

IMPACT OF AI-GENERATED REVIEWS ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Online consumer reviews have become a key information source in digital markets, shaping product evaluation, seller selection, and purchase intention. At the same time, the credibility of review ecosystems is increasingly challenged by generative artificial intelligence, which can produce fluent and persuasive review text at scale. This review paper synthesizes prior research to explain how AI-generated reviews influence consumer buying behaviour and why their effects may be both persuasive and harmful. Using a structured narrative review approach, the paper integrates evidence from studies on online review influence, synthetic review generation, detection limits, and marketplace governance. The discussion is grounded in Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and signaling and information asymmetry perspectives. The synthesis highlights three central behavioural mechanisms—suspicion toward review authenticity, perceived review credibility, and trust in platforms and brands that jointly shape purchase intention. The review finds that consumers often struggle to reliably distinguish AI-generated reviews from human reviews, which increases vulnerability to manipulation and can also produce generalized skepticism that reduces the usefulness of reviews overall. At the same time, AI-generated reviews may increase perceived informativeness and reduce cognitive effort, particularly for search products, which can raise purchase intention under low-suspicion conditions. Based on these findings, the paper proposes an integrative framework showing how usefulness-driven persuasion and authenticity-driven resistance interact under moderating conditions such as product type, consumer involvement, platform reputation, disclosure cues, and consumer awareness of AI. The paper concludes with implications for consumers, brands, platforms, and policymakers, emphasizing that sustaining review-based commerce requires protecting credibility as a market resource through responsible marketing, stronger platform governance, and effective regulation.

Keywords: AI-Generated Reviews, Generative AI, Fake Reviews, Credibility, Trust, Purchase Intention, Consumer Behaviour, Online Marketplaces.

Introduction

In today's digital market, people rarely buy a product without checking information first. Online reviews are among the strongest signals because they combine many customer experiences in one place and feel personal and practical. Ratings influence which products consumers open, compare, and trust, so buying decisions depend not only on price and features but also on confidence created by other users' experiences. At the same time, review systems have a long-standing credibility problem. Fake reviews have existed for years, but generative AI has made them easier to create and more natural in language. AI-generated reviews can look balanced, include believable product details, and sound like advice from a real user. This matters because consumers use reviews to judge not only the product but also the honesty of the seller and the reliability of the platform. If authenticity becomes uncertain, consumers may either be misled or become overly skeptical and stop trusting even genuine reviews. This review paper examines how AI-generated reviews affect buying behaviour using a behavioural approach.

Review Methodology

This paper adopts a structured narrative review approach. The focus is on consumer behaviour outcomes rather than purely technical detection performance, although detection research is included when it helps explain behavioural responses. Evidence from experimental and survey studies was prioritized because it directly captures consumer perceptions and purchase intention.

Conceptual Background and Key Constructs

1. Online Reviews and Their Influence on Buying Behaviour

Online reviews often influence buyers more than company advertising because they feel independent and based on real experience. They help consumers judge product quality and make faster decisions. Research shows that reviews affect purchase intention, especially through overall review tone and perceived credibility. Even when consumers read only a few reviews, star ratings and review volume act as quick signals of popularity and reliability. However, reviews work only when people trust them. If manipulation is suspected, consumers may ignore reviews and rely more on brand image or platform trust. AI matters because it allows large-scale production of convincing review content, which can weaken the credibility of the review environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

A few theories help explain why AI-generated reviews can sometimes persuade consumers and sometimes create doubt.

Source Credibility Theory suggests persuasion depends on perceived trustworthiness and expertise. Because the reviewer is usually unknown, consumers judge credibility using cues such as detail, balanced tone, and consistency with other information. If a review feels automated or fake, trust drops.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains that consumers sometimes evaluate information carefully and sometimes rely on quick cues such as star ratings and short summaries. AI-generated reviews can support careful evaluation by presenting clear points, but they can also look “too perfect,” which increases suspicion—especially in low-involvement buying where consumers rely heavily on shortcuts.

Signaling theory and information asymmetry also apply. Sellers know more about product quality than buyers. Reviews reduce this gap by acting as signals. If AI-generated reviews distort these signals, uncertainty increases and buying decisions may shift in misleading ways.

3. Key Constructs

AI-generated reviews are review texts written fully or partly using generative AI tools. They can be used ethically (such as summarizing real feedback) or deceptively (creating fake endorsements). This paper focuses on deceptive use.

Suspicion (review skepticism) refers to the belief that a review may not be real. It can be triggered by unusual language, odd review patterns, or general awareness of manipulation. Once suspicion starts, consumers scrutinize more and trust less.

Perceived review credibility is how believable and useful a review seems. It includes logical judgment (plausibility) and emotional judgment (authenticity).

Trust extends beyond one review to the platform, brand, and seller. Repeated exposure to suspicious reviews can reduce platform trust and loyalty.

Purchase intention refers to readiness to buy after reading information and is widely used as a predictor of online buying behaviour.

Thematic Analysis and Synthesis

1. AI-Generated Reviews and the New Credibility Problem

Fake reviews are not new, but AI has made them easier to produce and harder to spot. AI-written reviews can sound smooth and convincing, allowing manipulators to generate large volumes quickly. This can lead to two outcomes: consumers may be misled without realizing it, or they may become broadly skeptical and discount even genuine reviews.

2. Limits of Consumer Detection and the Psychology of Believability

A key question is whether consumers can detect AI-generated reviews. Evidence suggests it is difficult, so even careful consumers may rely on shortcuts such as “verified purchase” labels, review counts, and rating patterns—although these cues can also be manipulated. Awareness of AI can further reduce trust because consumers may discount reviews simply due to uncertainty. Since believability often depends on whether a review feels like real lived experience, authenticity cues become central.

3. Credibility, Usefulness, and the Path to Purchase Intention

The key issue is not whether reviews matter, but how AI changes the credibility pathway. AI-generated reviews can feel more useful because they are clearer and easier to read, which may increase purchase intention for search products where features can be evaluated before purchase. But if consumers suspect manipulation, credibility falls and purchase intention may drop—even if the content is positive.

4. Moderators: Product Type, Involvement, and Platform Reputation

Product type matters: search products may benefit more from structured information, while experience products depend more on genuine personal experience. Consumer involvement also shapes the effect: low-involvement buyers rely more on quick cues, while high-involvement buyers cross-check more and may become more skeptical. Platform reputation matters because trusted platforms reduce perceived risk; weak platform trust pushes consumers to other information sources.

5. Marketplace Governance and Regulatory Response

AI-generated fake reviews are now a policy issue. When consumers believe platforms and regulators are actively addressing manipulation, confidence can stabilize. When they believe manipulation is widespread and unchecked, trust erosion can accelerate.

Proposed Integrative Framework

AI-generated reviews influence buying through two competing routes: perceived usefulness and perceived authenticity. When reviews seem informative and fit expectations, they reduce mental effort and can increase purchase intention, especially for search products. When authenticity is doubted, suspicion rises, credibility falls, and purchase intention declines. Over time, repeated exposure to doubtful content can damage trust in platforms and brands, affecting loyalty. The outcome depends on product type, involvement, disclosure signals, platform reputation, and consumer awareness of AI-written content.

Discussion and Implications

1. Implications for Consumers

The main risk is shopping in an environment where information reliability is uncertain. Consumers may rely on shortcuts or become overly skeptical; both increase costs through vulnerability, time, and decision fatigue.

2. Implications for Brands and Marketers

AI-driven review manipulation may offer short-term gains but creates long-term risks through reduced trust, complaints, returns, and reputational damage—especially as regulation strengthens. Brands can protect credibility by encouraging verified and balanced feedback, responding transparently to negative reviews, and avoiding artificial rating inflation.

3. Implications for Platforms

Platforms shape review visibility and credibility. Because AI-generated reviews can look natural, platforms need layered methods such as behavioural pattern detection, network analysis, and stronger verification. Transparent enforcement can support trust, but communication must avoid revealing detection loopholes.

4. Implications for Policymakers

Fake reviews are a form of market deception. Policymakers face challenges of scale, cross-border enforcement, and fast-changing technology. Deterrence improves when penalties are credible and platforms cooperate, even though not every misleading review can be detected.

Conclusion

AI-generated reviews reshape online buying by changing the credibility environment. They can sometimes help consumers by presenting clearer information, but they also make deceptive content easier to produce and harder to detect. Their influence operates mainly through suspicion, perceived credibility, and trust. If credibility is not protected, reviews may lose value as a decision tool, harming consumers and honest sellers. A sustainable approach is to protect review integrity through responsible marketing, stronger platform governance, and effective regulation so consumers can trust that reviews reflect real experience rather than automated persuasion.



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