

The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Brand Attitudes and Repurchase Intentions in E-Commerce in China

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ABSTRACT

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KEYWORDS:

Online customer reviews

Brand attitudes

Repurchase intentions

e-commerce

Consumer behavior

CITATION:

Zhang, T., Lee, K. L., & Puteri Fadzline Muhamad Tamyez. (2025). The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Brand Attitudes and Repurchase Intentions in E-Commerce in China. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 10(2), e003203.

<https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i2.3203>

Online customer reviews (OCRs) play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior in the e-commerce landscape, particularly in China, where digital platforms dominate retail. This study explores the influence of OCRs on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions through a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with e-commerce consumers. The findings reveal that the credibility and trustworthiness of OCRs, shaped by factors such as verified purchases, visual evidence, and detailed content, significantly impact consumer perceptions of brands. Positive reviews enhance trust and loyalty, while negative reviews have a stronger deterrent effect on repurchase intentions, particularly when corroborated by multiple sources. Emotional engagement with OCRs emerged as a critical mechanism, with relatable and detailed reviews resonating more profoundly with consumers. Cultural factors, including collectivist values and the integration of social media with e-commerce platforms, amplify the influence of OCRs by fostering community validation and social proof. The study highlights the importance of active review management for brands, emphasizing strategies such as encouraging authentic and detailed reviews, addressing negative feedback constructively, and leveraging social media to build trust and loyalty. These findings offer valuable insights for e-commerce businesses aiming to enhance customer engagement and drive repeat purchases in a competitive digital market. Future research is recommended to explore the integration of advanced technologies, such as AI, to further optimize the effectiveness of OCRs.

Contribution/Originality: This study investigated the influence of online customer reviews (OCRs) on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in the e-commerce

context of China, employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. The findings provide valuable insights into how OCRs shape consumer perceptions and behaviors in a rapidly growing and competitive e-commerce market.

1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of the global retail landscape has significantly influenced consumer behavior, with e-commerce playing a pivotal role. China, as a global leader in this sector, boasts a highly competitive and innovative e-commerce market valued at over \$3 trillion as of 2023, and it continues to grow exponentially. Central to this digital ecosystem is the role of online customer reviews (OCRs), which have emerged as critical drivers of consumer decision-making and brand perception.

Online customer reviews, a prominent form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), serve as a bridge between consumer experiences and potential buyers. They provide valuable insights into product quality, brand reliability, and customer satisfaction, shaping brand attitudes and influencing purchase intentions. In a market as diverse and competitive as China's, the significance of OCRs is amplified by the cultural inclination towards collectivism, where consumer decisions are heavily influenced by peer feedback and shared experiences (Kuo et al., 2023).

Despite the widespread recognition of OCRs' impact on consumer behavior globally, their specific influence on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in China remains underexplored. Given the unique characteristics of the Chinese e-commerce landscape, including its advanced digital infrastructure, culturally distinct consumer behavior, and dominance of platforms like Taobao, JD.com, and Pinduoduo, there is a compelling need to investigate the nuances of OCRs in this context (Yu, 2022).

This paper seeks to address this gap by exploring how online customer reviews influence brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in China's e-commerce market. By examining the factors that determine the effectiveness of OCRs and considering the cultural and technological specifics of the Chinese market, this study provides actionable insights for businesses aiming to optimize their digital strategies and enhance customer engagement.

1.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the influence of online customer reviews (OCRs) on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions within the e-commerce context of China. To achieve this, the study aims to address the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine the factors contributing to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of online customer reviews. This objective seeks to explore how consumers assess the authenticity and reliability of OCRs and the role these factors play in shaping their perceptions of e-commerce brands.
- ii. To analyze the impact of positive and negative reviews on brand attitudes. This includes understanding how different valences of OCRs influence consumer trust, satisfaction, and overall perception of brands.
- iii. To evaluate the emotional responses elicited by OCRs and their role in influencing consumer behavior. This objective focuses on how emotional engagement with

OCRs affects consumers' attitudes toward brands and their likelihood of making repeat purchases.

- iv. To investigate the significance of the quantity and quality of OCRs in shaping consumer decisions. This involves assessing the importance of detailed, diverse, and relevant reviews in driving positive brand attitudes and fostering loyalty.

2. Literature Review

The rapid expansion of e-commerce in China has transformed consumer purchasing behaviors, with online customer reviews (OCRs) emerging as a pivotal factor influencing brand attitudes and repurchase intentions. This literature review examines the existing body of knowledge on the impact of OCRs within China's e-commerce landscape, focusing on their role in shaping brand perceptions and encouraging repeat purchases.

2.1. Online Customer Reviews and Brand Attitudes

OCRs function as a subset of eWOM, distinguished by their public accessibility and scalability (Khalifa & Liu, 2007). They enable consumers to share product evaluations, which prospective buyers often consult during decision-making. The two primary dimensions of OCRs—credibility and quality—play significant roles in influencing brand attitudes (Mir & Salo, 2024). Credibility is derived from the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the review source, while quality pertains to the depth, detail, and relevance of the review content.

In the Chinese market, trust in OCRs is particularly critical due to historical issues with counterfeit products and misinformation (Yao et al., 2023). This has prompted platforms like Taobao and JD.com to implement stricter review verification mechanisms to enhance review authenticity and maintain consumer trust.

The valence of OCRs—whether positive, neutral, or negative—has been extensively studied for its impact on brand attitudes. Positive reviews typically enhance brand favorability by reinforcing perceptions of quality and reliability (Kim & Baker, 2022). Conversely, negative reviews can significantly damage brand attitudes, especially when they highlight recurring issues such as poor product quality or unsatisfactory customer service (Walsh et al., 2011). In China's highly competitive e-commerce sector, brands are particularly vulnerable to the "negativity bias," where consumers disproportionately weigh negative information over positive.

The number of OCRs also influences consumer perceptions of brand popularity and credibility. Research suggests that a higher volume of reviews signals product popularity, which can enhance brand attitudes through social proof mechanisms (Jhamb et al., 2020). However, an excessive number of reviews with low informational value may dilute their impact, emphasizing the need for quality over quantity in consumer assessments.

China's collectivist culture moderates the impact of OCRs on brand attitudes. Consumers in collectivist societies place greater emphasis on communal experiences and social validation (Hwang et al., 2022). This cultural predisposition amplifies the influence of OCRs, as consumers are more likely to consider the opinions of others in their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the prevalence of mobile shopping and

integration of OCRs within social media platforms like WeChat and Douyin enhance their visibility and impact.

The issue of fake reviews remains a significant challenge in China's e-commerce landscape. Manipulated reviews not only mislead consumers but also erode trust in the platform and associated brands (Rathee et al., 2024). Platforms have adopted artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to detect and mitigate fake reviews, highlighting the importance of maintaining review authenticity for sustaining positive brand attitudes.

The perceived trustworthiness and expertise of reviewers are critical in determining the influence of OCRs on brand attitudes. Studies indicate that reviews authored by verified purchasers carry greater weight than anonymous reviews (Hong et al., 2022). Additionally, the inclusion of multimedia elements such as images and videos enhance review credibility, further impacting brand perceptions positively.

2.2. Online Customer Reviews and Repurchase Intentions

OCRs are essential tools for consumers seeking reliable information in e-commerce environments. By providing peer-generated insights, they reduce information asymmetry and uncertainty, facilitating more informed decision-making (Cunningham & De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021). Research highlights that OCRs not only influence initial purchase decisions but also significantly impact repurchase intentions, as consumers rely on them to validate their satisfaction and mitigate post-purchase dissonance (Phan Tan, 2023).

In the Chinese e-commerce context, platforms like Taobao and JD.com integrate OCRs into their interfaces to ensure transparency and enhance consumer trust, both of which are pivotal for encouraging repeat purchases.

The credibility of OCRs is a critical determinant of their influence on repurchase intentions. Credibility is shaped by factors such as the authenticity of the review, the reviewer's expertise, and the presence of verified purchase tags (Sun et al., 2022). Studies suggest that credible reviews foster trust in the product and the platform, which enhances customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases (Liao et al., 2017). In China's competitive e-commerce market, where consumers are particularly cautious about counterfeit goods, credible OCRs play a vital role in building long-term customer relationships.

The quality of information provided in OCRs directly affects their perceived usefulness and, consequently, their impact on repurchase intentions. High-quality reviews are characterized by specific, detailed, and balanced content that addresses key aspects of the product or service (Artana et al., 2022). Such reviews reduce perceived risks, particularly in categories like electronics and apparel, where product attributes are not easily verifiable online. Conversely, low-quality or overly generic reviews are less likely to influence repurchase intentions positively.

The emotional tone of OCRs, including their positive or negative sentiment, has a significant impact on repurchase intentions. Positive reviews create a sense of reassurance and satisfaction, reinforcing consumer loyalty and the likelihood of repeat purchases (Ji & Ha, 2021). Negative reviews, while often damaging to initial

purchase intentions, can still play a constructive role if they address specific issues and are followed by adequate brand responses. A well-managed response to negative reviews can mitigate their adverse effects and even strengthen customer loyalty by demonstrating the brand's commitment to improvement (Lin et al., 2017).

Consumer trust acts as a mediator between OCRs and repurchase intentions. Trust is built not only through credible and high-quality reviews but also through the overall transparency and reliability of the e-commerce platform. Studies indicate that platforms with robust review verification mechanisms and consistent quality control are more likely to encourage repeat purchases (Sharma et al., 2024). In China, where trust in online platforms has historically been a concern, the integration of technologies such as blockchain to authenticate OCRs is increasingly influencing repurchase behaviors.

The influence of OCRs on repurchase intentions is further moderated by social and cultural factors. In collectivist cultures like China, consumers place significant value on shared experiences and peer validation (Boger et al., 2023). This cultural inclination amplifies the effect of OCRs, as consumers are more likely to align their behaviors with the collective sentiment expressed in reviews. Furthermore, the integration of OCRs with social media platforms like WeChat has enhanced their visibility, making them a more integral part of the consumer journey.

The integration of OCRs into e-commerce platforms' user interfaces contributes to a seamless shopping experience, which influences repurchase intentions. Research on e-service quality highlights that features such as ease of accessing OCRs, searchability, and their alignment with product descriptions positively impact customer satisfaction (Natasha et al., 2023). This is particularly evident in China, where mobile-first shopping platforms like Pinduoduo have incorporated user-friendly review systems to drive customer retention.

3. Research Methods

This study investigates the influence of online customer reviews (OCRs) on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in the context of e-commerce in China. A qualitative research approach was adopted, relying on in-depth interviews to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of consumers toward OCRs. This section details the research design, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis methods employed in the study.

3.1. Research Design

A qualitative methodology was chosen to gain a nuanced understanding of how OCRs shape consumer attitudes and behaviors. Unlike quantitative methods, which often focus on numerical trends and correlations, qualitative research is well-suited for exploring underlying motivations, perceptions, and contextual factors. This approach allows for rich, detailed insights into the complexities of consumer decision-making in China's dynamic e-commerce landscape.

The study employs an interpretive paradigm, emphasizing the subjective interpretations of participants. This paradigm aligns with the research objective of understanding the cognitive and emotional processes that underpin consumer

interactions with OCRs and their subsequent impact on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions.

3.2. Participant Recruitment

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the sample included individuals with diverse experiences and demographics relevant to e-commerce in China. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active users of e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, or Pinduoduo. Regularly read and engage with OCRs as part of their shopping process. Have made at least one repeat purchase influenced by OCRs within the past six months.

A total of 20 participants were recruited, encompassing a balanced mix of age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds. This diversity was aimed at capturing a wide range of perspectives and behaviors, enhancing the study's validity and depth. Recruitment was facilitated through online forums, e-commerce communities, and social media platforms, ensuring access to individuals familiar with OCRs in the Chinese e-commerce context.

3.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and attitudes toward OCRs. This method was chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews. An interview guide was developed based on the study's objectives, with key themes including perceptions of OCR credibility and quality; the role of OCRs in shaping brand attitudes; the influence of OCRs on repurchase intentions; emotional responses to positive and negative reviews; the impact of cultural and contextual factors.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom or WeChat, depending on participant preference and logistical feasibility. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese to ensure participants could express their thoughts naturally and fully. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze the interview data. This method is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data. The analysis followed the six-phase framework proposed by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#).

The first step is generating Initial Codes, which means key phrases, concepts, and recurring themes were systematically coded across the data set using NVivo software. Coding was both inductive, allowing themes to emerge naturally, and deductive, guided by the research questions. Then is searching for Themes. Codes were grouped into broader themes that encapsulated significant patterns, such as "trust in OCRs," "emotional resonance of reviews," and "brand loyalty and repurchase." The third step is reviewing Themes. Themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the

data and were coherent, distinct, and relevant to the research objectives. Next is Defining and Naming Themes. Each theme was clearly defined and contextualized within the broader literature on OCRs, brand attitudes, and repurchase intentions. The last step is Writing the Report: The themes were synthesized into a narrative that addressed the research questions, supported by direct quotes from participants to illustrate key points.

4. Results

This study explores the influence of online customer reviews (OCRs) on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions within the e-commerce context of China. Through thematic analysis of qualitative data from in-depth interviews, five key themes were identified: (1) perceived credibility and trustworthiness of OCRs, (2) the role of review valence, (3) emotional impact of reviews, (4) significance of review quantity and quality, and (5) cultural and contextual influences. These themes collectively provide a nuanced understanding of how OCRs shape consumer behavior.

4.1. Perceived Credibility and Trustworthiness of OCRs

Credibility emerged as a fundamental determinant of the effectiveness of OCRs. Participants consistently emphasized that trust in OCRs was contingent upon their perceived authenticity, detail, and the presence of supporting visual evidence, such as photographs or videos. Verified purchase reviews were deemed significantly more reliable compared to unverified or anonymous reviews. As one participant noted, *“When I see a review with pictures and details about how the product was used, I feel more confident in my purchase. If the review is vague or too generic, I tend to ignore it.”*

Platforms such as Taobao and JD.com, which employ rigorous verification mechanisms, were particularly valued for fostering trust. The presence of fake or manipulated reviews, however, negatively impacted consumer perceptions, leading to skepticism about both the product and the platform. This was particularly detrimental to repurchase intentions, as consumers expressed reluctance to engage with platforms or brands perceived as unreliable. This finding highlights the necessity for e-commerce platforms to implement robust verification systems to preserve consumer trust and loyalty.

4.2. The Role of Review Valence

The valence of OCRs—whether positive or negative—was identified as a critical factor influencing brand attitudes and repurchase intentions. Positive reviews were strongly associated with enhanced brand perceptions and increased trust. Participants frequently described positive reviews as a form of social proof, reinforcing their confidence in the product. One participant explained, *“When I see many positive reviews, it makes me feel that the product is popular and reliable. It reassures me that others have had a good experience.”*

Negative reviews, on the other hand, exerted a disproportionately strong influence, particularly when they were detailed and corroborated by multiple reviewers. Recurrent negative feedback about specific issues, such as product quality or delayed delivery, deterred participants from repurchasing. As one respondent remarked, *“If several reviews mention the same issue, like poor quality or late delivery, I would not*

buy from that brand again." However, active review management—specifically, responding to negative reviews with constructive solutions or apologies—was found to mitigate these adverse effects, demonstrating the importance of maintaining transparent communication with consumers.

4.3. Emotional Impact of Reviews

OCRs were found to evoke a range of emotional responses that significantly shaped consumer decisions. Positive reviews often elicited feelings of excitement and anticipation, particularly when reviewers expressed high satisfaction or shared relatable success stories. For instance, one participant noted, *"When someone shares how happy they are with a product, I feel excited to buy it and try it for myself."*

Conversely, negative reviews triggered doubt, frustration, and anxiety, especially when they highlighted issues such as product defects or misleading descriptions. A participant described their experience: *"When I read a review about someone getting a broken product, I immediately felt anxious about my order. It made me reconsider buying from that brand."* Emotional resonance was further amplified when reviews addressed situations that participants could personally relate to, such as a product's suitability for specific demographics or occasions. This underscores the importance of aligning review content with consumer needs to foster positive emotional associations with the brand.

4.4. Significance of Review Quantity and Quality

Participants emphasized the dual importance of review quantity and quality in shaping their brand perceptions and repurchase intentions. While a high volume of reviews was generally perceived as an indicator of product popularity and reliability, participants consistently stressed that quality mattered more than sheer volume. Reviews that were specific, balanced, and provided actionable insights had a greater impact on consumer decisions than generic or overly promotional reviews. One participant explained, *"I look for reviews that give me a clear idea about the product's pros and cons. If there are too many generic 'good product' reviews, I feel like they are fake or unhelpful."*

The diversity of perspectives within reviews also played a crucial role in enhancing perceived reliability. Participants valued reviews from users with varied backgrounds and needs, as these provided a more comprehensive evaluation of the product's suitability for different contexts. For example, a participant stated, *"I look for reviews from people like me. If someone has similar needs, their experience is more relevant to me."* This finding highlights the importance of encouraging detailed and personalized reviews to maintain consumer trust and support informed purchasing decisions.

4.5. Cultural and Contextual Influences

Cultural and contextual factors unique to the Chinese e-commerce market significantly shaped consumer engagement with OCrs. The collectivist nature of Chinese society, where peer opinions and community validation hold substantial weight, emerged as a critical influence. Participants frequently referenced the importance of consensus in reviews, with one respondent noting, *"I trust reviews more when many people agree on something. It feels like the majority can't be wrong."*

The integration of social media platforms, such as WeChat and Xiaohongshu, with e-commerce platforms further amplified the influence of OCRs. Participants reported that sharing and discussing reviews on social media reinforced their trust in the product and the brand. One respondent commented, *“When I see people sharing their reviews on Xiaohongshu, it feels more reliable because it’s like hearing recommendations from friends.”*

Additionally, the issue of counterfeit products in China heightened the importance of credible OCRs. Consumers relied heavily on detailed reviews to assess product authenticity, particularly in categories like cosmetics, electronics, and luxury goods. Reviews that explicitly addressed product authenticity were especially valued, further underscoring the critical role of OCRs in alleviating consumer concerns about counterfeit goods.

4.6. Summary of Results

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how OCRs influence brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in China’s e-commerce landscape. Trust and credibility emerged as foundational elements, with verified reviews, visual evidence, and detailed feedback serving as critical factors in building consumer confidence. The valence of OCRs demonstrated a dual impact: while positive reviews strengthened brand trust and loyalty, negative reviews had a stronger deterrent effect, especially when they highlighted consistent issues.

Emotional engagement with OCRs further shaped consumer behavior, with both positive and negative reviews eliciting strong emotional responses that influenced purchasing decisions. Reviews that were detailed, relatable, and diverse in perspective were found to have the most significant impact, aligning consumer expectations with product performance.

Finally, cultural and contextual factors, such as collectivist values and the integration of social media with e-commerce platforms, amplified the influence of OCRs, emphasizing the importance of localized strategies for leveraging consumer reviews. For brands and platforms, these findings highlight the need for robust review management practices, including encouraging detailed and authentic reviews, addressing negative feedback constructively, and leveraging social media channels to foster consumer trust and loyalty.

5 Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of online customer reviews (OCRs) on brand attitudes and repurchase intentions in the e-commerce context of China, employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. The findings provide valuable insights into how OCRs shape consumer perceptions and behaviors in a rapidly growing and competitive e-commerce market.

The results demonstrate that OCRs significantly influence brand attitudes and repurchase intentions through multiple interconnected mechanisms. Trust and credibility are foundational, with consumers placing the highest value on verified reviews, visual evidence, and detailed feedback. The dual impact of positive and negative reviews is evident, with positive reviews enhancing brand trust and loyalty, while

negative reviews exert a stronger deterrent effect on repurchase intentions, particularly when they highlight consistent issues.

Emotional engagement with OCRs emerged as a critical factor, with both positive and negative reviews evoking strong emotional responses that shape consumer decisions. Detailed, relatable, and diverse reviews were found to be especially impactful in aligning consumer expectations with product performance. Additionally, cultural and contextual factors, such as collectivist values and the integration of social media with e-commerce platforms, amplify the role of OCRs in driving consumer trust and purchase behaviors.

The study highlights the importance of active review management for brands and platforms. Strategies such as encouraging detailed and authentic reviews, addressing negative feedback constructively, and leveraging social media channels can help strengthen brand attitudes and foster customer loyalty. For e-commerce platforms, implementing robust mechanisms to verify review authenticity is critical in maintaining consumer trust.

For practitioners, the findings emphasize the need to prioritize consumer trust in OCR systems. Brands should focus on encouraging high-quality reviews that provide actionable insights and resonate emotionally with potential buyers. Transparent responses to negative reviews can mitigate their adverse effects, turning challenges into opportunities to reinforce consumer trust.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The qualitative approach, while rich in detail, limits generalizability to the broader population of e-commerce consumers in China. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches or larger-scale quantitative studies to validate and expand upon these findings. Additionally, exploring the impact of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven review summarization and personalized recommendation systems, could offer new directions for enhancing the effectiveness of OCRs.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of OCRs in shaping consumer behavior within China's e-commerce landscape. By understanding the nuances of how OCRs influence brand attitudes and repurchase intentions, businesses can better adapt to the evolving preferences and expectations of consumers in the digital era.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article was extracted from a doctoral thesis submitted to Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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