

Online Product Reviews and Traditional Advertisements on Purchase Decisions of Consumers in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The transformation of the marketing environment through digital technologies has altered how consumers obtain product information, evaluate brands, and make purchasing decisions. This paper examines the influence of online product reviews (OPRs) and traditional advertisements (TAs) on consumer trust and purchase decisions. The paper adopts a secondary-data approach to examine the changing relationship between consumers, marketing communication, and information sources. It is anchored in Source Credibility Theory, which explains persuasion through the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of information sources. The discussion compares OPRs, including written reviews, star ratings, video reviews, and influencer reviews, with conventional advertising through television, radio, print, and out-of-home media. The reviewed literature indicates that OPRs can benefit from perceptions of peer experience, independence, authenticity, and accessibility, while traditional advertisements retain advantages associated with professional production, brand control, broad reach, and strategic message presentation. However, excessive exposure to both advertising and online information may contribute to advertising or social media fatigue, potentially reducing consumer attention and engagement. The paper further establishes that trust is central to the consumer decision-making process because perceptions of credibility, benevolence, and integrity can shape information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase intentions, and post-purchase behaviour. The paper concludes that consumer purchasing decisions are increasingly shaped by the interaction between digital peer-generated information and conventional marketing communication rather than by a single communication source.

Keywords:

Online product reviews; traditional advertisements; consumer trust; purchase decisions; and Source Credibility Theory

I. Introduction

The marketing world is rapidly evolving over the past two decades, largely due to the emergence of numerous new technologies. Marketing is about ensuring effective communication and information flow of what people need and match it up with what products and services are available. This is when companies target particular groups of customers with marketing communication to introduce products and company to them. Customers then absorb this information and their reactions are reflected in their attitude, perception of the message, product or company. But, not all of this communication process is necessarily straightforward, some people have argued that consumers do not necessarily have free choice, rather they are being manipulated by marketing messages. This has not only led to the creation of new lines of research but has also posed new challenges to the marketing field (Msughter et al., 2023).

In particular, the question has arisen whether the traditional marketing professional can handle cutting-edge data analytics, and whether this will result in a 'turf war' between traditional marketing professionals and data scientists, regarding the direction of marketing research (Ratchford, 2020). To meet these ongoing changes in technology and consumer lifestyles, marketers have increasingly looked to more effective and efficient means of communication and this has resulted in the popularization of the term Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), which is defined as a strategic approach that involves the integration of different communications disciplines to ensure that messaging is clear, consistent and maximizes impact at each and every point of customer contact (Ariff & Farrar, 2012; Taiwo et al., 2024).

For any effective relationship building and navigating the complexities of modern marketing, it is absolutely vital to understand consumer behaviour. Particularly given the growing sophistication of consumers, their active involvement in the communities and increased interaction with marketers (Park et al., 2018). Thus, the changing consumer landscape requires new, sophisticated consumer research to understand all elements of consumer behaviour, including engagement and personalisation.

The internet has been adopted widely with almost 80% of the population of developed countries being online now, completely transforming the marketing landscape. The digitalisation has caused a reallocation of considerable amounts of company money from traditional media such as television and print to social media and other digital media (Hausman & Johnston, 2014; Owens-Ibie et al., 2026). As a result, the volume of information and marketing online has made it difficult for advertisers to only count on a broad reach; they must acquire consumer attention through more competitive marketing strategies. True advertising campaigns, however, should now involve consumers as they seek information about the products they are interested in from social media, as up to 40-50% of consumers in some product categories actively look for reviews online prior to purchase.

This kind of interplay is crucial when it comes to engaging and conveying brand messages on social media, and influencers are especially important in driving messages to customers who engage with ad-blocking software. In addition to just reaching the audience, influencer marketing gives customers the chance to be part of the brand on their own terms, resulting in more trust than traditional online advertising and more brand confidence when customers see the brand endorsed in public (Aondover & Akin-Odukoya, 2024). Furthermore, influencer marketing has been proven to build much more customer trust than online advertising, research suggests that it brings about 20% of a customer's trust.

This paper aims to comment on the nature of the prevailing marketing paradigm today and its sometimes adverse implications which is the marketing mix paradigm. This development is facilitated by changing patterns in business such as strategic partnerships, alliances and networks. This emerging new approach revolves around relationship building and management. However, a detailed discussion of the nature of the relationship marketing paradigm is beyond the scope of this report (Msughter & Yau, 2018). So, over time, IMC has developed as a direct result of the interaction between the technological changes and the changing consumer behaviors. This requires a strong awareness of the psychological motivations behind people's purchasing decisions, especially when targeting demographics such as Millennials, who are increasingly part of the social media landscape but are less influenced by its advertising, which means some more nuanced marketing strategies need to be applied.

This change is especially noticeable in the food industry, where the 'Internet +' and 'platform economy' have totally changed the ways people buy and consume food, and a re-thinking of brand-consumer connections is required, particularly when it comes to increasing the number of online food trading platforms (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2025). Trust is especially critical in markets such as online food trading where there may be a 'lemon problem' due to consumer distrust and safety concerns, making the high-quality businesses less successful. In order to understand and connect to these challenges and establish enduring trust, it is essential to gain a full understanding of the consumer decision journey, even as knowledge and thinking about the consumer decision journey is spread across a number of very different terms and definitions of the dynamic phases (Hagger et al., 2022; Msughter, 2025).

In addition, the evolving consumer decision journey is crucial to understanding and adapting to, particularly as new and emerging technologies such as virtual reality, virtual agents, and autonomous shopping systems are set to bring unparalleled interactive and personalised opportunities and experiences to the consumer journey, fundamentally changing the way consumers make decisions (Ajzen & Sheikh, 2019). The 2007-2008 financial crisis had a distinct impact on the economies of the world, but it also brought about some innovation and changes in different sectors of the economy such as marketing.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Source Credibility Theory. Source Credibility Theory proposes that the persuasive power of a message is directly related to the credibility of the message source (Aondover et al., 2024). In contemporary consumer research, credibility is typically analyzed as consisting of two principal dimensions:

Expertise: Expertise refers to the extent to which a source is perceived as possessing the requisite knowledge and/or skills and/or experience concerning the issue. In the context of online reviews, it is the perceived reviewer's knowledge of, and/or prior experience with, the product. In the context of advertisements, expertise may be evaluated as knowledge of the brand, a particular spokesperson, or the supporting evidence.

Trustworthiness: Trustworthiness pertains to the extent to which a source is perceived as being honest and unbiased and as possessing no vested interest. In the context of online product reviews, trustworthiness is generally inferred from reviewer sincerity, potential reviewer bias, and/or the consistency of reviewer feedback. In contrast, trustworthiness is a function of the brand's reputation and ethicality, as well as the honesty of the advertisement, in the context of traditional advertising.

This theory holds great significance for the current investigation because it provides a direct explanation for how people's perceptions of the credibility of online reviewers and advertisers would affect their trust toward these information sources, and as a result, their purchasing intentions. Part of this study is to examine how these credibility dimensions relate to online participant reviews (OPRs) and conventional advertisements.

Source Credibility Theory identifies only two elements to source believability: expertise and trustworthiness. Other important elements that drive consumer behavior may include the emotional appeals of the message, the message itself, or the consumer's involvement level and

predisposition toward the product. Source credibility can shift and is dynamic. The dimensions and importance of source credibility can change by context, subject, and audience. The credibility of a source providing an online review may differ from the credibility of an advertising source, and this difference may also change over time and with context and additional information (Cheung & Thadani, 2020).

Measuring subjective perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise is difficult, and Source Credibility Theory can only classify these perceptions. In most cases, these perceptions are subjective, and the dimensions can change with the cues.

In placing great emphasis on the source, the theory also tends to place less emphasis on the relevance and the strength of the arguments presented in online reviews and traditional advertising. These elements can also drive consumer behavior and influence the decision to purchase.

The first way this theory is relevant is that OPRs and TAs can be compared directly. According to this theory, the ability of a message to persuade is directly related to the credibility of the source. Thus, the study is able to analyze how students perceive OPRs and TAs. This theory explains believability through the reader's perception of the expertise and the trustworthiness of the source. Our study aims to analyze how students perceive these qualities in online reviewers and traditional advertisers. This comparison will be instrumental to our study. For example, OPRs may be perceived as less biased and, therefore, more trustworthy because they come from peers as opposed to a paid source. On the other hand, traditional ads may convey higher credibility and greater perceived expertise because of the sponsorship of well-known brands (Etikan et al., 2016).

Also, Source Credibility Theory connects the believability of a source to the likelihood of the purchase. If students consider OPRs more credible, this theory suggests that they will buy the product. As for traditional ads, if they are perceived to be highly expert and trustworthy, they will likely positively impact purchase intent as well. The theory further explains how the constructs of expertise and trustworthiness are manifested in different ways across different media. In the case of OPRs, expertise could refer to having thorough and/or highly consistent reviews, while trustworthiness could stem from the perceived authenticity of the reviewer. For TAs, expertise may be related to a favorable perception of the brand, while trustworthiness may be associated with a brand's holistic perception (Aondover et al., 2024). This theory is also highly applicable for marketers who are seeking to engage university students. Through the application of this theory in this study, marketers may have a clearer understanding of how to make a credible source among students and determine if they will spend more time working on online reviews or develop more traditional marketing strategies (Ibrahim, 2014).

2.2 Empirical Review

In this part of our study, we evaluate the findings from other research on how traditional advertising and online product reviews affect consumer purchasing behavior. One major concern is “advertising fatigue,” when consumers become annoyed with a deluge of messages, causing diminishing returns on advertising.

Previous studies can shed light on these interactions, particularly with respect to how various types of information influence customer behaviors. Overexposure to advertising,

particularly in social media, may lead to advertising fatigue and consumers developing FOMO (fear of missing out), and thereby losing interest in such advertising.

Existing studies found that US university students, when experiencing advertising overload, made an effort to decrease their exposure to traditional advertising and online reviews. University students are also still in the "social media fatigue" state caused by having an overload of online information to the extent that it disrupts their ability to process OPRs. Alongside these global perspectives, several Nigerian studies are pertinent to the comparative analysis. In relation to the impact of the online world (Adewale et al., 2025). This research indicated that students are more likely to purchase products after reading positive online reviews and tend to trust reviews of products more than the corporate advertisements of the products. The combination of these various studies indicates both online product reviews as well as traditional advertisements can affect consumer behavior and decisions to purchase.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Online Product Reviews

Online product reviews (OPRs) are a type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and are reviews and evaluations written by users. Digital comments can be found on many online shopping websites, social media, or review collecting sites. Traditional word-of-mouth is verbal communication (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, OPRs are easily accessible, remain online for long periods of time, and can be seen by a massive and often anonymous audience. Therefore, many people are able to communicate regardless of location and time. There are many types and forms of OPRs, and they continue to change. The most common types of online product reviews are:

Star Ratings: These ratings are often used to answer the question "How likely are you to recommend this to a friend?". These ratings are often used to help customers choose the best product out of a large product selection.

Written Comments: This type of review goes beyond a brief rating and explains the reviewers product experience and gives recommendations and warnings. The detail and length of this type of review is what often makes them the most persuasive.

Video Reviews: These reviews capture product demonstrations with user commentary. Such content is primarily on YouTube and TikTok. The integration of sound and imagery gives video reviews the most engaging and informative appeal (Corina, 2006).

Influencer Reviews: Influencer reviews are product endorsements or evaluations that come from recognized authorities in niche areas of interest. Their content covers anything from lifestyle to travel, to beauty and wellness. Influencers' seemingly personal connections with their audience through parasocial relationships turns product recommendations into an engaging, informative type of endorsement (Makudza et al., 2021).

Reviews are a critical part of a consumer's ability to browse and assess relevant information before making a purchase. Reviews are a trusted form of information for consumers, especially for young people who value peer-based information more than advertising. Reviews are perceived to be independent and experiential, providing a credibility to them that advertising does not typically possess.

3.2 Traditional Advertisements

Paid advertisements that come in the form of non-personal announcements sent by a sponsor through a channel of mass media comprise traditional advertisements. Informing, persuading or reminding a target audience of a product, service or idea is the primary purpose of these advertisements. In contrast to the two-way communication of OPR, traditional advertisements are, for the most part, one-way. Traditional advertisements are designed to target the widest audience and comprise a great deal of control by the advertiser (Taherdoost, 2016). Traditional advertisements create a great deal of power to persuade through professional production, strategically placed messages that are designed to capture immediate attention and that, over time, help build value for a brand (Yuan et al., 2021). The various kinds of mass media that comprise traditional advertising allow it to take on many different forms:

Television Advertisements: Advertisements through commercial spots on a network are perhaps the most dramatic advertising medium. While they are the most costly, they are also the most effective. Digital media have not replaced the edge that television advertising holds in advertising the brand and placing the advertisement in the audience's lived experiences.

Radio Advertisements: These advertisements utilize various components of audio media: sounds, voices, music, etc. Radio media allows advertisers to target local audiences, and it is an advertisement medium that people can access on the go. Most of the effective advertisements rely on the repetition of a central advertising message (Akintayo et al., 2026).

Print Media Advertisements: These advertisements are those that are published in hard copy periodicals, such as newspapers and magazines. They provide a more thorough opportunity for potential customers to view and analyze advertisements because the advertisements can be published for an extended time.

These forms of advertising are outperformed by digital media in many regards, but they are still some of the most prevalent forms of advertising. These advertisements are able to maintain a broad consumer base and sustain credibility for brands. Some of these brands rely on these forms of advertising to create an emotional impact on potential customers and to enhance their brand stories.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 Consumer Trust in Online Product Review and Traditional advertisements

In marketing and consumer behaviour, consumer trust means a consumer's willingness to rely on a business partner like a brand, a reviewer, or an advertiser in whom they have confidence. It is a psychological state where someone is willing to be vulnerable because they have positive expectations about what another party intends to do or how they will behave (Msughter & Abba, 2017). This willingness to be vulnerable is based on beliefs about the partner's competence, honesty and good intentions. Trust has many aspects, often including **Credibility:** The belief that the source is honest, tells the truth and has relevant expertise. This is important for both OPRs (how expert and objective the reviewer seems) and traditional advertisements (how truthful the claims are and how competent the advertiser seems).

Benevolence: The belief that the source genuinely cares about the consumer's well-being and acts in their best interest. For OPRs, this might come from seeing reviewers as fellow consumers sharing unbiased experiences. For advertisements, it could relate to a brand's

perceived ethical stance, customer-focused policies or social responsibility efforts (Wellington et al., 2026).

Integrity: The perception that the source sticks to a consistent set of principles that the consumer finds acceptable. This relates to how consistent a brand's messages are over time whether it keeps its promises or a reviewer's consistent pattern of fair and balanced evaluations.

In the digital age, building trust is important because consumers are faced with huge amount of information from many different sources (Aondover et al., 2026). As a result, how trustworthy these information sources are perceived to be becomes a critical factor in how much they influence later buying decisions. Building trust is a complicated cognitive process. It can be shaped by social indicators as well as the trust cue itself. Trust can be understood as a mechanism to enable the transition from exposure to the information to engagement in the purchasing activity (Vitalis et al., 2025).

4.2 Consumer Purchase Decisions

The consumer purchase decision-making process is how people define and identify their needs, search for and obtain relevant information, and evaluate different alternatives before making decisions about which goods and services to purchase (Solomon, 2018). The decision-making process is commonly thought of as having a number of different phases. Within each phase, consumers can experience a number of different internal and external stimuli.

Need Recognition: The first phase occurs when the consumer recognizes a difference between their ideal situation and the real situation. Within this phase, the consumer recognizes some problem or need which a good or service will solve. This can either occur as the consumer recognizes an internal need, such as hunger, or this can occur through the exposure to external stimuli such as advertising.

Information Search: After the need has been recognized, the consumer will attempt to seek a solution to the need. The search for the solution can occur either internally, by memorizing and evaluating one's own previous experiences, or externally, through the evaluation of a large number of different sources such as online product reviews (OPR), traditional media advertisements, and personal or professional advice. How important and how involved the particular purchase is will usually determine how elaborate and extensive the information search will be (Aliough et al., 2023).

Evaluation of Alternatives: At this point, the consumer begins to analyze different products and services that are available in the market. In this stage, a lot of emphasis is put on the features of the product, the benefits that can be derived from the product, and the information that has been collected. In this step, a consumer will analyze the information he/she has collected on the product, and weigh the advantages and disadvantages with respect to the benefits the product is likely to provide to the consumer and based on the consumer's preferences.

Purchase Decision: In this step of the process the consumer will make a decision to purchase the product that he/she has selected. Out of this process comes the intention to purchase the product. In this step there is the likelihood of the consumer being unable to execute the intention to purchase the product. This can happen as a result of a variety of

reasons including the consumer being unable to purchase the product due to insufficient funds.

Post Purchase Behavior: This step of the process analyzes the decision that the consumer has made. The consumer will determine whether he/she is satisfied or not satisfied with the purchase. This will impact the consumer's purchasing behavior, loyalty to the brand, and the information that he/she will actively search for. This step of the process will determine the behavior of the consumer in the long term and the consumer's willingness to participate in recommending the product to others or the likelihood of the consumer participating in the opposite, negative publicity.

This is a lengthy and complicated process. The process is significantly impacted by only a few internal factors including, attitude, learning, personality, perception, and most importantly motivation. The process is also influenced by some external factors including, social class, culture, the reference groups, and marketing messages.

V. Conclusions

The review establishes that online product reviews and traditional advertisements remain significant sources of consumer information, although they operate through different communication characteristics. OPRs provide accessible, experiential, and peer-oriented information that may enhance perceptions of authenticity and trust, while traditional advertisements provide controlled, professionally produced, and strategically targeted brand messages. The influence of either source is closely connected to consumers' perceptions of credibility, particularly expertise and trustworthiness.

The consumer decision-making process involves the interaction of information exposure, trust, evaluation, and purchase intention. Source Credibility Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how perceptions of information sources can shape these processes. The evidence reviewed also suggests that excessive exposure to marketing information can produce fatigue and reduce engagement. Consequently, contemporary marketing communication requires greater attention to credibility, consumer trust, authenticity, and the complementary use of digital and traditional communication channels.

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