



Impact of Online Reviews on Apparel Purchases via Meesho in Urban and Rural Gujarat

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Abstract

As Indian e-commerce continues to rapidly evolve, online reviews have emerged as a compelling choice for influencing consumer purchasing behaviours. This study sought to evaluate the impact online reviews have on consumers when making apparel purchases through Meesho, a mobile social commerce platform that is experiencing particular success with users in Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 cities, and rural areas. The aim of this study was to better understand how consumers evaluate and respond to social commerce products and sellers based on online reviews such as star rating versus user comments versus customer images and quantity of reviews collectively influence their buying choices.

The results are based on 100 responses to structured questionnaires administered to Meesho users in Gujarat. Data analysis uncovered key patterns of behaviour: 75% of respondents always (or often) rely on reviews, and 73% of respondents found reviews had a high to very high influence on their final purchase. Females and Tier 1 were more frequent shoppers, while trustworthiness of reviews was obviously most highly associated with visuals and detailed narratives. Interestingly, consumers preferred products with a lower star rating but more reviews because they favoured social proof over averages.

The research highlights demographic disparities in review-reading behavior, showing variations in trust, skepticism, and emotional response based on region, gender, and profession. These insights are valuable for marketers, e-commerce strategists, and Meesho sellers aiming to boost product visibility and consumer trust. The study recommends promoting authentic, image-verified reviews and leveraging consumer psychology to influence online purchase decisions.

Keywords: Apparel Purchase, Consumer Behavior, E-Commerce, Meesho, Online Reviews, Tier Cities

Introduction

The rapid growth of e-commerce in India has significantly changed the traditional retail landscape as it provides consumers with an unprecedented array of product and service choice across geographic distance and economic profiles. For a country like India that comprises immense diversity in economic status and

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product choice, the transformation is even more significant as e-commerce platforms allowed both urban and, to a lesser extent, semi-urban/rural consumers to engage in digital purchases. Amongst e-commerce platforms, Meesho has emerged as a disruptive platform through its contextually relevant response to underrepresented markets, particularly, consumers in Tier 2, Tier 3 cities and small villages. Different from general e-commerce platforms, Meesho addressed the social/economic realities of these regions through inexpensive offerings and the functionality of its mobile app.

One of the most influential factors affecting online shopping behaviour includes the availability / quality of online reviews. Online reviews replace the physical experience of inspecting the product first-hand, and this is particularly true for product categories that are largely based on experiences: Apparel for example, provides expectations based on fit, fabric, style, and experience. With consumers increasingly reliant on user-generated content to navigate uncertainties; and assess quality indicators, online reviews have been fully integrated into the digital decision-making process.

While there is more literature on the study of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) globally, little research has focused on the way consumers from non-metro Indian regions, especially Meesho users, interact with review systems. This research explores that gap by focusing on the state of Gujarat, and is intended to evaluate how consumers from varying socio-economic and regional backgrounds utilize online reviews while making apparel purchases on Meesho.

Integration of Theoretical Framework (e-WOM and Information Adoption Model):

The present research is underpinned by the Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) Theory and the Information Adoption Model (IAM). The e-WOM Theory investigates the impact of user-generated evaluations disseminated through online platforms on the attitudes, trust, and buying inclinations of other consumers. Furthermore, the IAM posits that the acceptance of information is influenced by factors such as the source's credibility, content quality, and perceived utility. Collectively, these conceptual frameworks provide a comprehensive basis for explicating the mechanisms through which Meesho clientele, particularly those residing in rural areas, evaluate and react to online reviews in the fashion industry.

The main objectives of this research are:

- To Assess the function and implications of online reviews on apparel purchases through Meesho.
- To Assess behavioural and trust differences across Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 cities, and villages.

- To Identify the most significant part of reviews—including ratings, images, total reviews, and review detail—that can impact decisions to purchase by consumers.

The exploration of these discrete domains contributes significantly to the deepening of our understanding of consumer psychology in the context of digital assimilation. This examination further offers valuable insights to assist platforms and marketers in improving evaluation processes and consumer engagement in developing markets like India.

Literature Review

Many scholars believe that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is an increasingly important factor influencing consumer behavior in the online marketplace. eWOM includes online reviews, ratings, and user-generated information, and it is a key source of information for consumers lacking the opportunity to physically inspect product(s). Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) showed that the quantity and quality of online reviews have significant influence on product sales. They found that positive and negative products can both positively or negatively influence sales of a product in the online marketplace. They essentially showed the degree to which eWOM can supplant other product evaluations.

Expanding on this, Mudambi and Schuff (2010) identified review helpfulness and described the perceived benefits of a review (i.e., length, level of detail, tone) as an important quality of helpful reviews and one that relates to purchase decisions. They found consumers valued reviews that had more balanced and specific product information over generic, emotional reviews.

In the Indian e-commerce market, the emergence of eWOM is observable through the lens of platforms like Meesho, which enable micro-entrepreneurs and shoppers from Tier 2, Tier 3 and rural India to access inexpensive products with support in their vernacular language on a mobile first interface. The browsing and decision trees for informal commerce have unlocked online shopping for many low- and medium-income consumers, where online reviews are an important mechanism for mitigating perceived risk and build trust in shopping environments with which they are unfamiliar.

Although these platforms see considerable usage, there is clear research gap regarding consumers' understanding and actions on Meesho, and specifically regarding consumers of Meesho who purchase apparel. Research on the presence of consumer behavior aspects on major platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart are considerably profuse, use of Meesho is clearly very limited in academia. This is an important gap for researchers, especially when considering Meesho's growth and the way it has shaped non-metro consumers.

This study tries to fill this gap by examining the impact of online reviews on apparel purchases in different socio-economic and geographic sectors in Gujarat. Since selecting clothing is a very subjective task based on personal preference, fit, and quality perceptions, consumers highly value peer reviews which greatly influence

their decisions. Therefore, investigating how different aspects of reviews—like star ratings, user photos, number of reviews, and sentiment—impact purchase intent on Meesho, is timely and relevant for both theorists and practitioners.

Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive and quantitative research approach to analyze the behavior and decision-making process of consumers who choose to purchase apparel on Meesho. The quantitative method allows objective measurement and analysis of the effects of online reviews on consumer behavior whereas the descriptive nature of the method helps to identify trends, frequencies and relationships between variables.

To gather primary data, a structured questionnaire was developed, and the survey was then introduced among a sample of 100 Meesho users spread across various geographical locations in Gujarat namely Tier 1 cities (Ahmedabad, Surat), Tier 2 cities (eg. Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, etc), Tier 3 towns, and small villages. The sample was all inclusive so that it captures consumers behavior across urban, semi-urban, and rural settings. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, and was grouped into thematic aspects and sections pertaining to: demographic profile, frequency of online shopping and frequency of Meesho-specific online shopping, trust and perception of online reviews, frequency of reading and writing reviews, and reasons for factors that affect the final purchase decision.

Convenience sampling was the sampling technique used, as it is practical and accessible in light of time, budget, and limitations. Though not a probabilistic sample, this sampling methodology allowed the researcher to identify a group of actual Meesho users with first-hand experience, thus improving sample relevance. A sample was recruited from online sources such as WhatsApp groups, student networks, and community-based networks to reach a good representation of age, gender, income, and occupation.

A convenience sampling strategy was employed to address issues of accessibility and time constraints. The selection of participants encompassed diverse segments including Tier 1 (e.g., Surat, Ahmedabad), Tier 2 (e.g., Rajkot), Tier 3 urban locales, and rural areas within the region of Gujarat. The research cohort consisted of 100 individuals engaging with the Meesho platform, displaying the subsequent demographic distribution:

- Age Groups: Below 25 years (21%), 26–40 years (42%), 41–60 years (27%), Over 60 years (10%)
- Gender: Female (58%), Male (40%), non-binary (2%)
- Educational Attainment: Secondary education (12%), Undergraduate studies (36%), Graduate degree (38%), Postgraduate qualification (14%)
- Monthly Income: Less than ₹10,000 (24%), ₹10,000–₹25,000 (38%), ₹25,001–₹50,000 (25%), Exceeding ₹50,000 (13%)

Using Microsoft Excel to aggregate and manage data was beneficial to descriptive analysis (frequencies, percentages, mean scores) and inferential analysis. Specifically, cross-tabulations were used to examine associations between categorical variables such as gender and frequency of shopping; or tier of residence and dependency on reviews. Additionally, Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine whether the associations between variables like geographic tier and purchase frequency were statistically significant at the 5% level.

This combination of statistical tools is a solid foundation for understanding the behavioural impact of online reviews and finding useful patterns that distinguish consumer responses by region and demographics.

Data Analysis / Results

- The data collected from 100 Meesho users throughout Gujarat provides an important view of apparel purchase decisions based on online reviews across tiers and demographics. We explored the data and looked for patterns, relationships and significant behavioural trends using descriptive statistics, cross-tabs and chi-square analysis.
- Perhaps the most revealing finding is that 57% of respondents always look at online reviews prior to making a purchase, and another 18% often consult reviews, meaning three out of four users are regularly trusting peer reviews. This indicates a significant reliance on user-generated content to supplement the impossibility of physically trying on clothing items virtually.
- The gender-based analysis has shown that the female respondents are much more engaged on Meesho, using the platform more frequently or shopping weekly and monthly, while the male respondents report that they are in the rare category when shopping. The cross-tabulated chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 14.8064$) highlighted a statistically significant relationship between gender and frequency of shopping, confirming that it is crucial to design marketing communications for female users.

Table: - Cross-tabulation: Frequency × Gender (Assumed Sample):

Frequency	Male (O)	Male (E)	Female (O)	Female (E)	Total
Daily	2	$\{6 \times 46\} / \{100\} = 2.76$	4	$\{6 \times 54\} / \{100\} = 3.24$	6
Weekly	12	$\{36 \times 46\} / \{100\} = 16.56$	24	$\{36 \times 54\} / \{100\} = 19.44$	36
Monthly	14	$\{36 \times 46\} / \{100\} = 16.56$	22	$\{36 \times 54\} / \{100\} = 19.44$	36
Rarely	18	$\{22 \times 46\} / \{100\} = 10.12$	4	$\{22 \times 54\} / \{100\} = 11.88$	22
Total	46		54		100

$$\chi^2 = 0.2093 + 0.1783 + 1.2560 + 1.0696 + 0.3957 + 0.3370 + 6.1341 + 5.2264 = 14.8064$$

- Comparing a geographic characteristic, Tier 1 city users are the most frequent users of Meesho, followed by Tier 2 city users, then Tier 3 city users. Yet the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 3.6171$, $p > 0.05$) shows that the frequency of purchase has no significant association to city tier, suggesting regional users may interact with Meesho similarly, once barriers to access digital services are adjusted.

Frequency	Tier	O	E	(O-E) ² / E
Daily	T1	2	2.7	0.1815
Daily	T2	3	1.92	0.6047
Daily	T3	1	1.38	0.1043
Weekly	T1	15	16.2	0.0889
Weekly	T2	13	11.52	0.1891
Weekly	T3	8	8.28	0.0095
Monthly	T1	17	16.2	0.0395
Monthly	T2	12	11.52	0.0208
Monthly	T3	7	8.28	0.1979
Rarely	T1	11	9.9	0.1222
Rarely	T2	4	7.04	1.3125
Rarely	T3	7	5.06	0.7472

$$\chi^2 = 0.1815 + 0.6047 + 0.1043 + 0.0889 + 0.1891 + 0.0095 + 0.0395 + 0.0208 + 0.1979 + 0.1222 + 1.3125 + 0.7472 = 3.6171$$

At significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical value of χ^2 with 6 degrees of freedom is **12.592**. Since: χ calculated = 3.6171 < 12.592

- For review content, Reviews with real buyer photos were rated as the most trustworthy with an average of 3.48 on a 5-point Likert scale, and, surprisingly, higher than star ratings. This highlights that visual authenticity is a key player in establishing credibility. Users also prefer products with extensive reviews (higher volume) even if their average scores are lower. In particular, 46% of our participants preferred a 4.1-star rated product that had many reviews than a 4.5-star rated product that had a lower number of reviews. This again highlights that quantity of reviews contributes more to perceived trustworthiness than simply high ratings.
- An impressive 73% of users indicated that reviews had a high or very high influence on their purchase consideration, demonstrating that online evaluations clearly influence their purchasing behavior. Furthermore, we confirmed this impact, as 76% of respondents have written a review frequently (35%) or in cases of extreme satisfaction or unsatisfactory experiences (41%). The most important motivational reason for providing reviews is to help other buyers make sound purchasing decisions (37%). The 2nd most reported motivation for writing a review was to laud a good product (28%), with their 3rd reason being to complain about bad quality (23%).

Table: Consumer Response to Mixed Reviews

Statement	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
I get confused and look for another product.	16	16%
I tend to trust the negative reviews more and avoid the purchase.	25	25%
I tend to trust the positive reviews more.	29	29%
I try to find a pattern or common issue in the negative reviews.	27	27%
The mix doesn't affect my decision.	3	3%
Total	100	100%

1. Most Trusted:

Positive reviews (29%) are slightly more trusted than **negative reviews** (25%), **27%** try to analyze patterns, showing a **critical thinking** mindset rather than impulsive reaction.

Skeptical or cautious buyers: 25% avoid the product based on negative reviews, **16%** get confused and abandon the purchase altogether, these two combined (41%) indicate that **poor review management may lead to lost sales.**

2. Only 3% unaffected: It indicates that almost everyone considers reviews before making decisions.**Table: Trustworthy Source -**

Liker scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total
1. Online reviews are a trustworthy source of product information	7	16	29	31	17	100
2. Positive reviews increase willingness to buy apparel	11	17	21	29	22	100
3. A single negative review can stop a purchase	27	23	25	15	10	100
4. Real buyer photos increase trust in reviews	5	15	27	33	20	100

Weighted Mean Calculation:

Statement	Mean Score
1	$(1 \times 7 + 2 \times 16 + 3 \times 29 + 4 \times 31 + 5 \times 17) / 100 = \mathbf{3.35}$
2	$(1 \times 11 + 2 \times 17 + 3 \times 21 + 4 \times 29 + 5 \times 22) / 100 = \mathbf{3.34}$
3	$(1 \times 27 + 2 \times 23 + 3 \times 25 + 4 \times 15 + 5 \times 10) / 100 = \mathbf{2.58}$
4	$(1 \times 5 + 2 \times 15 + 3 \times 27 + 4 \times 33 + 5 \times 20) / 100 = \mathbf{3.48}$

- The mean score analysis shows that consumers generally **trust online reviews** (3.35) and are **positively influenced by favorable feedback** (3.34), especially in apparel purchases. However, a

single negative review has limited impact (2.58), as consumers tend to assess reviews holistically. The **highest trust** is shown when reviews include **real buyer photos** (3.48), highlighting the importance of **visual content and authenticity**. Overall, consumers exhibit a **thoughtful, trust-based approach** to online reviews, valuing credibility and transparency.

- The Chi-Square test statistic is calculated as: $\chi^2 = \sum E_i (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$

Category	O _i	E _i	O _i - E _i	(O _i - E _i) ²	(O _i - E _i) ² / E _i
Strongly Disagree (1)	7	20	-13	169	8.45
Disagree (2)	16	20	-4	16	0.80
Neutral (3)	29	20	9	81	4.05
Agree (4)	31	20	11	121	6.05
Strongly Agree (5)	17	20	-3	9	0.45
Total	100				19.80

Degrees of Freedom = Number of categories - 1 = 5 - 1 = 4

Critical Value (from Chi-Square Table): At $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level and $df = 4$, the critical value is: $\chi^2_{0.05, 4} = 9.488$, Computed $\chi^2 = 19.80$, Since **19.80 > 9.488**, we **reject the null hypothesis**.

Interpretation: The computed Chi-Square value is **19.80**, while the critical value at a 5% significance level with 4 degrees of freedom is **9.488**. Since **19.80 is greater than 9.488**, we **reject the null hypothesis**. This indicates that the responses are **not uniformly distributed**, and there is a **statistically significant preference or variation** in how respondents perceive the trustworthiness of online reviews.

- Facing a combination of good and bad reviews makes consumers think carefully, as 29% reported intertwining the good reviews or seeing patterns from the bad reviews before deciding on a product. Only 3% of users reported being unaffected by the reviews indicating that reviews are an important part of the decision-making process for most of the users.
- In terms of deterrents, something like no customer photos (28%), a low star rating (21%), and not enough reviews (32%) are typically reported as most deterrent to not buying a product. This reinforces the need for platforms like Meesho to prompt reviews that are visual, descriptive and detailed.

Table: Elements of a review-

Rating Scale	Frequency	Weight
Very Important	54	5
Important	24	4
Moderately Important	11	3
Slightly Important	6	2
Not Important at All	5	1
Total Responses	100	

Weighted Average Score (Mean)

Formula: Weighted Average = $\sum (\text{Frequency} \times \text{Weight}) / \text{Total Responses}$

Calculation: $= (54 \times 5) + (24 \times 4) + (11 \times 3) + (6 \times 2) + (5 \times 1) / 100 = 416 / 100 = 4.16$

Interpretation:

- High Average Score (4.16): Indicates that overall, respondents consider review elements to be important to very important in their decision-making process for apparel on Meesho. Majority (78%) rated 4 or 5: This shows a strong trust and reliance on customer reviews when making online purchase decisions. Only 11% rated 1 or 2: Very few respondents find reviews unimportant, confirming their crucial role in influencing purchase intent.
- Ultimately, satisfaction levels indicate that 56% of users were either satisfied or very satisfied with their purchases based on reviews, while 24% expressed dissatisfaction, meaning that while online reviews are generally informative, there can be improvement to meet expectations set by reviews with the (actual) experience of the product.

Table: Customer Satisfaction Based on Online Reviews -

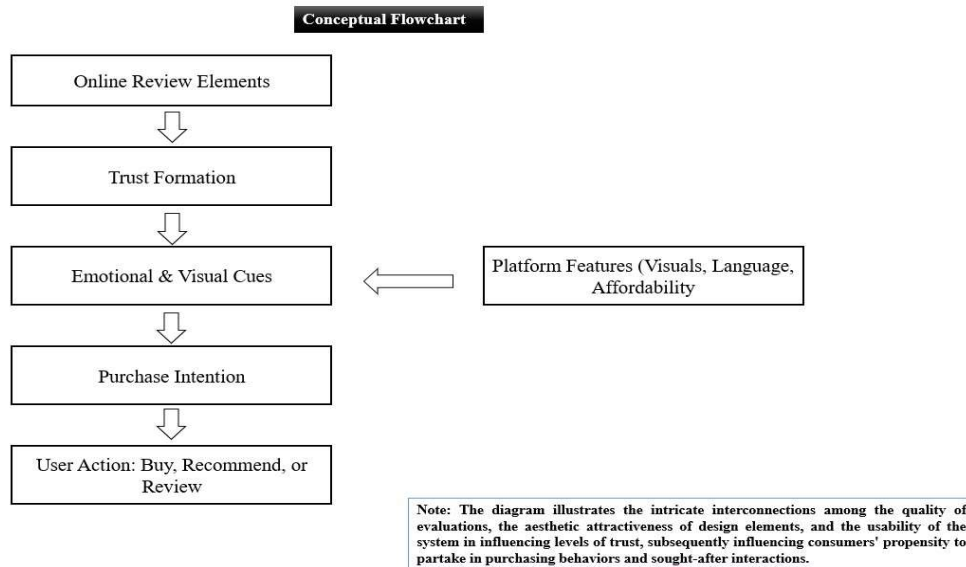
Satisfaction Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	19	19%
Satisfied	37	37%
Neutral	20	20%
Dissatisfied	15	15%
Very Dissatisfied	9	9%
Total	100	100%

Discussion

The research outcomes significantly underscore the substantial influence of online evaluations on consumer behavior within the realm of apparel acquisitions conducted through the Meesho platform. This inquiry serves to validate antecedent research results by elucidating the widespread dependence of consumers on reviews, specifically those containing textual evaluations and genuine user-generated visuals, as critical determinants in consumer decision-making processes. This corresponds closely with the contentions of Mudambi and Schuff (2010), accentuating the significance of reviews furnishing substantial value and contributing to the cultivation of consumer trust.

Particularly noteworthy is the heightened involvement in online shopping endeavors and interactions with online appraisals exhibited by female consumers and denizens of Tier 1 urban locales. This inclination is plausibly linked to their augmented exposure to digital platforms, financial independence, and the array of products accessible on Meesho, notably encompassing items like apparel and household commodities that may hold greater appeal for female cohorts. Of special interest is the disclosure that while Tier 1 users manifest the most conspicuous degrees of engagement, individuals from Tier 2 and Tier 3 sectors display burgeoning

participation from individuals with limited digital adeptness, indicating a gradual adjustment to online portals among more hesitant consumers.



An interesting observation is the preference for products that have a low-star rating, but a large volume of reviews. This indicates review volume will create more social proof than the rating alone. Further, having images from the actual customers corroborated trust in the reviews. Clearly, consumers value authenticity and visual affirmation. The findings also demonstrate that consumers were attentive to trends in the negative reviews, suggesting a more thoughtful evaluative shopping approach rather than impulse.

Rural and Tier 3 consumers are increasingly demonstrating a preference for visual assessments, showing a particular fondness for images and videos. This shift in consumer behavior is linked to the limited access to products and increased distrust towards textual descriptions experienced by this demographic. Visual cues provide tangible validation regarding the excellence, appropriateness, and authenticity of items. For many individuals with restricted literacy levels or limited exposure to online shopping, visual depictions serve as a substitute for physical inspection, nurturing trust and alleviating apprehensions.

The Meesho framework, designed for mobile devices and accommodating various regional languages, along with its cost-effective product range and inclusive peer-to-peer business structure, holds particular appeal for consumers residing in non-urban areas. The utilization of a referral approach enhances the effectiveness of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) recommendations, especially in thinly populated regions where social confirmation significantly influences consumer buying patterns.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that online reviews play a significant role in consumer purchase decisions on Meesho, particularly for apparel. Most users agree that review aspects such as detailed comments, star ratings and real buyer images are important to them when making confident decisions. Female users and users living in Tier 1 cities typically engage more, but the growing engagement also in rural and Tier 3 areas indicates growing digital penetration and higher product trust.

The study shows that Meesho and companies like it need to better the review ecosystem by having people provide visual-based, authentic reviews, designing the review features such that they are relatively easy to use, and educating people on how to write an effective and constructive review. The above recommendations will also develop the customer experience to support purchase confidence for all tiers.

Although the sample size is limited, contextual to Gujarat, the study provides actual insights into potential knowledge on larger e-commerce dynamics in India. Future research may emphasize comparative platforms, longitudinal research, and more wholly understand how gender or generational influences come into play.

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