

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE PRODUCT REVIEWS ON PURCHASE DECISIONS IN E-COMMERCE

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Abstract

Research purpose:

This study investigates the influence of online product reviews on consumer purchase decisions in Vietnam's emerging e-commerce market. Specifically, it examines four review attributes—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence (negative reviews)—to assess their role in shaping consumer behavior.

Research motivation:

While prior research consistently highlights the positive role of online reviews in driving purchase intentions, much evidence comes from developed economies. Emerging markets, such as Vietnam, face unique challenges, including weaker consumer trust and concerns about review authenticity. This raises the need to evaluate whether traditional review attributes carry the same weight in influencing consumer behavior in such contexts.

Research design, approach, and method:

The study employs a quantitative survey design, collecting data from 220 Vietnamese online shoppers. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and multiple regression analysis was applied to test the hypothesized relationships between review attributes and purchase decisions.

Main findings:

The results reveal that none of the four review attributes significantly predict purchase decisions in the Vietnamese context. While review usefulness and credibility show small positive associations, review volume and negative reviews exert negligible effects. Overall, the explanatory power of the model remains limited, suggesting that other contextual factors may shape consumer decisions more strongly.

Practical/managerial implications:

For e-commerce platforms, these findings highlight the need to enhance review credibility and usefulness through verified purchase tags, detailed feedback prompts, and stricter moderation policies. For academics, the study underscores the importance of incorporating contextual variables such as platform trust, product type, and cultural dynamics when analyzing the role of reviews in emerging markets.

Keywords: Online reviews, purchase decision, e-commerce, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has become one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide, transforming how consumers search for, evaluate, and purchase products. A central feature of this transformation is the role of online product reviews, which serve as digital word-of-mouth and provide valuable signals regarding product quality and seller credibility (Chen et al., 2021). In markets where consumers cannot physically inspect goods before purchase, such reviews are often considered essential for reducing uncertainty and guiding decision-making (Filiberti et al., 2021).

Despite the central role of reviews in consumer decision-making, existing research reveals significant limitations. Much of the evidence on the effects of reviews has been generated in developed economies, such as the United States, or rapidly digitized markets, such as China (Tsekouras et al., 2022). These studies consistently find that review characteristics—credibility, usefulness, valence, and volume—influence consumers' purchase intentions. However, far less is known

about how these factors operate in emerging markets like Vietnam, where rapid digital adoption coexists with persistent concerns about online trust, fake reviews, and seller opportunism (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023). The Vietnamese context is distinct because consumer reliance on informal networks, cultural skepticism toward anonymous information, and the prevalence of counterfeit products may dilute or alter the expected effects of reviews. This presents a critical research gap: do widely studied review attributes exert the same influence in Vietnam's e-commerce sector, or are alternative drivers shaping purchase behavior? While prior research in Vietnam has examined the influence of online product reviews on consumer behavior, most studies have been exploratory, focusing primarily on general perceptions of online reviews or consumer trust in e-commerce platforms. These studies often relied on small-scale surveys or descriptive analyses and did not systematically investigate the relative importance of different review attributes such as credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence. Furthermore, few studies have contextualized their analyses within the rapidly expanding Vietnamese e-commerce market, where consumer behavior is shaped by local cultural norms, rising digital adoption, and the dominance of specific platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Tiki.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine the influence of review credibility, usefulness, volume, and negativity on purchase decisions in Vietnam's e-commerce market. Specifically, it investigates whether these four review attributes, well established in global research (Vasal et al., 2021), significantly predict consumer behavior in this local context. The study employs a quantitative design, combining survey data with statistical techniques to test four hypotheses. In doing so, it not only evaluates the transferability of established models but also identifies their limitations in explaining consumer decision-making in Vietnam.

This study makes two key contributions. Theoretically, it expands the literature on online consumer behavior and e-commerce by examining whether dominant models of review influence—primarily developed in Western and Chinese markets—apply to a transitional economy characterized by lower levels of institutional trust.

It therefore contributes to cross-cultural consumer research and helps refine theories of information adoption by integrating the role of context and trust dynamics. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for e-commerce platforms, online retailers, and policymakers in Vietnam. For platforms, the results can guide strategies for building credibility signals (e.g., verified buyer tags, AI-based review filtering, or partnerships with trusted influencers). For businesses, understanding the limited or differential effects of reviews can inform marketing investments and customer engagement strategies. For regulators, the findings underscore the need to strengthen consumer protection frameworks around transparency and fake reviews.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to Online Reviews and E-Commerce

The rapid growth of e-commerce has fundamentally transformed how consumers search for, evaluate, and purchase products. In the absence of physical inspection and face-to-face interaction, online shoppers increasingly rely on product reviews to reduce uncertainty and guide their purchase decisions. These reviews constitute a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), where consumers share experiences and opinions that significantly influence the attitudes and behaviors of prospective buyers (Filieri et al., 2021). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, online reviews are accessible at scale, searchable across platforms, and often accompanied by credibility markers such as verified purchase tags or reviewer profiles, making them an integral part of the digital shopping experience (Vasal et al., 2021).

The significance of online reviews in e-commerce extends beyond influencing consumer decision-making; they also serve as crucial trust-building mechanisms in environments characterized by high information asymmetry between sellers and buyers. In emerging markets, where concerns about product authenticity, fraud, and unreliable sellers remain widespread, reviews act as signals of quality and reliability that can either reassure or deter potential buyers (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023). Simultaneously, the widespread accessibility of review platforms leads to information overload, where both genuine and deceptive reviews vie for consumer attention. These dynamics highlight the importance of understanding how consumers interpret and respond to reviews across different cultural and institutional contexts (Tsekouras et al., 2022).

As e-commerce continues to expand rapidly, particularly in emerging economies such as Vietnam, online product reviews serve a dual role: they empower consumers to make informed decisions and shape market dynamics by rewarding firms with strong reputations while penalizing those with negative feedback. Given this central role, a deeper understanding of how reviews influence consumer behavior across different contexts is essential for advancing both academic theory and managerial practice.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

Understanding the role of online product reviews in shaping purchase decisions requires a foundation in established theories of consumer behavior and information processing. One of the most widely applied frameworks is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which explains how individuals process persuasive information through either a central or peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the context of e-commerce, the central route involves a careful evaluation of review content—such as its credibility and usefulness—while the peripheral route relies on cues like review volume or star ratings. Recent research confirms that both routes are influential, but their relative importance may vary across cultures and product categories (Cheung et al., 2020; Filieri, 2020).

Another relevant framework is the Information Adoption Model (IAM), which builds on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and posits that information usefulness and credibility are the primary determinants of whether consumers

adopt online information in their decision-making. In e-commerce, this implies that reviews perceived as trustworthy and helpful are more likely to influence purchasing behavior (Zhang et al., 2022). Recent extensions of IAM emphasize the importance of context; for example, consumers in emerging markets may place greater weight on credibility cues due to lower institutional trust (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023).

A complementary perspective is offered by signaling theory, which considers online reviews as market signals that reduce information asymmetry between buyers and sellers (Spence, 1973). Reviews serve as social indicators of product quality: a high volume of positive feedback can reassure buyers, whereas negative reviews may act as warning signs. Recent studies expand on this argument by demonstrating that fake reviews undermine the signaling value of online platforms, eroding consumer trust and distorting decision-making (Tsekouras et al., 2022).

Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for examining how review characteristics—credibility, usefulness, volume, and negativity—influence purchase decisions. By integrating insights from information processing models (ELM and IAM) with market signaling perspectives, this study positions online reviews as both cognitive inputs and social signals in consumer decision-making. This dual perspective is especially valuable in emerging markets, where consumer skepticism and trust dynamics can amplify or diminish the anticipated effects of reviews.

2.3. Key review attributes studied in literature

2.3.1. Review Credibility and Consumer Trust

Review credibility is one of the most consistently studied factors influencing the effectiveness of online reviews. It is often defined as the extent to which review information is perceived as trustworthy, accurate, and unbiased (Filieri, 2020). In digital commerce, where consumers cannot physically inspect products, credible reviews serve as substitutes for direct experience, reducing uncertainty and fostering trust.

Empirical studies provide strong evidence of its importance across various contexts. For instance, Filieri (2020), using a survey of 421 UK travelers, found that credibility cues—such as detailed, balanced reviews and verified reviewer identities—significantly increased consumers' trust and purchase intention. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) surveyed 589 Chinese online shoppers and applied structural equation modeling (SEM) to demonstrate that review credibility, along with information usefulness, was the strongest predictor of purchase intention. These findings suggest that credibility is a universal driver, transcending service and product categories.

Research has also examined how platform design features enhance credibility. Gupta and Banerjee (2021) conducted an experimental study with 312 Indian participants and found that credibility badges (e.g., “verified buyer”) and AI-based filters for fake reviews increased perceptions of trustworthiness and usefulness, resulting in a greater willingness to purchase. This underscores the role of technological interventions in shaping credibility perceptions.

On the other hand, credibility can be undermined by the presence of fake or manipulated reviews. A systematic review by Tsekouras et al. (2022), synthesizing over 100 global studies, concluded that fake reviews reduce overall consumer trust in platforms and distort decision-making. This problem is particularly acute in emerging markets where institutional safeguards are weaker. For example, Nguyen and Khoa (2023), surveying Vietnamese online consumers, found that perceived review credibility was a decisive factor influencing purchase intention, given widespread concerns about counterfeit products and unreliable sellers in the local market.

2.3.2. Review Usefulness and Purchase Intention

Another critical dimension of online reviews is their perceived usefulness, often defined as the extent to which consumers believe a review helps them evaluate products and make informed decisions (Filieri et al., 2021). Unlike credibility, which focuses on trustworthiness, usefulness reflects the practical value of the information contained in reviews. Reviews that are detailed, relevant, and well-structured are more likely to be perceived as useful and, in turn, influence consumer purchase intentions.

Empirical evidence strongly supports the role of perceived usefulness in e-commerce decision-making. Filieri et al. (2021), using a survey of 452 international air travelers and applying structural equation modeling (SEM), found that the perceived usefulness of reviews significantly predicted both trust in online platforms and the intention to book services. Their findings highlight that perceived usefulness serves as a cognitive shortcut, enabling consumers to process large amounts of information efficiently. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022), in a study of 589 Chinese consumers, confirmed that perceived usefulness mediates the relationship between review credibility and purchase intention, indicating that credibility alone is insufficient—consumers must also find the information practically helpful.

Other studies have examined specific features that influence perceptions of usefulness. Cheung et al. (2020), surveying 417 consumers in Brazil, found that reviews perceived as balanced, detailed, and relevant to the product category were rated as more useful. Their results also indicated that longer reviews containing concrete examples increased engagement, whereas overly short or excessively positive reviews were often dismissed as less useful. In a different context, Gupta and Banerjee (2021), conducting an experiment with 312 Indian participants, demonstrated that reviews framed with product comparisons and experiential details were rated significantly higher in usefulness, which led to stronger purchase intentions.

The challenge of fake or low-quality reviews has been shown to undermine their usefulness. Tsekouras et al. (2022), in a systematic review of over 100 global studies, concluded that manipulated reviews dilute the perceived helpfulness of genuine ones, causing consumers to rely more heavily on platform cues (e.g., “most helpful review” tags). This issue is particularly relevant in emerging economies such as Vietnam, where Nguyen and Khoa (2023), using survey data from

Vietnamese consumers, found that usefulness was a stronger predictor of purchase intention than volume or valence. This is largely because consumers depend on detailed information to mitigate risks associated with counterfeit or low-quality products.

2.3.3. Review Volume and Product Popularity

Review volume, typically measured by the total number of product reviews available on an e-commerce platform, serves as a quantitative indicator of product popularity and reliability. From the perspective of signaling theory, a higher volume of reviews reflects widespread consumer engagement, which reduces uncertainty and reassures prospective buyers (Cheung et al., 2020). However, the strength of this effect may vary depending on the context, product type, and consumers' susceptibility to information overload.

Recent empirical evidence highlights the significant role of review volume in influencing purchase intentions. Vasal et al. (2021), in their systematic literature review of 129 studies, found consistent evidence that a larger volume of reviews enhances consumer trust, increases perceived product quality, and positively impacts sales. However, their synthesis also noted that this relationship is not linear: beyond a certain threshold, additional reviews provide little incremental value. Similarly, Zhu and Tan (2020), analyzing a large dataset of 1,200 products on a Chinese e-commerce platform, applied panel regression analysis and confirmed that review volume significantly boosts product sales, particularly for experience goods, while its effect diminishes for search goods, where objective attributes are easier to evaluate.

Experimental and survey-based evidence provides additional nuance. Cheung et al. (2020), surveying 417 Brazilian online shoppers, demonstrated that a high volume of reviews increased perceptions of product popularity, which in turn influenced purchase intention. However, they also found that an excessive number of reviews sometimes caused information overload, reducing consumers' ability to process content effectively. In a different context, Kim et al. (2021) experimented with 356 South Korean consumers, showing that review volume interacted with review valence: a high volume of negative reviews strongly deterred purchases, while a high volume of positive reviews increased purchase likelihood, albeit with diminishing marginal effects.

Emerging market studies present a slightly different perspective. Nguyen and Khoa (2023), using survey data from 380 Vietnamese consumers, found that review volume had a weaker effect compared to credibility and usefulness. Their regression analysis suggested that consumers in Vietnam rely more heavily on detailed and trustworthy reviews than on sheer quantity, likely due to skepticism about fake or manipulated reviews inflating volume counts. This highlights the importance of contextualizing review volume: while it serves as a strong popularity signal in many markets, its effectiveness may be moderated by cultural attitudes toward trust and authenticity.

2.3.4. Review Valence (Negativity vs Positivity)

Review valence refers to the direction of opinions expressed in online reviews—positive, neutral, or negative—and has long been considered one of the most influential factors in consumer decision-making. Research based on negativity bias theory suggests that negative reviews often carry more weight than positive ones, as consumers perceive them as stronger indicators of potential product or service risks (Baumeister et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2021). In the e-commerce environment, where uncertainty is high, the relative balance of positive and negative reviews can directly influence consumer trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions.

Empirical studies provide robust support for this claim. Kim et al. (2021), in an experiment involving 356 South Korean consumers, demonstrated that negative reviews exert a disproportionately stronger deterrent effect on purchase intention compared to the positive influence of favorable reviews. Their findings also revealed that the impact of negative valence was amplified when the volume of reviews was high, indicating an interaction between these two factors. Similarly, Ismagilova et al. (2020), in a meta-analysis of 44 studies conducted across multiple countries, confirmed that although both positive and negative reviews influence consumer perceptions and sales outcomes, the effect of negative valence is consistently stronger across industries.

Other studies have examined the conditions under which positive valence exerts stronger effects. For example, Filieri et al. (2021), in a study of 402 Italian consumers using structural equation modeling (SEM), found that positive reviews significantly enhanced purchase intention for hedonic products, such as fashion items. However, this effect was weaker for utilitarian products, where consumers prioritized credibility and detail over positivity. Similarly, Chen et al. (2021), analyzing review data from U.S. e-commerce platforms, found that positive valence most strongly boosted sales for lesser-known brands, where positive signals helped overcome low brand recognition.

The influence of valence is also shaped by cultural and market contexts. In emerging economies, where consumer trust in online markets may be fragile, negative reviews often serve as stronger deterrents. Nguyen and Khoa (2023), surveying 380 Vietnamese online shoppers, found that while positive reviews increased purchase intention, negative reviews carried significantly more weight—particularly for high-value or riskier products such as electronics. Their results suggest that in Vietnam, consumers place great importance on avoiding losses in online transactions, which amplifies the impact of negative valence.

2.4. Literature on Emerging Markets & Vietnam

While much of the literature on online product reviews originates from developed economies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on emerging markets. These contexts are especially valuable for study because they exhibit rapid e-commerce growth alongside challenges such as low institutional trust, counterfeit products, and infrastructural limitations. Consumers in these markets often interact with online reviews

differently, making it essential to examine their unique dynamics.

Studies in emerging markets emphasize that trust and credibility are central concerns. For example, Erkan and Evans (2018), surveying Turkish consumers, found that trust mediated the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and purchase intention, highlighting that reviews were effective only when consumers perceived them as credible. Similarly, Alam et al. (2021), in a study of 480 Pakistani e-commerce users employing structural equation modeling (SEM), demonstrated that review credibility and usefulness strongly predicted purchase intention, while cultural tendencies toward risk aversion increased the impact of negative reviews.

In Southeast Asia, where e-commerce adoption is among the fastest-growing globally, similar trends have emerged. Li and Yang (2019), in a survey of 600 Indonesian online shoppers, reported that review volume positively influenced purchase decisions—but only when reviews included credibility cues—suggesting that consumers were wary of inflated numbers. In Malaysia, Rahman, Khan, and Alam (2020) found that review valence significantly shaped purchase intention, with negative reviews exerting greater influence due to consumer skepticism about product authenticity.

Focusing specifically on Vietnam, e-commerce has experienced exponential growth, driven by platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Tiki. However, consumer behavior continues to be influenced by low trust in sellers and widespread concerns about counterfeit goods (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023). In a survey of 380 Vietnamese consumers, Nguyen and Khoa (2023) found that the credibility and usefulness of reviews were the strongest predictors of purchase intention, whereas the volume of reviews had only a weak effect. This suggests that consumers prioritize the quality and authenticity of reviews over their quantity, reflecting a cultural emphasis on cautious decision-making. Similarly, Tran and Nguyen (2022), through qualitative interviews with 30 Vietnamese online shoppers, discovered that participants heavily relied on detailed reviews and reviewer identity cues (e.g., verified purchase status) to mitigate perceived risk.

Other studies highlight the significant impact of negative reviews in Vietnam. Vu and Ha (2021), in a study involving 260 Vietnamese consumers analyzed using regression models, found that even a small number of negative reviews substantially decreased purchase intention, especially for high-risk categories such as electronics and cosmetics. This underscores the heightened sensitivity of Vietnamese consumers to potential losses in online transactions, aligning with broader findings in emerging economies.

The literature suggests that although global models of review influence—such as credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence—are broadly applicable, their relative effects vary in emerging markets like Vietnam.

2.5. Research gap

Although the literature on online product reviews has expanded significantly in recent years, several important gaps remain, warranting further research—particularly in emerging markets such as Vietnam.

First, much of the existing scholarship has been conducted in developed economies, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, where institutional trust in online platforms is higher and consumer protection mechanisms are more established (Filieri, 2020; Chen et al., 2021). In contrast, studies in emerging economies remain limited, despite these regions experiencing the fastest growth in e-commerce adoption (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023). This geographic imbalance restricts the generalizability of existing findings and overlooks how institutional weaknesses, counterfeit risks, and cultural differences in risk aversion may influence the impact of online reviews.

Moreover, while prior studies have examined key review attributes—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence—most treat these factors in isolation rather than considering their interactions. Recent research shows, for example, that review volume amplifies the effect of valence (Kim et al., 2021), while credibility can enhance perceptions of usefulness (Zhang et al., 2022). However, systematic exploration of these combined effects remains limited, particularly in emerging markets where consumer skepticism may alter the relative importance of different cues.

Next, there is a limited understanding of the relative importance of review attributes in shaping consumer decisions across different cultural contexts. Evidence from Vietnam suggests that credibility and usefulness are more influential than volume, reflecting consumers' heightened concern with authenticity and detail (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2022). However, most global models continue to assume a uniform hierarchy of attributes. This gap underscores the need for context-specific research that re-examines the assumptions of Western-centric frameworks in markets where consumer trust is fragile.

Finally, most studies rely on either survey or experimental methods, often using student samples or focusing on narrow product categories (Filieri et al., 2021; Gupta & Banerjee, 2021). While these approaches offer valuable insights, they may lack ecological validity when applied to real-world e-commerce transactions. More comprehensive approaches that combine multiple datasets (e.g., platform data with consumer surveys) are necessary to capture the complexity of online decision-making in dynamic markets such as Vietnam.

The current literature leaves several key questions unanswered: How do review attributes collectively influence purchase intention in low-trust environments? Do consumers in emerging markets place greater emphasis on review credibility and usefulness than on volume or valence? Additionally, which methodological approaches are most effective in capturing these dynamics? Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more context-sensitive understanding of online reviews—one that advances theoretical knowledge while providing practical guidance for firms operating in fast-growing yet institutionally fragile e-commerce markets.

2.6. Hypotheses Development

The preceding review has demonstrated that online product reviews play a pivotal role in shaping consumer decision-

making; however, their influence is not uniform across different markets. While attributes such as credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence are widely recognized as critical, much of the evidence originates from developed economies with mature institutional safeguards (Filieri, 2020; Chen et al., 2021). In emerging markets such as Vietnam, where consumer trust is fragile and concerns about counterfeits are prevalent, review attributes may carry different weights, and their combined effects remain underexplored (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2022).

Building on this gap, the present study investigates how four review attributes—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence—shape purchase intentions in Vietnam's rapidly growing e-commerce market. This focus addresses calls for more context-sensitive research that examines consumer behavior in low-trust environments (Alam et al., 2021). Furthermore, it advances prior studies by analyzing the relative and comparative importance of these review attributes, rather than examining them in isolation.

Credibility is a cornerstone of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) because it determines whether consumers perceive online reviews as reliable, authentic, and worthy of consideration in their decision-making process. In e-commerce settings, particularly in emerging markets such as Vietnam, consumers often face information asymmetry, where sellers possess more product knowledge than buyers. Under these conditions, review credibility becomes a crucial mechanism for reducing uncertainty and perceived risk. Credible reviews—those that are detailed, balanced, and provided by identifiable or verified reviewers—signal trustworthiness and enable consumers to make more confident judgments about products (Filieri et al., 2021).

Recent evidence highlights that credibility not only shapes attitudes toward reviews but also directly influences consumers' behavioral intentions, such as their willingness to purchase. Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrate that credible reviews increase consumers' reliance on online platforms by strengthening trust and reducing skepticism, which in turn enhances the likelihood of purchase. In the rapidly growing Vietnamese e-commerce market, characterized by intense competition and multiple sellers offering the same products, credible reviews serve as critical decision aids that help consumers distinguish between reliable and less trustworthy offerings.

Based on this reasoning, review credibility is expected to have a positive effect on purchase decisions.

H1: *Review credibility is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.*

Beyond credibility, consumers also evaluate how useful or helpful reviews are in guiding their purchase decisions. Review usefulness refers to the degree to which reviews provide diagnostic, detailed, and practically relevant information that reduces uncertainty and aids in assessing product quality. Useful reviews typically include specific product attributes, comparisons with alternatives, and experiential insights that enable consumers to make informed judgments. As Cheung et al. (2020) argue, consumers perceive reviews as more persuasive and reliable when they are informative, well-structured, and aligned with their decision-making needs.

Empirical studies confirm that the perceived usefulness of reviews strongly predicts online purchase intentions. Gupta and Banerjee (2021) demonstrate that when reviews are considered useful, they enhance consumers' confidence, reduce the perceived risks associated with online transactions, and ultimately increase the likelihood of purchase. In markets such as Vietnam, where consumers may be cautious about online shopping due to concerns about product authenticity and seller transparency, the usefulness of reviews becomes even more critical. Reviews that provide concrete and actionable information empower consumers to bridge the information gap, compare competing offerings, and reduce post-purchase dissonance.

Based on this rationale, the usefulness of reviews is expected to positively influence consumers' online purchase decisions.

H2: *Review usefulness is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.*

Third, review volume is often regarded as a signal of popularity, reassuring consumers about product reliability (Vasal et al., 2021). However, its effect in Vietnam may be diminished due to skepticism regarding manipulated review volumes (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023). Nonetheless, the general expectation remains that a higher review volume enhances purchase intention.

The volume of online reviews, typically measured by the number of consumer evaluations available, serves as a crucial heuristic influencing consumer decision-making. Many reviews signal product popularity and widespread acceptance, which reduces uncertainty and boosts consumer confidence in purchase decisions. According to Vasal et al. (2021), a high review volume not only offers richer information but also creates social proof, reassuring consumers that many others have engaged with the product. This effect is especially pronounced in digital marketplaces, where consumers lack opportunities for physical product inspection.

Recent studies in Vietnam support this perspective. Nguyen and Khoa (2023) demonstrate that the volume of reviews is positively associated with purchase intention in the local e-commerce context, particularly among younger consumers who are highly responsive to social cues and collective endorsement effects. For these consumers, a larger number of reviews enhances the perception of product credibility and reduces concerns about seller opportunism. This is especially important in emerging markets, where consumers often rely on aggregate indicators rather than detailed product knowledge when making purchasing decisions.

Based on this reasoning, review volume is expected to positively influence consumers' purchasing decisions in Vietnamese e-commerce.

H3: *Review volume is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.*

Lastly, the valence of reviews—positive versus negative—plays a decisive role, with negative reviews often exerting a stronger influence due to risk aversion (Kim et al., 2021; Vu & Ha, 2021). In Vietnam, where concerns about online fraud are pronounced, negative valence is expected to carry greater weight in shaping consumer decisions.

Valence, which refers to the overall tone of online reviews (positive versus negative), plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Positive reviews often serve as persuasive signals that emphasize product quality and customer satisfaction, thereby encouraging consumers to make a purchase. Conversely, negative reviews typically exert a stronger influence due to loss aversion, as consumers tend to give disproportionate weight to potential risks and adverse experiences. Kim et al. (2021) demonstrate that review valence significantly affects purchase intentions, with negative reviews having a greater deterrent effect than the persuasive power of positive ones. This asymmetry underscores consumers' heightened sensitivity to unfavorable information in digital contexts.

In Vietnam, similar dynamics have been observed. Vu and Ha (2021) found that review valence significantly influences consumer trust in e-commerce platforms, with negative reviews undermining trust more severely than positive reviews enhance it. In a market where concerns about product authenticity, seller reliability, and transaction security remain prominent, consumers often rely heavily on the tone of reviews as a shortcut for evaluating purchase risks. Thus, review valence not only conveys product performance but also serves as a key determinant of consumer confidence in the broader online shopping environment.

Based on this reasoning, review valence is expected to positively influence online purchase decisions, although negative reviews tend to have a relatively stronger impact than positive ones.

H4: *Review valence (positivity vs. negativity) significantly influences consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.*

By testing these hypotheses in the Vietnamese context, this study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends the literature on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) by examining the relative salience of review attributes in an emerging market, thereby challenging assumptions derived from Western-centric models. Practically, it provides actionable insights for e-commerce platforms and firms seeking to leverage consumer reviews in contexts where trust and authenticity are paramount.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the impact of online product reviews on consumer purchase decisions in Vietnam. This method was chosen for its ability to generate measurable, generalizable findings based on structured data. Quantitative research enables researchers to identify correlations and patterns through numerical analysis rather than subjective interpretation.

The study employed a structured survey utilizing closed-ended Likert-scale questions. The measurement scales were primarily adapted from established sources in the literature to ensure validity and reliability, with minor modifications tailored to the Vietnamese e-commerce context. Review credibility was assessed using items adapted from Filieri et al. (2021) and Zhang et al. (2022), focusing on consumers' perceptions of trustworthiness, authenticity, and expertise reflected in online reviews. Review usefulness (helpfulness) was adapted from Cheung et al. (2020) and Gupta and Banerjee (2021), capturing the extent to which reviews provide informative, relevant, and practically useful content for purchase decisions. Review volume was measured using items drawn from Vasal et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Khoa (2023), reflecting consumers' perceptions of the number of reviews as a signal of product popularity and credibility. Review valence was operationalized based on Kim et al. (2021) and Vu and Ha (2021), capturing the overall positivity versus negativity of reviews and their perceived impact on decision-making. Purchase intention was measured using a scale adapted from Pavlou and Fygenson (2006), which is widely applied in e-commerce and online consumer behavior research. All items were designed to reflect previously validated constructs in the literature, including review credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence. Respondents rated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling statistical analysis through SPSS. Minor contextual adjustments were made to ensure semantic clarity and relevance for Vietnamese respondents.

The positivist research philosophy underpins this study, positing that knowledge can be derived from observable facts and numerical data. In line with this philosophy, hypotheses were formulated based on prior empirical studies and tested using objective methods such as Cronbach's alpha, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The deductive reasoning approach is applied in this study. It begins with theories derived from previous research. Based on these theories, specific hypotheses are formulated, such as the anticipated positive effect of review credibility and the negative impact of unfavorable reviews on purchase intention. These hypotheses are subsequently tested using real-world data.

The survey was distributed online to Vietnamese consumers with experience in e-commerce. Data for this study were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire. This method was selected due to its low cost, rapid response rate, and effectiveness in reaching Vietnamese e-commerce users familiar with online platforms. Respondents were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to ensure representation of active online shoppers across various demographic groups in Vietnam. The survey link was shared via major social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Zalo) and e-commerce communities (e.g., Shopee and Lazada user groups), targeting individuals who had made at least one online purchase within the previous six months. This criterion ensured that all participants had recent and relevant experience with online reviews influencing their purchase decisions. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed across multiple online channels, including Facebook groups, university student forums,

and messaging apps. These platforms were chosen because they are widely used by young Vietnamese consumers, particularly those who frequently shop online. To ensure sample relevance, a screening question was included at the beginning of the survey. Only participants who confirmed they had previously read online product reviews before making a purchase were allowed to continue. This filtering step guaranteed that all responses came from individuals with pertinent experience.

A total of 220 complete responses were collected within two weeks. All participants completed the survey voluntarily. No incentives or payments were offered, which helped reduce bias and ensure honest answers. The sample included a diverse mix of genders, age groups, shopping frequencies, and product preferences. This diversity enhances the representativeness of the findings regarding real consumer behavior in Vietnam. The survey consisted of 24 closed-ended questions, organized into five sections: demographic information, review credibility, usefulness, volume, and negativity. All opinion-based questions employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” This format facilitated ease of response and provided consistent numerical data for analysis. Data were exported to Excel and subsequently imported into SPSS 27 for coding and analysis. Responses were examined for missing data, duplicate entries, or abnormal patterns. No significant data cleaning was necessary, as all 220 responses passed the initial quality checks.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Reliability Testing using Cronbach's Alpha

Table 1. Reliability Test Results (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Review Credibility	0.934
Review Usefulness	0.936
Review Volume	0.944
Negative Review	0.921

Source: Authors' calculation from survey data.

The reliability analysis, presented in Table 1, demonstrates that all four constructs used in this study exhibit excellent internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values for Review Credibility (.934), Review Usefulness (.936), Review Volume (.944), and Negative Review (.921) are all well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). More importantly, they also exceed the more stringent benchmark of 0.90, which is often interpreted as evidence of very high reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

These results indicate that the items designed to measure each construct are strongly correlated and consistently capture the underlying latent variable. For example, the Cronbach's Alpha of .944 for Review Volume suggests that respondents interpreted the related items in a highly consistent manner, reinforcing the robustness of this construct. Similarly, the reliability coefficient of .921 for Negative Review confirms that perceptions of review valence were measured reliably.

The fact that no cases were excluded in the analysis (N = 220 valid responses across all tests) further strengthens the integrity of the reliability results. This demonstrates that the dataset is complete and that the measurement scales performed effectively across the sample.

4.2. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Correlations

	RC		RU	RV	NR	PD
RC	Pearson Correlation	1	-.134*	.052	-.081	.075
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.047	.439	.234	.269
	N	220	220	220	220	220
RU	Pearson Correlation	-.134*	1	.027	.054	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047		.688	.425	.151
	N	220	220	220	220	220
RV	Pearson Correlation	.052	.027	1	-.026	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.439	.688		.705	.779
	N	220	220	220	220	220
NR	Pearson Correlation	-.081	.054	-.026	1	-.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.234	.425	.705		.395
	N	220	220	220	220	220
PD	Pearson Correlation	.075	.097	.019	-.058	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.269	.151	.779	.395	
	N	220	220	220	220	220

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' calculation from survey data.

The correlation analysis provides preliminary insights into the relationships among the study's key constructs: Review Credibility (RC), Review Usefulness (RU), Review Volume (RV), Negative Review (NR), and Purchase Decision (PD). Overall, the results indicate that the constructs are only weakly correlated with one another, which is desirable as it reduces

concerns about multicollinearity and suggests that each variable captures a distinct aspect of the consumer decision-making process. The strongest finding is the negative correlation between Review Credibility and Review Usefulness ($r = -0.134$, $p < 0.05$). While statistically significant, the effect size is small, indicating that participants who perceived reviews as more credible tended to rate them as slightly less useful, and vice versa. This unexpected result may reflect differences in how consumers define “credibility” (trustworthiness and believability) compared to “usefulness” (practical and decision-relevant content).

Other relationships, such as between Review Volume and Purchase Decision ($r = 0.019$, $p = 0.779$) and Negative Review and Purchase Decision ($r = -0.058$, $p = 0.395$), were statistically insignificant. These results suggest that, in isolation, neither volume nor negativity strongly predicts purchase decisions, highlighting the need for multivariate analysis (e.g., regression or SEM) to capture their combined and moderated effects.

Importantly, the absence of high correlations (all $r < 0.30$) confirms discriminant validity among the constructs, ensuring they are not overlapping but instead represent separate theoretical dimensions (Hair et al., 2019). This supports the robustness of the measurement model and justifies proceeding to further hypothesis testing.

4.3. Linear Regression

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	NR, RV, RU, RC ^b	.	Enter
a.	Dependent Variable: PD		
b.	All requested variables entered.		

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.144 ^a	.021	.002	.60013
a.	Predictors: (Constant), NR, RV, RU, RC			

Source: Authors' calculation from survey data.

Table 4. ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.628	4	.407	1.130	.343 ^b
	Residual	77.434	215	.360		
	Total	79.062	219			

a. Dependent Variable: PD

b. Predictors: (Constant), NR, RV, RU, RC

Source: Authors' calculation from survey data.

Table 5. Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	3.670	.597		6.146	.000
	RC	.088	.071	.085	1.239	.217
	RU	.122	.075	.111	1.630	.105
	RV	.011	.072	.010	.150	.881
	NR	-.064	.076	-.057	-.834	.405

Dependent Variable: PD

Source: Authors' calculation from survey data.

The regression analysis was conducted to investigate the effects of review credibility (RC), review usefulness (RU), review volume (RV), and negative reviews (NR) on consumer purchase decisions (PD). The overall model fit was relatively weak. The R^2 value of 0.021 and the adjusted R^2 of 0.002 suggest that the four predictors collectively explained only about 2.1% of the variance in purchase decisions. This indicates that the majority of the variance remains unexplained, pointing to the potential role of other unobserved factors influencing consumer behavior. The overall model was not statistically significant, as evidenced by the ANOVA F-statistic ($F = 1.130$, $p = 0.343$). This result implies that the predictors, when considered together, do not significantly improve the prediction of purchase decision outcomes compared to a null model.

Looking at the individual predictors, none reached statistical significance at the conventional 5% level. Review usefulness showed the strongest positive association with purchase decision ($B = 0.122$, $\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.105$), suggesting that consumers may be more likely to purchase when they find reviews to be helpful and decision-relevant, although this effect fell short of significance. Similarly, review credibility was positively related to purchase decisions ($B = 0.088$, $\beta = 0.085$, $p = 0.217$), but the relationship was weak and not statistically supported. Review volume had virtually no influence on purchase decisions ($B = 0.011$, $\beta = 0.010$, $p = 0.881$), which could reflect consumer skepticism toward inflated or

manipulated review counts, particularly in contexts such as Vietnam, where trust in online platforms remains fragile. Negative reviews showed a negative but insignificant relationship with purchase decision ($B = -0.064$, $\beta = -0.057$, $p = 0.405$). While this aligns with theoretical expectations that unfavorable reviews reduce purchase likelihood, the lack of significance suggests that the effect is not strong enough to draw firm conclusions in this dataset.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

The regression analysis aimed to test four hypotheses regarding the impact of review-related factors on online purchase decisions. However, none of the independent variables in the model showed a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. Although review helpfulness (RU) had the strongest coefficient among all predictors ($B = 0.122$), the p-value (0.105) was higher than the generally accepted threshold. This means that the effect of helpfulness, although seemingly positive, is not statistically supported in this context.

Review reliability (RC) also showed a weak positive impact ($B = 0.088$), but with a p-value of 0.217, it did not reach significance. Review volume (RV) had almost no impact ($B = 0.011$, $p = 0.881$), and negative reviews (NT) had a slightly negative coefficient ($B = -0.064$, $p = 0.405$), which was also not statistically significant.

The results did not confirm any of the proposed hypotheses. This may imply that, for the specific group of Vietnamese online consumers, there is a particular skepticism towards the authenticity and honesty of product reviews displayed on e-commerce platforms. In addition, it is also necessary to add more factors to the study to replace and supplement these independent variables in future studies on this topic.

Table 6. Summary results

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Review credibility is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.	Not Supported
H2	Review usefulness is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.	Not Supported
H3	Review volume is positively associated with consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.	Not Supported
H4	Review valence (positivity vs. negativity) significantly influences consumer purchase intention in e-commerce.	Not Supported

4.5. Findings and discussions

The regression analysis explored the influence of four key review attributes—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence (negative reviews)—on consumer purchase decisions. The results indicate that the overall model explained only a small proportion of the variance in purchase decisions ($R^2 = 0.021$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.002$), and the model as a whole was not statistically significant ($F = 1.130$, $p = 0.343$). This suggests that, taken together, these attributes do not strongly predict purchase behavior in the studied sample.

Examining individual predictors, none of the four variables was statistically significant at the 5% level. Review usefulness exhibited the strongest positive association with purchase decision ($B = 0.122$, $\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.105$), followed by review credibility ($B = 0.088$, $\beta = 0.085$, $p = 0.217$), though neither relationship reached significance. Review volume showed almost no effect ($B = 0.011$, $\beta = 0.010$, $p = 0.881$), while negative reviews were negatively associated with purchase decisions ($B = -0.064$, $\beta = -0.057$, $p = 0.405$) as expected, but the effect was weak and non-significant. The results of this study indicate that none of the proposed hypotheses was empirically supported. In other words, review credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence did not significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions in the Vietnamese e-commerce context. This finding diverges from a large body of international literature, where these attributes are typically found to be strong predictors of online consumer decision-making (e.g., Filieri et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021).

Several contextual explanations may account for this divergence. First, in Vietnam, consumers may prioritize other factors such as price discounts, free shipping, and platform reputation over review characteristics. This is consistent with Nguyen and Khoa (2023), who highlight that Vietnamese online shoppers are highly price-sensitive and frequently motivated by promotional incentives. Second, the rapid rise of fake reviews and review manipulation in local e-commerce platforms may have undermined the perceived credibility and usefulness of reviews, thereby reducing their influence on purchase intentions. Previous research in emerging markets has similarly found that review overload and distrust of online information can weaken the impact of reviews on consumer behavior (Gupta & Banerjee, 2021). Third, cultural factors may also play a role. Vietnamese consumers often rely heavily on peer recommendations, word-of-mouth from friends or family, and social media influencers rather than anonymous online reviews, which may explain the weaker effects observed (Vu & Ha, 2021).

The absence of statistically significant effects is a noteworthy finding, particularly given the extensive literature that consistently documents the positive influence of online reviews on consumer behavior (Chen et al., 2021; Filieri, 2020). One possible explanation is that in emerging markets such as Vietnam, contextual and institutional factors may overshadow the influence of review attributes. Consumers may rely more heavily on broader trust signals, such as platform reputation, seller ratings, or social recommendations, rather than on review content itself (Nguyen & Khoa, 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2022).

The finding that review usefulness and credibility showed small but positive associations suggests that these factors remain relevant, even if not statistically significant in this study. Prior research has emphasized that credible and helpful reviews reduce uncertainty and facilitate decision-making (Gupta & Banerjee, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). However, in Vietnam, where skepticism toward online information is relatively high, consumers may not fully trust or act upon reviews unless they are accompanied by other assurances, such as verified purchase labels or endorsements from known influencers.

The lack of effect for review volume contrasts with evidence from developed economies, where review quantity often serves as a strong signal of popularity (Vasal et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). This discrepancy may reflect local perceptions of inflated or fake review counts, a concern frequently raised in studies of Southeast Asian markets (Vu & Ha, 2021). Similarly, the weak and insignificant effect of negative reviews suggests that, while consumers are sensitive to unfavorable comments, their decisions may be tempered by other considerations such as price promotions, delivery options, or peer recommendations.

The findings underscore that traditional review attributes may have limited explanatory power in low-trust, emerging market settings. This highlights the need to move beyond isolated attributes and investigate how interactions among review factors (e.g., credibility $\times$ usefulness, or volume $\times$ valence) or contextual moderators (e.g., platform trust, digital literacy) shape purchase decisions. By focusing on Vietnam, this study adds nuance to the broader literature, suggesting that findings from developed economies cannot be generalized wholesale to emerging markets without considering cultural and institutional differences.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how four widely studied online review attributes—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence—influence consumer purchase decisions in the context of Vietnam’s rapidly expanding e-commerce market. The research involved 220 survey participants and applied a quantitative analysis model. The results suggest that, contrary to much of the established literature from developed economies, these attributes do not exert strong or statistically significant effects on purchase decisions when tested simultaneously. The regression model accounted for only a small portion of the variance in purchase behavior, underscoring that consumer decision-making in this context is shaped by additional factors beyond review content alone.

Although review usefulness and credibility showed positive associations with purchase decisions, the effects were modest and fell short of significance. This indicates that while consumers in Vietnam may value reviews they perceive as helpful and trustworthy, these factors are insufficient to drive purchasing behavior in isolation. Similarly, review volume and negative reviews did not emerge as significant predictors, suggesting that consumers may discount these signals due to concerns about review manipulation or cultural tendencies to rely more heavily on other trust cues, such as seller reputation or platform credibility.

The findings contribute to the growing body of work on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) by highlighting the importance of contextual variation. They caution against assuming that findings from Western or developed market settings can be directly generalized to emerging economies. In Vietnam, where institutional safeguards and consumer trust in digital transactions remain developing, reviews may play only a supporting role in shaping consumer behavior. These insights suggest that future research should examine how review attributes interact with broader contextual variables—such as platform trust, digital literacy, or peer recommendations—to more fully capture their role in online decision-making.

5.2. Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that the traditional attributes of online reviews—credibility, usefulness, volume, and valence—do not significantly shape consumer purchase intention in the Vietnamese e-commerce market. This outcome suggests that Vietnamese consumers may view review systems with skepticism, or alternatively, that other factors overshadow the influence of reviews when decisions are made. Considering these results, recommendations should not focus narrowly on increasing review volume or improving rating scores, but rather on rebuilding the conditions under which reviews could become more influential.

For e-commerce platforms, the priority lies in enhancing the credibility and transparency of the review environment. One practical approach is to strengthen verification systems, such as displaying badges for reviews linked to confirmed purchases, limiting the ability to post anonymous reviews, and employing automated tools to detect suspicious patterns indicative of manipulation. Greater transparency, including the publication of both positive and negative feedback, can further reinforce consumer trust by signaling that review systems are not selectively curated. By addressing authenticity concerns, platforms may gradually restore the informational value of reviews for consumers who currently discount them. From a managerial perspective, firms should not rely solely on online reviews to persuade potential customers, given their limited influence in this context. Instead, a multi-channel communication strategy is essential. Marketing practices such as flash sales, influencer partnerships, and livestream selling have demonstrated stronger resonance with Vietnamese consumers, who may be more responsive to real-time interaction and price sensitivity than to peer-generated reviews. Reviews, therefore, may serve better as supplementary signals that reinforce other persuasive cues, rather than as primary drivers of purchase intention.

Finally, the long-term role of institutional trust should not be overlooked. Regulators and policymakers can play an active role by establishing clearer guidelines for online review practices, requiring disclosure of sponsored content, and imposing penalties for fraudulent activity. Public awareness campaigns that educate consumers about identifying credible information sources may also contribute to more rational use of online reviews. Such systemic efforts are crucial for developing a trustworthy digital marketplace where reviews can function as reliable indicators of product quality and reduce information asymmetry between buyers and sellers.

Taken together, these recommendations highlight that while online reviews currently play only a marginal role in shaping purchase intention in Vietnam, they should not be dismissed entirely. Instead, they must be integrated into broader strategies of consumer engagement and trust-building. By strengthening credibility, combining reviews with other persuasive tools, and addressing institutional weaknesses, platforms and firms can create conditions under which online product reviews may eventually exert stronger influence on consumer decision-making.

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