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Impact of Misleading Product Reviews on Purchase Decisions of Saudi Consumers^(*)

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of misleading product reviews on consumer purchase decisions and company reputation in Saudi Arabia. A survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of 505 Saudi consumers to assess the extent to which misleading reviews influence their purchasing behavior.

The key findings are as follows:

Review Reading Behaviors:

- A clear tendency to read online reviews among the sample, with 88.7% of consumers reporting frequent or occasional review reading.
- Short review reading time with varying durations among consumers. While all participants were exposed to online reviews, most consumers read reviews before purchasing a product, spending less than 15 minutes on average. Review reading is most common on Fridays.
- Higher prevalence of review reading on weekends (84%) compared to weekdays.
- Widespread exposure to misleading online reviews, with 82.4% of the sample having encountered such reviews.
- Digital sources are the primary source of pre-purchase information for consumers, with review reading being the most relied-upon method.

Misleading Review Awareness:

- High awareness of misleading reviews among most participants. However, a concerning 12.3% of consumers exhibit low ability to distinguish between genuine and misleading reviews, posing a risk of falling victim to false information and purchasing products that do not meet their expectations or are of poor quality.
- Knowledge of promotional review practices among most consumers (51.9%), with 48.2% remaining unaware. This lack of awareness poses a potential risk.
- Reliance on diverse strategies to detect and avoid misleading reviews. The most common approach is reading a large number of reviews.

^(*) The Research was received on June 06, 2024, and accepted for publication on September 10, 2024.



Impact of Misleading Reviews on Purchase Decisions:

- Significant impact on consumer behavior, with 50.3% reporting that misleading reviews delay purchase decisions, indicating a major barrier to confident decision-making. Additionally, 38% reported making inappropriate purchase decisions due to misleading reviews, suggesting potential financial and emotional losses.
- Strong influence of review reading on online purchase decisions, with 94.9% reporting a change in purchasing decisions based on reviews, highlighting the crucial role of reviews in the digital age.

Keywords: Misleading Reviews - Purchase Decisions - Saudi Consumer - Online Platforms - Shopping Behavior.