate that online reviews significantly impact consumer purchases. Despite various insights into how online reviews influence behavior, little research has focused on their effects on Nigerian students. It is important to understand the criteria these students use to assess brand quality and their buying intentions.

Online reviews are essential in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in e-commerce Zhang et al (2014); Racherla and Friske (2013), and developing countries where traditional marketing may fall short. The

number and quality of these reviews can greatly influence sales and customer perceptions, with the perceived authenticity of the reviews being a key factor. These evaluations are often viewed as more genuine than regular advertising, boosting consumer trust and purchase intentions, Filieri (2016); Floh et al (2013); Guo et al (2020).

The ratings associated with online reviews greatly influence buying decisions. Research shows that ratings reflect consumer feelings and social norms, making them crucial in purchase choices. Positive reviews are key, with high ratings linked to increased purchase intentions, Craciun and Moore (2019); Beak et al 2012; Changchit, and Klaus (2020). Moreover, consumer buying behavior is heavily swayed by online reviews, which are seen as more trustworthy than traditional advertisements Guo et al (2020).

Online reviews affect broader social dynamics as well. The feedback from these reviews shapes consumer behavior, often aligning with perceived social norms. Positive reviews enhance product evaluations and encourage customers to adopt similar views. Group similarity matters, as individuals tend to resonate more with opinions from groups that share similar demographics, such as age or gender, Mudambi and Schuff (2010); Craciun and Moore (2019); Racherla and Friske (2013).

However, there is a lack of research addressing the impact of reviews on Nigerian students, a group that relies heavily on peer assessments.

In Nigeria, the digital environment is rapidly changing, marked by increasing smartphone use and internet access among youth. This demographic is particularly influenced by online and peer reviews when deciding what to purchase Smith (2011); Racherla and Friske (2013). Social media significantly affects consumer behavior through online ads, personal views, search results, reviews, and marketing campaigns. Although online reviews and ratings are conceptually distinct, both play a major role in product purchasing decisions, Chen and Ku (2021); Filieri (2016); Floh et al (2013); Guo et al (2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed both primary and secondary data for its survey. Primary data were gathered from 300 students across different faculties at LASU, while secondary data came from existing literature. The sample consisted of 65% females and 35% males, aged between 18 and 30. Most respondents (80%) were undergraduates, and 20% were postgraduates. Many students reported regular use of social media and e-commerce websites.

The survey utilized purposive sampling, a method chosen for its effectiveness in selecting participants knowledgeable about the research topic. Data collection involved giving questionnaires directly to students at LASU in Lagos State, Nigeria. A pilot study with 10 respondents was conducted beforehand to ensure the questionnaires were reliable. Of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 288 were completed, with 282 deemed valid, yielding a response rate of 94%.

The research instrument had two sections: the first assessed LASU students' views on how online reviews influence their purchase decisions, while the second gathered demographic information such as status, age, academic level, and family social class. A five-point Likert scale was used to gauge responses, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Frequently, if not always" (5). Descriptive statistics, percentages, and t-tests were applied to analyze the data.

The research instrument demonstrated high reliability and validity, with a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.8956, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, Cronbach, L.T. (1947). Management and marketing experts affirmed the measures' content validity, and the pilot study confirmed their predictive validity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to look at the impact of online reviews on student purchase decisions using a case study of Nigerian students at Lagos State University.

Key to research variables used:

- A1. Online reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior in e-commerce.
- A2. Online reviews perceived as authentic, with detailed comments and good ratings significantly influence purchasing decisions.
- A3. . Positive evaluations in online reviews significantly increase student trust toward goods and purchase intention.
- A4. Positive evaluations in online reviews significantly increase positive attitudes toward goods and purchase intention.
- A5. . Positive online reviews significantly enhance student purchase decisions.
- A6. A higher volume of reviews enhances consumer confidence.
- A7. Trusting online reviews from peers significantly leads to credibility.
- A8. There is a positive correlation between the number of positive reviews and the likelihood of purchase.
- A9. Students' tendency to purchase and their perception of the reliability of online reviews strongly correlate and influence purchase decisions.
- A10. Online reviews have a significant influence on the purchase choice decisions of LASU students.
- A11. The more positive online reviews there are, the more likely LASU students are to make a purchase.

Table 1:: Descriptive Statistics of the impact of online reviews on student purchase decisions using a case study of Nigerian students at Lagos State University. MEASURES (n = 282).

Variable	Mean	STD DEV	Skewness	Kurtosis
A1	4.8429	1.2475	-1.641	2. 253
A2	5.2471	1. 2893	-1.571	2.543
A3	5.4142	1.3705	-1.619	2.562
A4	5.4142	1.3705	-1.619	2.562
A5	5.5203	1.4104	- 1.676	2.730
A6	5.5137	1.4175	-1.739	2.973
A7	5.2915	1.2913	-1.586	2.524
A8	5.2831	1.2417	-1.572	2.520
A9	5.3170	1.3014	-1.671	2.601
A10	5.2820	1.2109	-1.565	2.514
A11	5.2716	1.2012	-1.542	2.485

Source: Fieldwork 2025

The research study examines how online reviews influence student purchasing decisions, focusing on Nigerian students at Lagos State University. The responses to various questions are presented in Table 1, which shows the impact of these reviews. Students were asked whether they believe online reviews are important for their purchasing choices.

Table 1 indicates that all variables (A1–A11) received positive feedback regarding this issue, with A5 scoring the highest mean value of 5.5203, suggesting that positive online reviews greatly impact student decisions. A6 follows closely with a mean of 5.5137, which highlights that a higher number of reviews builds consumer confidence. These results indicate that online reviews boost consumer confidence and significantly affect students' purchasing habits.

The variable A1, which states that online reviews are essential in shaping consumer behavior in e-commerce, received the lowest mean score of 4.8429. Despite this, the findings still affirm that online reviews play a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior in the online market.

Testing the Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis Ho: LASU students' purchasing decisions are not significantly influenced favorably by online reviews.

Based on the mean value presented in Table 1, which details the descriptive statistics for the study's variables, the first hypothesis was evaluated. The mean for A10 states that "Online reviews have a significant influence on the purchase decisions of LASU students," showing a value of 5.2820. This indicates that online reviews do significantly impact LASU students' purchasing choices. Additionally, the t-test analysis, conducted at a 5% significance level, demonstrates that the t-score value of A10 is 2.618, which exceeds the t-table value of 1.96. This leads to rejecting Ho, indicating that LASU students' purchasing decisions are indeed positively influenced by online reviews, therefore accepting the alternative hypothesis Hi.

Research Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Ho: Students believe that online reviews perceived as authentic, with detailed comments and good ratings, do not significantly influence their purchasing decisions.

The mean column in Table 1 shows that A2, which states that authentic online reviews with detailed comments and good ratings significantly influence purchasing decisions, has a value of 5.2471. This provides some support for this assertion. A3 indicates that positive reviews in online assessments significantly bolster student trust and purchase intention, with a mean of 5.4142. Similarly, A4 demonstrates that positive evaluations in online reviews enhance positive attitudes toward products and purchase intentions, also reporting a mean of 5.4142, further backing the alternative hypothesis Hi. Consequently, the null hypothesis Ho is rejected, affirming that authentic online reviews with detailed comments and good ratings do significantly influence purchasing decisions.

In the t-test analysis (not included), the t-score of 2.426, when tested at a 5% significance level, exceeds the t-table value of 1.96. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, asserting that authentic online reviews with detailed comments and good ratings significantly influence purchasing decisions. This study indicates that positive online reviews are essential for decision-making, supported by the correlation between high ratings and increased purchase intentions. Literature suggests that the most crucial factor in purchase decisions is the overall rating of online reviews, with positive evaluations leading to higher purchase intentions.

Research Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis Ho: Students' tendency to buy is not positively correlated with the reliability of online reviews.

The analysis shows that there is a strong connection, as indicated by the mean score of 5.3170 for A9, which states that students' purchasing tendencies are influenced by their views on review reliability. This result supports the research question, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that students' tendency to purchase is indeed influenced by their perception of online reviews. Additionally, in the t-test analysis, the t-score of 3.124 was higher than the critical value of 1.96 at a 5% significance level, confirming the same conclusion. The findings suggest that positive online reviews significantly impact consumer behavior, as they are considered more trustworthy than traditional advertising. Ratings in reviews are the most crucial factor in making purchase decisions, with higher ratings leading to greater purchasing intentions.

Research Hypothesis 4:

Hypothesis Ho: The more positive online reviews there are, the less likely LASU students are to make a purchase.

Hypothesis 4 looks into the relationship between positive online reviews and the purchasing likelihood of LASU students. The mean score of 5.2716 for A11 indicates strong support for the statement that more positive reviews lead to a higher likelihood of purchases by these students. This reinforces the idea that positive online reviews encourage purchasing decisions. The t-test analysis also showed a t-score of 3.4013, which surpassed the t-table value of 1.96 when tested at the 5% significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that more positive reviews increase the chances of purchases by LASU students.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research examines how online reviews affect the purchasing choices of students at Lagos State University in Nigeria. The results show that LASU students are positively influenced by online reviews when making buying decisions. Authentic reviews, featuring detailed comments and high ratings, play a crucial role in shaping these choices. Additionally, there is a strong connection between students' intentions to buy and how they view the trustworthiness of online reviews. The presence of more positive reviews increases the likelihood of purchases among LASU students. These findings align with existing literature on the subject, Kang et al (2020); Vimaladevi and Dhanabhakaym (2012); Von Helversen et al (2018); Wu et al (2021); Bae and Lee (2011); Beak et al 2012; Changchit, and Klaus (2020) .

This study focused on students at Lagos State University. To broaden the understanding of this topic, similar research should be conducted at universities across other states in Nigeria. Comparing these results can help determine if trends are consistent nationwide. This means the findings might not fully represent the views of all university students in Nigeria. Future research could also explore specific sectors to provide deeper insights. The results are beneficial for both scholars and business professionals interested in the Nigerian market.

REFERENCES

1. Bae, S., and Lee, T. (2011). Product type and consumers' perception of online consumer reviews. *Electron. Mark.* 21, 255–266.
2. Baek, H., Ahn, J., and Choi, Y. (2012). Helpfulness of online consumer reviews: readers' objectives and review cues. *Int. J. Electron. Commer.* 17, 99–126.
3. Changchit, C., and Klaus, T. (2020). Determinants and impact of online reviews on product satisfaction. *J. Internet Commer.* 19, 82–102.

4. Chen, C. D., and Ku, E. C. (2021). Diversified online review websites as accelerators for online impulsive buying: the moderating effect of price dispersion. *J. Internet Commer.* 20, 113–135.
5. Craciun, G., and Moore, K. (2019). Credibility of negative online product reviews: reviewer gender, reputation and emotion effects. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 97, 104–115.
6. Cronbach, L.T. (1947). Test reliability: its meaning and determination. *Psychometric*, 12(1);
7. Filieri, R. (2016). What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-WOM. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(9),3561-3570.
8. Floh, A., Koller, M., and Zauner, A. (2013). Taking a deeper look at online reviews: The asymmetric effect of valence intensity on shopping behaviour. *J. Mark. Manag.* 29:646670, 646–670.
9. Guo, J., Wang, X., and Wu, Y. (2020). Positive emotion bias: role of emotional content from online customer reviews in purchase decisions. *J. Retail. Consum.Serv.*52:101891.doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101891
10. Kang, T. C., Hung, S. Y., and Huang, A. H. (2020). The adoption of online product information: cognitive and affective evaluations. *J. Internet Commer.* 19, 373–403.
11. Kaur, S., Lal, A. K., and Bedi, S. S. (2017). Do vendor cues influence purchase intention of online shoppers? An empirical study using SOR framework. *J. Internet Commer.* 16, 343–363
12. Kaushik, A. K., Sharma, M., & Pant, P. (2020). Influence of online reviews on consumer purchase decisions in Indian e-commerce. *Journal of Digital Marketing*, 1(2), 144-161.
13. Lackermair, G., Kailer, D., and Kanmaz, K. (2013). Importance of online product reviews from a consumer's perspective. *Adv. Econ. Bus.* 1, 1–5.
14. Mudambi, S., and Schuff, D. (2010). What makes a helpful online review? A study of customer reviews on Amazon.com. *MIS Q.* 34, 185–200.
15. Mumuni, A. G., O'Reilly, K., MacMillan, A., Cowley, S., and Kelley, B. (2020). Online product review impact: the relative effects of review credibility and review relevance. *J. Internet Commer.* 19, 153–191.
16. Racherla, P., and Friske, W. (2013). Perceived “usefulness” of online consumer reviews: an exploratory investigation across three services categories. *Electron. Commer. Res. Appl.* 11, 548–559.
17. Ruiz-Mafe, C., Chatzipanagiotou, K., and Curras-Perez, R. (2018). The role of emotions and conflicting online reviews on consumers' purchase intentions. *J. Bus. Res.* 89, 336–344.
18. Smith, K.T. (2011). Digital marketing strategies that Millennials find appealing, motivating, or just annoying. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 19(6), 489-499.
19. Vimaladevi, K., and Dhanabhakaym, M. (2012). A study on the effects of online consumer reviews on purchasing decision. *Prestige In. J. Manag.* 7, 51–99.
20. Von Helversen, B., Abramczuk, K., Kopeć, W., and Nielek, R. (2018). Influence of consumer reviews on online purchasing decisions in older and younger adults. *Decis. Support. Syst.* 113, 1–10.
21. Wu, Y., Liu, T., Teng, L., Zhang, H., and Xie, C. (2021). The impact of online review variance of new products on consumer adoption intentions. *J. Bus. Res.* 136, 209–218.
22. Zhang, J., Craciun, G., and Shin, D. (2010). When does electronic word-of-mouth matter? A study of consumer product reviews. *J. Bus. Res.* 63, 1336–1341.
23. Zhang, K., Cheung, C., and Lee, M. (2014). Examining the moderating effect of inconsistent reviews and its gender differences on consumers' online shopping decision. *Int. J. Inf. Manag.* 34, 89–98.