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**THE IMPACT OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER  
DECISION-MAKING: A SURVEY IN THE UKRAINIAN  
MARKET**

Online reviews are a powerful source of information for consumers, especially in emerging markets such as Ukraine. However, little is known about how online reviews affect consumer behavior in this context. This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a survey of 321 Ukrainian consumers who have used online reviews for their purchase decisions. The paper explores the impact of online reviews on consumer decision-making, the motivations and barriers for writing and reading reviews, the elements of convincing and suspicious reviews, and the trustworthiness of online reviews compared to other sources of information. The paper also examines the cultural and social factors that shape consumer preferences and expectations, such as the war situation, ethical behavior, and CSR initiatives. The paper provides valuable insights for businesses that want to leverage online reviews to enhance their online presence and customer relationships in the Ukrainian market. The paper also contributes to the literature on consumer behavior and online reviews, and suggests directions for future research.

**Keywords:** online consumer reviews, consumer behaviour, digital marketing, purchase decision, customer survey, customer journey, corporate social responsibility.

**Introduction.** In today's digital age, the landscape of consumer behavior is undergoing a profound transformation, largely influenced by the rapid proliferation of online platforms and the omnipresence of information at one's fingertips. This paradigm shift has fundamentally altered the way individuals make purchasing decisions, ushering in an era where consumer choices are increasingly shaped by the experiences of their peers.

Consumer reviews, once relegated to informal conversations among friends and family, have now assumed a central role in the decision-making processes of consumers across the globe [10]. This shift is not unique to the

Western world; the same trend can be observed in different parts of the world where digital connectivity has rapidly penetrated everyday life. In this context, the focus of the study turns to the ever-evolving market of Ukraine, a country situated at the crossroads of Europe, where the fusion of tradition and innovation has resulted in a thriving digital marketplace.

Ukraine is facing the challenges of global economic forces and the unique geopolitical impact of the ongoing war. In these turbulent times, Ukrainian consumers are increasingly relying on the virtual realm to make informed purchasing decisions. Within this digital realm, online consumer reviews have become highly influential, creating new opportunities for businesses to succeed or fail.

This paper explores Ukrainian consumer behavior within the digital marketplace, with a particular focus on the role played by peer consumer reviews. Through a comprehensive survey, this study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted dynamics that underlie the purchase decisions of Ukrainian consumers. The exploration encompasses a wide spectrum of aspects, from the frequency of review consultation to the factors motivating individuals to contribute their own opinions.

The paper's aim is not only to shed light on the current state of consumer behavior but also to suggest possible strategies for businesses to succeed in the future. In doing so, the study seeks to add to the growing body of knowledge surrounding consumer behavior in the digital age.

**Literature review.** Online customer reviews, often referred to as consumer reviews or user-generated content play an increasingly significant role in online shopping, as consumers use them to gather information, compare options, and make purchase decisions [24]. In fact, 98% of US consumers said they browsed business reviews before purchase [26]. This shift towards peer-driven recommendations reflects a desire for authentic and unbiased information. It also reflects the cautious spending habits of today's consumers, who seek reassurance before committing financially. Many studies confirm that consumers find reviews and ratings a credible source of input [2; 5; 13; 20; 22; 26]. In fact, reviews are often more trusted than ads [3; 15]. What is more, reviews from fellow consumers are trusted nearly as much as personal recommendations from friends or family [26].

In response to these trends, a large body of research has examined the impact of online consumer reviews on consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Studies conducted in various global contexts consistently affirm

that consumers increasingly rely on online reviews to inform their choices [6; 10; 14; 26; 30; 32-33; 36]. As a result, positive reviews can significantly increase brand trust and customer purchase intention [4; 10; 12; 19; 21; 23; 32]. According to a Harvard Business School research by Luca [23], a restaurant can boost its sales by 5 to 9% for every extra star it gets on Yelp. This means that a restaurant that makes \$1M/year can earn \$50 000 – 90 000 more by improving its rating by one star. Conversely, negative reviews can deter potential customers and have a substantial impact on a business's bottom line [1; 8; 9; 11; 34]. According to a survey [27], 3.4 is the minimum rating a business should have in order for Australian customers to consider engaging with it. Though, based on a study by the Northwestern University on 5-star ratings, purchases are primarily swayed by reviews that boast an average rating ranging from 4.2 to 4.5 stars out of 5, establishing this as the optimal rating range for influencing purchase likelihood [7].

Although star ratings hold importance, it's noteworthy that the quantity of reviews is even more strongly correlated with revenue performance than the average ratings themselves [29]. According to a report from Search Engine Land, businesses that accumulate a higher volume of reviews witness a remarkable 54% increase in their revenue [31]. Moreover, enterprises that surpass the average number of reviews outperform those with below-average review counts by a significant margin, reaping an impressive 82% more annual revenue. These findings underline the strategic importance of reviews for businesses.

The reasons consumers decide to leave a feedback are reported as the desire to inform others about their experience, help other customers in their decision-making, give companies feedback about their experience, excellent customer service, socially and environmentally responsible business behaviour among other reasons [26; 27]. However, as per Joshi and Musalem [16], negative information tends to spread more extensively than positive information. Olson and Ahluwalia [24] suggest that if individuals were to share anything about their purchase, it would probably lean toward the negative side overall.

Surprisingly, though, 45% of consumers express an increased likelihood of engaging with a business that responds to negative reviews. In similar manner, according to Trustpilot's research, a substantial 62% of consumers declare their unwillingness to endorse brands that practice review censorship.

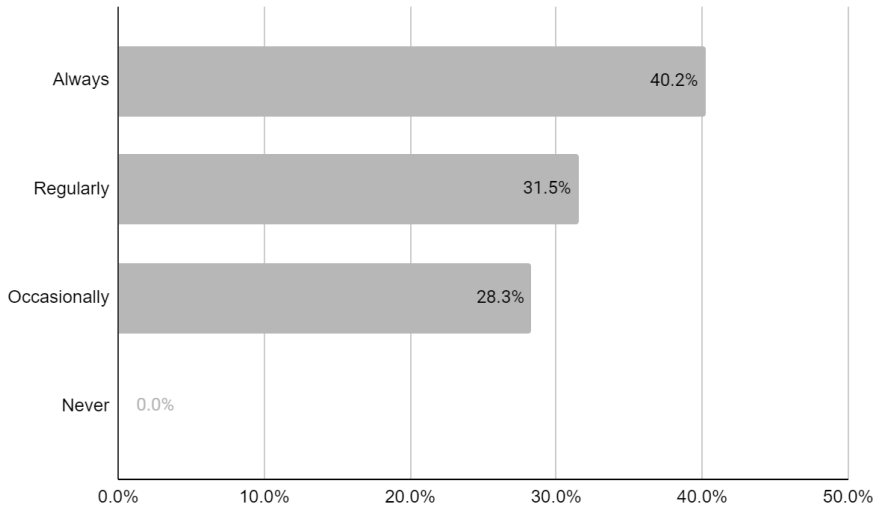
Moreover, with the proliferation of online reviews comes the issue of review authenticity. As an illustration, Amazon initiated legal action against over one thousand individuals accused of generating counterfeit reviews for a fee of approximately \$5 each [35]. Review authenticity is a concern for consumers in the digital marketplace. Overly positive or negative reviews, repetitive content, anonymous reviewers and reviews with minimal detail raise suspicions of fake reviews [17; 26]. Fake reviews can undermine business credibility. If a customer identifies a single fake review, it raises doubts about the reliability of all the other authentic reviews. Consumers seek detailed, informative reviews that provide evidence of authenticity. This reflects the prevailing desire for genuine and open feedback in reviews. For business owners, this entails refraining from manipulating or purchasing fake reviews as well as from censoring negative feedback [29].

**Methodology.** The study employed a survey method in order to explore the habits, perceptions and attitudes of Ukrainian customers in relation to peer customer reviews. The questionnaire items (12) used were adopted from the related studies carried out in the USA and globally, namely the ones undertaken by BrightLocal (10 items) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (2 items) [26, 28]. Some of the questions were slightly adjusted so as to account for the regional peculiarities of Ukraine. The survey polled 321 (210 women, 111 men) online Ukrainian consumers located inside as well as outside the Ukrainian borders. The participants belonged to Generation Z (48.6%), Millennials (42.4%) and Generation X (9%). The survey was conducted between 30th April and 17th August 2023. The questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms and encouraged the participants to spread it further to their acquaintances.

**Findings and discussion.** The results suggest that consulting peer consumer reviews is a key touchpoint in consumers buying journey in Ukraine too, given every respondent reported turning to online reviews when considering purchasing a product or service at least 'occasionally', while out of these the majority do so 'always' (see Fig. 1).

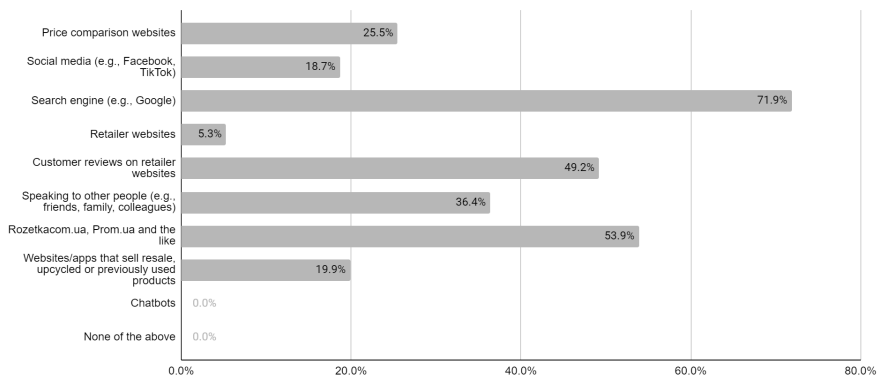
This comes as no surprise seeing that one of the main three preferred product and/or service research methods prior purchase is review-reading (see Fig. 2), the other two being using search engines and market aggregates such as Rozetka.com.ua and Prom.ua, which are the equivalents of Amazon in Ukraine. It seems like checking what other consumers have to say about the products and/ or services when considering purchase has become an

entrenched habit for the younger segments of Ukrainian consumers.



**Fig. 1. When browsing for a product, how often do you read the online reviews?**

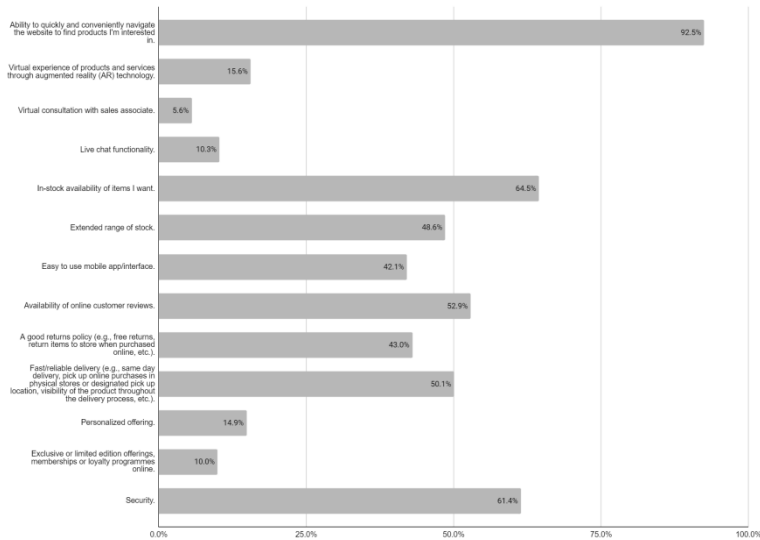
Sources: the author's own elaboration



**Fig. 2. Sources of customer research items to buy**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

This is further evidenced by the answers given to the question about the attributes consumers find important when shopping online (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3. Which of the following attributes are important to you when shopping online?**

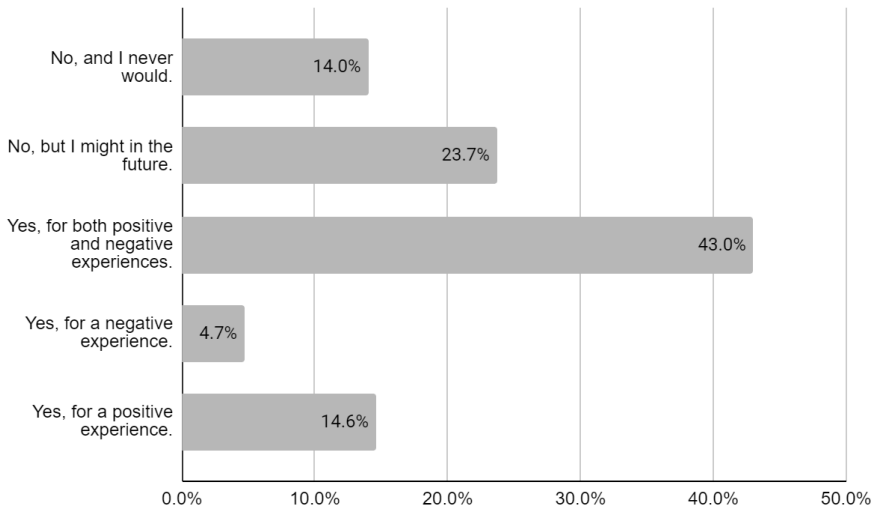
Sources: the author's own elaboration

The availability of online customer reviews comes as fourth (52,9%) after 'Ability to quickly and conveniently navigate the website to find products I'm interested in', 'In-stock availability of items I want' and 'Safety'. The importance of this last attribute is due to the current war. Hence, it can be assumed that in the ordinary climate of peace, reviews are one of the three main reasons why consumers use the internet for shopping. Therefore, all of these suggest that reviews are a way of life for younger Ukrainian consumers. This places expectations on businesses to gain online visibility.

As for their own practice of review-writing, 62,3% of respondents said they did write them themselves too (see Fig. 4). A further 23,7% reported

that while not having written any in the past 12 months, they would consider doing that in the future. Therefore, it can be observed that consumers not only recur to the internet to read feedback from their peers, but also use their own voice to share their experiences online.

Fig. 4 also demonstrates that most of those who did use their voice to write product and/or service reviews, did so for both positive and negative experiences (43%). Moreover, those who wrote only positive reviews outnumber notably those who did write one to express bad experiences.



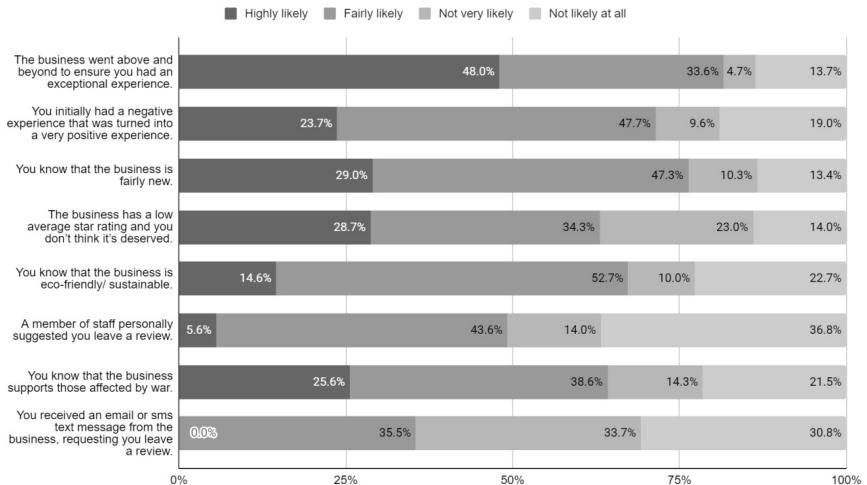
**Fig. 4. Have you written an online review for a product/service in the last 12 months?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

One possible reason why Ukrainian consumers tend to write more positive reviews nowadays is that they are conscious of the impact negative reviews can have on local businesses that are struggling due to the economic crisis brought upon by war. Therefore, they might be more lenient and forgiving when they encounter a bad service or product and hesitate before posting a negative review because of the consequences that might have for the businesses which are struggling as it is.

A pattern emerges when we look at the factors that most likely motivate

a consumer to write a review: they are related to positive experiences. 81,6% of respondents are “fairly likely” or “highly likely” to write a positive review if “the business went above and beyond to ensure an exceptional experience” (see Fig. 5). Similarly, 71,7% of them stated they were “fairly likely” or “highly likely” if “they initially had a negative experience that was turned into a very positive experience”.



**Fig. 5. How likely are you to leave a review in the following circumstances**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

Moreover, interestingly, the trend of consumers support for businesses can be observed again: 76,3% said they were “fairly likely” or “highly likely” if “the business is fairly new” as well as 63,3% if they feel “the business has an undeservedly low star rating”. As previously discussed, in most likelihood, they do so out of compassion together with a desire to give local businesses a fighting chance during these difficult times.

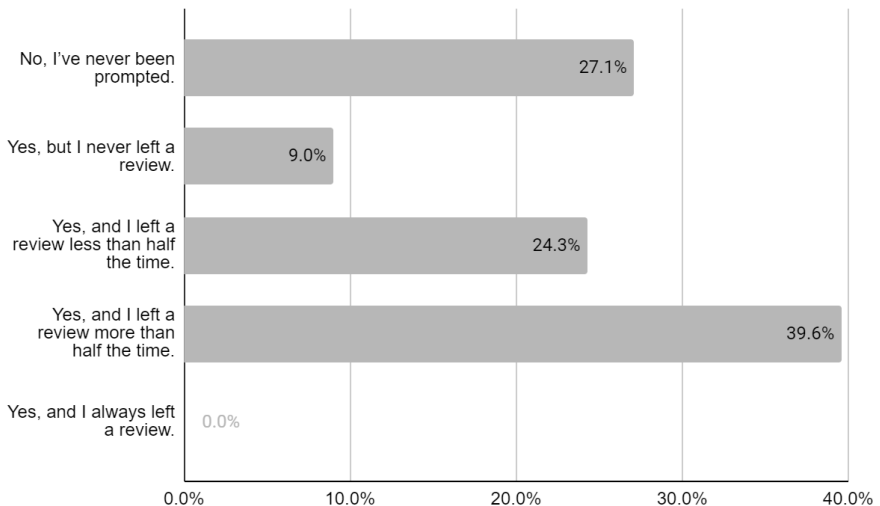
Another noteworthy observation is conscious consumerism and support for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): knowing that a business is eco-friendly/ sustainable and/ or supports those affected by war are two factors that most consumers said would impact their decision too (67,7% and 64,6% respectively). This is a significant finding as it supports the business case



for, as well as, confirming the marketing benefits of CSR in the context of Ukraine. This is especially important data given the difficulties faced by the current situation in Ukraine and the business rewards ethical behaviour could bring.

The factors with least impact on consumers likelihood to leave a review were reported to be having been asked to do so by the business itself both in-person as well as follow-up emails or text messages.

Hence, the importance of reviews as a key part of choosing a business to buy from, and the reluctance of consumers accepting review requests from business, the questions about how often respondents have done so as well as their preferred request methods follow (see Fig. 6).



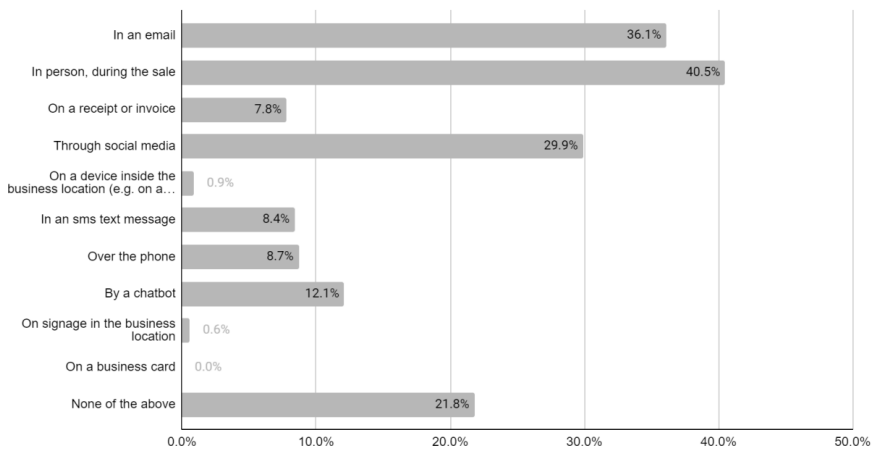
**Fig. 6. In the past 12 months, have you been prompted to leave a review for a business by the business itself?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

72,9% of consumers were prompted by businesses to write a review in the past 12 months, while 63,9% of them left reviews in response. Out of these, the majority (39,6%) did so more than half of the time. However, 9% of consumers did not leave a review after being prompted to do so by a business. This is relatively a small portion, which signals the consumers

willingness for engagement. This might again be a sign of their desire to support their local business in lieu of trying times caused by war.

As for the preferred methods of review request by businesses to which they would most likely respond to, 40,5% of respondents said they would likely write a review if they were requested to in person during the purchase transaction, followed by 36,1% who said they would be likely to write a review if asked to do so by email, while 29,9% of consumers said through social media would be an effective way of inciting a review (see Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7. Which review request methods would make you more likely to leave an online review?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

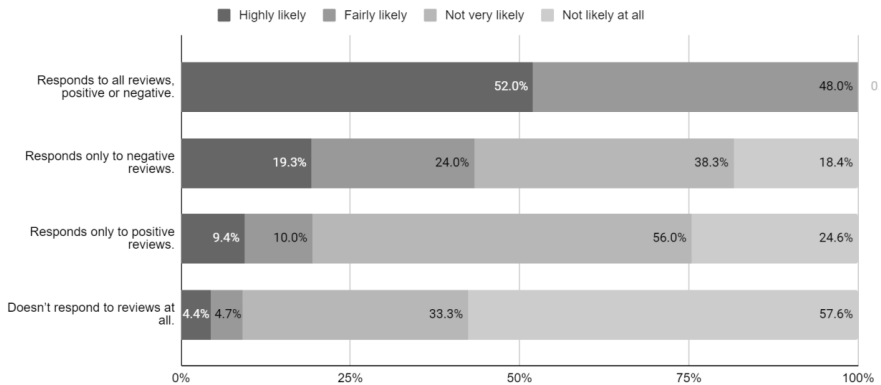
Therefore, the top method for requesting reviews is in person. As seen earlier, businesses that go the extra mile have the best chance of getting positive reviews. Moreover, it was previously discussed that business ethical practices had also a positive effect on the consumers willingness to leave a review. This implies that communicating one's CSR involvement could enhance your chances of getting customers to write a positive review. Social media is an increasingly popular channel for CSR promotion. This could lead also to other marketing benefits such as customer loyalty. Hence, seeing that third-most-popular way for businesses to request reviews from customers was through media, it makes sense combining these two factors

together for an improved likelihood of customer engagement.

Emails came in second in their popularity. This channel could also be effectively used to tell current or potential customers about one's socially and environmentally beneficial activities in order to drive the same kind of results from them.

The survey also asked about how business owners' responses to reviews affect consumers' perceptions (see Fig. 8).

All survey participants indicated their inclination to use a business when they observe the business responsiveness to reviews, irrespective of whether the feedback is positive or negative. Specifically, 43,3% of consumers expressed a likelihood of choosing a business where the owner exclusively addresses negative reviews, while 19,4% expressed a similar inclination toward businesses where the owner exclusively responds to positive reviews. Moreover, 9,1% of respondents mentioned that they would still consider using a business even if it does not engage with online reviews.



**Fig. 8. How likely are you to use a business in the following situations?**

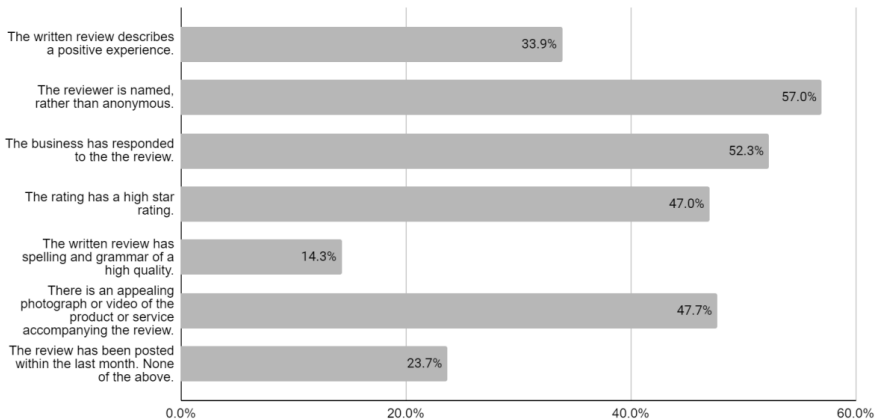
Sources: the author's own elaboration

These data highlight the significance of businesses dedicating time to addressing all types of reviews. Furthermore, it reveals that consumers are more than twice as likely to favor businesses that exclusively address negative reviews (43,3%) compared to those that exclusively respond to positive reviews (19,4%). This observation may imply that consumers perceive in positive light the business efforts to address negative

experiences.

In continuation, the survey asked about the elements of review content which might convince consumers to use a business (see Fig. 9).

According to the responses, consumers would feel positive about using a business with reviews where the reviewer is named (57%), to which the business has responded (52,3%), and which includes an appealing photograph or video (47,7), as well as being highly rated (47%). This once again emphasises the significance of responding to all consumer reviews as well as customer service excellence. It also points at the fact that consumers are wary of fake reviews and look for evidence indicating the authenticity of the reviews.

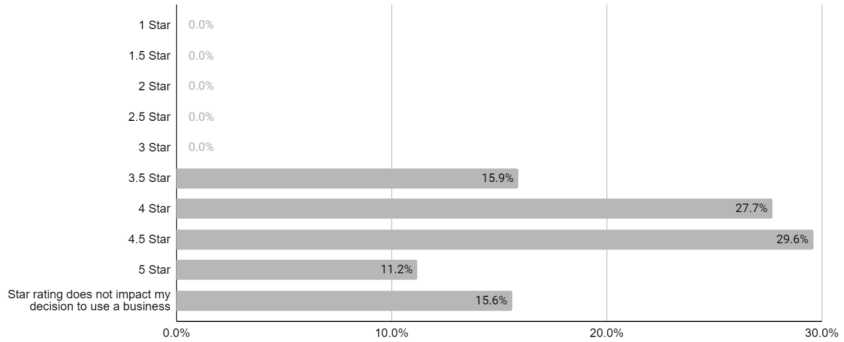


**Fig. 9. What review factors would make you feel positive about using a business?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

Given the importance of star rating in consumers decisions, the survey explored consumers perceptions of minimum average rating acceptable (see Fig. 10). The lowest acceptable average rating reported by the respondents is 3,5 stars. 29,6% expect the rating to be as high as 4,5 stars to even consider purchase. 15,6% of consumers though said that an average star rating does not impact their decision to buy from a business. It is clear that for those who see high star ratings as important, 4 stars and above is the expectation. However, the fact that 27,7% of respondents are happy to accept 3,5 star

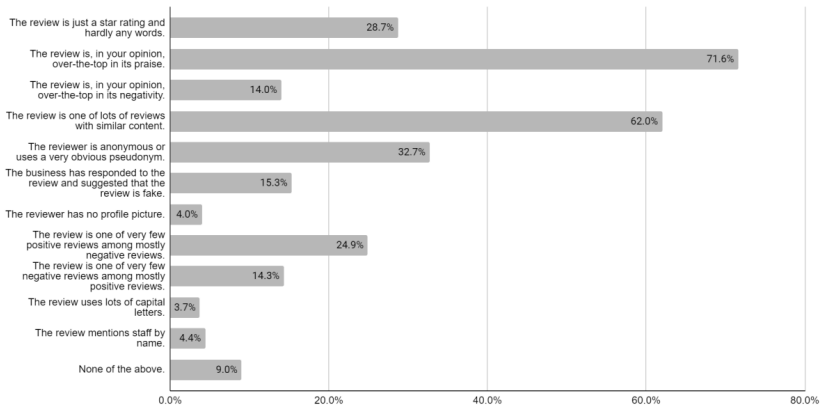
rating and 15,6% saying that star rating is not important to them at all, may suggest that some readers are not just taking star ratings at face value, but rather assess supporting review content instead.



**Fig. 10. What is the average star rating a business must have for you to consider using them?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

This brings the discussion to the issue of review authenticity (see Fig. 11).

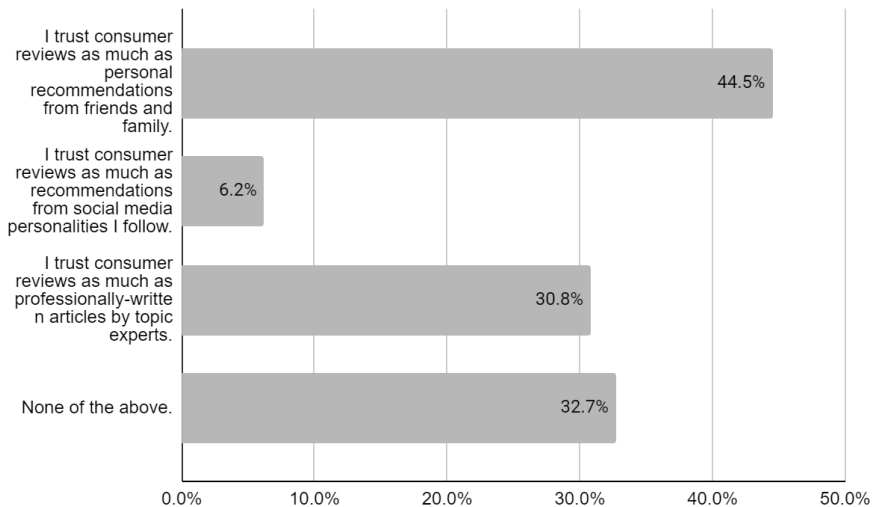


**Fig. 11. Which of the following would make you suspicious that a review might be fake**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

The survey asked what factors might make people suspicious that the review content they are seeing is fake. According to the results, 71,6% said that over-the-top positivity would make them suspicious of a fake review, while 62% said that many reviews with similar content would make them doubt the veracity of that content. 32,7% reported that they perceive the anonymity of the reviewer as dubious too. This is congruent with the finding consumers would feel positive about using a business with reviews where the reviewer is named. What is more, 28,7% of consumers said that reviews with just star ratings and hardly any words would also make them skeptical. The fact that consumers see a lack of detail in reviews as suspicious shows the importance of written review content as opposed to a single star rating.

Lastly, the issue of customers trust in reviews per se was explored, as compared to recommendations of others, such as personal connections, influencers, or professional reviews (see Fig. 12).



**Fig. 12. Which of the following statements do you agree with?**

Sources: the author's own elaboration

44,5% of respondents find online reviews as trustworthy as personal recommendations from friends or family members, while 30,8% trust online reviews as much as professional reviews, and 6,2% trust consumer reviews

as much as recommendations from social personalities.

The finding that almost half of consumers trust consumer reviews as much as personal recommendations from family and friends adds to the significance of customer reviews as a touchpoint. It highlights the relationship between real experiences and how consumers relate to these types of reviews, as compared to those by influencers or experts.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, the research results highlight the pivotal role of online reviews in the modern Ukrainian consumer landscape. This study explores how online reviews influence consumer behavior in Ukraine's digital marketplace. The findings show that online reviews are a crucial touchpoint for consumers, who rely on them when making purchase decisions. The study also reveals the cultural and social factors that shape consumer preferences and expectations, such as consumers supporting local businesses during the war, writing reviews mainly for positive experiences, and preference for businesses that are responsive and socially and environmentally responsible. The study identifies the elements of convincing reviews, such as named reviewers, business responses to reviews, visuals, and high ratings. The study also examines the factors that make consumers doubt the authenticity of reviews, such as overly positive, repetitive, anonymous, or vague content. The study also identifies the best practices for businesses to solicit, respond to, and benefit from online reviews, as well as the pitfalls to avoid, such as fake or unconvincing reviews. The study also compares the trustworthiness of online reviews with other sources of information, highlighting the importance of peer-driven opinions in the Ukrainian context. The study concludes that online reviews play a pivotal role in the Ukrainian consumer landscape. Businesses that understand and leverage these insights can enhance their online presence, foster positive customer relationships, and thrive in a consumer-driven digital marketplace. As the dynamics of consumer behavior continue to evolve, staying attuned to these trends and adapting strategies accordingly will be essential for businesses aiming to succeed in the Ukrainian market. The study contributes to the existing literature on consumer behavior and online reviews, as well as providing practical implications for businesses aiming to succeed in the Ukrainian market by understanding and leveraging the power of online reviews in influencing consumer decisions.

However, the study sample (321) was not big enough to allow exploration of the differences and similarities between consumer segments

based on age and gender. Future studies could account for these demographic differences and/or be more representative of a wider spectrum of generations, since this study included members of the Generation Z, Millennials and a small portion of Generation X. Moreover, a longitudinal study could be conducted to examine how consumer behavior and online reviews change over time, especially in relation to the post-war situation and its impact on the economy and society.

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## **ВПЛИВ ОНЛАЙН-ОГЛЯДІВ НА УХВАЛЕННЯ РІШЕНЬ ПРО ПОКУПКУ: ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО РИНКУ**

Онлайн-огляди є потужним джерелом інформації для споживачів, особливо на ринках, що розвиваються, таких як Україна. Однак мало відомо про те, як онлайн-огляди впливають на поведінку споживачів у цьому контексті. Ця стаття має на меті заповнити цю прогалину шляхом проведення опитування 321 українського споживача, які використовували онлайн-огляди для своїх рішень про покупку. У статті досліджується вплив онлайн-рецензій на прийняття споживачем рішень, мотиви та перешкоди для написання та читання рецензій, елементи переконливих і підозрілих рецензій, а також надійність онлайн-рецензій порівняно з іншими джерелами інформації. У статті також досліджуються культурні та соціальні чинники, які формують уподобання та очікування споживачів, такі як воєнна ситуація, етична поведінка та ініціативи корпоративної соціальної відповідальності (КСВ). Результати дослідження можуть бути корисними компаніям, які хочуть використовувати онлайн-огляди для покращення своєї онлайн-

присутності та відносин з клієнтами на українському ринку. Стаття є внеском у дослідження поведінки споживачів та онлайн-огляди. Пропонуються напрями подальших досліджень.

**Ключові слова:** онлайн-відгуки споживачів, поведінка споживачів, цифровий маркетинг, рішення про покупку, опитування клієнтів, шлях споживача, корпоративна соціальна відповідальність.

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