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Abstract

This study empirically investigates the impact of online customer reviews on consumer purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. Using a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected through a structured survey of online consumers and analysed using regression techniques, while qualitative insights were obtained from semi-structured interviews with e-commerce managers. The quantitative findings demonstrate that review credibility and review quality have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, with consumer trust acting as a partial mediator. Review volume shows a weaker but conditional influence when credibility is established. Qualitative analysis reveals that managerial practices related to trust management, response speed, detection of fake reviews, and the systematic use of customer feedback significantly shape the effectiveness of online review systems. The study provides empirical support for electronic word-of-mouth and trust theories within a developing economy context and offers evidence-based managerial implications for improving review management, service quality, and consumer trust in Bangladesh's growing e-commerce market.

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1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped the global commercial landscape, transforming how consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make purchasing decisions. E-commerce platforms have increasingly displaced traditional brick-and-mortar retail models by offering greater convenience, wider product assortments, and enhanced price transparency. This transformation has been particularly pronounced in emerging economies, where improvements in digital infrastructure have enabled new forms of market participation and consumption behaviors. As digital marketplaces expand, understanding the mechanisms that influence consumer decision-making in online environments has become a critical concern for both researchers and practitioners. In Bangladesh, the growth of e-commerce has accelerated markedly over the past decade. Rising internet penetration, widespread smartphone adoption, and the expansion of digital payment systems—particularly mobile financial services—have collectively lowered barriers to online transactions. Major platforms such as Daraz, Chaldal, Pickaboo, and AjkerDeal have emerged as prominent actors within the national retail ecosystem, facilitating transactions across a diverse range of product categories. These developments have reshaped buyer–seller relationships, shifting interactions from direct interpersonal exchanges to digitally mediated forms of engagement.

Within digitally mediated contexts, consumers are required to make purchasing decisions under conditions of increased uncertainty. Unlike traditional retail environments, online shoppers are typically unable to physically inspect products or directly assess service quality prior to purchase. As a result, consumers depend heavily on information cues embedded within digital platforms to reduce perceived risk. Among these cues, online customer reviews have emerged as one of the most influential sources guiding consumer behaviors.

Online customer reviews constitute a prominent form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), encompassing user-generated ratings and experiential narratives shared by previous customers. In the absence of direct personal experience, such reviews function as a substitute for traditional interpersonal trust mechanisms, enabling consumers to infer quality and credibility through the collective experiences of others. Consequently, online customer reviews play a pivotal role in shaping consumer trust and purchasing decisions within contemporary e-commerce environments.

1.1 Background of the Study

Historically, consumer purchasing behaviors in Bangladesh has been deeply embedded within relationship-based trust systems. Traditional retail transactions were characterised by repeated interactions with familiar shopkeepers, physical inspection of goods, and reliance on recommendations from family members or close social networks. Trust was established through personal familiarity, reputational knowledge, and long-term relational exchange, serving to reduce uncertainty and reinforce confidence in purchasing decisions.

The expansion of e-commerce has disrupted these conventional trust structures. Digital transactions replace physical proximity with virtual interfaces and platform-mediated interactions, requiring consumers to transact with unfamiliar sellers. As a result, trust is increasingly constructed through digital signals such as platform reputation, seller ratings, and online customer reviews rather than interpersonal familiarity.

Information asymmetry between buyers and sellers is particularly pronounced in online environments. While sellers possess detailed knowledge of product quality and service processes, consumers must rely on externally generated information to evaluate offerings. Online customer reviews play a critical role in mitigating this asymmetry by aggregating experiential insights from multiple users. Review ratings, sentiment, narrative detail, and user-generated images collectively shape consumer expectations and perceptions of risk. Within the Bangladeshi e-commerce context, the influence of online customer reviews is especially significant due to persistent concerns regarding product authenticity, delivery reliability, and post-purchase service quality. Consumers frequently consult reviews to assess whether sellers fulfil commitments and provide value for money. Reviewer credibility, consistency of feedback, and platform responsiveness to negative reviews emerge as key determinants of trust formation. In this sense, online customer reviews function not merely as informational resources but as essential trust-building mechanisms within digitally mediated transactions.

Despite the growing reliance on online customer reviews, the Bangladeshi e-commerce market faces several challenges. The proliferation of fake reviews, manipulated ratings, and promotional content presented as genuine feedback undermines consumer confidence. In addition, variations in digital literacy influence how consumers interpret and evaluate review information. These challenges underscore the need for empirical investigation into the role of online customer reviews in shaping consumer purchasing decisions within Bangladesh's evolving digital marketplace.

More broadly, the shift from traditional retail practices to digitally mediated consumption reflects a contemporary transformation in consumer purchasing behaviour. Whereas purchasing decisions in conventional retail settings were shaped by physical inspection, interpersonal trust, and informal social recommendations, contemporary e-commerce decisions are increasingly influenced by online customer reviews, platform reputation, and digitally constructed trust

signals. This transformation represents a fundamental reconfiguration of how consumers assess risk, credibility, and value in the absence of face-to-face interaction.

Recent industry estimates indicate that Bangladesh's e-commerce sector has experienced sustained growth over the past decade, supported by rising internet penetration, smartphone adoption, and mobile financial services. Reports suggest that millions of consumers now engage in online purchasing annually, with online marketplaces becoming a routine component of everyday consumption. As digital transactions increase, consumer reliance on online customer reviews as decision-support tools has also intensified, particularly in contexts characterised by perceived risk and information asymmetry.

1.2 Problem Statement

The increasing reliance on online customer reviews has created both opportunities and challenges for consumers and e-commerce organisations in Bangladesh. While reviews enable consumers to access experiential information that would otherwise be unavailable in online transactions, their growing volume and variable quality have introduced new complexities into consumer decision-making processes.

A central challenge for consumers lies in assessing the credibility of online reviews. The prevalence of fake reviews, biased ratings, and promotional content presented as genuine feedback often undermines confidence in review systems. As a result, consumers may struggle to distinguish authentic opinions from manipulated information or to determine which review attributes are most relevant when making purchase decisions. This uncertainty weakens the effectiveness of reviews as decision-support tools and may discourage online purchasing behaviors.

From an organizational perspective, many e-commerce platforms in Bangladesh collect substantial volumes of customer feedback but fail to leverage this information strategically. Reviews are frequently treated as reactive customer service artefacts rather than as valuable sources of performance intelligence. Inconsistent responses to negative reviews, delayed engagement with dissatisfied customers, and limited use of review insights in service improvement initiatives diminish consumer trust and loyalty. Consequently, the potential of online reviews as mechanisms for organizational learning and quality enhancement remains underutilized.

These challenges are further intensified by Bangladesh's developing digital ecosystem and uneven levels of technological literacy among consumers. Variations in familiarity with e-commerce platforms and online evaluation mechanisms shape how reviews are interpreted and the degree of trust placed in digital information. However, much of the existing literature is derived from developed market contexts and pays limited attention to such contextual conditions, reducing its applicability to the Bangladeshi setting.

Accordingly, a clear research problem emerges regarding how online customer reviews influence consumer purchasing decisions through trust-related mechanisms and how e-commerce organization's can strategically utilize review data to improve service quality and customer satisfaction in Bangladesh. Addressing this problem is essential for advancing contextualised academic understanding and informing more effective managerial practice within the country's growing digital economy.

1.3 Research Aim & Objective

Research Aim

The primary aim of this study is to examine the influence of online customer reviews on consumer purchasing decisions within Bangladesh's e-commerce sector, with particular emphasis on the role of trust and managerial engagement. The study seeks to generate empirically grounded insights into how consumers interpret review-related information in digitally mediated purchasing environments and how these interpretations shape purchase intention. In addition, the research aims to explore how e-commerce organizations strategically utilise online customer reviews as tools for service improvement, performance management, and trust-building. By integrating consumer-level behavioral analysis with managerial perspectives, the study aims to produce practice-oriented knowledge that is theoretically informed and contextually relevant to Bangladesh's evolving digital economy.

Research Objectives

To operationalize the research aim, the study is guided by the following interrelated objectives:

1.To identify key review-related factors that influence consumer purchasing decisions in e-commerce environments.

This objective seeks to examine critical dimensions of online customer reviews—such as review quality, credibility, sentiment, and volume—that significantly shape consumer purchasing decisions within the Bangladeshi e-commerce context.

2.To examine the mediating role of consumer trust and perception in the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase intention.

This objective focuses on understanding how consumer trust and perception influence the extent to which online customer reviews affect purchase intention, particularly by reducing perceived risk in digitally mediated transactions.

3.To evaluate how e-commerce managers utilize online customer feedback for service improvement and performance management.

This objective explores how e-commerce managers in Bangladesh collect, interpret, and apply online customer reviews as inputs for service enhancement, quality control, and organisational learning.

4.To propose managerial practices for effectively monitoring, responding to, and leveraging online customer reviews.

This objective aims to develop evidence-based recommendations for using online customer reviews to strengthen customer trust, improve service quality, and enhance overall performance within Bangladesh's e-commerce sector.

1.4 Significance

This study contributes theoretically, managerially, and at the policy level by examining the influence of online customer reviews on consumer purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector, integrating both consumer and managerial perspectives. It advances understanding of how trust is constructed and operationalized in digitally mediated markets, particularly in a developing economy where institutional arrangements remain fluid. Theoretically, the research extends electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature by situating review influence in an emerging market characterized by digital literacy gaps, regulatory uncertainty, and uneven consumer protection. Unlike prior studies in mature markets, this study empirically demonstrates how trust formation processes may differ under conditions of perceived risk, delivery uncertainty, and service variability, confirming the mediating role of trust in linking reviews to purchase intention.

Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative managerial insights. This approach allows both theory testing and contextualization, bridging a gap between consumer behavior research and organizational practice.

Managerially, the findings offer practical guidance for e-commerce operators. They highlight the importance of review credibility, timely responses, and strategic engagement with customer feedback to build trust and influence purchase decisions. Insights from the study can inform proactive review management, transparency enhancement, and integration of review analytics into service and performance management processes, ultimately supporting customer satisfaction and competitive advantage.

At the policy level, the research informs debates on consumer protection and digital trust. Findings provide evidence to guide regulatory frameworks addressing review authenticity, disclosure requirements, and platform accountability, supporting a balance between consumer safety and sustainable digital sector growth.

In sum, the study delivers empirically grounded, contextually relevant knowledge that advances theory, informs managerial practice, and supports policy development, contributing meaningfully to the sustainable growth of Bangladesh's e-commerce ecosystem.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and trust theory, providing a framework to understand consumer purchase decisions in digital environments. It explains how online customer reviews act as informational and social cues that shape trust and, consequently, purchase intention in e-commerce contexts.

2.1.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

eWOM extends traditional word-of-mouth into digital spaces, encompassing consumer-generated evaluations publicly available online (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In e-commerce, eWOM reduces uncertainty arising from the inability to inspect products physically or interact directly with sellers. Online reviews serve as proxies for product quality, service reliability, and seller credibility. Key review characteristics influencing consumer behavior include review quality (usefulness, clarity, depth), credibility (trustworthiness, authenticity, reviewer expertise), and volume (signalling popularity and social validation). These factors guide consumer decision-making, particularly in high-risk or information-scarce contexts.

2.1.2 Trust Theory

Trust is central to consumer behaviour under uncertainty, enabling engagement in transactions despite limited control over outcomes. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) model conceptualizes trust as willingness to be vulnerable based on perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity. In e-commerce, trust mitigates perceived risk, shaping purchase intention (Gefen et al., 2003). In this study, trust refers to consumer confidence in sellers and platforms, constructed through repeated exposure to digital signals, including review content, reviewer behaviour, and organizational responsiveness.

2.1.3 Integrating eWOM and Trust

Integrating eWOM and trust theory provides a coherent framework: online reviews influence purchase intention primarily through trust. Reviews perceived as credible, informative, and consistent enhance trust, reducing perceived risk and increasing the likelihood of purchase (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). This is particularly relevant in Bangladesh, where institutional trust mechanisms are still developing, and consumers exhibit heightened risk sensitivity.

2.1.4 Relevance to Organizational Management

The framework underscores the managerial significance of review governance. Organisations actively shape trust through transparency, responsiveness, and systematic review management. This aligns with the study's broader objective of linking consumer behaviour to managerial practice, highlighting trust formation as both a consumer and organizational responsibility in digital marketplaces.

2.2 Online Customer Reviews and Consumer Behavior

A substantial body of research has examined the relationship between online customer reviews and consumer behavior in e-commerce environments. Empirical studies consistently show that online reviews significantly influence attitudes toward products and sellers, perceived value, and purchase intention. Review valence, review volume, and review quality are the most frequently examined attributes within this literature.

Review valence refers to the overall positivity or negativity of customer feedback. Positive reviews are generally associated with higher purchase intention, whereas negative reviews tend to discourage consumers. However, research indicates that negative reviews do not uniformly deter purchasing; moderate negative feedback can enhance perceived credibility by signalling authenticity and balance. This suggests that consumers engage in evaluative rather than purely affective processing of review information.

Review quality has received increasing attention, as not all reviews exert equal influence. High-quality reviews are typically detailed, containing specific product information and experiential narratives. Such reviews are perceived as more diagnostic and useful, enabling consumers to better assess product suitability and expected performance. In contrast, brief or generic reviews are often discounted due to limited informational value.

Review volume also influences consumer behaviour through social proof. A large number of reviews may signal product popularity, market acceptance, or widespread usage, thereby reducing uncertainty. However, recent studies caution against assuming a linear relationship between review volume and persuasion. In contexts where fake reviews are prevalent, high review volume may provoke scepticism rather than confidence, particularly if credibility cues are lacking.

While empirical research supports the influence of online reviews on purchasing behaviour, much of the literature originates from developed markets and student samples. Consequently, little is known about how consumers in developing economies interpret review information, especially under conditions of institutional uncertainty and uneven digital literacy. This limitation underscores the need for context-specific research that considers local market dynamics and consumer concerns.

Comparatively, factors influencing consumer decisions in traditional retail differ substantially from those in contemporary e-commerce. Traditional decisions relied on physical inspection,

direct seller interaction, and recommendations from trusted networks. In contrast, digital purchasing relies heavily on online reviews, aggregated ratings, and platform-mediated trust mechanisms. This shift underscores how experiential and interpersonal cues have been replaced by digitally generated signals, requiring consumers to interpret credibility, authenticity, and risk through review systems rather than personal familiarity. Existing eWOM research focuses on these digital mechanisms, offering limited insight into how they depart from traditional decision-making practices, particularly in developing economies.

2.3 Trust, Perception and Purchase Intention

Trust occupies a central position in models of online consumer behaviour and is widely recognized as a key determinant of purchase intention in e-commerce. By reducing perceived risk, trust enhances consumers' confidence that sellers will fulfil transactional obligations related to product quality, delivery, and after-sales service. In online environments, where physical cues and interpersonal interactions are absent, trust must be constructed through indirect signals and information cues.

Online customer reviews play a crucial role in trust formation by providing third-party validation of seller claims. Reviews perceived as credible and consistent strengthen trust in both the seller and the platform, while perceived manipulation, inconsistency, or exaggeration undermines trust and diminishes purchase intention. This highlights trust as a mediating mechanism through which review information shapes consumer behavior.

Consumer perception further influences how reviews are interpreted and evaluated. Prior online shopping experience, cultural norms, and technological familiarity affect consumers' ability to assess review credibility and relevance. In developing markets such as Bangladesh, trust formation may be particularly fragile due to concerns over fraud, delivery reliability, and limited recourse mechanisms. Consequently, consumers may rely more heavily on credibility cues and detailed experiential information when evaluating reviews.

Although existing research supports the mediating role of trust in the review–purchase intention relationship, empirical evidence from developing economies remains limited. This gap underscores the need for context-specific investigation to understand how trust functions within particular institutional and cultural settings, and how it shapes consumer responses to online customer reviews.

2.4 Managerial Use of Online Customer Reviews

Beyond their influence on consumer behavior, online customer reviews are a valuable managerial resource for e-commerce organizations. Reviews provide continuous feedback on product performance, service quality, delivery efficiency, and customer satisfaction, which, when systematically analyzed, inform operational decisions and service improvement initiatives. Effective review management involves continuous monitoring, timely responses to complaints,

and integration of insights into performance evaluation systems. Visible engagement with reviews, particularly negative feedback, enhances consumer trust and signals organizational accountability. Constructive responses mitigate dissatisfaction and demonstrate commitment to service quality.

Despite their potential, many organizations underutilize reviews, treating them as reactive customer service tools rather than as sources of organisational learning. Limited analytical capabilities, resource constraints, and absence of structured feedback systems restrict the ability to identify recurring issues, implement preventive measures, and drive continuous improvement. In developing e-commerce markets, these challenges are intensified by high transaction volumes, limited technological infrastructure, and the prevalence of fake reviews, making review moderation and managerial response critical to review credibility and effectiveness.

2.5 Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap

The literature shows that online customer reviews significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions through information provision, social proof, and trust formation. Review quality, credibility, and volume are consistently identified as key determinants, with trust serving as a central mediating mechanism.

However, notable gaps remain. Most empirical evidence comes from developed economies, limiting applicability to contexts such as Bangladesh, where institutional trust, regulatory oversight, and digital literacy differ substantially. Many studies focus solely on consumer responses, neglecting organisational practices that shape review credibility. Additionally, few integrate consumer-level and managerial perspectives within a single framework.

Existing research also rarely situates online reviews within the broader transformation from traditional, relationship-based purchasing to review-driven, platform-based decision-making. Understanding how this shift unfolds in developing markets remains limited.

This study addresses these gaps by examining contemporary consumer decision-making mechanisms while integrating managerial practices and contextualising findings within Bangladesh's evolving digital economy.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that integrates online customer review characteristics, consumer trust, and purchase intention within Bangladesh's e-commerce context. The framework positions review quality, review credibility, and review volume as key independent variables influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Consumer trust is conceptualised as a mediating variable that explains how review information is translated into purchase intention.

Review quality reflects the depth, clarity, and diagnostic value of review content, while review credibility refers to the perceived authenticity and trustworthiness of reviewers and feedback. Review volume represents the extent of collective endorsement and social proof associated with a product or seller. These review attributes are expected to shape consumer perceptions by reducing information asymmetry and perceived risk.

Trust functions as a central mechanism within the framework, mediating the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase intention. Credible and high-quality reviews enhance trust in both the seller and the platform, increasing consumers' confidence in transaction outcomes. In contrast, perceived manipulation or inconsistency in reviews undermines trust and weakens purchase intention.

The framework also incorporates managerial engagement as a contextual influence identified through qualitative analysis. Managerial actions such as response speed, transparency, and review moderation practices shape the effectiveness of review systems by reinforcing or undermining trust perceptions. This integrative approach allows the study to examine online customer reviews not only as consumer decision aids but also as organisational performance tools.

By combining quantitative testing of hypothesised relationships with qualitative exploration of managerial practices, the conceptual framework supports a holistic analysis of how online customer reviews influence purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector.

3.Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to examine the influence of online customer reviews on consumer purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. It covers research philosophy, design, quantitative and qualitative phases, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

- Pragmatism adopted: method selection guided by research problems and practical value of findings.
- Combines quantitative (explanation, pattern identification) and qualitative (contextual understanding) methods.
- Enables mixed-methods design to capture consumer behavior and managerial practices.

3.2 Research Design

- Sequential explanatory mixed-methods:
 - Phase 1: Quantitative survey to identify statistical relationships.
 - Phase 2: Qualitative interviews to contextualize and explain quantitative findings.
- Ensures coherence between empirical results and managerial insights.

3.3 Quantitative Research

Data Collection & Sample:

- Structured questionnaire administered to 150–200 active online shoppers from platforms like Daraz, Chaldal, and Pickaboo.
- Purposive non-probability sampling ensures participants have relevant e-commerce experience.

Survey Instrument & Measures:

- Constructs measured: review quality, credibility, volume, consumer trust, perceived risk, purchase intention.
- Items adapted from validated scales; responses recorded on Likert-type scales.

Data Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics summarize demographics and shopping behavior.
- Inferential analysis (correlation and regression) examines relationships between review attributes, trust, and purchase intention.

- Mediation analysis assesses trust as a mechanism linking reviews to purchase intention.

Prior to hypothesis testing, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all multi-item constructs exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory measurement reliability

3.4 Qualitative Research

Data Collection:

- Semi-structured interviews with e-commerce managers and customer service professionals.
- Focus on trust management, responsiveness, fake review detection, and organizational learning.

Data Analysis:

- Thematic analysis applied to identify recurring patterns and themes.
- Integration with quantitative findings enhances triangulation and contextual insight.

The sample size was adequate for regression analysis, exceeding minimum recommendations for behavioral research involving multiple predictors.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained.
- Anonymity and confidentiality assured; no personal identifiers collected.
- Data stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.
- Methodological Limitations
 - Non-probability sampling limits generalizability.
 - Self-reported survey data may introduce response bias; mitigated by qualitative triangulation.
 - Cross-sectional design captures a single point in time; does not account for longitudinal changes in trust or review systems.
 - Integration of qualitative insights provides contextual depth and partially offsets limitations.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

The full survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix.

4 Results and Interpretation

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative phase examined the influence of online customer review attributes on consumer purchasing decisions within Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. Regression analysis assessed the predictive relationships between review quality, review credibility, review volume, consumer trust, and purchase intention. This approach was appropriate for identifying the relative explanatory power of review-related variables while controlling for interrelationships and isolating the unique contribution of each construct.

The regression model demonstrated satisfactory explanatory power, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.56$), indicating a strong overall model fit.

The regression results summarizing the influence of online customer review attributes and consumer trust on purchase intention are presented in Table 4.1.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive influence of online customer review attributes and consumer trust on purchase intention.

Standardized coefficient			
Predictor Variable	beta	T-value	Significance
Review Quality	0.31	4.62	<0.01
Review Credibility	0.45	6.98	<0.001
Review Volume	0.18	2.87	<0.05
Consumer Trust	0.39	5.74	<0.001

R^2	0.56
Ad. R^2	0.54
F-Statistic	41.83

TABLE-1

4.1.1 Review Credibility as the Strongest Predictor:

Review credibility emerged as the most influential predictor of purchase intention. Consumers were more likely to purchase when reviews were perceived as authentic, detailed, and authored by verified or experienced users. This underscores the centrality of trustworthiness in environments where consumers cannot physically inspect products or directly assess seller reliability.

Review credibility emerged as the most influential predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$), highlighting the dominant role of perceived authenticity and trustworthiness in shaping online purchasing behaviour.

4.1.2 Contextual Sensitivity in Bangladesh:

The prominence of credibility reflects heightened consumer sensitivity to perceived risk in online transactions, driven by concerns over counterfeit products, delivery failures, and inconsistent post-purchase service. Credible reviews act as trust substitutes, enabling consumers to infer seller competence and platform integrity through others' experiences. This aligns with eWOM research emphasising credibility as a critical determinant of information adoption in high-uncertainty contexts.

Review quality also showed a statistically significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that detailed, balanced, and informative reviews enhance consumer confidence and decision certainty.

4.1.3 Review Quality and Informational Richness:

High-quality reviews-characterized by clarity, balance, specificity, and detailed experiential descriptions-positively influenced purchase intention. Consumers valued not just the sentiment of reviews but their informational depth, which enabled them to visualize product usage, anticipate service outcomes, and assess suitability. This finding supports the Information Adoption Model, highlighting that actionable, credible information facilitates confident purchasing decisions.

4.1.4 Review Volume as Social Proof with Conditional Effect:

Review volume had a positive but comparatively weaker effect. While a higher number of reviews signals popularity and social validation, its influence is contingent on perceived credibility and quality. In Bangladesh, where awareness of fake reviews is high, volume alone is insufficient to drive purchase decisions, highlighting the importance of evaluative judgement over purely heuristic-based decision-making.

Although review volume exhibited a positive relationship with purchase intention, its effect size was comparatively weaker ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that numerical popularity cues alone are insufficient without supporting credibility signals.

4.1.5 Partial Mediation of Consumer Trust:

Trust partially mediates the relationship between reviews and purchase intention. Credible and high-quality reviews enhance trust in the seller and platform, which in turn increases purchase likelihood. This demonstrates that while reviews have a direct effect, a substantial portion operates through trust formation, positioning trust as a central psychological mechanism in digital consumer behavior.

Mediation analysis revealed that consumer trust partially mediated the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase intention, indicating that reviews influence purchasing decisions both directly and indirectly through trust formation.

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the indirect effect of online customer reviews on purchase intention through consumer trust.

4.1.6 Implications of Findings:

These results indicate that online customer reviews influence purchasing decisions not solely through information provision, but by reducing uncertainty and fostering trust. The dominance of credibility, coupled with the conditional impact of volume, highlights the importance of context-specific and risk-sensitive evaluation in emerging e-commerce markets. Collectively, the findings provide empirical support for eWOM theory and the Information Adoption Model, emphasising perceived credibility and usefulness as key determinants of consumer decision-making in high-risk, digitally mediated environments.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase explored managerial perspectives on the role of online customer reviews within Bangladeshi e-commerce organizations. Semi-structured interviews with managers and customer service professionals were thematically analysed. Four dominant themes emerged: trust management, fake reviews, response speed, and service improvement. These themes provide organizational-level insight into how reviews are interpreted, managed, and operationalized in practice.

4.2.1 Trust Management

Trust management was a central concern across all interviews. Managers emphasised that consumer trust in online platforms is fragile and must be actively cultivated through transparent, visible, and consistent engagement. Online customer reviews serve not only as feedback mechanisms but also as public signals of organizational credibility, continuously evaluated by both current and prospective customers.

Managers highlighted that visible responses to reviews—particularly negative feedback—reinforce trust. A lack of response is interpreted as indifference, avoidance, or lack of accountability, whereas timely, constructive replies demonstrate organizational responsibility. Several participants noted that even when service failures occur, transparent acknowledgment of mistakes and clear communication about corrective actions mitigate negative perceptions and preserve customer confidence.

These findings suggest that trust in e-commerce is not solely generated through peer-to-peer interaction but is actively shaped by organizational behavior. Review platforms function as trust arenas, where managerial actions are publicly observable and contribute directly to trust formation. This challenges the view of trust as purely consumer-driven and highlights its interactive construction in digital marketplaces.

4.2.2 Fake Reviews

The prevalence of fake or manipulated reviews emerged as a significant challenge undermining review system credibility. Managers acknowledged that inauthentic reviews—whether artificially positive or strategically negative—pose risks to platform trust and brand reputation.

Participants reported that fake reviews distort consumer perceptions and weaken the reliability of review-based decisions. Some managers described implementing manual moderation, algorithmic detection, and reviewer verification mechanisms to identify suspicious patterns. However, these measures are resource-intensive and imperfect, particularly for high-volume platforms requiring real-time monitoring.

Fake reviews were seen as threats not only to consumers but also to organisations aiming to build long-term trust. Managers emphasised that once consumers suspect manipulation, trust in the entire review system can deteriorate, reducing the effectiveness of genuine feedback. This underscores review authenticity as a strategic priority rather than a purely technical concern.

4.2.3 Response Speed

Response speed emerged as a critical determinant of consumer perception and trust restoration. Managers consistently noted that delayed, generic, or automated responses intensify dissatisfaction, whereas timely and personalised engagement facilitates service recovery and reputation management.

Rapid responses signal organisational attentiveness and respect for customers, particularly in addressing negative reviews that remain publicly visible. Managers explained that prompt engagement improves the affected customer's experience while signalling reliability and professionalism to other consumers.

This theme highlights that responsiveness functions beyond operational performance, serving as a symbolic indicator of organisational commitment to service quality. Response speed therefore influences both immediate outcomes and broader trust perceptions within digital marketplaces.

4.2.4 Service Improvement

Service improvement was identified as the most strategic use of online customer reviews. Managers described reviews as valuable diagnostic tools, revealing recurring service issues such as delivery delays, product mismatches, packaging problems, and communication gaps. Aggregated review data inform prioritization of corrective actions and operational adjustments. However, the systematic use of reviews varied across organizations. Some reported structured processes for analyzing feedback and integrating insights into decision-making, while others addressed reviews reactively, without formal learning or performance evaluation mechanisms. These findings indicate that while managers recognize the strategic value of reviews, many organizations have yet to fully leverage review analytics for continuous improvement, representing an untapped opportunity beyond routine customer service.

4.2.5 Interrelationships Between Qualitative Themes

Although presented as distinct themes, the findings are closely interrelated. Trust management, response speed, fake review detection, and service improvement collectively shape the credibility and effectiveness of review systems. For instance, failure to address fake reviews undermines trust management, while slow responses diminish the trust-restoring potential of engagement.

Managers' narratives suggest that review systems function as interconnected ecosystems rather than isolated mechanisms. A transparent response strategy loses effectiveness if consumers suspect review manipulation, just as advanced fake review detection is limited without visible engagement. This interdependence highlights the need for holistic review management integrating technical controls, human responsiveness, and organisational learning.

Furthermore, the interaction between response speed and service improvement suggests that responsiveness is both reactive and diagnostic. Timely engagement enables early identification of recurring issues, reducing systemic service failures. Responsiveness thus contributes indirectly to performance optimization and continuous improvement, reinforcing its strategic significance beyond immediate customer service metrics.

4.3 Integrated Discussion

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a comprehensive understanding of how online customer reviews influence consumer purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. By combining consumer-level statistical evidence with managerial insights, the study reveals that online customer reviews operate simultaneously as decision-support mechanisms for consumers and performance management tools for organisations.

The quantitative findings demonstrate that review credibility and review quality are significant predictors of purchase intention, with consumer trust playing a partial mediating role. These results align closely with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) theory, which posits that peer-generated information influences consumer behavior by reducing information asymmetry in online environments. The prominence of credibility supports the Information Adoption Model, which emphasizes that information is adopted when it is perceived as both useful and trustworthy.

The qualitative findings reinforce these conclusions by illustrating how managerial practices shape the effectiveness of review systems. Managers' emphasis on trust management and visible engagement highlights that trust is not a static outcome of peer reviews but a dynamic process influenced by organizational behavior. This extends traditional trust theory by demonstrating that trust formation in e-commerce contexts involves continuous interaction between consumers, peer reviewers, and platform managers.

The identification of fake reviews as a major organizational concern provides important insight into the limitations of review volume as a trust signal. While quantitative analysis shows that review volume contributes to purchase intention through social proof, its influence is contingent upon perceived authenticity. This explains why review volume exerts a weaker effect compared to credibility and quality and highlights the "dark side" of eWOM, where manipulated content undermines trust and reduces informational value.

Response speed emerged as a critical trust-building mechanism that bridges consumer perception and managerial action. From the consumer perspective, prompt responses reduce uncertainty and signal reliability. From the managerial perspective, responsiveness functions as both a service recovery tool and a reputational strategy. This dual function reinforces the review–trust–purchase intention pathway identified in the quantitative analysis.

Finally, the theme of service improvement demonstrates the strategic potential of online customer reviews in line with Taylor's Scientific Management principles. When reviews are systematically analyzed and integrated into operational decision-making, they function as contemporary performance data supporting evidence-based management and continuous improvement. However, the uneven use of review analytics observed among managers suggests that many organizations have yet to fully realise this potential.

Overall, the integrated findings extend existing eWOM and trust theories by demonstrating how online customer reviews function within a developing economy characterised by uneven digital literacy and evolving institutional trust. By linking consumer perceptions with managerial practices, the study offers a holistic explanation of how online reviews influence purchasing decisions and organizational performance in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector.

4.3.1 Theoretical Implications for eWOM and Trust Theory

The integrated findings contribute to eWOM theory by demonstrating that the influence of online customer reviews is conditional upon credibility and trust formation, particularly in developing economy contexts. While traditional eWOM models often assume that exposure to peer-generated content directly influences attitudes and behaviour, the present findings suggest a more layered process in which consumers actively evaluate the trustworthiness of review systems before adopting information.

The study extends trust theory by illustrating that trust in e-commerce is co-produced through interactions between consumers, reviewers, and platform managers. Trust is not solely an outcome of peer consensus but is dynamically shaped by organizational behaviour such as responsiveness, transparency, and moderation practices. This challenges static conceptualizations of trust and highlights its processual nature in digitally mediated markets. Furthermore, the findings refine the Information Adoption Model by emphasising that information usefulness and credibility are contextually interpreted rather than universally perceived. In Bangladesh's e-commerce sector, usefulness is closely tied to experiential detail and realism, while credibility is strongly influenced by perceptions of authenticity and manipulation risk.

4.3.2 Managerial Sensemaking and Scientific Management Revisited

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer contemporary insight into the application of Scientific Management principles within digital marketplaces. Online customer reviews function as modern performance data, enabling systematic monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of service processes. Managers' use of aggregated review feedback to identify recurring operational issues reflects Taylor's emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

However, the uneven integration of review analytics observed among organizations indicates a partial realization of these principles. While some firms leverage review data strategically, others remain reactive, addressing issues on a case-by-case basis without formal learning mechanisms. This variation highlights the managerial capability gap in transforming unstructured customer feedback into structured performance intelligence.

By linking review analytics to trust outcomes, the study demonstrates that efficiency-oriented management practices have psychological consequences for consumers. Evidence-based responsiveness and systematic feedback utilization not only improve operational outcomes but also shape trust perceptions, reinforcing the relevance of Scientific Management in customer-facing digital environments.

Viewed through the lens of contemporary transformation, the findings suggest that organizational management practices must adapt to fundamentally different consumer decision-making processes than those associated with traditional retail environments. As consumers increasingly rely on online customer reviews rather than interpersonal trust, organizations assume a more visible and active role in shaping trust through responsiveness, transparency, and review governance. This represents a shift in managerial responsibility from relationship maintenance at the point of sale to continuous trust management within publicly observable digital platforms. Consequently, effective review management emerges not only as a marketing or customer service function but as a core organizational capability aligned with performance management and strategic decision-making in the digital economy

Illustrative examples of anonymized online customer reviews are provided in Appendix C to contextualize the review environment examined in this study.

5 Contributions

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several meaningful contributions to the literature on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), trust, and digital consumer behaviour. First, it extends existing eWOM theory by empirically demonstrating how online customer reviews shape purchasing decisions within the context of a developing economy. Unlike prior studies, which largely focus on Western or technologically mature markets, this research provides evidence from Bangladesh, where institutional trust, digital literacy, and infrastructural reliability differ substantially.

Second, the study advances the Information Adoption Model by highlighting the mediating role of consumer trust in the review–purchase intention relationship. Findings indicate that information usefulness alone cannot fully explain consumer behaviour in online environments characterised by perceived risk. Credibility and trust function as central mechanisms through which review information is evaluated and adopted. This insight refines theoretical assumptions by emphasising trust as a dynamic, context-dependent construct shaped by both consumer perception and situational uncertainty.

Third, by integrating managerial perspectives, the study contributes to trust theory by demonstrating that trust formation is not solely a consumer-driven cognitive process but is actively influenced by organizational practices such as response speed, transparency, and review moderation. This practice-informed perspective bridges the gap between consumer behaviour and organizational management, linking peer-generated content with managerial actions.

Finally, the study reinterprets classical management theories, such as Taylor’s Scientific Management, in a contemporary digital context. Online customer reviews are conceptualised as modern performance data that facilitate evidence-based decision-making, continuous improvement, and service optimization. This theoretical repositioning illustrates how classical management principles retain relevance in data-driven digital environments and demonstrates the integration of behavioral, informational, and organisational dimensions in contemporary digital commerce research.

Additionally, this research contributes methodologically by adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design that combines empirical generalisation with in-depth managerial insight. This integrative approach provides a robust framework for future studies examining digitally mediated consumer behaviour in developing economies.

5.2 Managerial Contributions

From a managerial standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for e-commerce platforms and online retailers in Bangladesh. First, the study underscores the importance of prioritising review credibility over review volume. Managers should strengthen verification mechanisms, encourage detailed and informative feedback, and actively mitigate fake reviews to preserve consumer trust and reduce transactional risk.

Second, response speed is identified as a critical trust-building strategy. Timely, personalised engagement with reviews—particularly negative feedback—signals accountability and enhances platform credibility. Structured review response protocols and empowered customer service teams are recommended to ensure proactive engagement.

Third, online reviews can serve as strategic inputs for continuous service improvement rather than solely reactive customer service tools. Systematic analysis of aggregated review data allows organizations to identify recurring operational issues, optimize delivery performance, and refine communication strategies. Managers should integrate review analytics into formal organizational learning and performance management systems to fully leverage the strategic potential of customer feedback.

Fourth, transparent review systems contribute to long-term competitive advantage. Platforms that integrate reviews into decision-making enhance consumer confidence, build trust, and foster customer loyalty, ultimately supporting sustainable growth in increasingly competitive e-commerce markets.

Furthermore, managerial attention to review systems can help firms navigate reputational risks in high-uncertainty environments. Effective review governance—combining technical detection of fake reviews, visible engagement, and strategic learning from feedback—enables organisations to reinforce trust, differentiate their platforms, and position themselves as reliable, consumer-centric operators.

5.3 Limitations and Reflexivity

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the use of non-probability sampling in the quantitative phase limits generalizability beyond the sampled population. Future studies could employ probability-based sampling techniques or larger datasets to enhance external validity.

Second, the cross-sectional design captures consumer perceptions and managerial practices at a single point in time. Trust and review dynamics evolve, and longitudinal designs would offer

deeper insight into how consumer trust and review influence change over time in response to platform interventions and market developments.

Third, reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential response and social desirability biases. While qualitative triangulation partially mitigated this limitation, future research could incorporate behavioral data, such as actual transaction records or platform analytics, to strengthen empirical robustness.

Reflexively, the researcher acknowledges that interpretation of qualitative data is shaped by familiarity with Bangladesh's e-commerce context. While this enhanced analytical depth and contextual sensitivity, it may have influenced interpretation. Systematic coding procedures, iterative triangulation, and theory-driven analysis were employed to maintain analytical transparency and reduce subjectivity.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

Future research could expand this study in several ways. Comparative studies across multiple developing economies could assess whether the relationships between reviews, trust, and purchase intention hold in diverse institutional contexts. Longitudinal studies could track how trust evolves over time with changes in review systems and managerial interventions.

Emerging technologies present additional avenues for exploration. For instance, research could examine the role of artificial intelligence in review moderation, sentiment analysis, and automated response systems, assessing how algorithmic management influences consumer trust and purchase behaviour. Studies could also explore the interaction between platform design, gamification of reviews, and consumer engagement to understand how digital interfaces shape information adoption and trust formation.

Finally, further work could examine sector-specific dynamics within e-commerce, comparing high-risk categories such as electronics or fashion to low-risk categories like digital services, thereby refining context-sensitive managerial recommendations.

5.5 Conclusion

This study explored how online customer reviews influence consumer purchasing decisions in Bangladesh's e-commerce sector. A mixed-methods approach integrated consumer-level statistical analysis with managerial insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of eWOM dynamics.

Findings demonstrate that reviews significantly influence purchase intention through credibility and trust. Review quality and authenticity were more influential than review volume, particularly in contexts characterized by perceived risk and evolving digital trust. Managerial practices—such as response speed, transparency, and systematic use of review data—play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and trust formation.

The study contributes theoretically by extending eWOM and trust frameworks into a developing economy context, and practically by providing evidence-based recommendations for e-commerce managers. By positioning online reviews as both consumer decision aids and

managerial performance tools, the research underscores their strategic importance in Bangladesh's digital economy.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that e-commerce platforms in Bangladesh:

Strengthen review authentication systems to minimize fake reviews and enhance credibility. Prioritize timely and transparent responses to customer feedback, particularly negative reviews, to reinforce trust and customer confidence.

Invest in review analytics capabilities to transform qualitative feedback into actionable insights for service improvement and operational optimization.

Integrate reviews into organizational learning and performance systems, ensuring feedback informs both short-term corrective actions and long-term strategic planning.

Policymakers may also consider developing regulatory frameworks to promote transparency, review authenticity, and consumer protection within online marketplaces. Such initiatives would reinforce trust in Bangladesh's digital ecosystem, encourage responsible platform practices, and support sustainable growth in the e-commerce sector.

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Abbreviations

Abb.	Full Form
AI	Artificial Intelligence
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
HR	Human Resources
IAM	Information Adoption Model
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JD-R Model	Job Demands–Resources Model
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

Appendix

1 Illustrative

(Values for multiple regression are take from the review & rating of consumers
Higher rating= high likert scale value)

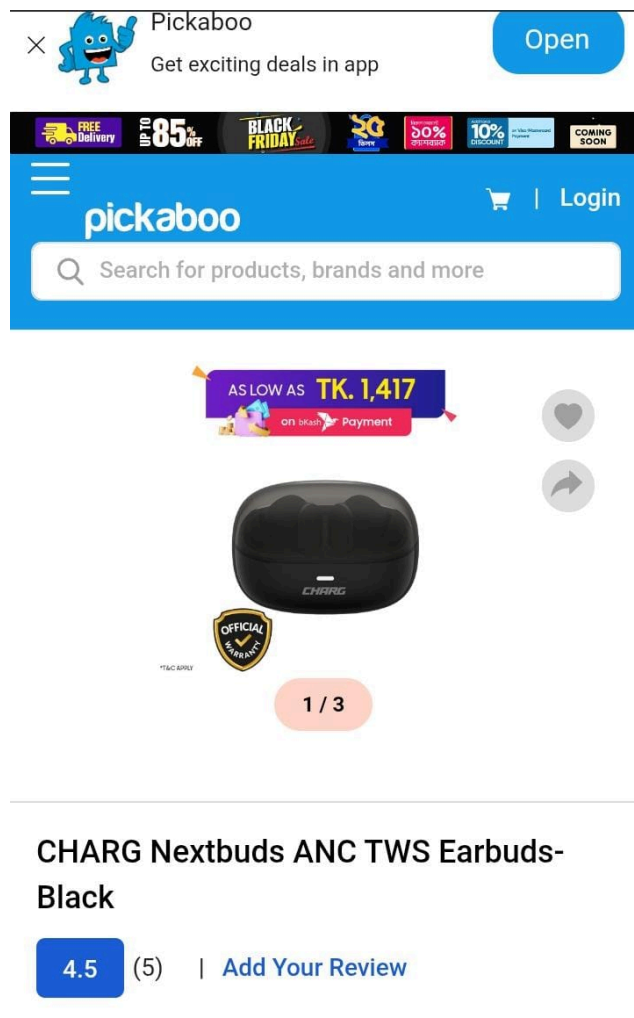


Figure 1

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Ashik Nazrul

(5.0) ★★★★★

Joss product

Posted on 19 November 2025

Joss product

👍 0

👎 0
- 

Mumu

(4.3) ★★★★★

authentic

Posted on 5 October 2025

Thanks Pickaboo! Got authentic earbuds and fast delivery

👍 0

👎 0
- 

Nusrat Zaman

(4.3) ★★★★★

good

Posted on 5 October 2025

Used for 2 months daily, performance is too good

👍 0

👎 0

Figure 2

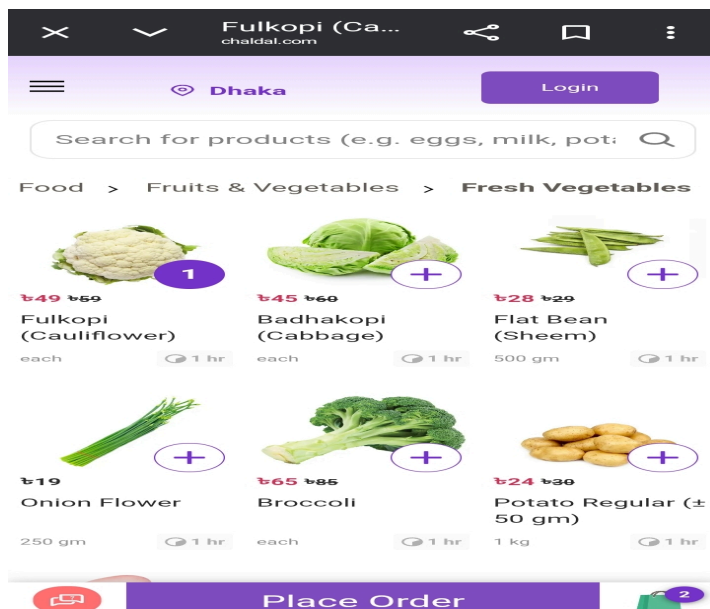


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5