



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN ACCOUNTING RESEARCH

Journal homepage: <https://jurnal.adai.or.id/index.php/ijtar/index>



# The Impact of Customer Online Reviews on Purchase Decision in Vietnam: Using Brand Switching as A Mediator

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 07 May 2024

Accepted: 28 May 2024

Published: 30 May 2024

#### Keywords:

Customer Online Review;

Purchase Decision;

Business

### ABSTRACT

*The rapid development of technology leads to diversification in consumer behavior. Businesses face greater competition challenges. New factors such as online customer reviews also affect consumer purchasing decisions. In order to create sustainable sales growth, businesses need to pay attention to the customer experience to reduce the percentage of customers switching to a new brand. This study incorporates these factors into the proposed model to assess their relationship. The analytical results show that the factors of customer online reviews and brand switching all impact purchase decisions.. Research is meant for businesses in general and marketers in particularly.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Customer online reviews increasingly play an important role in consumers' purchase decisions and marketing in the context of growing e-commerce. Customer online reviews (Manzoor et al., 2024) include positive and negative reviews. Show that consumers learn about product information such as product attributes, usage patterns, and product performance through online reviews. In the survey report of Xie et al., (2014) indicates that 90% of online consumers read product reviews and 839% of their direct purchase decisions were influenced by online reviews (Henning-Thurau, 2004)

The company can survive and grow depending on customers. Revenue is the lifeblood of the company. To increase revenue, the company needs to increase purchases. It means that the customers' purchase decision is very important. The purchase decision is affected by many factors. This study focused on how CORs (customer online reviews) affect purchase decisions in the context of taking brand switching as the mediator. On the other hand, when a customer converts to another brand, the company loses that sales. The meaning of research helps marketers understand the importance of CORs in retaining customers and maintaining and increasing sales. Since then, businesses and marketers have sensibly impacted CORs strategies.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Customer purchase decisions

Consumer purchase decisions refer to the ability of consumers to be willing to buy certain products (Dodds et al., 1991). The decision-making process of consumers is information processing (Bettman, 1979). Consumers find information, evaluate it and make choices (Bettman et al., 1998). Häubl & Trifts, (2000) suggest that consumers' decision-making process goes through five steps: (1) need recognition, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase behaviour. Step 1: Recognition and Needs. Kotler & Armstrong (2010) classify demand acknowledgment according to internal or external stimulus. Internal stimuli are basic human needs, such as the thirst that makes you buy a bottle of water. External stimuli are external factors that affect the consumer's desire, such as an advertisement on television that makes consumers want to buy a new phone. Recognition and demand can be categorised according to functional needs, social needs, and needs to change. For example, in function needs, the demand is related to a functional problem, eg. consumers buy newer phones for better imaging. In social needs, consumers need social recognition, eg. buying expensive products to show wealth. In need to change, the demand consumers want to change, e.g. they buy new clothes or new furniture because they want to change their designs. Step 2: Search for information. At this stage, consumers seek information through a variety of channels. In the present era, as pointed out above, CORs are one of the sources of information that greatly influences consumer decisions. The information sought at this step helps consumers remove certain brands when purchasing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Step 3: Evaluate alternatives. The evaluation of choice is different for each customer. Customers can evaluate the alternatives carefully or perhaps just replace the choice with intuition. However, these alternatives have some similar features (Solomon & Solomon, 2004). Step 4: Make a purchase decision. Consumers make purchase decisions based on perceptions of products and services in the search for information and alternative product reviews (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Consumers tend to buy their favourite brands. The factors that influence consumer purchasing decisions can be the opinions, attitudes of others, or beliefs about the brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Consumers make a purchase decision through mental shortcuts: the higher the price, the higher the quality of the product or the product brand is likely to be good (Solomon, 2004). Step 5: Post-purchase behavior. Consumers express satisfaction with the product they have purchased. If expectations for the product are not met, consumers feel frustrated (Khan & Dhar, 2006). In contrast, if the product exceeds consumers' expectations, consumers are satisfied. Consumers with high levels of satisfaction can turn to brand loyalty. The purchase decision is a complex act. Consumers can decide to change the brand or repurchase the old brand. Consumer buying decisions are influenced by other people's opinions, such as CORs (M.AIMana & A. Mirza, 2013).

### Customer online reviews (CORs)

Many scholars study the impact of customer online reviews (CORs). They offer many concepts of customers' online reviews from different perspectives. (Chen & Xie, 2008) define online review as the information users provide on the internet based on their experiences. Another definition by (Hennig-Thurau et al., (2003) is electronic word-of-mouth motives for and consequences of reading customer articulations on the internet. According to (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011), online reviews are the most influential way to make recommendations in the purchase process. Smallbiztrend.com's 2017 report shows 972% of consumers read online reviews before buying. As can be seen, online reviews are becoming increasingly important in influencing purchase decisions. From another perspective, CORs impact revenue and profit (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh (2003). Consumers can put on the internet positive or negative reviews on products or services. Thus, the online review coexists both negative reviews and positive reviews. Discuss the impact of negative CORs and positive

CORs (Liu & Yin, 2006), considering that positive CORs have a greater impact on revenue than negative CORs. In other words, positive CORs and negative CORs affect on attitudes and behavior of customers (Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Laczniak et al., (2001) show that negative CORs have a stronger impact on the buyers' intention. Arevalo's survey, published on Brightlocal.com on October 08, 2018, showed consumers increased their spending by about 31 per cent on the products and services of businesses with more positive reviews to support them. About 86% of potential customers will not buy products or services of businesses which have more negative reviews. A single negative rating can lose about 22% of customers, while about three negative CORs can reduce the customer by 59%. People hesitate to buy from businesses without a review or too many negative reviews. The finding of Hu et al., (2014) shows that negative reviews for products lead to negative attitudes toward the product and service. The intensity of negative attitudes increases with the negative response rate. In contrast, the positive attitude of consumers has a positive relationship with positive reviews.

Brand switching is a transfer of loyalty from one brand to another. The reason for converting the brand is that the brand is not attractive. Consumers tend to switch to more attractive brands. It is possible to say that choosing to buy another brand or continue to use the old brand is affected by customers' online reviews.

### **The relationship between CORs and purchase decision**

The rise of the internet and technology makes CORs increasingly influential in purchasing decisions (Constantinides & Holleschovsky, 2016). Positive and negative CORs influence consumer behaviour, but their impact differs. BrightLocal report indicates that positive CORs impact consumer perceptions and behaviours. Negative reviews have a negative impact on consumer perceptions and behaviour. Dellarcas (2003) argue that negative reviews of a company's products and services can spread quickly and potentially harm the company. Positive online reviews help companies increase sales, while negative reviews reduce sales (King et al., 2014). Consumers tend to buy more when reading positive reviews and vice versa and tend not to buy or buy less when reading negative ones.

Therefore, hypothesis 1 is formulated as follows:

**H1:** *Customer online reviews have a positive influence on purchase decisions.*

### **The Relationship of CORs and Brand Switching**

Basically, brand switching is the customer moving from one brand to another. Consumers switch brands when they feel the brand is no longer attractive (Al-Kwafi & Ahmed, 2015). And brand switching is thought to be the behavior of consumers shifting attitudes from one brand to another. Thus, brand switching can be considered one of the manifestations of consumer attitudes and behavior. Researchers point out that CORs significantly impact consumer behavior (Burtona & Khammash, 2010). In other words, CORs have a link to branding. Online positive reviews make consumers want to keep buying old brands, whereas negative comments make consumers abandon old brands for a new brand that they think is better (Helversen et al., 2018). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is formulated as follows:

**H2:** *Customer online reviews have a significant influence on brand switching.*

### **The Relationship of Brand Switching and Purchase Decision**

Branding is a behaviour done by the customer. Each customer has different preferences and types, which can change over time. When customers want to innovate, they can transform the brand to have a new experience or be no longer satisfied with the old brand, or another

brand is more attractive. When making a purchase decision, consumers consider brands with similar product attributes. Shukla (2011) said that brand switching has significant purchasing decisions. Choosing a brand is a decision-making process

Therefore, hypotheses 3 and 4 are formulated as follows:

**H3:** Brand switching has a significant influence on purchase decisions.

**H4:** Brand switching has a mediated effect on the relationship between customer online reviews and purchase decisions.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

Figure 3.1 shows the proposed study framework. The research finds out how the relationship between CORs (positive, negative) affects the purchase decision. In addition, how does brand switching mediate the relationship between the CORs and the purchase decision? In the model, there is one independent variable (COR). The study's output is the purchase decision.

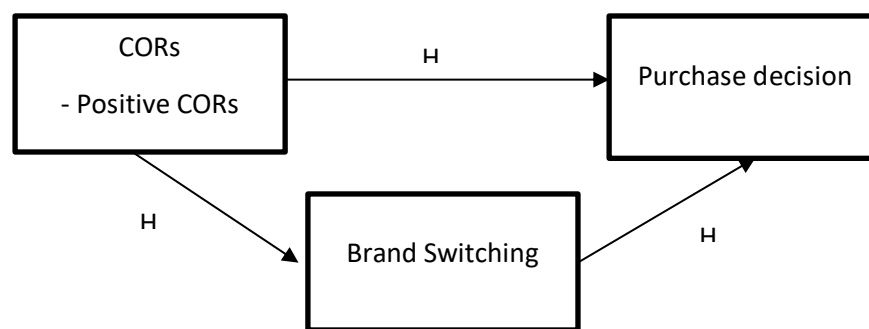


Figure 3.1 study framework

Research data collected through online surveys. The objective is to test the model relationship and the hypothesis proposed above. Five likert-type scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) were used to measure the questionnaires of variables. Collected data is analyzed by SPSS 24. Research model has 3 constructs and 18 items. Six constructs include Customer Online Reviews (6 items), Brand Switching (5 items), Purchase Decision (7 items). The questionnaires of variables was applied from previous researchers as follows: Hennig-Thurman et al. (2003), Kotler & Armstrong (2008), Indah Fintikasari Elia Ardyan (2018), Dodds et al. (1991).

The results section summarises the data collected for the study in the form of descriptive statistics and also reports the results of relevant inferential statistical analysis (e.g., hypothesis tests) conducted on the data. You need to report the results in sufficient detail so that the reader can see which statistical analyses were conducted and why, and to justify your conclusions. Mention all relevant results. There is no fixed recipe for presenting the findings of a study. Therefore, we will first consider general guidelines and then turn our attention to options for reporting descriptive statistics and the hypothesis test results. You should present your findings as concisely as possible and still provide enough detail to adequately justify your conclusions and enable the reader to understand exactly what you did in terms of data analysis and why.

To estimate the reliability of the items, a pilot test was conducted with the number of samples collected from 50 respondents. This initial test data was evaluated based on the Cronbach Alpha index. Accepted variables must have a Cronbach Alpha index greater than 0.7. Demographic factors are included to assess the differences between each group with different demographic characteristics. In this study, the demographic characteristics included in the study are sex, job, age, and income.

The data in this research is collected through surveys on social networks, forums, and emails. The survey questionnaire was posted on Facebook, 5 forums and 300 emails were sent. Therefore, the survey participants are random. The study only took the survey samples of participants aged 18 to 65 who are working. The data was run a pilot test based on 50 initial samples to assess the reliability of the variables. If the variables do not satisfy Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the questionnaire will be evaluated, edited and rebuilt. After that, continue to collect the survey sample and carry out the test until the variables satisfy the research Cronbach alpha index. The final step, bringing the completed questionnaire to the survey participants and collecting data.

## 4. RESULTS

### Characteristics of Respondents

The survey received 450 responses, which removed 31 responses, from participants under the age of 18. Of 429 valid responses, 100 responses were equivalent to 23.313 from social networks Facebook, 129, equivalent to 30.06% of feedback came from the forum and 200 with 46.62% of the feedback coming from email. The number of women's responses in the survey is larger than men's. The age of the survey has a large difference in the number of responses, ages 26 to 35 (198 responses) with the largest number and at least over 45 (11 responses). Responses in different Job groups do not have a significant difference, in which feedback in the group of employees with the largest number is 177, the lowest is in the self-employed group with 133 responses. Responses in the Income group are quite volatile. The number of responses from the high-income group is much less than those from the lowly and mid-income groups. In particular, the lowest number of responses is from the income group over \$1,000 / month (24 responses), and the highest is from the income group of \$300-600 / month (146 responses).

### Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests

Before testing the hypothesis, the factor analysis method was applied to exclude unsuitable items that did not support the factor. Factor analysis includes factor loading and reliability. Analysing factors helps to measure the scale, convergence value and discriminant value of items. The criteria for selecting the appropriate items are as follows: Factor loading: significant when coefficient is higher than 0.6 and Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO): factor analysis consistent with data retention when the KMO coefficient is greater than 0.5. Bartlett's test to determine the correlation of variables in the overall. The standard for achieving correlation is Sig. less than 0.05. The significant factor when Eigen value is greater than 1, The scale that is significant when Cronbach's coefficient alpha is higher than 0.6, the Item-to-total correlation higher than 0.5, the variables have an internal correlation.

### Factor analysis and Reliability test

Initially, construct Customer online review was built with 6 items (CO1- CO6). The Eigenvalue factor analysis results are 5.554 greater than 1, which is a significant factor. Bartlett test values are 0.000, which indicates that correlations between variables are significant. CO5 is excluded because of the factor loading coefficient of this item is 0.385 less than 0.6. The remaining items meet the criteria for the factor loading coefficient in the range of 0.832 to 0.885, all greater than 0.6. High reliability with Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.912, item to total correlation coefficient is more than 0.5. Thus, there are five items accepted in construct customer online review to use for further analysis.

Construct Brand Switching was built with 5 items (BS1- BS6). The Eigen value factor analysis results are 2.401 greater than 1, which is a significant factor. Bartlett test values are 0.000, which indicates correlations between variables is significant. All items meet the criteria for the factor loading coefficient in the range of 0.649 to 0.780, all greater than 0.6. High reliability with Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.826 and all items to total correlation coefficient is greater than

0.5. Thus, there are five items accepted in this construct to use for further analysis. Construct customer online reviews was built with 7 items (PDI- PD7). The Eigenvalue factor analysis results are 1.069 greater than 1, which is a significant factor. Bartlett test values are 0.000, which indicates that correlations between variables is significant. PD5, PDI, PD7 is excluded because of the factor loading coefficient of these items are 0.663, 0.624, 0.607 less than 0.6. The remaining items meet the criteria for the factor loading coefficient in the range of 0.695 to 0.732, all greater than 0.6. Scale test with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.777, item to total correlation coefficient is greater than 0.5. Thus, four items are accepted in the purchase decision construct to use for further analysis.

### Independent Sample T-test

In this study, an independent sample t-test is used to check the differences in feedback between men and women in 3 constructs. The two groups differ when the p-value is less than 0.05, and the t-value is greater than 1.98 (Hair et al., 2006). Table 4.8 shows the independent sample t-test results of 3 constructs. All constructs have t-value and p-value values that do not meet the criteria, so there is no difference between the two groups of men and women in these constructs.

Table 1. The T-test results compare Customer Online Reviews, Brand Switching, and Purchase Decision.

Mean	Male	Female	T-value	P-value	Difference between groups
	N = 198	N = 231			
Customer online review	4.136	4.257	-1.778	.076	NS
Brand switching	4.230	4.26	-.494	.621	NS
Purchase decision	94.1881	4.2721	-1.481	.139	NS

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Source: Original study

### Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis is used to test the hypothesis. Table 2 shows the results of descriptive correlation of variables. Construct brand switching has the largest mean value (4.201), and the standard deviation is 0.7033. The Pearson correlation coefficient shows that customer online reviews are significant for brand switching ( $r = .284$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). And brand switching is significant for purchase decisions ( $r = .619$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, the following hypotheses are:

H1: Customer Online Reviews have a positive influence on purchasing decisions.

H2: Customer Online Reviews have a significant influence on Brand Switching.

H3: Brand Switching has a significant influence on purchase decisions.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations of the Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	COR	BS	PD
COR	4.201	.7033	1		
BS	4.260	.6020	.122*	1	
PD	4.234	.5905	.098*	.619**	1

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001; COR= Customer Online Reviews; BS= Brand Switching; PD= Purchase Decision

### The Mediating Effect of Brand Switching

This study uses regression analysis to test Brand Switching's mediate effects. Firstly, Brand Switching is tested for its mediate impact on the relationship between CORs and purchase decisions. The results are shown in Table 4.3.

Model 1: Test the relationship between CORs with brand switching. The results show that CORs have a positive effect on Brand Switching ( $B = 0.194$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H2 is supported.

Model 2: Test the relationship between brand switching with purchase decision and CORs with purchase decision. Results showed that brand switching positively affected purchase decisions ( $B = 0.619$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). And, CORs positively affect purchase decisions ( $B = 0.207$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H1 and H3 are supported.

Model 3: CORs and brand switching regressed with purchase decision ( $B = 0.90$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $B = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The results showed that R-square = 0.391 and the R-square adjustment is 0.388, meaning that 38.8% of the variance in purchase decisions can be from the switching brand and customer review. F-value equals 136,923 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ) is significant. VIF is 1.039, and does not appear multicollinearity.

According to the results, the beta value of customer online reviews is reduced from 0.194 to 0.090, and both brand switching and customer online reviews are significantly related to purchase decisions. Therefore, brand switching provides a partial mediation effect on the relationship between customer online reviews and purchase decisions. H4 was supported.

Table 3 Mediation Test of brand switching between price and purchase decision.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2		Model 3
	BS	PD	PD	PD
CO	.194***		.207***	.090***
BS		.619***		.602***
R2	.038	.383	.043	.391
Adj-R2	.036	.382	.041	.388
F-value	19.128	139.41	19.128	136.923
P-value	0	0	0	0
D-W	1.351	1.938	1.742	1.959
Max VIF	1	1	1	1.039

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; CO= Customer Online Reviews; BS= Brand Switching; PD= Purchase Decision

### 5. CONCLUSION

The study assessed the factors affecting the purchasing decisions of people over 18, in different careers and income levels. The analytical results show that the factors of customer online reviews and brand switching all impact purchase decisions. The study also tested the mediator role of brand switching in the relationship between customer online reviews and purchase decisions. In addition, brand switching's mediate effects on the relationship between customer online reviews and purchase decisions are also included in the test. Customer online reviews and brand switching all positively impacted purchase decisions. As can be seen, brand switching has the largest direct positive impact on purchase decisions compared to other factors ( $B = 0.619$ ). This shows that consumers tend to change to new products if the product is more attractive. This result is consistent with previous research by Naeem, M., 2017.

Research results confirm that customers base on customer online reviews to make purchasing decisions, coinciding with the research results of Arndt (1967) and the other authors with a perspective that positive customer online reviews have a positive effect to customer purchase decision also negative customer online reviews have negative effect to customer purchase decision (Floyd et al., 2014; PY Chen et al., 2004; RA King et al., 2014). Findings showed that brand switching mediated the relationship between customer online reviews and purchase decisions, while brand switching has a perfectly mediated effect in the relationship between price and purchase decision. In conclusion, the brand switching factor has the greatest impact on purchase decisions, which is a mediator that leads to consumer purchasing decisions after referring to customer online reviews.

Research makes sense for businesses in general, marketers, and product and service developers in particular. Initially, online customer reviews also played an important role in brand switching and buying decisions. Therefore, businesses need to focus on building platforms for customer reviews. And, especially, marketers need to pay attention to creating effects to enhance positive reviews and decrease negative reviews. The more positive reviews, the higher the rate of buying goods or services of the business and vice versa. Positive reviews will bring many customers from customers who are more likely to find new products or services. This significantly determines the turnover of the business.

Limitations of the study are only studied in the Vietnam market with a small number of samples (429 samples). In addition, research has not entered a specific industry or product. Each business product will have its own characteristics, so the research results may change when applying the same model to a specific product or industry. Therefore, the following studies may apply this model but with the scope of research for specific sectors or projects, as well as for the participants In a specific group to get research results has high applicability in practice.

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