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**THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS ON BRAND  
PERCEPTION AND PURCHASING DECISIONS**

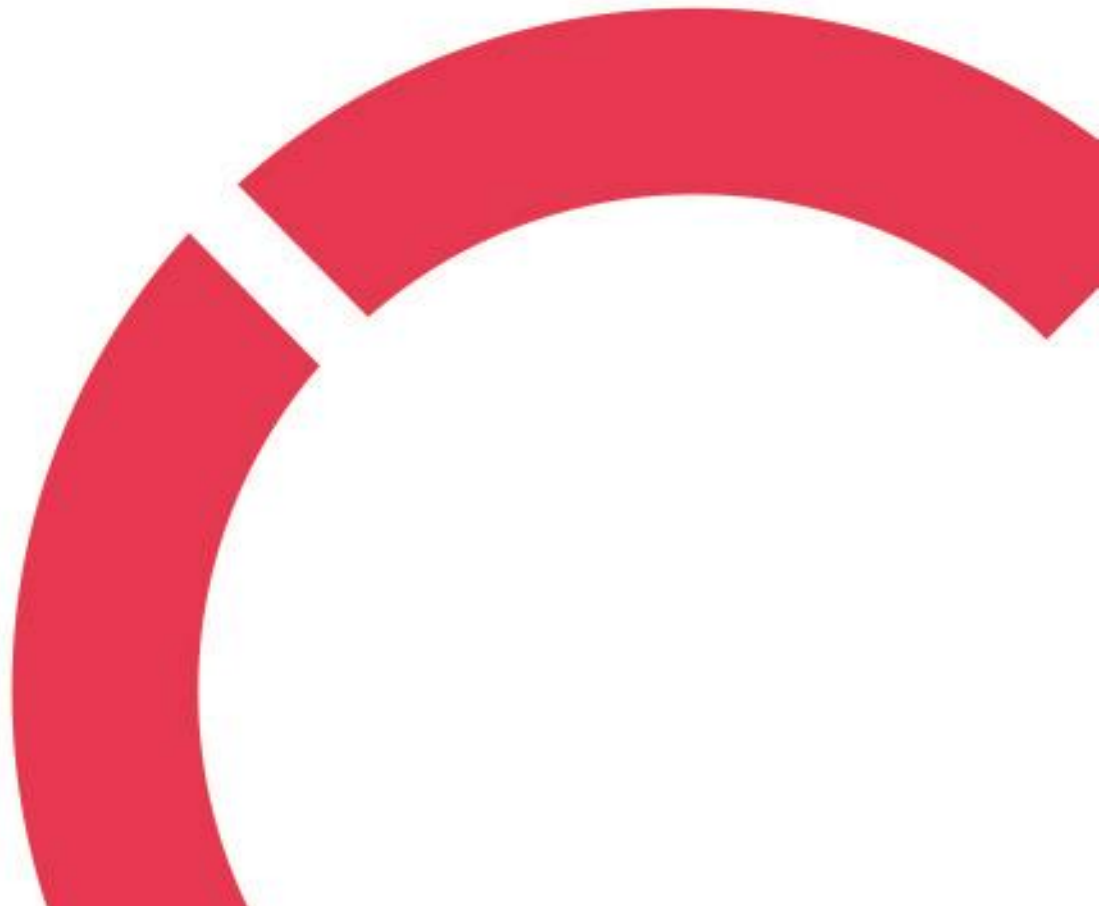
**An analysis of consumer buying behaviours at Vivo Sales Centre**

**Thesis**

**CENTRIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

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**ABSTRACT**

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<b>Name of thesis</b> THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS ON BRAND PERCEPTION AND PURCHASING DECISIONS. An analysis of consumer buying behaviours at the Vivo Sales Centre		
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<p>Consumer decisions in today’s digital age are influenced by online platforms and e-commerce. People heavily depend on different platforms’ reviews to get a perspective before purchasing. Although this approach is more recent, it has created a powerful platform that dictates decision-making.</p> <p>The research’s primary objective was to investigate the influence of online customer reviews on brand perception and consumer purchasing decisions. It summarizes the relationship between brand and reviews; how reviews influence the brand and how the brand influence the purchase made. The research approach was quantitative to determine the accurate measurement between online reviews and brands. This research reflects on how those reviews have described the characteristics of the consumer views and how reviews have influenced the decision to purchase. Considering that online reviews are the main source of product information for most consumers, the quantitative research approach holds significant importance.</p> <p>The research focused on VIVO Bangladesh, a branch of the globally recognised smartphone company VIVO, to establish a clear market perspective. Engaging in a survey displayed a conclusive investigation, as it involved more details on the impact of online reviews on consumer decision-making. The company representatives' interaction was jointly considered with the survey objectives, resulting in a recommended log on consumer reviews.</p> <p>The results provide insights to other future researchers due to the plenty of opportunities presented to advance the needs of a client. Such an initiative can help a client achieve a better product and service delivery to a company, accordingly assisting companies in understanding the terms of handling case consumers. Later, the findings furnish a detailed roadmap for consumers and corporations, guiding them in effectively managing online purchase decisions through reviews.</p>		
<b>Key words</b> Reviews, Online Customer Feedback, Customer Ratings, E-commerce, Consumer Opinions, Reputation Management, User-generated Content, Brand Image, Consumer Trust, Consumer Behaviour, Decision-making Process, Market Perception, Product Reviews, Word of Mouth		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Online platforms and e-commerce have a huge impact on consumer decision-making in today's interconnected world. Many people can use computers, so they rely on platforms like user reviews to decide if products or services are good. These platforms provide lots of information, helping people make better choices. User generated reviews from consumers also play a decisive role in forming consumer choice. With the internet boom and the rise of e-commerce, geographical boundaries are becoming increasingly meaningless. Consequently, we now have access to various products and services from all over the world. Therefore, it is critical for businesses to understand how customer reviews on the internet affect their brand image and influence the purchasing decisions of consumers. Customer reviews function as a major source of information when people come to make a purchase. By examining these reviews, potential buyers can gain insights into product quality, usefulness, and overall satisfaction.

The aim of the thesis is to investigate and analyse how online customer reviews impact consumers' perceptions of a brand and influence their purchasing decisions. The given objectives, such as examining the relationship between online customer reviews and brand perception and understanding how online customer reviews shape consumer opinions, will be followed to achieve this aim. Nonetheless, it offers insights into how businesses can effectively handle online reviews to enhance brand perception and positively shape purchasing decisions. With the understanding of objectives, the research will answer important questions such as How do online reviews influence consumer buying opinions?

An insight into the theoretical frameworks that underpin the investigation into the impact of online customer reviews on brand perception and purchasing behaviours in today's interconnected world is sought to be provided. The theoretical parts are divided into two chapters. Firstly, this study dives deep into the significance of online customer reviews, exploring their impact on brand perception, consumer behaviour, and regional trends. The significance, management, and influence on brand image and purchase decisions are also analysed. Secondly, an examining the psychology behind brand perception in the digital age, considering how online reviews impact consumer behaviour. Theoretical frameworks help us understand the varying influence of positive and negative reviews. By examining these theoretical perspectives, aim is to establish a solid foundation for the thesis and provide insights into how online customer reviews influence consumer decision-making processes.

The quantitative research method is chosen for this thesis. It allows to emphasize the use of numerical data and statistical analysis to address the thesis aim and subsequent objectives. First starts by making questionnaires and conducting a survey to collect participant data and strictly adhering to ethical guidelines regarding participant confidentiality and informed consent. After collecting data, the process will involve analysis and visualization, using tools such as Excel, to effectively visualize and analyse the data. By employing this quantitative approach, valuable insights into the influence of online customer reviews on brand perception and purchasing decisions will be aimed to be provided and contributed to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

VIVO Bangladesh, a prominent smartphone manufacturer in Bangladesh known worldwide as VIVO Global, holds the third position in the market and is committed to enhancing technology and customer satisfaction. Vivo Bangladesh itself regularly launches value-for-money smartphones and tech gadgets at competitive prices. In year 2019 Vivo set up company's fifth a global and country's seventh mobile phone manufacturing plant by this company reducing the huge tax burden in Bangladesh. The company's representative, Sajel Mahmud Khandakar, brings extensive corporate experience to VIVO and currently serves as a store manager.

## 2 COMMISSIONER

In this research, VIVO Bangladesh, a subsidiary of VIVO Global, a leading smartphone manufacturer, was chosen as the company. The commissioner of this thesis is Sajel Mahmud Khandakar, who serves as the company representative.

Vivo, founded in 2011 as a Chinese smartphone manufacturer, has experienced a staggering growth in the global mobile phone market. Boasting over four hundred million users and a presence in over sixty countries and regions. Their commitment to innovation extends beyond smartphones, with a product portfolio encompassing earphones, wearables, and various accessories, creating a comprehensive mobile ecosystem for their customers. The recently launched X90 Pro and V30 Pro flagship exemplifies this focus on innovation, particularly in camera technology (Vivo 2024). Vivo actively invests in brand recognition through strategic marketing initiatives. Vivo was the official smartphone sponsor for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and Indian Premier League. Those are prime example of their past sponsorship of highlighting their dedication to reaching a wider audience (Gurnaney 2019.).

In Bangladesh, vivo has established itself as a major player, capturing a significant 11.95% market share as of February 2024. This positions them firmly as the third most popular brand behind Samsung and Xiaomi. Their success in Bangladesh likely stems from their strategic focus on mid-range and budget-friendly smartphones, perfectly aligning with the price-conscious nature of a large segment of the Bangladeshi market (Statcounter Global Stats 2024). By implementing a plant, vivo cut down taxes from 57% to 18% on smartphones and from 32% to 13% on feature phones, respectively. Currently, the other six mobile assemblers, which have the capacity to meet 40% of the country's handset demand, will be affected by a 55% decrease in demand after the activation of the vivo plant. In 2022, Vivo Global inaugurated South Asian largest flagship store in Bangladesh which is situated in located on the ground floor of Alamin Icon Center opposite Jamuna Future Park in the capital Dhaka. In the five thousand square feet flagship store people can sees the continuous history and innovation can experiences pre-lunching products. (Dhaka tribune 2022.)

Sajel Mahmud Khandakar, the commissioner of this thesis, brings valuable industry expertise. Previously worked as a Brand Advisor at VIVO Bangladesh, his career path led him to his current role as a Shop Manager at a VIVO Sales Centre in Sylhet. He holds a degree in Business Administration from the National University. His work has demonstrably shaped consumer perceptions and market positioning for the company. His experience working directly with customers at VIVO Bangladesh to the table.

This on-the-ground perspective proves crucial throughout the research process. For the research phase, Sajel's insights will be instrumental in crafting a survey that effectively captures the real-world experiences of VIVO customers. His understanding and concerns will ensure that the survey gathers the most valuable data possible.

### 3 ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS

Online consumer reviews are always an essential part of the human lifestyle. These reviews are the good, bad, or the in-between and provide authentic and valuable information. This thesis examines how online customer reviews help build brand image and motivate customers to purchase. This discussion deeply drives the conceptualization of customer reviews in this digital-connected world, which has influenced people's daily behaviour in consumer goods. User generated reviews can be found all over the internet, for example on e-commerce platforms, social media, and specialized product review websites. Nowadays people no longer rely on marketing materials or brand statements to make purchasing decisions. Instead, they value the insights and perspectives of consumers who have already tried the product or service. Extensive research has shown how much customer reviews influence our buying choices. The ratings given by customers can impact a company's reputation-to be more specific, its product sales. Positive reviews can give a boost to sales, while negative ones might discourage buyers from making a purchase. Increasing a product's rating by one star on a five-star scale can lead to a significant sales increase of anywhere between five to nine percent. This example vividly demonstrates how customer reviews directly affect a company's revenue. (Park, Lee & Han, 2007, 125–127.)

#### 3.1 The Significances of Online Reviews

In our interconnected world a fundamental shift has taken place between business and customers. People are more than just passive participants in commerce, as consumer reviews help to facilitate this transfer. These digital testimonials are posted on e-commerce websites, social media sites and specialty review portals. They are importantly used for gaining insights into consumer behaviour as well as business strategies. Online reviews double as recommendations for ratings. (Zhu & Zhang, 2010, 133.) The credibility of reviews is key, and according to Bright Local, 91% of consumers trust reviews as much as personal recommendations (Marchant 2014). The power of online reviews across all kinds of platforms is shown by the extent to which they affect business. From the experience of users, positive evaluations can lend a firm a great deal of reliability which enhances corporate credibility. On the other hand, if businesses pay no concern to reviews, this can have a very negative impact-bad for their name. (Jiménez & Mendoza 2013, 227.)

When considering a factor on purchasing decision, the influence of reviews must be considered. In the past, Consumers would listen to advertisements or personal recommendations if they were unsure about buying things. Now that those people have access to review sites, they can change their minds and the product will be at your door with only a few clicks. (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung & Lee 2014, 78–80.) Ninety-three percent of respondents in one survey claimed that online reviews had a certain away on their purchasing decisions. Businesses are happy to visit such sites for a brief overview of the opinion-domain. It is worth noting that this figure alone shows how much influence customer feedback has over whether a business will sell its products effectively (Vimaladevi & Dhanabhakaym 2012.)

In terms of search engine optimization (SEO), reviews represent a heavy dependence. The quantity of reviews as well as their quality are considered by search engines like Google as they decide the rankings of websites. A business that consistently gets reviews is more likely to appear in search engine results, thereby elevating its internet profile for organic traffic. This is good for those businesses trying to make their mark in local search results. (Onaifo & Pennington, 2013, 89–91.)

While a business can benefit from good reviews, user feedback does not always harm a business. It also gives companies a chance to identify areas for improvement. And yet, by considering the issues raised in these reviews, businesses can even improve their products or services necessary to maintain their lives on this earth. Out of the box thinking it also showcases a committed company to customer satisfaction if companies respond positively and empathically to feedback. This is a proactive approach that can both win back customers and attract new ones. Company commitment to improving its offerings is shown by demonstrating it in this way to customers. In the field of human psychology, the idea of proof is deeply rooted. Before they can decide people must win the approval of those around them. Online reviews fulfil this desire by providing proof of a product or service's effectiveness. The presence of recommendations and positive testimonials from customers influences the likelihood of customers engaging with a particular business. Reviews are a kind of bridge between business-customer it creates interaction, building trust and loyalty. (Sparks, So & Bradley, 2016, 78-80.)

### **3.2 Types of Online Customer Reviews**

Review is a parameter of individual products or services which can impact others whether they purchase or not. In the digital world, reviews can be found on the e-commerce sites, which refer to the customer's satisfaction level after purchasing or using the services (Zhang et al. 2014). The following discussion will be about different types of reviews.

Star Ratings provide customers with an efficient method to assess products or services through a rating scale ranging from one to five stars, with five representing the highest possible rating attainable. Textual Reviews involve users describing their experiences with products, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. Photo Reviews allow customers to contribute to evaluations by sharing pictures, typically depicting themselves using the product, which are included as part of their review. Video Reviews serve as a platform for consumers to showcase and discuss products or services through video format. Nowadays, YouTube stands out as the largest platform for all types of product and service reviews, with independent creators uploading videos to share their experiences. (Stamped 2024.)

Reviews on social media platforms can be another source of valuable feedback for businesses. Social media users often share their experiences with products and services, which can help potential customers make informed decisions. Influencer reviews from influencers or industry experts can be particularly impactful, as they often have a large and engaged following. Influencer collaborations can help brands reach a wider audience and generate interest within an untapped audience. Podcast reviews on podcasts can provide a different perspective on products and services and can be particularly useful for businesses that have a strong podcast presence. Some search engines display reviews in their search results, which can be helpful for potential customers who are researching products online. (Paniagua & Sapena 2014, 2-4.)

### **3.3 Managing Online Customer Reviews**

Online reviews have become a critical component in shaping consumer behaviour and business strategies, serving as a valuable source of information for potential customers and influencing the performance and reputation of businesses. Readability of reviews and characteristics of reviewers, such as their historical rating distribution, significantly influence the perceived value of online reviews, which is important for businesses to identify and manage valuable reviews. Managerial responses to negative reviews can positively affect subsequent reviews, especially when tailored to address specific issues raised by guests, whereas responses to positive reviews may have a negative impact if they appear self-promotional. (Wang and Chaudhry 2018, 21-25.)

Online reviews are recognized as an influential information flow that affects marketing systems at various levels, suggesting that businesses should consider the broader implications of reviews beyond immediate sales or reputation. The quantity and quality of managerial responses to online reviews, particularly when addressing extreme reviews, can positively impact competitive performance. A comprehensive online review management (ORM) strategy includes creating positive guest experiences, encouraging reviews, monitoring, and responding to reviews, and acting upon the information gathered. An effective online review management system should incorporate formality, centralization, specialization, response customization, integration, and review analytics. Online reviews can enhance purchase intention through perceived effectiveness of social media platforms and online trust, with cosmopolitanism moderating this effect. Expressing gratitude towards customers in response to online reviews can improve a business's online reputation, signalling care and consideration. Customer engagement plays a role in the likelihood of writing online reviews, with trust and satisfaction influencing this relationship; businesses should leverage mobile platforms to enhance customer engagement and encourage review writing. (Wang et al. 2018, 21-25.)

### **3.4 The Impact of Customer Reviews on Consumer Behaviour**

In today's age and era, with the rise of online shopping, consumer reviews are incredibly important for customers deciding on their purchases. We are dependent on what others think, and their experiences with products before deciding to buy them. These reviews also are commonly found out on various platforms like media and e-commerce websites. They have had a great effect on the way consumers behave. Plenty of studies have been done to more fully understand customer reviews' workings and how they affect consumer behaviour. One significant effect of customer reviews is their ability to influence consumer purchasing decisions. The evidence is consistent that a positive review will increase the chances of a consumer making a purchase. In addition, both number as well as quality play roles. (Srivastava & Kalro 2018.)

A study has shown that as the number of reviews increases, consumers' intent to purchase also increases. It takes on this meaning when people regard other people's internet comments as an information source to help build confidence in a product. (Bhale & Tongare 2018, 53.) The perception of the shopping site and the product itself is influenced by customer feedback. Good reviews not only increase people's perception of an item. It also breeds in the customer's idea of trust for the shopping site. (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008, 556-557.)

It is this trust that can attract consumers and goes some way to fostering loyalty that leads to shopping decisions. On the other hand, negative customer reviews can affect consumers purchase decisions. Upon reading reviews, consumers might start to feel tasteless and doubtful about a product's quality and reliability. Their indecision may then lead to their reluctance to buy later somehow, they may even be turned off to making a purchase. (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008, 556-557.)

Maintain that contemporary shoppers no longer turn to sales staff or ads for advice; to them nowadays online reviews are king. By providing people first-hand impressions of the quality and usefulness of products, they help them to figure out their options and reach a decision. The mood of the review helps determine consumer attitudes and behaviours too. Positive internet reviews have shown to influence people's buying decisions. There has been no current research which suggests anyone would want anything but the best available customer service, for who wants either to be waiting in lines or feeling like they have been screwed over at every opportunity. (Chen, Samaranayake, Xiong, Cen, Qi & Lan 2022.) In contrast negative product evaluations can affect the way that people make decisions about buying certain things from others as well- based on how much trust and reliance is placed upon them. Negative reviews tend to influence the price people are willing to pay for a good and whether they will stick to it. In contradistinction, favourable responses quite tempting and rich, able to attract custom. Furthermore, the volume of reviews also carries meaning were able to demonstrate that more numerous consumer assessments influenced intentions to purchase more powerfully than favourable evaluations. (Yang, Xiong, Cao, & Li 2019.)

The impact of reviews on the attitudes and behaviours of customers should not be undervalued. Online reviews can cause ripples in consumer perception, particularly when it comes to making purchases. Regardless of whether these reviews are good or bad, the comments on them can hugely affect customer attitudes and actions. As a matter of fact, these reviews impact all sorts of things: product selection, willingness to pay, confidence, faithfulness - every aspect of consumer enjoyment with a product. Businesses must conscientiously manage and monitor these reviews because they directly influence consumer opinions, determining the success or failure of a product. Furthermore, internet reviews do not only affect the choices of single consumers but have wider significance for companies. (Chen 2015.) They have a significant bearing on a firm's financial performance, including such items as box office receipts, sales of entertainments, even stock market valuations. These findings suggest that firms must manage online reviews effectively, for they directly affect consumer perceptions, and in the end the fate of a product or service may depend upon the degree of public recognition it receives from different sections of the consumer market. (Zhang et al. 2014.)

### **3.5 The influence of online customer reviews on consumer purchase decisions**

The impact of customer reviews on consumer buying decisions is significant in today's age. With the increasing interconnectedness of the world more people are turning to platforms for research, comparison, and purchases. This shift in consumer behavior influences businesses in terms of how their brands are perceived globally and the choices consumers make when buying. (Park, Lee & Han, 2007.) The advent of online shopping has revolutionized the way customers shop by eliminating constraints. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have provided businesses with opportunities to promote their products and engage with customers offering flexibility. To reach audiences and build brand loyalty companies need to have a presence on these platforms. (M.K. & Niyaz Panakaje, 2022.)

Both cognitive and emotional factors influence consumers perceptions. The online marketplace is highly competitive. Consumers' experiences and expectations are constantly evolving. To establish trust and engagement with clients' online businesses must deliver high quality content. Online reviews play a role in shaping consumers' opinions. Positive reviews contribute to enhancing a brand's reputation while negative ones can be detrimental. These ratings are indispensable for consumers as they provide insights into product reliability and quality when making purchases. Creating a brand goes beyond designing a logo or producing a phrase. It is about developing a brand that resonates with consumers. (Koufaris, 2002.) According to Aakers Model of brand personality there are five dimensions, sincerity, enthusiasm, expertise, ruggedness, and sophistication (Aaker 1997, 347-356). A recent study on Aakers Model and consumers choice of brands found that four out of the five dimensions significantly impacted consumers' decision-making process, but sophistication did not have the same influence. Understanding brand personality and its application in e-commerce is crucial. (P. K. Ladipo et al. 2022.)

Samsung, one of the leading mobile phone companies, stays competitive by leveraging reviews and consumer behavior insights. They adapt their marketing strategies based on evolving consumer needs through in-depth analysis of customer psychology and behavior patterns. In response to the COVID 19 pandemic Samsung shifted to sales (production prioritizing in-demand, massive e-commerce appearances, targeted promotion supply chain organization and home officing) to minimize losses. The company's global dominance can be attributed to their agility and deep understanding of consumer behavior. (Jun Huang, 2022.)

Online reviews available on platforms can be considered as word of mouth. In the past people relied on recommendations from friends and family when making purchasing decisions. However, with the access of reviews online consumers now have access to a range of global perspectives influencing their choices. Peer reviews have an impact on consumers decisions when considering buying a product or service. (Banerjee, Bhattacharyya, & Bose 2017, 7–26.)

Negative customer reviews have the potential to discourage clients, which's why businesses strive to maintain a positive online reputation. A negative review provides a strong signal when compared to more commonly observed positive reviews. (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava 2000, 203–214) Online review platforms are gaining increasing attention from consumers. There is a lack of trust when it comes to reviews that are fake or sponsored. Verified reviews on the hand hold value as they come from individuals who have purchased or used the product or service being reviewed. Businesses highly value reviews because they establish trust and credibility. The number of ratings and reviews can influence a buyer's decision-making process. Products with reviews are seen as reputable and well liked. Furthermore, a high overall rating can inspire confidence in consumers. It is important for buyers to read both negative reviews to get an understanding of a product or service. By responding to feedback businesses can earn the trust of their customers. Negative ratings affect every business in some way or another. How an organization responds to feedback can make an impact. Prioritizing customer satisfaction, resolving complaints and offering solutions are all ways businesses can improve upon customer experiences. This shows customers that the organization values their feedback and strives for improvement. (Utz, Van De Kerkhof and Van Den Bos, 2012.)

As technology advances online reviews will continue to evolve alongside it. In the future augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) could potentially allow consumers to test products before making a purchase. This immersive experience, combined with reviews will influence consumers' buying decisions. Customer reviews have transformed consumer behaviour as much as any phenomenon on earth. In today's world, businesses must at the same time the business must effectively use online reviews for promotion. To increase sales and leave a mark in the market, companies can take unfair advantage of online reviews. They should study how to improve their work and make themselves better by writing insightful, constructive critiques. To Be ahead of the game by Using technology in innovative ways. (Poushneh and Vásquez-Parraga, 2017.)

### 3.6 Model for Analysing Online Reviews

An increasing number of consumers are relying on feedback to decide between goods and services. Understanding how people interact with these appraisals-in the mental, cognitive sense-is at the heart of any successful enterprise. Such processes and perception are as important in services as in products. The elaboration likelihood model provides a helpful to understand this phenomenon. Its basic premise is that people go about information processing in two basic ways central route and peripheral route processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986.)

When people have the interest and the ability, they tend to carefully read and think about reviews before making decisions. They look at things like how convincing the arguments are and whether the information seems reliable. But if someone is not very interested or has little time, they might just quickly scan or heuristics to the reviews. They might rely more on shortcuts or rules of thumb to decide whether something is good. For instance, they may use factors such as ranking or number of evaluations as warning signs of product/service quality. The systematic model offers an integrated framework for understanding how customers evaluate internet reviews. This model implies that both heuristic processing activities occur in a review assessment. Systematic processing means to reflect the contents of reviews and deliberate on the arguments and evidence presented. When customers have both the inclination and aptitude to easily process information, Heuristic processing is more likely. When consumers have low motivation or ability to process information then Heuristic processing, which involves using shortcuts rather than logical reasoning in making judgments about internet comments is more likely. (Mafé, Chatzipanagiotou & Pérez, 2018.)

Decision criteria may be adopted by consumers, such as sanctioning ratings or simply the volume of reviews to gauge internet reviews for their integrity and trustworthiness. If online customers regard the ratings as dependable information and receive comments from friends or qualified experts about such ratings, then they become much more positive about reviews and show a willingness to listen without prejudice. The idea of these two models (heuristics and systematic) is to explain how people evaluate reviews and use the given information to make choices. (Noh, Jeon & Hong, 2023.)

Moreover, these (heuristics and systematic) models emphasize that the factors that impact consumer decision-making are about cognitive processing and peripheral heuristics or shortcut they use. They posit that consumers can employ different levels of cognitive processing, based on characteristics such as motivation, cognitive capacity, and mental resources. (Martignon & Gaissmaier, 2011, 473-474.)

Furthermore, factors such as the calibre and volume of the reviews and whether they are perceived to be reliable have an impact on the extent to which customers evaluate online reviews and in turn form their attitudes and behaviours toward them (Martignon & Gaissmaier, 2011, 473-474.)

Using quantitative action as a framework, a way to understand how consumers approach online reviews is offered in the analysis chapter of this thesis. It is asserted by the thesis that people's attitudes toward reviews and their plans to act on them are shaped by their beliefs and the opinions of others.

## **4 BRANDING**

Branding is the creation of a distinct identity for a product, service, or organization. It encompasses elements such as logos, colours, slogans, and messaging designed to make an impression and differentiate from competitors. Branding builds recognition, loyalty, and trust among consumers. It influences purchasing decisions and attitudes about a product or company. It can drive engagement and contribute to a successful business, brand, or campaign. (Zaichkowsky, 2010, 549.) In today's era customer reviews play a role in shaping the image of a brand. When potential buyers research a product or service, they often turn to reviews to gain insights from others who have already had experiences with that offering. Negative reviews can harm a company's reputation leading to decreased sales. Conversely positive reviews can help build trust and attract customers. (Zhu et al. 2010, 144-145.)

### **4.1 Branding in the digital era**

Branding has witnessed significant transformations to foster effective engagement with online consumers. The emergence of media and digital platforms has opened avenues for brands to connect with consumers, build loyalty, and foster conversations. Consumers now have influence over brands as they actively participate in discussions and engage with other consumers. This shift necessitates the adoption of strategies that encompass both online and offline environments. These strategies involve building brand reputations, managing brand perceptions, and employing approaches to navigate the fragmented media landscape. The digital age has comprehensive changes on conventional habits that are causing businesses to modify their strategies if they hope to be able to reach and really engage with consumers in the domain of brand building. (Phwaa & Putrib 2022.)

Today, marketing is a rapidly growing industry, so the way companies can promote their products and services, with the rise of technologies and changing consumer behaviours, branding too has evolved. Brand names must meet and overcome in this era such consumer heavy reliance on digital information and buying decisions. Moreover, new types of marketing strategy such as influencer marketing and content marketing have also appeared; all this is matched by the proliferation of touchpoints between brands and consumers on media platforms and in other innovative ways as well as various innovative technologies. (Olsen 2018, 72-75.)

For brands to succeed in this ever-changing environment, they must have comprehensive knowledge of marketing tactics and strong skills in developing integrated the strategy. This way they can better understand their products or services, conduct effective communication with others, and create relationships with those who matter. The present age of branding is in transition. Now, strategies should implement to interact appropriately online (and offline) with consumers and the way dive into all kinds of media forms. Speaking more specifically but, one must always be on their guard these strategies can enable brands to gain well-founded reputations among people and set themselves apart in the market. Therefore, branding has adjusted to adapt to the current business environment where organizations must engage more effectively with consumers. Modern consumers place increasing reliance on platforms to procure information and weigh up their purchases. This change has given rise to numerous tough problems of both doctrine and action. (Olsen 2018, 81-83.)

Brands are increasingly being challenged to achieve engagement outcomes - loyalty, connection-building, and consumer-to-consumer interaction. In brief, the development of branding in the digital age means that brands need to think about how to generate interaction and response, manage brand reputations across the fragmented media-out while distinguishing themselves in market. Branding in this age has brought a complicated task for businesses to take on from various directions. With brands separated from a range of fare from customers who have a variety of avenues open to them for contacting or discussing about products consumers are now calling into question every societal norm under the sun. This is why branded strategy online and offline oriented approaches are required. Besides, businesses need today in a background of fragmented media to formulate practical theories about how to create worth in the digital age and cultivate valuable links with the various publics. (Steenkamp, 2020, 2-6.)

## **4.2 The Psychology behind Brand Perception**

In today's business landscape the way consumers perceive a brand plays a pivotal role in shaping their behavior and decision-making process. The way consumers perceive a brand is influenced by factors, such as how well known It is the impressions it creates its unique identity and its overall value. Brand awareness refers to how familiar consumers are with a brand. It is an indicator of the brand's visibility and recognition among consumers. Brand awareness plays a role in shaping consumers' ability to identify and remember a brand in the market. Additionally, it helps consumers differentiate between brands and make informed purchasing decisions. (Chandon 2003, 1-9.)

Brand image reflects how consumers perceive and connect with a brand. It encompasses their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs about the brand. This perception is shaped by factors like brand communication, advertising efforts, product quality and customer experiences. Consumers' perception of a brand's image can significantly influence their attitudes and behaviors towards that brand. A positive brand image can cultivate loyalty among customers while enhancing satisfaction levels and advocacy. A brand's identity is what sets it apart from others. It encompasses a combination of qualities, values and characteristics that define the brand. This identity shapes how the brand presents itself to the world and how it wants to be seen by its customers. The various elements that contribute to brand identity include the brand name, logo, tagline, packaging, and consistent messaging. These components visually represent the brand. Help establish its distinctiveness in consumers' minds. Additionally, brand identity plays a role in shaping how consumers perceive the brand and influences their behavior. In contrast, brand equity represents the worth of a brand in the marketplace to consumers arising from their perceptions, associations, and accumulated experience with it. (Chandon 2003, 1-9.)

A brand which the consumer perceives as being valuable or powerful will have implications for things like sales success, market share, and profitability. A brand finds a place in memory as a concept and retains its place there for different periods. Brand awareness is the foundation of brand perception. If consumers perceive a brand as such it can be considered reflectively thereof. If consumers believe that brand makes products they like, then businesses can charge more for their wares. Brand perception is based on brand awareness and brand image, as well as brand equity. These factors can Affect consumer perception to a great extent. Brand awareness is especially valuable in influencing consumers to remember a brand in the marketplace. (Zhao, Butt, Murad, Mirza, & Al-Faryan 2022, 4-6.)

On the other hand, brand image reflects consumer experience and emotion toward a brand; it is influenced by elements such as communication efforts made by the company, advertising campaigns, product quality, and customer interactions. Consumers' perceptions, associations, and experiences with the brand, also bear strongly upon brand equity. The brand image has a tangible impact on how people perceive and experience a brand. When it comes down to it, a brand cannot be talked about at all without regard for its image among consumers. It is made up of the characteristics, principles, and individual qualities that define the identity of a brand. One brand's differentiating characteristic often make it possible for people to identify it relative to any other. The brand name, logo, or symbols, package are but a few sensory inputs that make up one's experience of a brand. All these things help consumers associate ideas with a brand. And they form impressions based on them. Elements such as brand awareness, brand

image and brand identity significantly affect brand equity, the entire concept and value people have towards a brand. (Hasim, Ishak, Halim, Ahmad, & Suyatna 2020, 1001-1004.)

### **4.3 How Customer Reviews Impact Brand Image**

There are ways in which customer reviews can affect how brands are perceived. Positive testimonials attract customers. When potential consumers see that others have had experiences with a brand they tend to trust and engage with that brand more readily. According to Bright Locals study in 2014 88% of consumers consider reviews influential, as personal recommendations when making decisions (Local Consumer Review Survey 2014). Negative feedback can have an impact, on the reputation of a brand. When potential customers come across interactions that others have had with a company their trust in that company diminishes, making them less likely to engage in business with it. A study conducted by Moz reveals that even a single negative review can result in a loss of up to 22 percent of consumers for a company. (Hinckley 2015.)

Online consumer reviews serve as tools for businesses to identify areas for improvement. By reading these reviews companies can gain insights into the experiences their customers are having and utilize this data to enhance their products, services, and customer service. For example, Research found that businesses which respond to reviews witnessed a 30% increase in customer satisfaction. Online consumer reviews play a role in establishing trust between businesses and customers. When companies promptly and courteously respond to these reviews it showcases their appreciation for customer feedback and commitment towards providing experiences. (Zhao, Wen, Feng, Li, & Lin.2020, 2-3.)

According to a study by Trustpilot responding to reviews has led to 64% of consumers placing trust in those businesses. Additionally online customer reviews contribute significantly to search engine optimization (SEO) efforts undertaken by companies. Positive reviews can bolster the rankings of businesses, on search engine results pages (SERPs) thereby increasing visibility and attracting customers. Increased website traffic and sales can be an outcome of this. (Trustpilot Business Blog, 2020.)

### **4.4 Digital Touchpoints and their Impact on Brand Perception**

In the present era, digital touchpoints are rewriting the way we talk about brands. Given digital advertising, and social media now stretches the horizon, every brand has ample opportunity to engage with its

ideal audiences and attain a strong brand identity. A digital touchpoint is any way that people interact with a brand. This could include websites, social media platforms, mobile apps, and subscriptions services such as newsletters or fancier fare like b2b (business to business). For instance, in-store digital banner advertisements (to passersby) can also serve as digital touchpoints. (Dhebar 2013, 199–201.) Powered by media, advanced technology has given marketers an opportunity to expand personalized connections to their customer base. Quickly addressing customer concerns and getting feedback in are just two of the many activities that can help deepen relationships. There are plenty more example sharing content, offering recommendations and promotions on the Web, and building forums or user-generated content-based online communities where people can discuss your brand all day long. In addition to creating digital interactions, at all stages and on all aspects of the customer journey. In the stage online ads, social media content and reviews have an impact on customers brand awareness and consideration. When it comes to making a purchase, websites and mobile apps serve as platforms that enable convenient transactions for customers. Even after the purchase is made these digital touchpoints continue to influence how customers perceive the brand through purchase communication, customer support services and personalized recommendations. (Hennig-Thurau, Malhotra, Frieger, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy, & Skiera 2010, 312-313.)

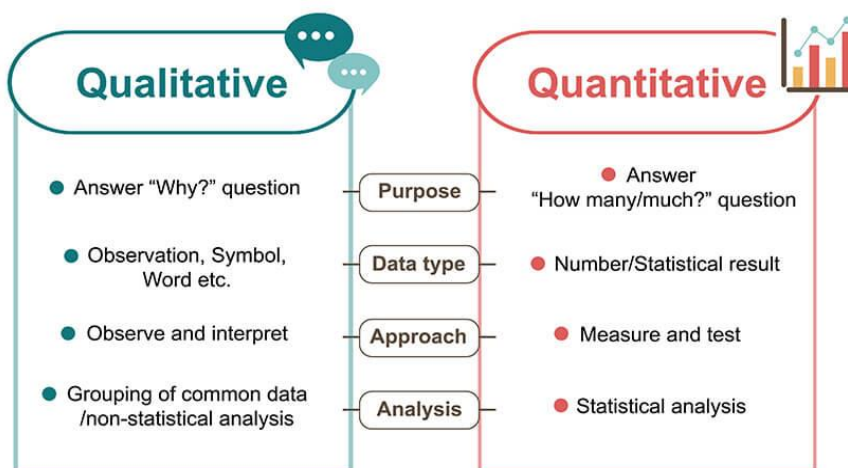
These touchpoints foster engagement, it helps to build strong relationships with customers leading to increased loyalty and repeat purchases. However, the increasing number of touchpoints throughout the customer journey poses challenges for marketers. They must navigate through touchpoints to ensure brand messaging while delivering a seamless experience across all channels. To meet these expectations marketers must merge the interactions, between customers and companies both online and offline. This integration is essential for building relationships that benefit both business and social aspects. Through managing and using touchpoints, retailers can control how their brand is perceived and how customers react. Retailers can make this possible by focusing on the most valuable touchpoints that influence engagement and profitability perceptions. (Zimmermann & Auinger 2020.)

On the other hand, digital touchpoints have a major role to play in their brand perceptions. Retailers can influence customers by leading them on their journey while ensuring an ideal impression is gained side by side. (Zimmermann & Auinger 2020.)

## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research plays a vital role in advancing knowledge across various fields, including the social sciences, medicine, and marketing. It allows us to explore, understand, and address complex issues by systematically collecting, analysing, and interpreting data. There are two primary research methods: quantitative and qualitative research, each with its own set of techniques and philosophical interpretations. (Bryman 2006, 97.)

Quantitative research involves comprehensive techniques to collect and analyse numerical data. It is best suited for hypothesis testing, discovering trends, and making predictions. Quantitative research relies on the idea that reality can be measured and quantified using scientific methods. Quantitative methods are valued for their ability to produce results that are generalizable to larger populations. (Heyink & Tymstra 1993, 296.)



PICTURES 1. Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research – Types of Studies (Stolle 2022).

On the other hand, qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning of human experiences and social phenomena. It involves collecting non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and text analysis. Qualitative research is frequently linked with exploring aspects of reality that may not be easily quantified or measured through traditional scientific methods, which recognizes that reality is subjective and constructed by individuals. Qualitative methodology is particularly effective in providing a thick description and depth of understanding, which complements the breadth of understanding afforded by quantitative methods. (Carter & Little 2007, 1318-1319.)

## 5.1 Research Design

Quantitative research design is a systematic approach used in various fields, including natural and social sciences, to collect and analyse numerical data. Its primary aim is to uncover trends, calculate averages, evaluate relationships, and derive overarching insights. This method relies heavily on statistical techniques for processing and interpreting numerical data. One of the main advantages of quantitative research is its ability to provide comprehensive information and generalize outcomes from a larger sample population. This allows researchers to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other variables, providing valuable insights into the ordering of reality while mitigating personal bias. Furthermore, it facilitates systematic comparisons and enables hypothesis testing and analysis of numerical data. (Rahman 2016, 105-106.)

Quantitative research designs include descriptive that characterize the state of a variable-correlational research that attempts to find existing connections between variables using statistical methods- causal-comparative/quasi-experimental research that attempts to test cause and effect and experimental research that relies on the scientific method. Despite that, there are limitations to quantitative research. However, this type of study has some disadvantages. It is difficult and long because it requires large amounts of data and detailed statistics. Moreover, some aspects of human life may not be quantified at all, which complicates the analysis of research. Quantitative research is one way of studying phenomena and testing assumptions of the higher probability of their implementation and the result. However, it can be very instructive when used correctly, especially for areas of knowledge and discovery. (Price & Lovell 2018, 40-41.)

## 5.2 Data Collection Method

Quantitative data analysis involves using statistical methods to measure variables and find relationships between them, commonly done in surveys, experiments, and research. Common methods for collecting quantitative data include probability sampling, interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document review. Surveys, interviews, and observation gather data directly from participants, while document review analyse s existing records. Each method has its strengths and is chosen based on research needs, study design, and available resources. Data can be primary (collected for the study) or secondary (pre-existing), from sources like surveys, administrative records, or databases. (Albers 2017, 49-53.)

The goal of the survey is to figure out how much influence consumers have from an online review. Unfavourable reviews affect brand perception. To be able to measure such things in the survey. For this purpose, it is time to consider whether popular tools such as Google Forms will fit in a spam-free system. A random sampling technique will be employed by the author to ensure that the participants are represented by a diversified group of people from across society. Participation is open to individuals from selected demographic categories, including age range, gender, and geography. The survey items designed by using Likert scales and checkbox matrix format. They are designed to let subjects express their thoughts freely.

### **5.3 Questionnaires**

Quantitative surveys are structured sets of questions designed to draw detailed responses from participants regarding a particular research topic. These inquiries push the boundaries of surveying, aiming to gather numerical data for subsequent statistical analysis. (Bhat, 2023.) The quantitative approach emphasizes the acquisition of numerical or quantifiable data, facilitating analysis and interpretation. It serves to characterize attributes within vast populations, offering invaluable insights into demographics, public sentiment, and more (van Holm 2021). Researchers employ quantitative surveys to collect data, which are then presented in numerical or percentage formats for analysis. This method enables the identification of trends and patterns, revealing audience preferences in various media, such as advertisements, films, or surveys (SurveyMonkey).

To achieve the goal of gathering data, it needed to conduct a sample survey. The questionnaire is designed to collect data on the frequency of reviews, their impact on perceptions of different brands as well as choices in buying. The poll will be conducted in a Vivo sales centre which is in Sylhet, Bangladesh. These survey questions are to cover such areas as the frequency with which reviews are read, as well as the effect of good and bad reviews on perceptions of brands / purchasing decisions. Last, what level of trust can be attributed to online reviews.

### **5.4 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data analysis involves using statistical methods to measure variables and find relationships between them, commonly done in surveys, experiments, and research (Holmes & Rinaman, 2014).

Common methods for collecting quantitative data include probability sampling, interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document review. Surveys, interviews, and observation gather data directly from participants, while document review analyses existing records. Each method has its strengths and is chosen based on research needs, study design, and available resources. Data can be primary (collected for the study) or secondary (pre-existing), from sources like surveys, administrative records, or databases. (Holmes & Rinaman, 2014.)

## **5.5 Validity and Reliability**

Validity (called accuracy in data) refers to the accuracy of a measure. It corresponds to real properties, characteristics, and variations in the physical or social world (while reliability corresponds to variance in the measurement, not the real world). Validity is determined by checking how well the results correspond to established theories and other measures of the same concept. (Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & Van Heerden 2004, 1061.) Reliability (called dependability) refers to the consistency of scores derived from a measure. It indicates the amount of variance in the given measure and shared variance between the measures. In other words, how free the test is from random errors. (Almehrizi 2013, 438.)

The study on the influence of online customer reviews on brand perception and purchasing decisions follows the ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation of all survey respondents. Measures are taken to prevent bias, and participant information is securely stored to maintain secrecy. This research validity declares that the data acquired is a true representation of the facts under investigation. It also shows that the interview method is suitable for obtaining relevant information. Reliability for this thesis remains to bring the same results if someone else conducted research.

## 6 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A research questionnaire, consisting of ten questions and one open-ended query, was utilized to gather the necessary data for this study. Specifically, the survey focused on Vivo Bangladesh's stores named Vivo sales centre at Puranlen, Sylhet. From March 15, 2024, to March 28, 2024, a total of thirty-three participants who visited or had purchased smartphones from the store were targeted to participate in the survey. Participants engaged in the survey via a Google form and a structured questionnaire (appendix), which was provided to them after obtaining their online consent. They were selected through random sampling from a larger population. The process of data collection, analysis, and visualization took three weeks to complete effectively.

### 6.1 Findings and Chart Representation

The survey was administered online, with a total of thirty-three respondents voluntarily participating. This chapter discusses the outcomes of the survey. The representation and discussion analysis are presented in accordance with the questions asked.

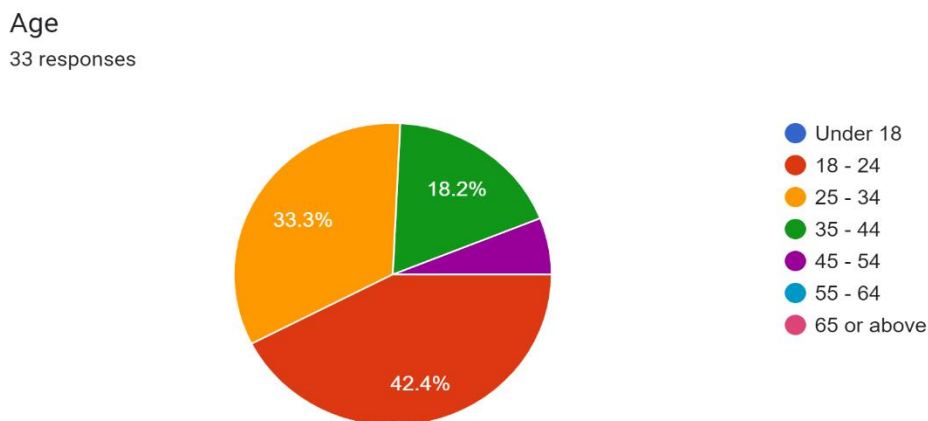


FIGURE 1. Age

The above pie chart reveals an age distribution primarily concentrated between 18 to 34 years old. Specifically, 42.4% of respondents fall within the 18 to 24 age brackets, while 33.3% are aged between 25 to 34. There is also representation from older age groups, with 18.2% in the 35 to 44 range and 6.1% respondents from age groups 45-54 range. Zero percent and zero respondents are from age group over fifty-four range. No respondents from over 55 years age groups.

## Gender

33 responses

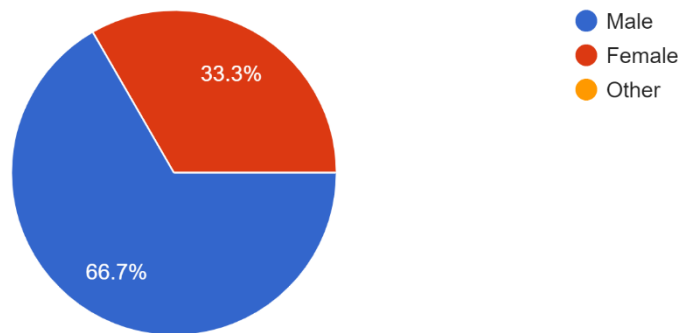


FIGURE 2. Gender

Among the respondents, there is a slight tilt towards males, with 66.7% of respondents identifying as male and 33.3% as female. When considering both age and gender, the data suggests that most respondents, particularly those between 18 to 24 years old, are male. This may indicate a specific demographic trend in terms of male are more actively engaged aspects such as here buying smartphone.

## Before making a purchase, do you usually read or watch online reviews?

33 responses

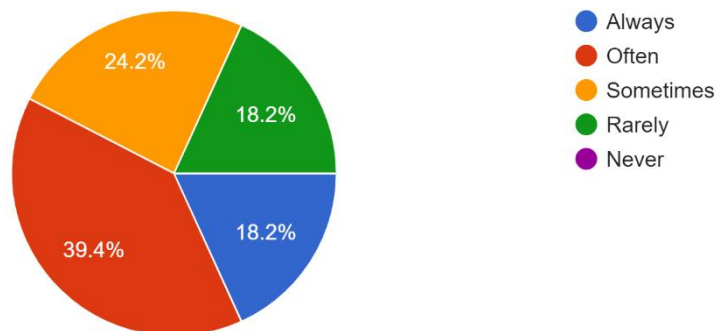


FIGURE 3. Online Review Consumption Before Purchases

The pie chart illustrates the outcomes of a survey where individuals were asked about their habit of consulting online reviews prior to purchasing. According to the data, 24.2% consistently rely on online reviews, 18.2% do so often, and an additional 18.2% occasionally use them. Conversely, 39.4% seldom or never consult online reviews before buying. Combining those who frequently, occasionally, and always use online reviews, it appears that 62.4% of the surveyed individuals utilize them to some extent

before making purchases. Nonetheless, it is vital to recognize the limited scope of this survey, as it involved only thirty-three respondents, thereby potentially limiting its representativeness of the broader population. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the significant role online reviews play as a consumer information source.

Have you ever decided not to purchase a product based solely on negative reviews?

33 responses

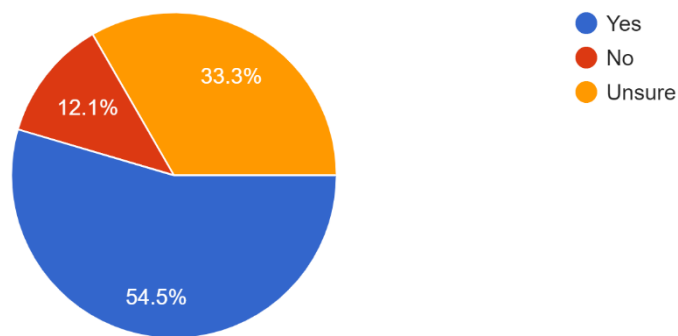


FIGURE 4. Consumer Decision-Making: Negative Reviews

The above pie chart provided depicts the outcomes of a survey query regarding the impact of negative reviews on purchasing decisions. It categorizes responses into three options: yes, no, and unsure. Notably, 33.3% of respondents admitted to deciding against purchasing a product solely due to negative reviews, indicating a significant influence of such feedback. Conversely, 54.5% reported that negative reviews did not influence their purchasing decisions, demonstrating a considerable portion of consumers who remain unaffected by such criticism. Additionally, 12.1% expressed uncertainty regarding the impact of negative reviews on their choices, highlighting a level of ambiguity among respondents. This data collectively suggests that while negative reviews can discourage some consumers, other factors also weigh into their decision-making processes when making purchases.

Which review platform do you prefer for reading or watching reviews?

33 responses

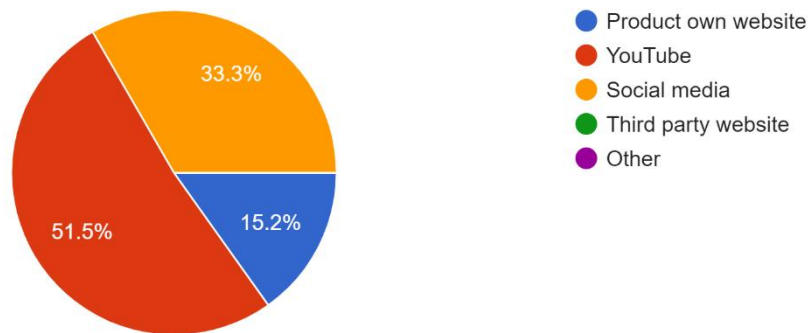


FIGURE 5. Preferred Platform for Reading/Watching Reviews

The pie chart illustrates the outcomes of a survey querying respondents about their preferred platforms for reading or watching reviews, conducted among a group of thirty-three individuals. The majority (51.5%) expressed a preference for YouTube, driven by perceptions of trustworthiness or the convenience of centralized product information. One-third of respondents favoured product own websites (33.3%), influenced by the engaging and informative nature of authentic reviews available on these platforms. A smaller segment (15.2%) leaned towards social media, indicating its lesser prominence in review consumption despite its widespread use for communication and information sharing. Notably, no respondents favoured third-party review websites or other platforms, suggesting an area for further investigation in larger studies. Overall, the data underscores a clear inclination towards product websites and YouTube for review consumption, with social media playing a secondary role. However, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this data due to its small sample size, suggesting the need for broader research to confirm these findings.

On a scale of 1 to 5, How influential are online reviews in your purchasing decisions? (1 being not influential, 5 being very influential)

33 responses

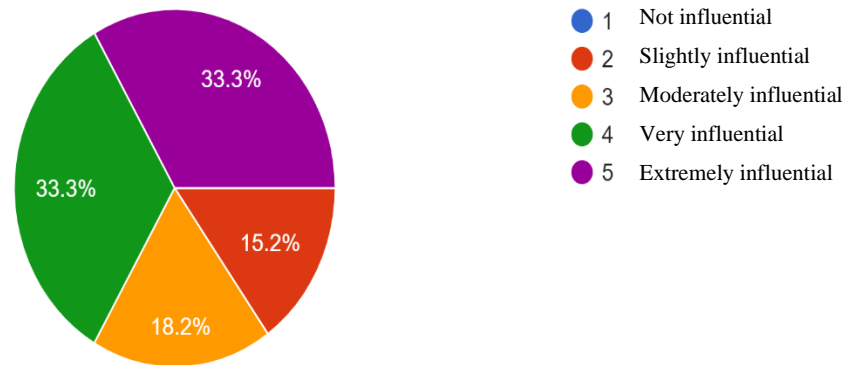


FIGURE 6. Influence of Online Reviews on Purchasing Decisions

The chart shows that 33.3% of respondents said that online reviews are very influential (5 on the scale), and another 33.3% said moderately influential (3 on the scale). That means that two-thirds of the people surveyed found online reviews to be at least moderately influential in their purchasing decisions. Significantly fewer people said that online reviews were not very influential in their purchasing decisions. Only 18.2% said online reviews were slightly influential (2 on the scale), and 15.2% said not influential (1 on the scale). Overall, this pie chart suggests that online reviews are a major factor for most people when they are making purchasing decisions.

Do you trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations?

33 responses

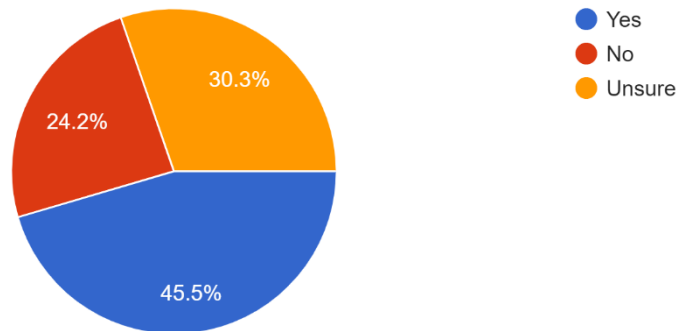


FIGURE 7. Consumer Trust in Reviews Compared to Recommendations

The pie chart reveals that 45.5% of respondents trust online reviews equally to personal recommendations, while 30.3% are unsure, and 24.2% do not trust them as much. This data indicates that half of the respondents view online reviews as reliable as personal endorsements, yet there's a considerable group that either remains uncertain or views them sceptically. The doubt may stem from concerns about the potential for misleading or biased online reviews, highlighting the complexity of relying on digital endorsements compared to personal advice.

How often do you leave online reviews after purchasing a product?

33 responses

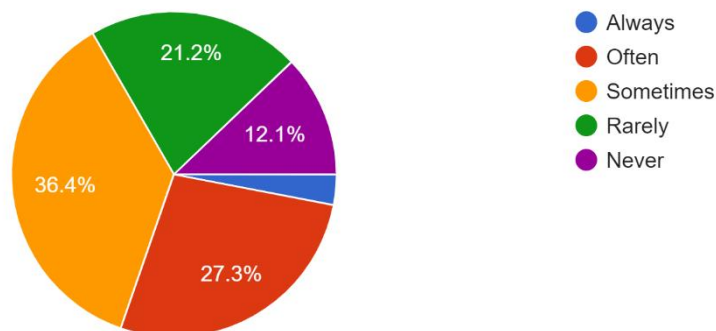


FIGURE 8. Frequency of Online Product Review Submissions

The pie chart illustrates the frequency with which respondents leave online product reviews. The data reveals that 21.2% of respondents always leave reviews, making it the most common response, while

36.4% often do, 27.3% sometimes participate, 12.1% rarely engage, and only 3% never leave reviews. Summarily, 77.9% of the surveyed individuals post reviews at least occasionally, highlighting a notable tendency to share product experiences within this community. However, the specificity of the survey's subreddit context limits the broader applicability of these findings, and the survey's lack of inquiry into the reasons behind the review behaviours leaves an area unexplored.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree that online reviews give a true representation of a product's quality? (1 strongly disagreed, 5 strongly agreed)

33 responses

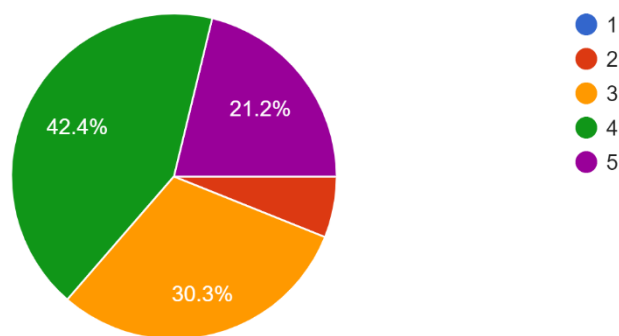


FIGURE 9. Online Reviews as Indicator of Product Quality

The chart illustrates a survey outcome regarding people's perceptions of the authenticity of online reviews in representing a product's quality, using a 1 to 5 scale where one signifies strong disagreement and five indicates strong agreement. In the survey, 30.3% of the participants were neutral, choosing three, while 42.4% somewhat agreed and 21.2% strongly agreed, culminating in 72.7% of the 33 respondents acknowledging some level of agreement that online reviews accurately reflect a product's quality. However, it is crucial to note the survey's limited scale, which may affect the reliability of these findings.

## 6.2 Interview

Among ten different questions, there is an open-ended question for the respondent. In this question, they have to answer by typing, allowing for more detailed and personalized responses. Here is the question following.

**10 *In what circumstances do you prioritize brand reputation over user reviews when making purchasing decisions?***

This question is an open-ended one. Without categorizing the data, it becomes challenging to present a chart. A visual representation is attempted to be created after data extraction. Given the qualitative nature of the data points, a suitable chart type could be a bar chart that counts the frequency of each mentioned factor. However, categorization of these respondents is required. (it signifies an individual respondent who aligns with the common agreement in circumstances) into broader themes to make a meaningful chart. Here are the categories based on the data which are found from respondent (numerical value indicate respondent),

Trust in Brand (respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 23, 28, 32)

After Sales Service (respondents 5, 19, 29)

Product Quality (respondents 6, 15, 17, 18, 25, 31, 33)

Value for Money (respondents 11, 16, 26)

Personal Experience (respondents 7, 8, 13, 20, 22)

Recommendations (respondents 12, 21, 24, 30)

Personal Preference (respondents 14, 27)

Let us assume each data point is a single mention. A frequency chart is now created based on these categories.

TABLE 1. Factors influencing brand trust.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Trust in Brand	8
After Sales Service	3
Product Quality	7
Value for Money	3
Personal Experience	5
Recommendations	4
Personal Preference	2

The following chart presents a visual representation illustrating the relative frequencies of factors affecting brand trust, delineated according to the categories derived from the dataset.

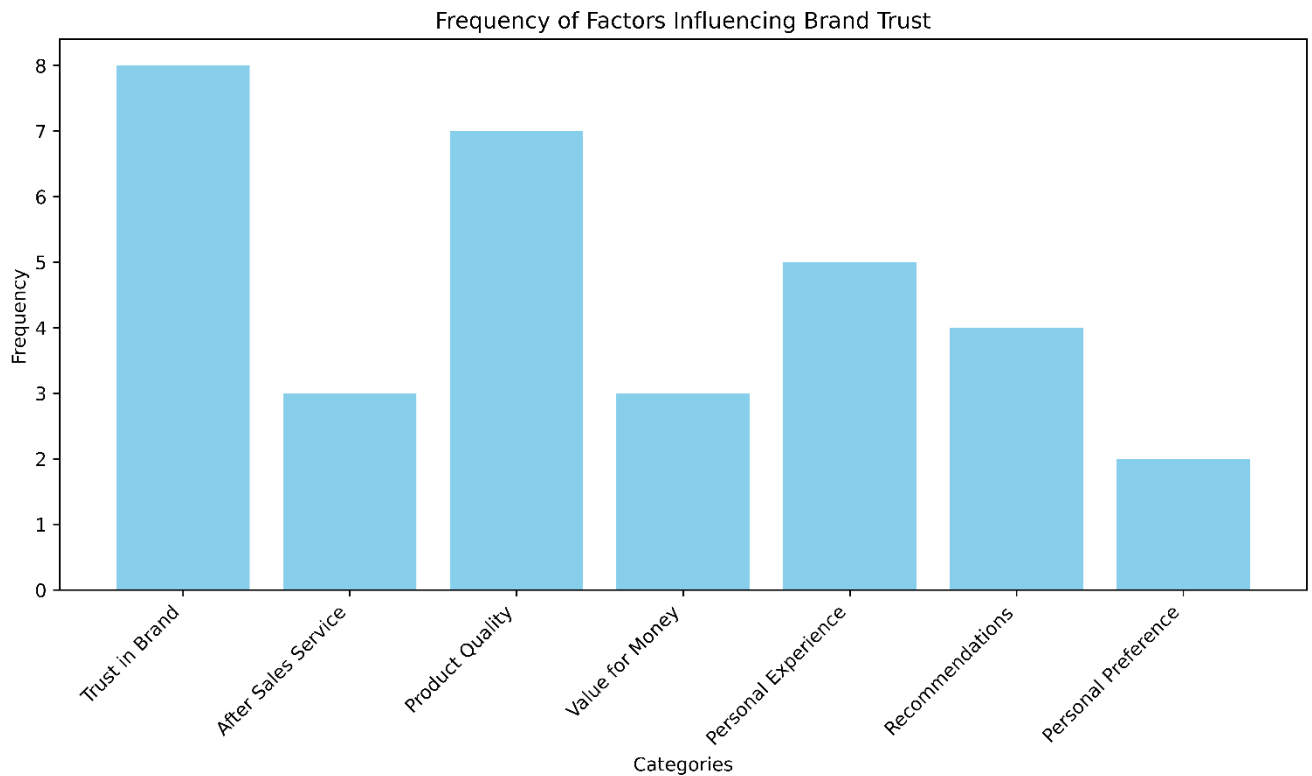


FIGURE 10. Prioritizing Brand Reputation vs. User Reviews

This chart shows the importance of several factors such as trust in the brand, after-sales service, product quality, value for money, personal experience, recommendations, and personal preference in influencing brand trust. "Trust in Brand" and "Product Quality" are the most significant factors. Many respondents prioritize "Trust in Brand" and "Product Quality" over considering reviews. They believe that a brand with a well-established reputation for product quality consistently satisfies customers and earns their trust.

### 6.3 Analysis

Following the examination of survey data collected from thirty-three respondents in Sylhet, Bangladesh at Vivo sales centre, to understand the influence of online customer reviews on brand perception and purchasing decisions. While the sample size limits generalizability, the findings offer valuable insights into the review habits and decision-making processes of consumers.

The survey targeted a certain demographic region, with a significant majority (75.7%) of respondents between 18 and 34 years old. This age group is typically tech-savvy and comfortable navigating online platforms, reflected in their reliance on online reviews. Over 60% (62.4%) reported consulting reviews before purchases, with a notable portion (24.2%) consistently seeking them out. This highlights the growing importance of online reviews as a trusted source of consumer information.

The survey results indicate a clear link between online reviews and purchasing decisions. Over a third of respondents (33.3%) revealed they avoid products solely based on negative reviews. This suggests that negative online sentiment can significantly impact brand perception and purchasing behaviour. However, the influence is not absolute. Over half (54.5%) of the respondents claimed negative reviews do not necessarily deter them, indicating a more nuanced decision-making process where reviews act as one factor among many. Interestingly, two-thirds of respondents (66.6%) found online reviews to be at least moderately influential, with a significant portion (33.3%) rating them as very influential. This underscores the potential of online reviews to shape brand image and influence consumer choices.

The survey delves into the concept of trust in online reviews. Half (45.5%) of the respondents consider online reviews as trustworthy as personal recommendations from friends or family. This suggests a growing acceptance of online reviews as a credible source of information. However, a sizeable portion (30.3%) remains unsure about their reliability, and some (24.2%) express doubt. This highlights the ongoing challenge of perceived bias or misinformation in online reviews.

When it comes to platforms, YouTube emerged as the favourite (51.5%) for consuming reviews, due to the prevalence of video content and the perception of greater authenticity. Product websites (33.3%) followed closely, offering readily available reviews alongside product information. Social media (15.2%) trailed behind, suggesting it may not be the primary platform for review consumption despite its widespread use.

The survey also explored review behaviour. A large majority (77.9%) of respondents said they leave online reviews at least occasionally, indicating a willingness to share their experiences and contribute to the online review ecosystem. Additionally, most respondents (72.7%) perceived online reviews as or strongly reflecting product quality, underscoring their potential role in influencing brand reputation.

The analysis of the open-ended question reveals some key factors influencing consumer trust in brands over online reviews. Here is the breakdown: While online reviews hold significant sway, brand reputation emerges as the trump card when faced with negative feedback. Consumers prioritize established brands with a long-standing reputation for quality (8 mentions), evidenced by a history of delivering high-quality products (7 mentions). Responsive and reliable customer service (3 mentions) also fosters trust, encouraging consumers to believe in the brand's overall commitment to excellence, even if they encounter a single negative review. Beyond brand reputation, positive personal experiences (5 mentions) can create a buffer against negative online sentiment. Similarly, trusted recommendations from friends and family (4 mentions) can solidify a brand's image, tipping the scales in its favour when consumers weigh online reviews. These findings highlight the importance of cultivating a strong brand identity built on consistent quality, exceptional customer service, and competitive value. By prioritizing these aspects, companies can establish a foundation of trust that empowers them to weather the storm of occasional negative online reviews.

Nevertheless, more research should be done to evaluate the significance of all the factors effecting trust in online reviews. Additionally, can examine how review characteristics such as text and video format affect consumer decisions would provide valuable insight. The research on the impact of review format on the consumer's choice would be especially helpful. Also, the study based on the bigger number of participants and more diversity would allow making more general conclusions based on the influence of consumer characteristics of all ages and places.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The main aspect to focus on in this thesis is how reviews contribute to the formation of not only perception of the brand, but also the consumer behaviour on purchasing decisions. It is viewed at Vivo sales centre in Sylhet, Bangladesh, the research about how online reviews can influence the perception of the brand, respectively, the buying decision, could be beneficial insights and that useful for the business and marketers.

All in all, the survey, the visuals representation of the data, and their analysis allow collecting and drawing some significant conclusions regarding the correlation between online reviews, brand perception, and consumer behaviour within purchases. Hence, one can highlight that a considerable category of customers relies upon reviews for making decision based on and upon negative reviews. This fact proves that businesses need to be observant and active in managing and maintaining their reputation online. The findings also demonstrate a preference among consumers for specific platforms for reviews consuming, such as YouTube and product websites, for accessing reviews. In summary, the research underscores the significance of reviews in shaping consumer perceptions. However, it also highlights that individuals continue to prioritize the quality of a company or product, as well as the excellence of customer service, irrespective of negative feedback posted online.

However, the study has its limitations. The limitation of the sample and its geography may restrict the scope of the results. It is possible to generalize the findings by expanding the population and where it lives or works in the first place, thus employing a different research tool to provide a better understanding of customers' attitudes towards reviews and the brand. Thus, in general, this thesis is quite relevant given the general shift towards a digital format in everything, emphasizing the importance online reviews play this light. In addition, the work can be of interest to business representatives planning to investigate and review their platform. Thus, the results may lead to more advanced practical decisions from a business management perspective.

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## APPENDIX 1/1

Hello!

This survey aims to investigate the impact of online customer reviews on both brand perception and purchasing decisions and figure out the relations between them. Your participation will contribute to understanding how consumers perceive brands and make purchasing choices based on online reviews. Your responses will remain anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes. Thank you for your valuable input.

### 1. Age

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 or above

### 2. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

### 3. Before making a purchase, do you usually read or watch online reviews?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

## APPENDIX 1/2

4. Have you ever decided not to purchase a product based solely on negative reviews?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

5. Which review platform do you prefer for reading or watching reviews?

- Product own website
- YouTube
- Social media
- Third party website
- Other

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, How influential are online reviews in your purchasing decisions? (1 being not influential, 5 being very influential)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

7. Do you trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

APPENDIX 1/3

8. How often do you leave online reviews after purchasing a product?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree that online reviews give a true representation of a product's quality? (1 strongly disagreed, 5 strongly agreed)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

10. In what circumstances do you prioritise brand reputation over user reviews when making purchasing decisions?

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