The critical role of reviews in Internet trust

/ How different types of Internet reviews create and damage consumer trust
Introduction

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust

As trust in society is eroding and people come to put their faith in the anonymous reviews of strangers, attitudes towards trust are impacting people’s decisions and behaviour.

In order to better understand Internet consumer trust, Trustpilot commissioned independent behavioural insights practice Canvas8 to explore what consumers value online and how reviews impact their behaviour. The following report illustrates the insights that emerged.
We are a behavioral insight practice based in London and New York helping organisations to understand people.

Our core team of Behavioral Analysts – with backgrounds ranging from anthropology to psychology, journalism to strategy – is complemented by a global network of over 1,400 influential thinkers and cultural observers.

Our approach blends human science, market research and strategic consultancy – and is a product of our unique company structure.

We’ve helped the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation leverage the science of influence; informed major activations for Nike and helped the British government stimulate global trade.
Approach

/ How the research was conducted

Methodology

Desk research and media analysis: Review of existing research on relevant behavioural and cultural trends, learnings and insights around trust and reviews. This was supplemented with an analysis of emerging media narratives around Internet trust and reviews, using Quid, a media index and analysis tool.

Quantitative survey: A nationally representative online survey of 2152 people across the UK, 2056 in France and 2175 in the US.

Expert interviews: Interviews with leading experts in marketing and social sciences, to uncover richer insights behind why consumers do what they do on the Internet and why transparent reviews matter.

The experts

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Invisible Influence: The Hidden Forces that Shape Behavior*.

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University and co-editor of the *Annual Review of Sociology* and editor of a number of books in the Russell Sage Foundation Trust Series.
Navigating the Internet trust landscape
Key findings / Trust in brands is eroding, but consumers know how to fix it

11% decline in trust from ages 18 to 65 for consumers globally*

Brands need to rebuild trust with consumers

89% of consumers globally check reviews online before making purchases*

Consumers have already found confidence in the voices of their peers

62% of consumers globally would stop using platforms that they knew they were censoring reviews*

As a company or brand, you can't fake it

64% of consumers globally would prefer to buy from a responsive company over one that appears perfect*

Consumers want companies to join the conversation and empower discussion

55% of consumers globally would prefer to use an open platform*

and they want to be able to share their experiences without fear of being silenced

*The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020 Average of results, France, UK and US. See 'Market Reports' for country specific data.
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The Erosion of Trust
Trust is historically low all across society. Governments, media and educational institutions have all been experiencing a slide in public confidence.
Trust in many segments of society is at an all-time low

The political climate of recent years has been characterised by increased erosion of trust in the government, media, and a wide range of public and private institutions. The discourse around fake news has been central to our understanding of political developments in the US and the UK in particular, with Russia’s interference in the US 2016 elections and pro-Brexit campaigns often cited as vivid examples of the problem that post-truth politics poses in modern society.

“We’ve seen a regular rate of decline of trust in government, religious, even medical institutions to a degree”

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University
People are more and more aware now that the mainstream news has an agenda, it isn’t unbiased

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania

At the same time, political parties rank 7th... out of the seven entities tested in this study and are the least trusted by consumers

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
As people lose faith in the mainstream news media, political parties, and even the church, they’re increasingly turning to their peers to get information and recommendations.

"Trust is definitely eroding and society is becoming more polarised, this is a trend we can see is being led by the US."

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University

Consumer review websites rank...

2nd

...as most trusted by consumers in the UK and US to provide honest opinion about a good or service. Only ‘family and friends’ rank higher.

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
The online sphere is particularly scrutinised

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have come under considerable scrutiny for the role they play in the spread of misinformation. Along with other open platforms, they have become the major battleground for arguments for and against censorship. Discussions around the open, uncensored nature of these platforms are ongoing.

However, according to a 2018 Pew study, better Internet identity-verification systems, tighter security standards in internet protocols, new laws and regulations, new techno-social systems like crowdsourcing, up-voting/down-voting (or challenging) online content, and blockchain will all inspire more confidence in online trust in the coming decade.

The Fate of Online Trust in The Next Decade, 2018
Brands are in danger of suffering similar declines experienced by the other areas of society.

Only 71% of people trust consumer brands.

*The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020*

Average of results, France, UK and US
Older consumers are more skeptical...

11% decline

in trust from ages 18 to 65 for consumers globally

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US

Looking at the global average, trust in brands peaks with consumers aged 25-34 and then declines.
...and brand trust is at risk among younger consumers

When asked about how their trust in brands has changed over the past 12 months, the most stable group overall was 25-34 year olds. While erosion in brand trust roughly correlated with age, 18-24's also indicated a decline in trust, especially in France and the UK.

1 in 5

(21%) consumers aged 18-24 say they trust brands less than they did 12 months ago

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
The Importance of Review Platforms
As trust declines, people increasingly put faith in peer-generated content
Review sites are a natural step in consumers’ shopping journeys

An overwhelming majority (89%) of consumers report checking reviews before making purchases.

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US

And with 45% indicating they use them more now than they have in the past, this is only likely to increase with the continued growth of e-commerce into the next decade.
[As] more people are shopping on the internet, and for more things – the need for reviews only increases... There’s a lot of new brands and we’re seeing smaller players coming in and disrupting industries, and so consumers need to turn to others online to get information

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania

49% of consumers selected positive consumer reviews in their top 3 purchase influences

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
Top purchase drivers

Top factors compelling consumers to purchase from a company ranked by the rate of incidence of inclusion in consumers’ top three:

**US**
- **1st Reliability** product/service (53%)
- **2nd Positive consumer reviews** (51%)
- **3rd Sustainable/environmental** (41%)
- **4th Have heard of the company** (41%)
- **5th Friend recommended** (36%)

**UK**
- **1st Reliability** product/service (51%)
- **2nd Positive consumer reviews** (50%)
- **3rd Sustainable/environmental** (43%)
- **4th Friend recommended** (36%)
- **5th Have heard of the company** (36%)

**FR**
- **1st Reliability** product/service (58%)
- **2nd Sustainable/environmental** (54%)
- **3rd Have heard of the company** (38%)
- **4th Positive consumer reviews** (35%)
- **5th Protects data** (34%)

Please rank the top three most important factors influencing your buying decisions. *I'm more likely to buy from a company...*

*Full response: sustainable and acts in the interests of the environment/wider society*
Consumer review websites are more trusted than traditional institutions

Although they’ve been around for less than two decades, consumer reviews platforms are trusted sources, second only to friends and family in the US and UK where they score higher than schools, religious institutions, mainstream media and social media influencers.

3rd trust ranking of review sites, ranked above religious institutions and political parties globally

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US

“People are getting more cautious about information...[in the US in particular,] regulatory bodies and others aren’t viewed as trustworthy, as people question their motives depending on who’s in charge of them now. It makes sense that consumer review sites [are more trusted than] expert reviews because there are a lot of them and people look for consensus.

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University
Consumer review websites rank 3rd for trust on average across all three markets.

Ranked groups by top ranking of trust:

**US**
1. Family and friends
2. Consumer review websites
3. Schools and educations systems
4. Mainstream news (CNN, USA Today, New York Times, etc)
5. Religious institutions
6. Social media influencers
7. Political parties

**UK**
1. Family and friends
2. Consumer review websites
3. Schools and educations systems
4. Mainstream news (Guardian, Daily Mail, etc)
5. Religious institutions
6. Social media influencers
7. Political parties

**FR**
1. Family and friends
2. Schools and educations systems
3. Mainstream news (Le Figaro, etc)
4. Consumer review websites
5. Social media influencers
6. Religious institutions
7. Political parties

Please rank these groups in order of which you feel you can trust the most. Rankings start with the top at "most trustworthy"
Consumers see their peers as independent and honest

When asked specifically which sources they would trust to provide them with an honest and independent information, consumer review websites were ranked third out of a possible 11 options.

Friends and family claimed the top spot in all three markets, reflecting high levels of trust within peer networks.

And consumer review sites are a conduit to a wider network of peers.

3rd

rank of consumer review sites as the sources most likely to provide an honest review

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
Not all review platforms inspire the same levels of trust

Despite review platforms embedded in eCommerce websites experiencing some of the highest rates of traffic in this space, they are not the most trusted.

Reviews on social media sites – while being relatively high in usage, also ranked poorly for trust (7th place in both the US and UK).

Former go-tos for brands looking to engage with consumers, social media influencers and celebrities, are also viewed with skepticism.

96% of global consumers do not trust social media influencers

Universal McCann, 2019
While social media usage increases, trust in it decreases

25% of UK consumers are using social media more than they did two years ago

63% of UK consumers trust social media less than they did two years ago

Yougov, 2019
Standalone consumer review platforms are popular for people looking for impartial and more diverse peer networks.

"Things that are unbiased are seen as not having an agenda, even schools and media channels, whether liberal or conservative media, they have an agenda. Social media too. Facebook, CNET, Amazon or eBay could be seen as having an agenda...When you see standalone consumer reviews, they’re not perceived to have an actor or entity behind them."

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania
What Consumers Want From Reviews
Consumers are strongly against censorship and are invested in finding the truth, and expect review platforms to align with these values.
Truth and transparency are valued above ease of use

The majority of consumers prefer to use an open platform – by which we mean users don’t have to be invited by the brand to participate. On an open platform, anyone is free to write a review as long as they comply with the guidelines set out by the platform.

In short, open platforms enable greater freedom of speech and do not allow companies to censor reviews.

People prefer something that’s open... to consumers the notion of companies being able to remove [unflattering] reviews can sound nefarious

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania

56% of consumers in the UK, think it’s very important to know exactly how review websites choose to publish reviews

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Consumers won’t tolerate fakes

Fake reviews were cited most commonly amongst the most undesired behaviours on the internet (requiring zero-tolerance policies) with more than three in five people believing they should be removed.

Politically biased advertising and insults were in fact seen as less problematic than fake reviews; such high ranking may have to do with economic investments at stake, as people want to be protected from wasting their money on fraudulently reviewed products and experiences.

62% of consumers globally, hold a zero-tolerance attitude towards fake reviews

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020

Average of results, France, UK and US
Consumers believe too many dishonest brands are guilty of manipulating reviews to improve their image

Dishonest brands have been known to manipulate consumers with celebrity endorsements or riding the wave of social causes. Half of consumers (49%) believe that “too many companies” are ‘creating fake reviews online’.

This is perceived to be a bigger problem among dishonest brands than false claims in advertising (45%).

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
The more diverse reviews the better

Consumers indicate that a mixture of positive and negative reviews are more authentic – and that an imperfect but good score was a better prompt to purchase than consistently positive reviews.

“More and more people are getting suspicious of 5 star ratings

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University

53% of consumers globally selected a realistic mix of positive and negative reviews as the top prompt to purchase

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
The more reviews and input, the more I can gauge whether the product is worth buying. It all boils down to variety with reviews.

US Respondent
The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020

55% of consumers would prefer to buy a product with a large number of reviews and an average rating over a product with a small number and excellent rating.

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
Consumers have more trust in imperfect scores

Perfect scores are seen as too good to be true, as consumers seek information that is diverse and varied. Over half of consumers have more faith in imperfect scores, who believe that a less than perfect review proves authenticity – this was highest in the US and UK (55% and 52% respectively)

“If the company had only 5 star reviews I am more likely to believe they have had people put up false reviews and delete bad reviews.”

US Respondent
The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
‘Detective’ consumers will dig deeper into 5 star reviews to sort the truth from fiction

Many consumers no longer accept reviews at face-value - although some will see a 5 star review and instinctively think the product or service is a must-buy, the majority will consider the proposition, but approach with caution and still do a bit of digging around.

“It’s all about the quality of information – and can you trust it?”

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University

56% Will consider a 5-star rated product or service, but do more research before committing
21% See a 5-star review and believe it’s a “must buy”
16% See a 5-star review and suspect that it’s a fake
The more reviews the better

According to Edelman’s 2019 Trust Barometer, 81% of consumers say that trusting a brand to do what is right is a deciding factor in purchase decisions.

While consumers worry that fake reviews will lead them to waste their money, open platforms with diverse reviews encourage people to trust and buy from brands.

49% of consumers worry that fake reviews will lead them to waste money on poor products and services

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US

“A larger amount of people reviewing it would imply it’s popular.”
UK Respondent
The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020

“The more reviews there are, the less chance that they’ve been faked.”
France Respondent
The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Consumers are waking up to the reality of negative reviews

Seven in 10 people believe censorship of negative reviews to be a serious concern. In the US, people are more acutely aware of such practices and consider them highly problematic, whilst in the UK almost a third of consumers weren’t aware of review censorship but were very concerned by the notion.

70% (23% previously not aware and not concerned + 47% aware and concerned)

of consumers globally believe that censorship of reviews is a serious concern

The critical role of reviews in internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
And consumers will bypass a brand they think manipulates reviews

Consumers see review manipulation as a breach of trust. and will take their vistorship or business elsewhere - suggesting that review manipulation is a very risky practice for companies to engage in, with potentially damaging consequences.

62% of consumers globally would stop using platforms that they knew they were censoring reviews

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Consumers also want their peers to be able to share their experiences with brands without fear of being silenced or edited.

Consumers prefer to use open platforms over closed platforms.

“I think there’s a free speech element involved, people generally believe they should be able to say what they want [without fear of being silenced]”
Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania

55% of consumers globally, would prefer to use an open platform
The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
People want to see a lot of reviews – not just a few

Consumers place more trust in a large number of reviews with a middling score, than a high score from just a handful of reviews. Globally, over half of consumers would opt for more reviews.

“...If I have a hundred people saying I like this TV show, that’s great – it’s a lot of social proof – [more reviews provide] more corroborating evidence...”

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania

55%

Percent of consumers globally, would put more trust in a large number of average reviews than a small number of perfect ones

The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020
Average of results, France, UK and US
People want real responses to criticism in reviews

Responsive companies are preferred to those that appear perfect. **Consumers are three times more likely to buy from a company that seems to have made a mistake and responded quickly**, compared to a company that appears to be absolutely perfect.

"[When companies respond to critical reviews,] it’s an indicator that the companies are taking the reviews seriously and that they care about the quality of their products and services.

64% of consumers globally would prefer to buy from a responsive company over one that appears perfect.

*The critical role of reviews in Internet trust, 2020*

Average of results, France, UK and US

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University
Consumers want to have relationships with brands like they do with everyone else in their lives. Consumers need to feel that brands are having an open dialogue - this creates trust.

"It's important when brands respond to consumer concerns [in a way that indicates] “we’re not just an entity, we’re people like you.”"

Professor Karen Cook
Director of the Institute of Research for Social Sciences, Stanford University
04
The DNA of Trusted Reviews
From the Research We’ve Identified The Three R’s Essential For Reviews

/ Realness
There’s no magical formula for realness, but consumers consider the amount of reviews, and the ratings – too much perfection can be seen as fake to many.

/ Recency
Consumers are acutely aware that in the world of commerce, you’re only as good as your last sale. Many feel that companies can change over time – for the better or worse - and put extra weight on the most recent consumer feedback.

/ Relationships
Consumers want to feel a human connection from brands and most are more than willing to accept that mistakes happen. Brands that are seen to step in and make things right inspire more confidence than those that appear “too perfect”.
It’s not too different to how people deal with friends – if you’ve had a friend that made a mistake but they fixed it, then the relationship becomes deeper than if it had never been tested.

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania
Trust cues could become codified

/ Review sites can help consumers sort content
While consumers do seek out group consensus and variety in reviews, they sometimes struggle to distinguish the real content from fakes. As open platforms rise in popularity, there’s an opportunity to help people find reliable reviews.

/ Reliable reviewers are trusted advisors
Helping consumers identify the reviews they are most interested in will help bolster trust in the space, as it amplifies the voices of real people and their real experiences with products and services. Consistently open, honest reviews engender trust as much in the people leaving them as they do in the brands themselves.

“Imagine we have an open platform, but some people have a little badge beside their name – so anyone can write a review, but I can decide for myself which ones I believe”

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania
Open reviews will build a lasting trust

/ Authentic consumer reviews will grow with ecommerce
As ecommerce continues to wear away at brick and mortar in almost every category, the use of consumer review platforms will also grow as people reach out to their peers to get honest opinions before spending money.

While open review sites represent the authentic views of their peers, closed platforms are at risk as consumers don’t trust brands to moderate honestly. Word of mouth marketing has been a pillar of sales strategies since the dawn of capitalism, and open reviews are the next frontier.

“ I’m going to look in that review for clues of who the person writing it is – if they sound like me I’m going to find that review more diagnostic – I’m going to try to do some detective work

Professor Jonah Berger
Associate Professor of Marketing, Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania
Consumers are looking for reviews they can count on to make the right decisions

**Trustworthy**
64% in the USA
62% in the UK

**Helpful**
43% in the USA
38% in the UK

**Honest**
36% in the USA
35% in the UK

In France

- **Digne de confiance - 48%**
- **Honnête - 41%**
- **Transparent - 32%**
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Consumer review websites are ranked 2nd for trust in the US

Ranked groups by top ranking of trust:

1. Family and friends
2. Consumer review websites
3. Schools and education systems
4. Mainstream news (CNN, USA Today, New York Times, etc)
5. Religious institutions
6. Social media influencers
7. Political parties
Consumer review websites are ranked 3rd for the perception of providing honest reviews

Ranked entities by top ranking of trust:

1. Family and friends
2. Regulatory bodies eg: BBB (Better Business Bureau)
3. Consumer review sites
4. Expert Reviews (CNET, Consumer Reports)
5. E-commerce websites with reviews (Amazon, eBay)
6. Media reviews (CNET, ReviewFreaks, Good Housekeeping)
7. Social media sites with reviews (Facebook reviews, etc)
8. Social media influencers/reviewers
9. Celebrities' owned social channels
10. Paid-for advertising on TV / in newspapers
11. Paid-for advertising on social media
Positive consumer reviews rank within the top 3 most compelling reasons to purchase

Top 3 factors compelling purchase from a company by inclusion in top 3 rankings:

1. Reliable product or service (53%)
2. Positive consumer reviews (51%)
3. Sustainable and acts in the interest of the environment/wider society (41%)
4. Where I've heard of the company (41%)
5. My friend has recommended (36%)
75% of US consumers have high or very high trust in consumer brands

Q: How would you rank your trust in consumer brands? (eg: Pret a Manger, Coke, Primark, Apple)
The youngest and the oldest are less likely to trust brands than those aged 25-34.

Q: How would you rank your trust in consumer brands? (eg: Pret a Manger, Coke, Primark, Apple)
Consumers in the youngest and oldest groups report their trust in brands to be decreasing across time

Q: Has your trust in consumer companies changed over the last 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Trust Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US total</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>+15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>-11%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*net difference between incidence of those who report an increase and those who report a decrease
Consumers believe that brands who manipulate their image are faking and deleting reviews

Manipulations perpetrated by companies selling products or services:

1. Using societal issues as a marketing ploy (51%)
2. Buying celebrity endorsements (51%)
3. Creating fake reviews online (49%)
4. Making false claims in their advertising (45%)
5. Deleting negative reviews online (43%)
62% of consumers in the US hold a zero tolerance attitude towards fake reviews

Q: Too many companies are manipulating their image by... Please tick all that apply

- Zero tolerance (should be removed) 62.0%
- The ability to report and remove 24.0%
- Age filtering or age-restricted access 7.0%
- No moderation 7.0%
Tolerance towards fake reviews decreases with age

30% of 18- to 24-year-olds feel that fake reviews should be dealt with via a reporting mechanism.

- **18-24**: 30%
- **25-34**: 27%
- **35-44**: 23%
- **45-54**: 22%
- **55-65**: 21%

Q: For each of the following please describe how you feel they should be moderated (or dealt with) on social media platforms:

- **The ability to report and remove**: 57%
- **Zero tolerance - should be removed**: 56%
- **No moderation**: 60%
- **Age filtering or age-restricted access**: 67%
- **Other**: 69%

The ability to report and remove: 30%
Zero tolerance - should be removed: 27%
No moderation: 23%
Age filtering or age-restricted access: 22%
Other: 21%

Age filtering or age-restricted access: 7%
No moderation: 7%
Other: 24%
The ability to report and remove: 62%
Almost half of US consumers are relying more on reviews now than they were in the past 2 years.

Q: Do you rely more on consumer reviews now than you did...

- 24 months ago: 8%
- 12 months ago: 17%
- 6 months ago: 23%
- I don't rely on consumer reviews: 13%
- I rely on reviews as much as I did 24 months ago: 39%

48%
/ Just over half of consumers believe that anyone with an opinion should be able to write a review

The 54% section of the pie chart includes both those who believe ‘anyone with an opinion’ and ‘anyone except those that work with the company or have a partnership with it’

40% also believe that only those who have transacted with the business should be allowed to write a review

Only 3% believe an invite from the brand should be mandatory

Q: Who do you think should be allowed to write a review for a company, product or service? Please select one answer
61% of US consumers think it’s very important to know exactly how review websites choose to publish reviews.

Q: It’s very important to me to know exactly how review websites choose which reviews are allowed to be posted and which aren’t.
A large number of reviews with an average rating is a better signal of trust than a high score with fewer reviews.

I would prefer to buy a product or service with a large number of reviews and an average rating overall

58%

I would prefer to buy a product or service with a small number of reviews and a high rating overall

28%

This opinion is stronger amongst males (63%) and those with higher incomes (65%)

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion
Voice of the consumer

Quotes from respondents reveal consumers place confidence in the consensus reached by a large number of reviewers

“Because a lot of people liked the product, so it has to be good.”

“I'm more comfortable with products that have numerous reviews regardless of when they were posted.”

“Because I love more reviews that give me more insight on the product.”

“The more reviews and input, the more I can gauge whether the product is worth buying. It all boils down to variety with reviews.”

“The more opinions the better the odds of being the truth”
Over half of consumers believe that a less than perfect review score is more authentic

Agreement with the statement “A less than perfect review proves authenticity”:

- Strongly agree: 17%
- Agree: 38%
- Neutral: 32%
- Disagree: 9%
- Strongly disagree: 4%
Voices of the consumer

Quotes from respondents reveal they want both negative and positive reviews in order to make informed decisions.

"The consumer should be able to consider ALL reviews."

"I want to be able to read all negative reviews. I usually sort by negative reviews first, just to see what I may or may not be dealing with first."

"Because I would rather have honest peoples opinions even if they didn't like the product!"

"A company having the ability to remove or edit ratings, especially bad ones, does not produce an accurate review."

"even if some reviews are fake I would rather see negative ones instead of companies removing them"
Responsive companies are preferred over those that appear “perfect”

I would prefer to buy from a company that seems to have made a small mistake and responded quickly 67%

I would prefer to buy from a company that seems to have never made a mistake 22%

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion
Voice of the consumer

Quotes from respondents reveal consumers view responsiveness as an indicator of trust

“I would have faith knowing if something was to go wrong they would make sure they made it right for me”

“Because everyone makes mistakes and as long as they apologize and fix it I respect that way more than a company trying to act like they are perfect”

“It's important for companies to own up to their mistakes and would make me trust them more in the future”

“Mistakes are unavoidable sometimes. I admire that a company recognizes their mistake and happily fixes it.”

“I do like companies that own up to their own errors and fix it quickly/fairly.”

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion
81% of US consumers have a positive view towards companies that respond to reviews.

19% Would still avoid it due to the negative review

52% Would consider using the company’s products or services if it responded well

29% Would trust the company even more if it had listened to the feedback

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion.
Well over a quarter of consumers trust a company with a 4 star score over a 5 star score.

I would trust a company more that has a 5 star review 51%

I would trust a company more that has a 4 star review 28%

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion
Voice of the consumer

Quotes from respondents reveal they are suspicious of perfect scores as they suspect review tampering

“I am not sure of a company that has straight 5 star reviews because they may be fake reviews by the manufacturer.”

“If the company had a 5 star review I am more likely to believe they have had people put up false reviews and deleting bad reviews. No company is perfect.”

“A solid 5 star review makes me think they have a lot of fake paid reviews”

“4 stars shows that almost all of the people were pleased. But some were not. You can’t please everyone. Perfect ratings aren’t real.”

“A 5 star review could be based upon a lot of company sponsored or otherwise fake reviews.”
Recency is more important than the total number of reviews a company has.

I would trust a company more that has fewer reviews overall, but has more recent reviews  
65%

I would trust a company more that has many reviews but hasn’t had any posted in a few months 
16%

Q: In each of the following scenarios, please pick the option that best describes your opinion.
Voice of the consumer

Quotes from respondents reveal they believe that the quality of products and services change over time

“The company might have changed for the better or worse and we need an up to date review on the brand as a whole”

“I do like to see what has happened in the last couple months. A whole lot can change from reviews left years ago.”

“If there hasn't been any recent reviews, that will make me think that the quality of products/services has declined.”

“I want to know how that company stands in today's market, not from old reviews.”

“Businesses can change overnight. What may have been true 2 years ago may not apply today”
56% of consumers aren’t immediately won over by a five star review, opting to do more research.
Whether they were aware or not of review censoring, 72% are concerned about it now

- 50% : I am aware this happens and it's very concerning
- 17% : I am aware this happens but it doesn't worry me
- 6% : I don't know or care
- 22% : I wasn't aware this happened until now, and I'm very concerned
- 5% : I wasn't aware this happened until now, but it doesn't worry me

27% of consumers are not aware that brands are able to censor or remove negative reviews on certain platforms

Q: How concerned are you that on some reviews sites companies can censor and remove consumer reviews?
Half of consumers would opt to only use “open” sites if they discovered censorship on another platform.

Q: If you had the knowledge of which reviews sites allowed companies to censor their reviews and which ones didn't - would you?
Consumers report that they check reviews 90% of the time when buying online.

90% of consumers check reviews before making a purchase.

- **US total**: 90%
- **Female**: 89%
- **Male**: 92%

Q: How often do you read reviews on products, companies or services before buying online?
Consumers report that they estimate to have wasted approximately $125 on average in the past year due to inaccurate reviews.

Q: What percentage of these purchases would you say you first checked the online reviews of?
A mix of both positive and negative reviews is the strongest factor to prompt purchase

Seeing a realistic mix of both negative and positive comments but overall positive results 56%
Reviews marked as verified or genuine 44%
Positive reviews from recent months 43%
Reviews that have accompanying pictures taken by others users 32%
Very positive, consistent reviews 29%
Reviews that are easily searchable for specific information (durability, etc) 27%
Consumers believe review censorship leads to wasted money and damages freedom of speech.

Consumers waste money on poor products or services 52%

It gives too much control to businesses 45%

It builds fake company reputations 42%

It removes freedom of speech 39%

It means ethical businesses that don't censor their reviews struggle to succeed 31%

Q: What are the biggest risks associated with companies censoring their own reviews? Please choose the top three most relevant