

Beyond Stars: Role of Online Reviews on Customers' Purchase Decisions of Smartphones

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how online reviews affect smartphone purchases among university students in Abia State, Nigeria, paying attention to the features of reviews, namely valence, quality, credibility, and volume. The research design was survey research, where 247 students of Abia State University were surveyed by applying a convenience sampling method. The analysis of the collected data was performed using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient. The study shows that there are strong correlations between all of the review features and consumer buying behavior. Particularly, the tone of online reviews (review valence) and credibility were determined to affect purchase intentions most of all, and high-quality reviews helped to increase consumer trust as well. Review volume was observed to have a positive relationship with perceived reliability of the product, especially in markets which consumers have perceived high levels of risk, like in the smartphone market in Abia state. The findings support the realization of how the dynamics of online reviews affect the buying patterns in emerging markets and give suggestions to smartphone marketers. They recommend that smartphone companies promote thorough, authoritative, and favorable commentary on major online shopping websites to increase consumer trust. The way forward in future studies should be the identification of the psychological elements mediating the influence of online reviews on consumer behaviour, especially in emerging economies.

KEYWORDS: eWOM, smartphone buying decision, online reviews, consumer behaviour

1. Background to the Study

The smartphone industry has grown to become a fundamental part of the world's digital economy, and billions of people are using smartphones as a means of communication, socialization, and business. As of 2025, mobile network subscriptions in the world had reached 7.3 billion and will have a higher number in 2028, of 7.9 billion (IDC, 2025). This growth has also been accompanied by an increase in the significance of online reviews in influencing the consumer purchase decision. Online reviews are a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has a great impact on consumer behavior. Studies have also found that the perception of online reviews, which is best determined by valence (positive or negative feelings), and volume (number of reviews), quality (informative and clear), and credibility (veracity of the source), can have a significant effect on purchase intention, particularly in high-involvement products such as smartphones (Lee et al., 2025)

Consumers are also becoming dependent on the online market when making their purchases, especially when it comes to purchasing items such as smartphones, whose reviews are crucial. The online reviews have become significantly prominent in consumer decision-making, as smartphones have become indispensable in the life of an average person. Nasiri and Shokouhyar (2021) emphasize that the review is no longer an assessment of the performance of the smartphones but also an aspect to evaluate the credibility of the products, which promotes the purchase process.

It has also been found that the volume of reviewing could have a positive influence on consumer confidence. According to Rachmiani et al. (2024), when individuals receive a large number of reviews, they develop a sense that a product is popular and reliable and, consequently, affect their buying behaviors. On the same note, Pooja and Upadhyaya (2024) observe that the more reviews, the more valid the perceived information, particularly when the overwhelming number of reviews is positive. These results highlight the influence of volume on consumer decisions.

Besides, the quality of the reviews is vital in determining the choice of consumers. Filieri et al. (2021) note that more elaborate, well-organized reviews that include detailed information on the characteristics and functioning of a product have greater chances of

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affecting consumers. Nevertheless, the source of the review is likely the most significant aspect in its credibility. Qiu and Zhang (2024) state that people tend to believe more in reviews of reputable people, including professional reviewers or authentic buyers. This credibility increases the overall influence of eWOM in influencing purchases. This idea is backed by Alrubaian et al. (2018), who claim that the reviews in credible sources have a strong impact on consumer decision-making in comparison with reviews of anonymous or unverified sources.

The tendency of consumers to rely on online reviews when buying smartphones is further confirmed by Filieri et al. (2021), who explain that smartphones can be perceived as an expression of self-identity and prestige. This perception increases the demand by consumers to establish trusted and reliable information before purchasing. With the smartphone market in Africa, specifically in Nigeria, rapidly expanding following the growth of internet penetration and the growing involvement of youth in the market (Agbeyangi & Suleman, 2024), online review has become a key factor that consumers use to determine the products available in the market. The research by Tjhin and Aini (2019) and Nyagadza et al. (2023) accentuates that social media and e-commerce platforms play a central role in promoting eWOM in such an emerging market as Nigeria and affect consumer decision-making.

This paper employed the theoretical approaches to investigate the relationship between online reviews and consumer behavior in the Nigerian smartphone market: Information Adoption Model (IAM). The IAM concentrates on the consumer perception of the information contained in online reviews and the way in which the information is applied in their purchase intentions, taking into consideration the credibility, usefulness, and perceived relevance of the information. This model provides a good basis of study concerning the dualistic relationship between online reviews and consumer buying behavior within the smartphone industry (Sussman & Siegal, 2003)

IAM framework supports the study of the different consumer traits, including age, digital literacy, and social media use, which mediate the impact of online reviews (Khan et al., 2025). With the adoption of smartphones as a personal and professional growth tool in Nigeria, the insight into the effects of online reviews on the purchasing behavior in areas such as Abia State will serve a crucial purpose to marketers and policymakers. This paper seeks to make a contribution to the ever-expanding literature on the topic of eWOM, specifically in the high-involvement product lines such as smartphones, and more so in the emerging markets where digital infrastructure is quickly changing.

The smartphone market in such Nigerian states as Abia is evolving rapidly, which is indicative of general trends in internet penetration and social media application (Enahoro et al., 2021). The young generation in the region, especially those who are active on the internet, is turning to online reviews as a way of making informed choices when it comes to purchasing smartphones (Grewal & Stephen, 2019). The necessity to overcome the problem of product selection under the impact of doubts about the quality and authenticity of smartphones offered in the market enhances the significance of eWOM in these markets.

The high growth rate of the smartphone market, particularly in emerging markets such as Nigeria, has changed consumer behavior, with online reviews becoming more and more important in influencing purchase decision-making (Kalba, 2008). Nevertheless, the nature and impact of the online reviews, especially in developing economies like Nigeria, is under-studied though the significance of eWOM is becoming increasingly important. Although the contribution of eWOM on consumer decision-making has received a great deal of research in developed markets, the issues and dynamics of eWOM in emerging markets are under-analyzed, especially in regions such as Abia State.

The smartphone buying process in Abia State is usually coupled with a substantial amount of financial investment, more so among the youths. Although use of smartphones is on the rise, there is uncertainty among consumers when purchasing the phones, depending on the brands, models, and prices, as there is no reliable information about the quality of the products and their performance (Shapiro, 1982). The availability of counterfeit products in the market increases this doubt, and consumers rely more on online reviews to confirm the claims of products (Kennedy, 2020; Lei et al., 2025; Malbon, 2013). Nonetheless, these reviews are not always of good quality, credible, or written in a tone that will bring out confusion instead of clarity.

The existing empirical literature of eWOM is mainly based on the developed markets with internet literacy, consumer trust, and e-commerce infrastructure in place. As an illustration, a study by Chen et al. (2018) in the UK demonstrates the impact of eWOM in consumer decisions in a well-developed digital setting, but this research cannot be directly applied to Nigeria because of misinformation, financial constraints, and technological barriers that influence the level of consumer behavior. In the study by Sudaryanto et al. (2025), which investigates the concept of eWOM in online interactions, the authors concentrate on developed markets and well-developed e-commerce solutions, which do not apply to the emerging market, such as Abia State.

Unlike other types of studies, including those of Shukla and Goh (2024) on hotel bookings and Prabhala and Bose (2023) on the Indian automotive market, this study targets specifically the smartphones in Nigeria. Although these past studies are insightful, they vary in their geographic area, type of product, and their subject matter of interest, and therefore are less applicable to the special problems of the smartphone users in Abia State. This study will help to answer this gap by empirically testing the relations between review features, including volume, valence, quality, and credibility, and purchase decision among consumers in this region.

By conducting this research, we can make significant contributions to the understanding of the impact of online reviews on smartphone purchase behavior in Abia State, which is relevant to the literature on the topic of eWOM and its role in the emerging market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORY, AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT.

2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

According to IAM (Information Acceptance Model), multiple elements are vital in ensuring that information is useful and relevant in influencing consumer behavior; among the elements are the usefulness and relevance of the information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Filieri et al. (2021) show that the reviews that are more detailed and comprehensive in terms of the functionality and performance of a product have higher chances of being accepted by consumers. This is especially true with high-involvement products such as smartphones, where a consumer wants to get detailed information before making a purchase. The number and quality of reviews can consequently be one of the main drivers of minimizing cognitive dissonance and gaining consumer trust (Ögütçü, 2023).

Social influence on consumer behavior is also a point made by the IAM. The same idea is extended by Wang et al. (2023), who define eWOM as the process of peer-related information adoption, where the information about the product is shaped not only by the product itself but also by the social background of sharing it. This is a very potent social influence, especially in an online setting where reviews serve as a source of social evidence in shaping consumer purchasing behavior by using the experiences and opinions of others. Social media and social media platforms support this social aspect of eWOM since it is easy to create a lot of buzz and engage a large number of people through a review.

Although IAM is an effective framework in explaining the linkage between eWOM and consumer decision-making, the framework has its shortcomings. Critics claim that IAM puts excessive emphasis on mental elements and does not consider emotional and social elements that can also contribute to the adoption of information (Forgas, 1994). As an example, the tone of the review, be it good or bad, may cause an emotional reaction that may not be accurately represented by the IAM's focus on credibility and utility. Review valence and the emotional tone of reviews, as recommended by (Guo et al., 2020) can determine consumer decision-making, even in the context where the information offered is not always the most helpful and credible.

However, IAM is the best theoretical category that can be used to explain the way consumers process and embrace online reviews when purchasing smartphones. It gives a clear prism through which the implications of review properties, including valence, volume, quality, and credibility, can be analyzed, especially when it comes to consumer behavior in emerging markets such as Nigeria. As consumers in states like Abia State are increasingly using online reviews to make their purchasing choices, especially in products that have high risks like smartphones, IAM can provide an excellent model with which to analyze the impacts that online reviews have on consumer trust, perception, and ultimately, purchase intentions.

2.1 Review Valence: The Effect of Positive and Negative Sentiment

Review valence is a good concept that denotes a tone of positive or negative online reviews and how it can greatly affect consumer behavior, especially when buying smartphones. Favorable marketing remarks would work to boost customer confidence and trust, particularly in high involvement products such as smartphones, where the purchase decisions require a considerable amount of investment in finances (Gough & Nurullah, 2009). Social proof is linked with positive sentiment, which can be described as a psychological tendency to choose to act in the way other people do in a belief that one is making the right decision. The effect is especially applicable in markets where a consumer may be unsure of the quality and authenticity of the product in question, since positive reviews would assure the consumer. According to (Furner et al., 2022), positive reviews can boost brand loyalty, and thus, they are a good asset in creating consumer confidence, particularly in new markets.

But there is too much positivity, which produces skepticism. Reviews that seem to be overly positive can be seen as fake, and the consumers will doubt their credibility (Filieri, 2016). The balance between positive and negative reviews is regarded as more legitimate and sincere. Conversely, negative reviews may also have a consumer decision-making effect, but this is more complicated. According to Abedi et al. (2019), the negative reviews tend to get more attention as the consumers are inherently paranoid about making a big purchase. With smartphones, negative ratings can indicate possible problems with the functioning of the product, its quality, or the service, and it can be seen as a deterrent to prospective customers. According to Filieri (2016), negative reviews may destroy the image of a product, but they are also a valuable source and allow consumers to make informed decisions. They may, however, devalue a product when the negative reviews exceed the positive ones and thus reduce the consumer interest. Positive reviews that provide negative feedback but have a solution or context are believed to be useful, and can have a positive influence on consumer behavior (Le & Ha, 2021)

H01: There is a substantial influence of digital review valence on consumer purchase decisions of smartphone brands.

2.2 Review Volume: Effect of Review quantum on consumer confidence.

Another important factor that impacts on consumer decisions is review volume which refers to the number of reviews a product has obtained. According to the wisdom of the crowd theory, the more the reviews a product has, the more reliable it seems because it is viewed as a social approval of a large number of consumers (He & Bond, 2015). This is specifically pronounced in the markets such as smartphones, whereby in making a decision, the process may be overwhelming given the number of options available. The more reviews, the more reliability and popularity, which in turn can decrease the perceived risk of buying a product, particularly in emerging economies where consumers are more skeptical about the authenticity and quality of products (Zhu et al., 2020). Iqbal et

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Volumes of reviews may play an important role in influencing consumers in high-involvement purchases, like smartphones, where consumers do not look at product features and brand equity only but also the amount and type of reviews (Anderson & Simester, 2014). It is more probable that consumers in these markets will use the number of reviews as a gauge of the credibility and trustworthiness of a product to mitigate the perceived risk in a purchase (Akdim, 2021). It is more relevant in low-end markets of smartphones where customers tend to demand more convincing before they can buy. Thus, the role of the review volume in consumer confidence and eliminating the uncertainty in the decision-making process is significant in relation to the decision to buy a smartphone.

H₀₂: The connection between the volume of reviews has a significant impact on consumer buying decisions of smartphones.

2.3 Informativeness of Reviews, Reviews of Depth, Reviews of Detail, and Reviews of Quality.

Reviews are directly related to their quality in terms of the ability to impact consumer decisions. The highly informative reviews that give detailed information about the performance of a product, its features, and advantages are especially persuasive in the high level of involvement products such as smartphones. Casaló et al. (2015) argue that the reviews containing more information can help consumers to evaluate the suitability of the product and the risk levels and decide more wisely, lessening their anxiety levels. These kinds of reviews can be of great importance in markets where consumers are making high-stakes purchases and require a full picture on the capabilities of the product before they make a decision.

Consumers consider reviews that are clear, actionable, and provide comparisons to other products to be particularly helpful (Chen et al., 2022). Quality of the review does not just lie in giving information but also in giving a balanced view, discussing all the positive and negative attributes of the product. This moderate way makes the review more credible and more reliable to consumers. According to Iqbal et al. (2022), informative reviews are most critical in emerging markets where people are generally uncertain about their economies, and their purchases are made based on reviews. The more intensive a review, the higher the probability of influencing consumer behavior because the in-depth reviews will offer the required information to decrease the perceived risk and raise confidence levels in a purchase (Huang et al., 2013)

H₀₃: Digital review quality positively influences the purchase decision of customers of smartphones

2.4 Review Credibility: Review Source Credibility

One of the most important issues that can affect the effects of online reviews on consumer behavior is the credibility of the source of the review. User-generated content is typically viewed as less credible compared to the expert reviews, which are usually perceived as biased and technical and typically agree with the information given by the expert (Xu et al., 2025). Nonetheless, user reviews might remain very weighty, particularly when of reliable origin or from prominent persons. According to Chakraborty (2019), reviews by authoritative bodies, including verified customers or influential commentators, are more likely to be accepted as more credible and therefore tend to affect the decision of the consumer.

According to Firdaus et al. (2023), the presence of a review by a reputable source, either an expert within the industry or a popular influencer, is especially convincing in high-involvement products such as smartphones, where buyers prefer to be informed with the help of a trusted source. Credibility of the source of the review has a direct influence over the consumer trust and this is one of the determinants of purchase intention. (Mallik et al., 2025) argue that consumers tend to use credible sources when making purchases of high-value products, particularly smartphones. In a state with a high level of counterfeits like Abia State, Nigeria, the reliability of online reviews is more essential, and the customers are in need of sound information in order not to fall prey of the dishonest products sold. Therefore, credibility of source of online reviews is an important factor that determines consumer behavior and purchase decisions.

H₀₄: Review credibility significantly influences the relationship between review characteristics and consumer purchase decisions

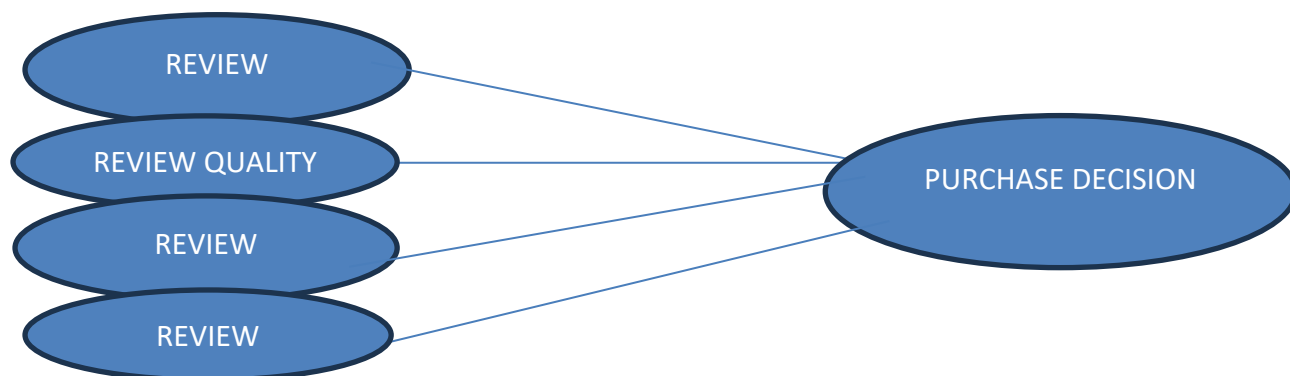


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is a cross-sectional survey research design, since the study design involved a quantitative design. This design was selected because it collects data using structured questionnaires, which will shed light on the prevailing situation of the phenomenon being studied. It is also useful in determining the relationship among variables, as well as in explaining the nature of a large population. Through surveys, the study sought to undertake an investigation into the effect of online reviews on consumer buying behavior, particularly in the case of smartphones among the student population. Both primary and secondary sources were used to collect data. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data based on the research objectives. The questionnaire was structured in a manner that would allow the collection of information about some of the major variables, including quality of reviews, credibility of reviews, volume of reviews, and valence of reviews, which are core in consumer decision-making as relates to online reviews. The secondary data was obtained through literature available in the marketplaces, such as academic journals, textbooks, company websites and other pertinent books in marketing and consumer behavior. This mixture of data sources enabled conducting a thorough analysis of the factors that affect consumer purchasing decisions on the basis of online reviews.

The research tool was a self-report questionnaire, which had a 5-point Likert scale with the 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scales. The scale was employed to assess the attitudes of the respondents towards the important variables. The design of the questionnaire was set in accordance with the literature available to fit the context of the study. The questionnaire has undergone a pre-test on a sample of students before the actual survey to find out its clarity and reliability. The pretest outcomes were used in refining the instrument, making sure that it was effective in measuring the constructs of interest.

The study population was students (third- and fourth-year students) of the Faculty of Economics and Management Science of the Abia State University, Uturu. The reason why this group was selected is that this segment of the population utilizes smartphones at high rates and has an active presence within online platforms meaning that they are the ones that are best suited to be studied with respect to the influence online reviews have on purchase decisions. Students representing four of the departments were used in the study, that is, Marketing, Banking and Finance, Management, and Accountancy since the number of students studying in the online space is large in these departments.

The overall number of students was 647, and the Taro Yamane formula of determining the sample size at a 95 percent confidence level resulted in a sample size of 247 students. Proportional sampling was used in order to make the sample representative of the population. The distribution of questionnaires to each department was done depending on the share of the department in the total number of students. Such an approach made sure that the sample was representative of the distribution of students in the departments. The sampling technique was non-probability sampling, which is convenience sampling, whereby the participants were selected depending on their availability and readiness to take part. There was also a proportional method of sampling to distribute the sample size among the sampled departments. This strategy made the sample represent the student body, and at the same time efficient in data collection. To ensure the instrument's research validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used, with emphasis on convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent and discriminant validates have been evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE), the root of AVE, and correlation coefficients, respectively. These measures were taken to make sure that the measurement items measure the intended constructs and to make sure that the constructs could not be confused with one another. These tests proved that the instrument employed in the research was valid.

The test-retest method was used to test the reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire was also presented to a different subset of the students, and the results obtained were also recorded after two weeks to determine consistency. As well, a calculation of the alpha of Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was done on each construct. The alpha values of Cronbach's alpha were found to be between 0.751 and 0.885 and were considered acceptable, meaning that the instrument was reliable and could generate consistent data.

Online reviews, which were considered in terms of review valence, review quality, review credibility, and review volume, were the main independent variable of the study. These constructs were based on the literature's existence of scales that were modified to measure their effect on the dependent variable that was consumer purchase decisions. Particularly, the research aimed to investigate the effect of these attributes of online reviews on the decision of students to purchase smartphones, including their intention to purchase, their choice of the brand to purchase, their belief in their purchase decision, and their actual purchase decision.

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the key variables. To test the hypotheses, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was employed at a 0.05 significance level.

4. Test of relationships and significance

There is no significant relationship between digital review valence and consumers' purchase decision of smartphones.

H0₁: There is a significant relationship between digital review valence and consumers' purchase decisions of smartphones.

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Test of Hypothesis Two

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H₀: There is no significant relationship between digital review quality and purchase decision of online reviews

H₁: There is a significant relationship between digital review quality and purchase decision of online reviews

Correlations

			Consumer Decision	Purchase	Digital Valence
Spearman's rho	Consumer Decision	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		.843**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		.000
		N	202		202
	Digital Review	Correlation Coefficient	.843**		1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.
		N	202		202
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
		N	202		202

Correlations

			Consumer Decision	Purchase	Digital Review Quality
Spearman's rho	Consumer Decision	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		.750**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		.000
		N	202		202
	Digital Review Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.750**		1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.
		N	202		202
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
		N	202		202

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Result: The tests for the relationship between digital review quality and purchase decision of online reviews of Abia State University students reveals significant results (correlation coefficient = .750; and $P < 0.05$) which indicates a strong level of significant relationship; between digital review quality and purchase decision of online reviews (correlation coefficient = .750; and $P (0.000) < 0.05$).

Decision: The results show that (correlation coefficient = .750; and $P (0.005) < 0.05$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative. This shows that there is a significant relationship between digital review quality and purchase decision of online reviews.

Test of Hypothesis Three

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Review Credibility and consumer Purchase Decision

H₀: There is a significant relationship between Review Credibility and consumer Purchase Decision

Correlations

			Consumer Purchase Decision	Review Credibility
Spearman's rho	Consumer Decision	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.857**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	202	202
	Review Credibility	Correlation Coefficient	.857**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	202	202
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	202	202

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	N	202	202
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Result: The tests for the relationship between Review Credibility and consumer Purchase Decision reveal significant results (correlation coefficient = .857; and $P < 0.05$), which indicates a strong level of significant relationship between Review Credibility and consumer Purchase Decision (correlation coefficient = .857; and $P < 0.05$).

Decision: The results show that (correlation coefficient = .857; and $P < 0.05$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative. This shows that there is a significant relationship between Review Credibility and consumer Purchase Decision.

Test of Hypothesis Four

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between the interaction of Review Volume and Consumer Purchase Decision

H_0 : There is a significant relationship between the interaction of Review Volume and Consumer Purchase Decision

Correlations

			Consumer Purchase Decision	Review Volume
Spearman's rho	Consumer Purchase Decision	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.758**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	202	202
	Review Volume	Correlation Coefficient	.758**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	202	202

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Result: The tests for the relationship between the interaction of Review Volume and Consumer Purchase Decision reveal significant results (correlation coefficient = .758; and $P < 0.05$), which indicates a strong level of significant relationship between the interaction of Review Volume and Consumer Purchase Decision. (correlation coefficient = .758; and $P < 0.05$).

Decision: The results show that (correlation coefficient = .758; and $P < 0.05$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate. This shows that there is a significant relationship between the interaction of Review Volume and Consumer Purchase Decision.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This paper reviewed how online reviews affect the smartphone purchase decision among Abia State University students. The most important conclusions are as follows:

The study showed that the tone of online reviews (review valence) was strongly related to purchasing smartphones. The number of people who claimed to buy smartphones after being motivated by positive reviews was high (84 percent), and those who were discouraged by bad ones was high too (86 percent). This confirms the conclusions of earlier researchers like Hajli (2020) that the valence of reviews is an important factor that affects consumer trust and buying behavior, particularly in products with high involvement, including smartphones.

The quality of the reviews, their informative depth, also played a major role in the purchase decisions. About 80% of the respondents confirmed that detailed reviews, particularly those that set out all details concerning smartphone features and performance, did have an effect on their way of making decisions. It is in line with the studies conducted by Filieri et al. (2021), who state that quality reviews lower the perceived risk and can guide consumers to make wise decisions.

Review credibility was identified to have a significant effect on consumer choices. Other one, a major proportion of the respondents (86) had more trust in reviews done by experts and verified customers than by regular users. The given finding aligns with the previous literature that focused on the significance of authoritative sources to help lessen the perceived risk of buying products that are expensive, like smartphones, as Wang et al. (2022) did.

The number of reviews had a real impact on purchase decisions by consumers. An overall of 81 percent of the respondents indicated that a high number of positive reviews gave them more confidence to buy smartphones. This observation supports the theory of the wisdom of the crowd, which states that the number of reviews indicates the popularity and reliability of a product, as already mentioned by Rachmiani et al. (2024).

5.2 CONCLUSION

This research study indicates that the characteristics of online digital reviews, that is, review valence, quality, credibility, and volume, are the critical factors that can affect the smartphone purchase decisions among university students in Abia State, Nigeria. The results are consistent with the available literature since they demonstrated that positive reviews, authoritative sources, descriptive content, and the number of reviews lead to increased consumer confidence and trust. Moreover, the importance of a review's valence and credibility highlights the fact that people are not interested in only receiving positive feedback but also attach enormous importance to the credibility of the source and authenticity of the reviews.

With the stakes being high when purchasing smartphones, the study identifies the increasing role of the eWOM, especially in the developing markets where economic uncertainty prevails. With a growing reliance on online reviews by consumers to assist them in making their decisions, the study recommends that smartphone producers and online shop web portals should focus on believable and informative reviews to foster consumer trust.

5.3 Practical Implications

This research plays a major role in the current body of literature by supplying empirical data on the topic of online reviews in Abia State, Nigeria, which has a lack of research conducted on it. It builds upon past studies through an investigation of the joint effects of the volume of reviews, their quality, credibility, and valence in consumer buying decisions. The results presented in this research provide a more comprehensive picture of the workings of eWOM in a highly-involved product line such as smartphones, particularly in the emerging markets. The research bridges the knowledge gap on how consumers behave in developing economies and provides insight to learners in the same field as marketers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Manufacturers are supposed to motivate customers to write positive and detailed comments, particularly on a reputable site. Such reviews are useful to establish trust and minimize the perceived risks of buying smartphones, and the Platforms are to prioritize positive and reliable reviews of verified buyers or professionals since they are best perceived by the consumers. To present these reviews better, enhanced filtering systems in reviews can be employed to display these reviews more efficiently, and Consumers should also be encouraged to write detailed and validated reviews, especially those related to high involvement products such as smartphones, which can be used by other buyers in order to make their judgments.

Due to the high power of online reviews, laws should be developed in order to challenge the authenticity and credibility of the reviews to avoid fraudulent and biased information, particularly in volatile markets.

Restrictions and future investigations.

The methodology used in the study of a cross-sectional survey is a weakness since it represents the status of consumer behavior at one time period. Future research can be conducted in a longitudinal design to investigate the relationship between consumer behavior changes over time. The research was also limited in terms of geography as it was restricted to Abia State, Nigeria, and might not be representative of consumer behaviour in other areas of Nigeria and Africa. Another limitation of the study is the absence of causal analysis, which is a result of the cross-sectional nature of the study, as it is not possible to evaluate long-term effects or cause-and-effect relationships between online reviews and the behavior of consumers.

The next step in future studies may be analyzing the role of online reviews in other emerging economies in Africa, including Ghana, Liberia, or Gambia, to compare the cultural and socio-economic provisions on consumer dependence on eWOM. Also, the research can examine the psychology of consumer behavior as a reaction to reviews, especially the effect of the SES of review valence and the effect of credibility on consumer emotions and trust. The other field where future studies can be conducted relates to the contribution multimedia reviews (e.g., video reviews) make to consumer trust and purchase decisions as compared to textual reviews.

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