

## Signaling Brand Reputation: The Role of Consumer Reviews, Corporate Response, and Trusts in Undifferentiated Service Setting

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### Abstract

As social media platforms introduce new features—such as comment sections, embedded advertising, revenue sharing (e.g., Twitter), and virtual currencies like Gold Coins (Facebook)—more people are turning to these platforms to share their experiences with brands. This shift has led to a surge in online reviews. Drawing on signaling theory and the elaboration likelihood model, this study examines the effect of online reviews based on review quantity, consistency, quality, trust, and corporate response on brand reputation. Using data collected from 129 customers in an undifferentiated service setting. These customers follow the brand on Twitter and have posted or read online reviews related to this brand. The data was analyzed using multiple regression via SPSS. The results showed positive and significant effects for review credibility, trust, and corporate response on brand reputation. The study concludes that while review volume and consistency may have limited direct effects, trust and proactive customer engagement play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. Brands looking to strengthen their reputation should prioritize trust-building efforts and responsive customer service.

**Keywords:** Brand Reputation, Online Review, Trust, Corporate Response, Review Credibility, Nigeria

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### 1. Introduction

As social media platforms continue to evolve—introducing features such as comment sections, embedded advertising, revenue-sharing models (e.g., Twitter), and virtual currencies like Facebook's Gold Coins—users are increasingly using these spaces to share their experiences with brands. This evolution has fueled a dramatic growth in online consumer reviews (Marquiz, 2023; Zhang, Gao, & Zheng, 2020). Today, online reviews represent one of the most influential channels through which consumers express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and overall evaluations of brands (Liu, Ren, Xu, & Xie, 2025).

Online reviews are commonly defined as consumer-generated evaluations of a brand, product, service, or consumption experience (Cheng et al., 2019). Compared with traditional advertising and other marketer-generated communications, they are generally perceived as more credible and trustworthy (Han, Anderson, & Chung, 2023). Their persuasive power, however, is not uniform. Prior studies show that the impact of reviews depends on several key characteristics, including review volume, content quality, consistency, and credibility, all of which shape consumer judgments and decision-making processes (Thomas et al., 2019; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021; Roy et al., 2021).

Given their growing influence, online reviews have created strong incentives for firms to actively engage with customers in order to protect and enhance brand reputation (Kumar, Qiu, & Kumar, 2018). As a result, many companies now systematically monitor online feedback and respond through corporate responses—an interaction strategy designed to address customer concerns, signal accountability, and manage brand perceptions in digital spaces (Zhang, Gao, & Zheng, 2020).

Existing research has examined how various heuristic cues embedded in online reviews—such as review volume (Roy et al., 2021), valence (Sun, Gonzalez-Jimenez, & Wang, 2021; Roy et al., 2021), consistency (Lo & Yao, 2019), and credibility (Thomas, Wirtz, & Weyerer, 2019; Lo & Yao, 2019)—influence consumer behavior. These studies have largely focused on outcomes such as review helpfulness (Ventre & Kolbe, 2020), purchase or booking intentions (Wang, Tariq, & Alvi, 2021), sales performance (Fan, Zhang, & Rai, 2021), and brand engagement (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021). Similarly, research on management responses has highlighted their effects on customer satisfaction, recommendation intentions (Han et al., 2023; Zhang, Gao, & Zheng, 2020), and corporate reputation (Jacobs & Liebrecht, 2023).

Despite these contributions, empirical findings remain fragmented and, in some cases, contradictory. For example, Maslowka et al. (2017) reported only a weak relationship between online reviews and sales, while Shankar et al. (2020) found no significant effect of reviews on mobile banking adoption intentions. In contrast, Roy et al. (2021) demonstrated that online reviews positively influence customer recommendation intentions by enhancing perceived service quality. In response to such inconsistencies, Lopes et al. (2023) called for further investigation into the effects of online reviews beyond traditional outcomes such as purchase intentions and future review volumes.

Moreover, while substantial research has examined the separate effects of online reviews and management responses on consumer behavior (Han, Anderson, & Chung, 2023; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022; Roy et al., 2021), far less attention has been paid to their combined influence on brand reputation. This gap is particularly evident outside commonly studied contexts such as hotels, box-office sales, and banking. The issue is increasingly important, as brands are now frequently discussed not only in review platforms but also in comment sections and conversations surrounding unrelated or trending topics. Such widespread exposure creates both reputational opportunities and significant risks for firms.

To the best of our knowledge, empirical studies that directly link online reviews and corporate response strategies to brand reputation remain limited. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the following research questions:

- What is the effect of review quality on brand reputation?
- How do review features—such as quality, consistency, and credibility—shape customers' perceptions of brand reputation?
- To what extent does consumer trust influence brand reputation?
- How do corporate response strategies affect customers' perceptions of brand reputation?

## 1.2 Background to the Study

The study is situated within an undifferentiated service context, focusing on MTN Nigeria, the country's leading telecommunications service provider. MTN Nigeria commands an estimated market share of approximately 50 percent, outperforming major competitors such as Airtel, Globacom, and 9mobile. The firm is widely recognized for its extensive and advanced network infrastructure, including broad spectrum coverage that positions it as 5G-ready (Lagos Business School, 2019). Its service portfolio includes mobile network access, internet connectivity, bill payments, device financing, data management services, SIM registration, and related offerings (Bloomberg, 2023).

Despite its market leadership, MTN Nigeria faces a growing challenge arising from the increasing volume of customer reviews on social media platforms, many of which are predominantly negative. Such reviews pose a potential threat to the company's brand reputation and may contribute to customer dissatisfaction and churn if not effectively managed.

Examining the effect of online consumer reviews on brand reputation is therefore of significant practical importance. First, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of online brand reputation management and how firms monitor and respond to consumer feedback. Second, the study aims to equip managers with evidence-based insights that can support informed decision-making regarding the management of online reviews. Finally, the findings are expected to provide MTN Nigeria—and similar brands—with a robust foundation for developing effective strategies to manage online consumer reviews, mitigate reputational risks, and foster favorable brand perceptions among consumers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Review Quantity

Online review quantity refers to the total number of reviews available for a product, service, or brand across digital platforms. It is commonly interpreted as a signal of product popularity and market acceptance and plays a key role in reducing consumers' perceived uncertainty during the evaluation process (Hu & Yang, 2020). Because of its influence on consumer decision-making, information accessibility, and brand reputation, review quantity has become a critical determinant of business performance in digital markets (Roy et al., 2021; Maslowka et al., 2017; Khare et al., 2011; Lopes et al., 2023).

However, consumers do not evaluate review volume in isolation. Their interpretation largely depends on the balance between positive and negative reviews. A high volume of positive reviews tends to enhance trust in a brand by lowering perceived risk and uncertainty (Shankar, Jebarajakirthy, & Ashaduzzaman, 2020). At the same time, an unusually large number of overly positive reviews may trigger skepticism, raising concerns about fake or manipulated feedback (El-Said, 2020). In contrast, a high concentration of negative reviews can seriously damage brand reputation and significantly reduce consumers' purchase intentions (Dens et al., 2015).

Empirical evidence on the effects of review quantity remains mixed. Maslowka et al. (2017) reported only a weak relationship between review volume and sales, while Shankar et al. (2020) found no significant effect of review volume on

mobile banking adoption intentions. Conversely, Roy et al. (2021) demonstrated that a higher volume of reviews positively influences customers' recommendation intentions by enhancing perceived service quality. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2019) showed that greater review volume contributes to higher perceived credibility. Given these divergent findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: Review quantity has a positive and significant effect on brand reputation.

## 2.2 Review Consistency

Review consistency plays a pivotal role in shaping how consumers perceive brands, products, and services in digital environments. It refers to the degree of uniformity in the sentiment and content expressed across multiple reviews for the same offering. Lo and Yao (2019) define review consistency as “the extent to which message content is consistent with or similar to others regarding the same product or service” (p. 5). This concept is closely related to consensus, variance, congruence, and coherence in consumer evaluations.

A consistent pattern of reviews strengthens perceived reliability, making review information more credible and persuasive (Lo & Yao, 2019). When consumers encounter similar evaluations across reviews, they are more likely to form clear and realistic expectations about product performance, service quality, and overall value (Shankar, Jebarajakirthy, & Ashaduzzaman, 2020). Such alignment reduces cognitive effort and uncertainty, thereby increasing confidence in decision-making. Evidence suggests that review consistency can even encourage the adoption of new or high-risk services, such as mobile banking (Shankar et al., 2020).

In contrast, highly inconsistent reviews can undermine perceived helpfulness, creating confusion and skepticism among potential customers. Conflicting opinions make it difficult for consumers to assess true quality, which may weaken trust and discourage engagement. Given its strong influence on consumer confidence, trust formation, and decision-making, review consistency is a crucial factor in shaping brand reputation. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H<sub>2</sub>: Review consistency has positive and significant effect on brand reputation.

## 2.3 Credibility

In an era where anyone with internet access can post a review—and where brands or competitors may generate fake or biased content—review credibility has become more important than ever (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Review credibility refers to “consumers' perception that the information contained in a review is believable, true, or factual” (Filiari et al., 2021, p. 7). Reviews authored by verified purchasers or those that clearly disclose affiliations with a product or service are generally perceived as more trustworthy (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Such transparency not only enhances the credibility of individual reviews but also strengthens trust in the brand as a whole.

Credible reviews exert a powerful influence on consumer decision-making. When consumers perceive reviews as reliable, they are more likely to rely on them as diagnostic information when forming attitudes and making purchase decisions (Xu et al., 2016). Conversely, fake or manipulated reviews erode trust and can generate negative consequences for both consumers and firms. The growing prevalence of deceptive reviews has therefore intensified the need for effective credibility-enhancing mechanisms in online review systems.

Prior research shows that review credibility positively affects key consumer outcomes, including attitude toward the product, attitude toward the brand's online presence, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) adoption (Chih, Hsu, & Ortiz, 2020). Credible reviews also enhance perceived review helpfulness, making them more influential in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019). Given its central role in trust formation and reputation building, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H<sub>3</sub>: Review credibility has a positive effect on brand reputation.

## 2.4 Trust

Trust refers to the willingness to rely on the actions, words, or decisions of others based on the belief that they are reliable, honest, and well-intentioned (Mayer et al., 1995). It is a foundational element of social interaction, enabling cooperation, strengthening relationships, and reducing uncertainty in decision-making. As a core component of social capital, trust becomes particularly important in contexts characterized by high uncertainty and information asymmetry (Luhmann, 2000). In business settings, trust underpins consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and long-term relational exchanges.

The development of trust requires transparency, consistency, and ethical conduct. Consumers are more inclined to engage with brands that demonstrate openness in their operations and communications (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Consistently delivering on promises reinforces consumer confidence and loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), while ethical business practices further strengthen trust by signaling integrity and social responsibility (Singh et al., 2019).

In digital environments—where face-to-face interactions are limited—trust plays a critical role in bridging the gap between consumers and firms. Online reviews and ratings function as trust-building mechanisms by allowing consumers to evaluate the experiences of others, thereby reducing uncertainty related to product quality, reliability, and performance (Filiari et al., 2014). Beyond individual transactions, trust facilitates long-term relationships, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately enhancing brand reputation and competitive advantage (Gefen, 2002). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H<sub>4</sub>: Trust has a positive and significant effect on brand reputation.

## 2.5 Corporate Response

Engaging with online reviews is a strategic tool for managing brand reputation and customer satisfaction (Kumar, Qiu, & Kumar, 2018; Ghosh & Mandal, 2020). Timely responses to positive feedback signal appreciation and reinforce loyalty, while professional handling of negative reviews demonstrates accountability, mitigates dissatisfaction, and publicly communicates a commitment to quality service (Vermeulen et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2020). Corporate responses also allow firms to identify recurring issues, inform improvements, and foster community engagement, positioning the brand as customer-centric (Lee & Koo, 2015; Ye et al., 2011).

H<sub>5</sub>: Corporate response has a positive and significant effect on brand reputation

## 2.6 Brand Reputation

Brand reputation reflects consumers' overall evaluation of a firm based on past performance, expectations, and interactions across multiple touchpoints (Rust et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2023). Strong reputations enhance brand awareness, reduce perceived risk, and buffer against negative events (Ryan & Casidy, 2018; van Doorn et al., 2010). Online reviews and eWOM directly influence reputation, with positive feedback reinforcing trust and negative feedback threatening credibility (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Nisar et al., 2020). Active engagement on social media further strengthens brand recall and consumer perception (Lim, Chester, & Heinrichs, 2020).

## 2.7 Theoretical Framework: Signaling Theory

Signaling theory posits that consumers rely on observable cues to infer unobservable qualities such as product or service quality, reliability, and trustworthiness (Donath, 2007; Utz et al., 2012). Firms signal these attributes through online reviews, ratings, and corporate responses, which reduce uncertainty and inhibit opportunistic behavior (Mavlanova, Benbunan-Fich, & Koufaris, 2012; Ho-Dac et al., 2013). Review valence indicates quality, consistency conveys reliability, and managerial responses demonstrate accountability and service orientation, collectively shaping consumer perceptions and brand reputation (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013; Eckert, Louviere, & Islam, 2012)

## 3 Research Methodology

Data were collected using a structured Google Forms questionnaire, distributed electronically via Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and personal networks. A screening question ensured participants were active on social media, specifically Twitter, and engaged with MTN-related reviews. The survey comprised two sections: the first assessed online review characteristics and trust, including review consistency, quantity, credibility, and corporate response strategy (adapted from Thomas et al., 2019; Dens et al., 2015; Shankar & Jebarajakirthy, 2020; Niu & Fan, 2017; Zhang, Gao, & Zheng, 2020), while the second measured brand reputation (Jurisic & Azevedo, 2010; Jacobs & Liebrecht, 2023). All items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to ensure standardized responses.

The study targeted a population of mobile telecommunication customers with an online presence, using judgmental sampling to select 129 of MTN users who follow the brand on Twitter and engage with online reviews. After cleaning the data to remove inconsistent, missing, or invalid responses, 111 valid responses were retained for analysis. This dataset provides sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing while maintaining relevance to the research objectives. The cross-sectional survey design enabled the collection of primary quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis, supporting the examination of relationships between online review features, trust, corporate response strategies, and brand reputation in a representative sample of active social media users.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of respondents

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' gender. The analysis showed that the respondents were almost an even split. While 51 percent of the respondents are female, about 47 percent are Male.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	57	51.4
	Male	52	46.8
	Prefer Not to Say	2	1.8
Age	25 - 30	25	22.5
	31-35	19	17.1
	36-40	25	22.5
	41-45	10	9
	Above 45	16	14.4
Education	OND/NCE	95	85.5
	BSc/HND	1	.9
	PG	62	55.9
		48	43.2

	Total	111	100.0
Occupation	Student	20	18.0
	Self-employed	13	11.7
	Priv. Employee	68	61.3
	Govt. Employee	10	9.0
Income	< 80,000 Naira	5	4.8
	80,001 - 150,000 Naira	26	24.8
	150,001 - 250,000 Naira	28	26.7
	250,000 - 500,000 Naira	23	21.9
	> 500,000 Naira	23	21.9
	Total	105	100.0

The age distribution showed that most of the respondents are 40 years old (72%). The data suggest that the respondents are well educated with a majority having a bachelor's degree or its equivalent while about 43 percent (48 respondents) have a post graduate degree. More than 60 percent of the respondents are self-employed, while about 10% works with the public sector and about 12 percent are self-employed. The rest (18 per cent) are full students. The data for respondents' income show that about a quarter of the respondents (25%) earn between 80,001 to 150,000 naira monthly. Similarly, about 27 percent of the respondents earn between 150,001 and 250,000 naira monthly. In addition, more than 40 percent earn a minimum a 250,000 monthly.

#### 4.2 Factor Analysis and Reliability test

Prior to hypothesis testing, data reduction and measurement reliability analyses were conducted to ensure the robustness of the study measures. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was applied, specifying six factors, and items with factor loadings below 0.4 were removed. The analysis produced six distinct factors, each representing a key construct in the study.

The first factor, Brand Reputation, consisted of six items and accounted for 21% of the total variance, reflecting its central role in the study. The second factor, Review Volume, included four items and explained 15% of the variance, while the third factor, Review Credibility, captured all relevant items and accounted for 8% of variance. The fourth factor, Trust, was represented by five items; one item—“MTN services are mutually beneficial to service providers and users”—cross-loaded and was removed. Trust explained 7% of the variance.

The fifth factor, Review Consistency, consisted of two items after one item—“Different online reviews about MTN on Twitter are often consistent with each other in terms of content”—was removed for falling below the 0.4 cut-off. This factor accounted for 6% of variance. Finally, the sixth factor, Corporate Response, included seven items and explained 6% of the variance. Collectively, the six factors explained 62.51% of the total variance, indicating a solid factor structure suitable for further analysis.

Reliability analyses using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated strong internal consistency for all constructs except Corporate Response, which scored 0.65, slightly below the 0.70 benchmark. All other factors exceeded 0.70, confirming their reliability as measurement scales. A detailed summary of factor loadings, total variance explained, and reliability statistics is provided in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Factor analysis and reliability test score <sup>a</sup>

	Component				
	Brand Reputation	Rev Vol.	Rev. Cred.	Trustcon	Corp Resp
MTN maintains high ethical standards	.818				
Overall, MTN has a good reputation	.794				
MTN has a high reputation with good reason	.784				
MTN is a well-run organization	.778				
In the past, today and in the future, the values behind MTN will not change	.541				
MTN is very popular brand	.529				
3. There is a wealth of reviews about MTN on Twitter		.821			
2. There is a whole lot of reviews about the services offered by MTN.		.807			
1. So many people comment about MTN on Twitter		.712			
4. The number of online reviews about MTN on Twitter is high		.707			
10. I think most of the online reviews about MTN on Twitter are reliable.		.885			
11. I think most of the online reviews about MTN on Twitter are trustworthy		.818			
8. I think most of the online reviews about MTN on Twitter are credible.		.637			
9. I think most of the online reviews about MTN on Twitter are factual		.462			
19. MTN is a reliable brand				.810	
21. MTN is concerned with the present and future interests of users				.764	
20. I can trust in the promises given by MTN				.695	
23. MTN have the necessary experience to provide Telecommunication services				.804	
24. MTN has the necessary resources to carry out commercial activities successfully				.799	

6. Different online reviews about MTN on Twitter overlap to some extent with each other in terms of content	.889
7. There are a number of overlaps among different online reviews about MTN's product/service on Twitter	.765
17. MTN provide individualized responses to positive comments on Twitter	.683
18. MTN provide individualized responses to negative comments on Twitter	.630
14. MTN reply customers by diverting to private conversations	.607
16. MTN makes an effort to provide personalized responses to customers' comments on Twitter	.545
12. MTN responds frequently to customer reviews on Twitter	.524
13. MTN reply customers openly when they are mentioned in a Tweet	.468
15. MTN does not respond to customers' tweets directly on Twitter	.416

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
 a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Table 3. Reliability Test Score

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Review quantity	.806	4
Review consistency	.833	2
Review credibility	.742	4
Corporate response	.653	6
<b>Trust</b>	.779	6
<b>Brand reputation</b>	.774	6

### 4.3 Testing of Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, we conducted a multiple regression analysis using SPSS version 22. The initial data analysis revealed a noteworthy ANOVA result with F-statistics ( $F = 62.98, p = 0.00$ ), indicating a strong model fit. Additionally, all Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) exceeded 1, signifying an absence of multicollinearity issues. The R-squared and adjusted R-squared values indicate that the data explains approximately 75% to 74% of the variations in the dependent variable, brand reputation

Table 4. Regression Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t		Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.084	1.908		.044	.965		
Review quantity	-.116	.077	-.086	-1.498	.137	.724	1.382
Review consistency	-.155	.093	-.091	-1.661	.100	.789	1.267
Review credibility	.147	.082	.100	1.805	.074	.772	1.295
Corporate Response	.116	.055	.109	2.102	.038	.884	1.131
Trust	.926	.057	.823	16.246	.000	.929	1.077
R <sup>2</sup>	.750						
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.738						
F	62.981**						

a. Dependent Variable: Brand reputation

H<sub>1</sub> predicts that Review quantity will have a positive effect on brand reputation. The regression result show review quantity does not have a positive nor significant effect on brand reputation of MTN brand ( $\beta = -.12, t = -1.50, p = 0.14$ ). In other words, customer do not infer the brand reputation from the sheer number of reviews available on Twitter. The second hypothesis test the extent the consistency in sentiments expressed in reviews affect the brand reputation. The regression result show that there is no significant positive effect of review consistency on brand reputation ( $\beta = -0.155, t = -1.66, p = 0.10$ ). In other words, the consistency in customers' reviews on Twitter does not influence customers' perception of the brand's reputation. Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive effect of credibility on brand reputation. The result as shown in the regression table 4.4.1 above indicates that review credibility that there is a positive and significant effect of review credibility on brand reputation ( $\beta = 0.15, t = 1.81, p < 0.1$ ). In other words, the perceived credibility of customer reviews about MTN on Twitter will affect the brand's reputation. Hypothesis 4 predicted that trust will have a positive effect on brand reputation. The regression results show there is a positive and significant effect of trust brand reputation ( $\beta = .23, t = 2.909, p = 0.04$ ). Trust has strongest effect on brand reputation. Finally, we test the effect of management response to reviews on the brand's reputation in H5. The result as shown that there is a positive and significant corporate response to reviews on brand reputation ( $\beta = .12, t = 2.10, p < 0.05$ ). In other words, responding to customer reviews has a positive effect on how customers perceive the reputation of the brand.

#### 4.4 Discussion

This study examines how online customer reviews and trust shape brand reputation in the era of social media-driven consumer feedback. The findings reveal that while certain characteristics of online reviews—such as review quantity and volume—do not significantly impact brand reputation, trust and corporate responses exert a strong positive influence. Additionally, review credibility plays a significant role, though its effect is more pronounced at a less stringent confidence level.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that a higher quantity of reviews would enhance brand reputation, particularly for the MTN brand. However, the results do not support this assumption. The volume of Twitter reviews does not significantly affect MTN's brand reputation, suggesting that sheer review quantity does not shape consumer perceptions. Interestingly, the relationship between review quantity and brand reputation is negative—though weak and statistically insignificant—indicating that most online reviews may be unfavorable, potentially harming the brand's image.

This finding contrasts with studies by Fan, Zhang, and Rai (2021) and Roy et al. (2023), which identified a positive correlation between review volume and performance metrics. However, it aligns with Maslowka et al. (2017) and Shankar et al. (2020), who found limited effects of review volume on sales and adoption intentions. A potential explanation is that MTN's well-established reputation, built through consistent service delivery, means that consumers rely more on personal experience than on online reviews. Additionally, as the market leader, MTN receives frequent mentions in social media discussions, many of which may be unrelated to actual consumer experiences, further diluting the impact of review volume on reputation.

The study also finds that review consistency does not significantly influence brand reputation. This suggests that the nature of Twitter discussions about MTN does not strongly shape consumers' perceptions of the brand. This result diverges from prior research by Wang, Tariq, and Alvi (2021) and Shankar et al. (2020), which highlighted the role of review consistency in decision-making and adoption intentions. According to dual-process theory, consistent messaging typically signals brand quality. However, in this case, corporate responses may serve as a stronger indicator of brand reliability than review consistency. This underscores the importance of direct brand engagement in shaping reputation, rather than relying solely on the uniformity of customer-generated content.

As expected, corporate responses have a significant and positive impact on brand reputation. This finding highlights the importance of businesses actively engaging with customer feedback, whether in public forums or private interactions. Personalized responses—both to praise and criticism—reinforce brand credibility and customer trust. This aligns with previous research showing that frequent and thoughtful management responses enhance customer satisfaction (Liang, Schuckert, & Law, 2017) and strengthen brand reputation (Jacobs et al., 2023). From a signaling theory perspective, management responses serve as a powerful indicator of a brand's attentiveness and commitment to customer relationships, further elevating its reputation.

The study finds that review credibility does not reach significance at the conventional 5% confidence level but becomes significant at a more liberal 10% threshold. This suggests that while credibility plays a role in shaping brand reputation, its influence may not be as strong as other factors. This finding contrasts with Filieri et al. (2021) and Chih et al. (2013), who reported that credible reviews positively impact customer satisfaction and purchase intention. However, it reinforces the idea that consumers perceive credible reviews as trustworthy and factual, contributing to overall brand perception.

Among all the examined factors, trust emerges as the most influential driver of brand reputation. Regardless of what consumers say online, a brand's ability to deliver on promises, demonstrate competence, and consistently provide high-quality products or services remains the key determinant of its reputation. This finding aligns with research by Shankar et al. (2022) and Ventre & Kolbe (2020), reinforcing the crucial role of trust in shaping consumer perceptions. However, it contrasts with Moloi et al. (2022), who reported a non-significant relationship between trust and purchase intention.

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## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, it is crucial for service firms that provide undifferentiated services to adopt strategic measures for managing online reviews and strengthening their brand reputation and differentiating their offering.

First, online reviews increase transparency in competition, meaning that brands cannot rely solely on their popularity. A strong reputation can be undermined by credible negative reviews. To counter this, brands should actively encourage satisfied customers to share positive reviews. Additionally, while increased patronage may indicate strong market positioning, brands should regularly conduct reputation research to assess customer perceptions. This is essential because customer loyalty may sometimes stem from high switching costs rather than genuine brand satisfaction. As social media mentions—especially complaints—continue to shape public perception, brands must recognize the broader impact of these reviews on stakeholders beyond just customers. Second, although this study found that review consistency does not significantly impact brand reputation, companies can still strategically encourage customers to share testimonials and positive brand experiences. This requires investing in service quality and responsive customer support to ensure consistently positive customer interactions.

Third, reviews should not be seen merely as customer opinions but as valuable insights into how a brand is perceived. When multiple customers highlight similar complaints, brands should identify recurring themes and act accordingly. Successfully resolved complaints should be shared online, and customers should be encouraged to share testimonials of their positive resolutions. To manage online reviews effectively, brands should monitor and categorize Twitter reviews

based on sentiment (positive, negative, neutral), analyze customer feedback to identify common concerns and areas for improvement, engage promptly and professionally with customers, ensuring personalized responses that create a positive experience, be transparent about challenges and communicate the steps being taken to address them.

Fourth, while private resolutions may pacify individual customers, they do little to enhance brand transparency or reputation. Public responses to complaints demonstrate accountability, increase consumer trust, and reinforce the brand's commitment to service excellence. Instead of merely reacting to customer feedback, brands should create engaging content that addresses common concerns and showcases service improvements, share success stories and customer testimonials to highlight positive experiences, stay active on social media by addressing customer comments, monitoring trends, and adapting offerings to evolving consumer needs. Fifth, to maintain credibility, brands should filter out unreliable, sponsored, or arbitrary reviews. When reviews are perceived as factual, reliable, and trustworthy, they contribute positively to brand reputation. Telecommunications firms should consider using algorithms to flag fake reviews, including brand mentions unrelated to actual service experiences. Future research should explore how consumers perceive brand mentions in trending social media conversations and how this effect brand evaluation.

Finally, trust is a fundamental factor in shaping brand reputation. To build and maintain trust, brands should make realistic promises and consistently fulfill them, invest in trust-building initiatives, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, transparent communication, and ethical business practices.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while online review quantity and consistency have limited influence, trust, corporate responses, and credible reviews are key determinants of brand reputation. Active engagement with customer feedback and consistent fulfillment of brand promises are essential for enhancing reputation.

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### Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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