

Online Customers Review and Buying Behaviour among Students at Heritage Polytechnic, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the Internet has revolutionized advertising by providing businesses large and small alike unprecedented access to global audiences at lower costs and faster rates. However, this shift has also diminished advertisers' monopoly over information, giving rise to a consumer-centric economy where users actively engage in evaluating and discussing product experiences online. This study aims to examine how online product reviews influence consumer perception and buying behavior. Employing a survey research design, data were collected through electronic questionnaires from a sample of 333 respondents, determined according to Phillip Meyer's sampling recommendation. The results reveal that continuous online discussions and reviews significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions, as they tend to rely heavily on peer opinions before making a purchase. Negative reviews were found to reduce purchase intention, while positive feedback strengthened brand trust and loyalty. The study concludes that online product reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior in the digital marketplace. It implies that advertisers and product manufacturers must actively monitor, respond to, and integrate consumer feedback into product improvement strategies to foster positive perceptions and sustain competitiveness in an increasingly transparent digital environment.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a unique advertising medium that offers exceptional advantages to advertisers and product producers (Appel et al., 2020). Its most valuable feature is interactivity, allowing users to engage in real-time conversations and form communities within the online marketplace (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In these spaces, product users and prospective buyers discuss products and their features to determine the necessity of further purchases (Alalwan, 2018). Holleschovsky and Constantinides (2016) affirm that a new generation of online tools, applications, and approaches—such as blogs, social networking sites, online communities, and customer review sites—commonly referred to as Web 2.0, has transformed the Internet from a “broadcasting” medium into an “interactive” one, enabling a wide range of technology-mediated social participation (Ngai et al., 2015). This interactivity empowers consumers to openly discuss product features, helping to inform their purchase decisions (Chen et al., 2022). Further support this idea, noting that the interactive Web makes it easy for consumers to compare market offerings or seek purchasing advice from other users through product reviews (Lis & Neßler, 2022). A product review takes place when consumers or previous users critically discuss the product's features and their satisfaction, serving as an aspect of consumer protection and a core strength of the Internet as a modern advertising medium (Wang et al., 2023).

The Internet enables individuals and organizations to showcase their products and services to prospective buyers within virtual communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). One advantage of these networks is the presence of a large, diverse, and highly educated audience with varying needs (Hajli et al., 2021). This diversity empowers individuals to seek new products, utilizing their purchasing power, which is enhanced by their education and product knowledge (Shareef et al., 2019). The open discussions about products and their manufacturers contribute to this dynamic (Soro et al., 2022). The Internet has positioned consumers as the most influential element in the distribution chain, granting them the ability to broker and control the volume of sales as well as determine market coverage (Ladhari et al., 2020). Moreover, digital communities enable collaborative decision-making and brand co-creation, reinforcing consumers' active role in shaping online markets (Dessart et al., 2020).

Consumers now leverage technology to discuss products and assess their performance relative to marketing claims, influencing their purchasing decisions (Filieri et al., 2021). This process is known as an online product review. Online consumer reviews are subjective opinions that summarize experiences, attitudes, and viewpoints expressed by consumers (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). These reviews represent the benefits or shortcomings of a product as experienced by previous users, advising prospective buyers on product qualities (Mariani & Borghi, 2021). Personal opinions and experiences shared in online reviews have become one of the most valuable sources of information for users making purchasing decisions (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Cheung et al., 2021).

The purpose of a review is to inform prospective buyers about a product's quality, enabling them to make more informed purchase decisions (Park et al., 2021). Most people purchase products based on what others say about them (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The most authentic and effective marketing strategies draw on the experiences of previous users, encouraging open discussions about product functionality—this is the essence of a product review (Kumar & Tan, 2018). As a popular Nigerian adage goes, “sellers do not say their products are bad,” but such criticism can come from those outside of production (Nwokah et al., 2020). For this reason, potential customers often seek the opinions of others before making a purchase, relying more on the perspectives of impartial, disinterested users (Wang et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2022).

In this context, Brüggemann & Pauwels (2025) observes that, unlike offline shopping where consumers can see the physical item, online consumption often requires additional consideration since the actual product is not visible. This leads consumers to engage in a series of psychological assessments before making a final decision (Chen et al., 2022). Product reputation becomes one of the most critical reference factors, with online reviews serving as the primary source of online reputation (Bhatti & Alawad, 2023). Essentially, a product review can highlight the strengths of a product and encourage positive purchasing behavior. However, it can also expose negative aspects, which may deter potential buyers and lead to negative purchasing behavior.

Research shows that students are among the most active users of Internet resources in Nigeria (Okpala, 2021), and students at Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, are no exception. They frequently utilize the Internet and, as a result, are exposed to product reviews—an exposure that can significantly influence their buying behavior. Therefore, this study examines the

impact of online customer reviews on consumer purchasing behavior, taking students at Heritage Polytechnic Eket as a reference point.

The Internet offers substantial promise for businesses in the 21st century, with executives continually exploring innovative models suited to a high-tech environment. One significant outcome of the Internet's evolution is that consumers can easily access basic information about products through online reviews. These reviews serve as a key source for potential buyers to learn about products, especially since product packaging and promotional materials may sometimes be misleading. As a result, consumers seek firsthand insights from previous users to guide their purchasing decisions—a dynamic known as customer reviews. Due to their widespread access to the Internet, consumers can obtain abundant information about products and manufacturers. Students, in particular, are very active online and frequently discuss product features with peers. However, the extent to which online reviews influence students' buying behavior remains an empirically unanswered question, forming the foundation for this study.

The objectives of this study were to determine whether Heritage Polytechnic students read product reviews on the Internet before making a purchase, to assess the influence of these reviews on their purchasing behavior, and to identify other intervening factors that affect the buying behavior of students at Heritage Polytechnic aside from online product reviews. Accordingly, the study formulated the following research questions: whether Heritage Polytechnic students read product reviews online prior to purchasing, the extent to which online product reviews influence their buying behavior, and additional factors that impact the purchasing decisions of Heritage Polytechnic students.

METHOD

The research design utilized in this study was survey research. The study population comprised 2,926 students at Heritage Polytechnic Eket, as recorded by the Registry, with a sample size of 333 determined using Philip Meyer's formula for sample calculation. The sampling techniques applied were both purposive and convenience sampling. Initially, two faculties were purposively selected: the Faculty of Science and Technology and the Faculty of Management Sciences. Research was conducted within two departments from these faculties—the Department of Mass Communication and the Department of Science Laboratory Technology. Convenience sampling was then used to collect data at the individual respondent level. To facilitate distribution, an assistant researcher sent copies of the questionnaires to the respective WhatsApp groups for each class, after which the completed questionnaires were collected for analysis.

Data analysis incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency tables, percentages, and mean scores, were employed to summarize demographic data and general responses from participants. Inferential analysis, including correlation and regression techniques, was used to evaluate the relationship between online product reviews and consumer buying behavior. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The raw data collected through the e-questionnaire, particularly those addressing the research questions, were presented and analyzed as follows:

The demographic data indicated that 130 respondents (39%) were male, while 203 (61%) were female, suggesting that the majority of respondents were female and potentially more influenced by online reviews. In terms of age, 153 respondents (46%) were within the 18–25 age group, 100 (30%) were between 26 and 33, and 80 (24%) were 34 years or older. This shows that most participants were young people who actively used the Internet and were likely to read product reviews.

Regarding the respondents' level of study, 34 (11%) were in ND 1, 64 (19%) were in ND 2, 91 (27%) were in HND 1, and 144 (43%) were in HND 2. The data indicates that most of those who regularly read online reviews and made online purchases were final-year students.

RQ1: Do Heritage Polytechnic students read product reviews on the Internet?

This research question was posed to determine whether students at Heritage Polytechnic read product reviews on the Internet before making a purchase, as well as to assess the extent to which undergraduate students in Nigeria consume erotic media content. Table 1 presents data relevant to this research question.

Table 1. Do Heritage Polytechnic Students read reviews on the Internet before making a Purchase?

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	201	60
No	102	40
Total	333	100

The data in Table 1 indicate that the majority of respondents read online reviews before making a purchase.

Table 2: Does online product review influence their buying behaviour?

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	193	58
No	140	42
Total	333	100

The data in Table 2 revealed that the majority of respondents were influenced by the online reviews they read. This affected the way their behaviour towards product buying.

Table 3: What other intervening factors influence the buying behaviour of Heritage Polytechnic Students?

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Product quality	-	-
Branding	-	-
Price	-	-
All of the above	333	100
Total	333	100

The data in Table 3 indicate that product quality, branding, and price are key intervening factors influencing the buying behavior of students at Heritage Polytechnic. The study's findings provide strong evidence that online product reviews significantly affect students' purchasing decisions, especially among young, tech-savvy consumers. This aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which posits that individuals highly involved in decision-making are more persuaded through the central route, deeply analyzing information such as detailed product reviews. In this case, students who regularly read reviews tend to process information rationally, weighing both positive and negative experiences before making a purchase.

The impact of online reviews can also be explained by the Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz et al., 1974), which suggests that consumers actively seek media content that satisfies their needs—here, informational and evaluative. Students use online reviews not only to reduce uncertainty but also to validate their decisions through social proof, highlighting how digital communication has empowered consumers to be both creators and evaluators of marketing information.

Furthermore, this study supports Kim and Park's (2013) findings that information credibility and reviewer expertise are critical in building consumer trust in online reviews. Heritage Polytechnic students, as educated and digitally literate individuals, are more adept at discerning credible reviews and dismissing biased or fake ones, reflecting increasing digital maturity among young Nigerian consumers.

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the necessity for advertisers and manufacturers to engage proactively with online feedback systems. Regular monitoring of consumer-generated content on platforms such as e-commerce sites and social media allows companies to respond rapidly to consumer concerns and adapt their strategies accordingly. Zhang et al. (2022) suggest that firms that respond promptly to online feedback benefit from higher brand loyalty and improved reputation management.

This study demonstrates that online product reviews significantly influence students' perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing intentions, while traditional factors like product quality, branding, and price continue to serve as important moderating variables. Further research could incorporate models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or Consumer Decision Model (CDM) to understand how perceived ease of use and the usefulness of review platforms affect buying behavior. Additionally, cross-cultural or longitudinal studies would offer greater insight into the changing dynamics of online consumer engagement across different settings and over time.

CONCLUSION

Online media have become central to business operations in the 21st century, prompting executives to continually leverage emerging platforms to reach target consumers. An unintended consequence of this shift is that online users now have access to far more information about products than in the past. Before making purchasing decisions, prospective buyers engage with others online, asking about product quality and performance—interactions that significantly influence their buying behavior. Survey results indicate that students in tertiary institutions consult online reviews prior to making purchases, and these reviews

substantially affect their purchase decisions and behavior. Traditional factors such as product quality, branding, and price also play a role as intervening influences on students who rely on online reviews. In this information-driven age, producers must prioritize product quality to meet consumer expectations, as unfavorable reviews can deter purchase decisions. Consumers are no longer uninformed buyers—negative commentary during reviews can lead to product rejection, making it imperative to focus on quality improvement, effective branding, and competitive pricing. For future research, it is recommended to explore the mediating role of consumer trust, the moderating effects of digital literacy or cultural background, and to conduct longitudinal or cross-country studies to better understand how online reviews shape consumer loyalty and long-term purchasing behavior across diverse settings.

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