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A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF FAKE ONLINE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: TRUST, PERCEPTION, AND PURCHASE INTENTION

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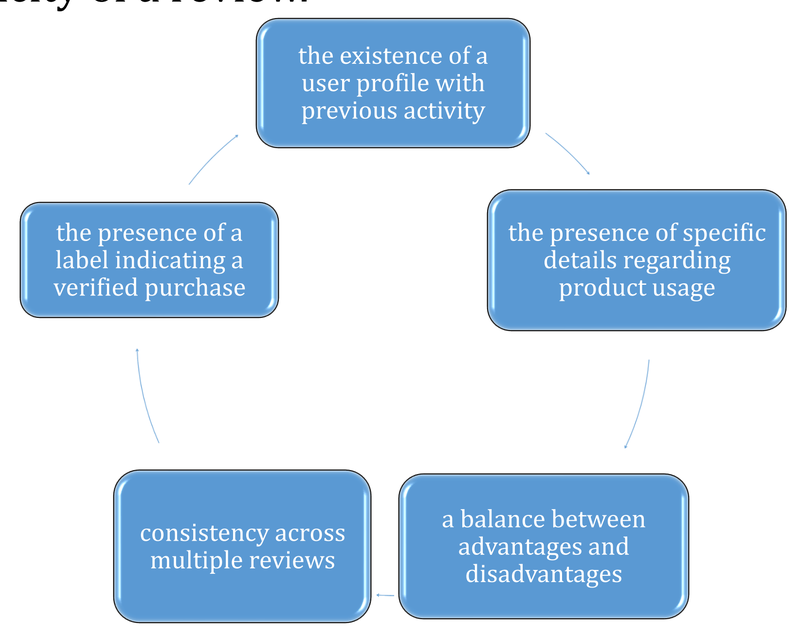
Abstract: The development of e-commerce and the increasingly frequent use of digital platforms have transformed online reviews into an important factor in consumers’ decision-making processes. Opinions and ratings published by other users contribute to the formation of perceptions regarding the quality of products and services, influencing consumers’ level of trust and purchase intention. However, the emergence of fake reviews and manipulated ratings raises questions about the authenticity of information available in the digital environment and its effects on consumer behavior. This paper aims to analyze the influence of fake reviews on consumer trust, product perception, and purchase intention. The research seeks to identify the main factors that determine the credibility of online reviews, such as average ratings, the number of reviews, the content of review messages, and previous purchasing experiences. It also considers the psychological mechanisms through which social influence and the perceived popularity of a product can contribute to consumer decision-making.

Introduction

- The development of e-commerce has significantly changed the way consumers search for information, compare products, and make purchasing decisions. While in traditional retail environments consumers could directly examine products or ask for recommendations from people close to them, in the digital environment they increasingly rely on information available online, particularly reviews and ratings published by other users.
- Online reviews represent a form of electronic interpersonal communication, known in the academic literature as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). They allow consumers to share their experiences, opinions, and impressions of products and services, thereby influencing the perceptions and behaviors of other potential buyers.
- The importance of online reviews stems from their ability to reduce the uncertainty associated with online shopping. In the absence of direct contact with a product, consumers rely on other people's experiences to assess its quality, usefulness, and reliability. A high number of positive ratings can create the impression that a product is popular and well-regarded, whereas negative reviews may lead consumers to postpone or abandon a purchase.
- However, the credibility of information available online can be affected by the presence of fake reviews. These may be generated by individuals who have never used the product, published in exchange for certain benefits, or created through coordinated efforts to artificially influence the reputation of a product or a retailer.

Results and discussions

- Trust represents an individual's willingness to consider information sufficiently credible to rely on it when making decisions.
- In the digital environment, consumers cannot always verify the identity of a review author or whether they have actually used the product. For this reason, they may rely on indirect cues, such as:
  - the existence of a user profile with previous activity;
  - the presence of specific details regarding product usage;
  - a balance between advantages and disadvantages;
  - consistency across multiple reviews;
  - the presence of a label indicating a verified purchase.
- These cues can contribute to the perception of credibility; however, they do not guarantee the authenticity of a review.



Conclusions: Online reviews have become an essential element of the e-commerce environment, significantly influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. By providing access to the experiences and opinions of other users, they help reduce uncertainty and enable consumers to make more informed choices. However, the growing presence of fake reviews highlights the importance of critically evaluating online information. Therefore, although eWOM represents a valuable source of information and a powerful influence on consumer behavior, its effectiveness largely depends on the credibility and authenticity of the reviews being shared.