

From Ratings to Consumer Preferences: A Bibliometric Review of Customer Review Research in the Digital Age

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Customer Review, Customer Preference, Machine Learning, E-Commerce, Consumer Behavior

Received : 20, May

Revised : 22, June

Accepted: 25, July

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric review of the development of research on customer reviews and customer preferences in the digital era. Based on an analysis of 108 Scopus-indexed publications from 2005 to 2025, the study maps the evolution of themes, research trends, scientific collaboration, and intellectual landscapes, illustrating the shift in focus from rating-based analysis to predictive approaches for understanding consumer preferences. Using VOSviewer, six main clusters were identified: Customer-Centric Product Design & Preference Modelling, E-Commerce Customer Review Analytics & Performance Evaluation, Sentiment Analysis & Personalization in Customer Reviews, AI-Driven Recommendation & Feature-Based Review Analysis, Consumer Decision-Making & Online Purchasing Behavior, and Machine Learning & Text Mining for Customer Satisfaction Analysis. Research trends indicate a shift from rating-based analysis to more predictive consumer-preference modeling, driven by AI, machine learning, and NLP in processing customer reviews in the digital era. The findings show that sentiment analysis, machine learning, data mining, and natural language processing dominate current scholarly discourse, affirming the role of customer reviews as a strategic data source for mapping preferences and developing more adaptive recommendation systems. This study contributes to understanding the transformation of research from numerical evaluation to consumer preference analysis based on big data in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation and the rapid growth of e-commerce have made online customer reviews a crucial source of information for both consumers and businesses. E-commerce has grown rapidly, especially during the pandemic, and consumers are increasingly seeking product information from online reviews (T. Chen et al., 2022). Not only does it change consumer shopping behavior, but it also creates a vast and complex data ecosystem in which customer opinions become valuable assets for understanding market behavior (Yi & Liu, 2020).

Buying and selling transactions are now conducted online through e-commerce platforms and marketplaces. The emergence of the Online Customer Review (OCR) feature supports this shift (Siti Nuraeni & Irawati, 2021). The use of online customer reviews (OCR) has become an increasingly important part in determining customer trust and their purchasing decisions. Online reviews can influence customers' perceptions and beliefs about a product and serve as a marketing communication tool in the contemporary digital business world (Lukitasari & Tiara, 2024).

Along with digital transformation and the rapid growth of e-commerce in Indonesia and worldwide, online customer rating and review (OCR) systems have proliferated. It is essential to understand the components that influence purchase decisions and customer trust, given the shift in buyer behavior from offline shopping to online platforms. Customer reviews and ratings are essential components that serve as a primary source of information in the decision-making process (Farki et al., 2016).

Although previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding the influence of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) and ratings on consumer behavior in the digital era, several weaknesses and limitations remain to be considered for further research. Most previous studies have focused on the direct relationship between reviews and purchase intentions, without delving deeply into the shift from rating systems to a more complex, context-based analysis of consumer preferences.

Previous studies indicate that customer reviews play an essential role as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) that influences consumer trust and purchasing decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Raffaele et al., 2018). In the digital context, online reviews not only serve as a source of information but also as a means of shaping market perceptions and preferences (Y. Chen & Xie, 2008). In addition, consumer behavior theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Icek Ajzen, 1991) explain that online reviews can strengthen purchase intentions by increasing trust and reducing uncertainty (Gefen & Anderson, 2004). Thus, this literature review highlights a shift in research from rating-based analysis to a more contextual, big-data-driven, predictive understanding of consumer preferences.

New research has the opportunity to understand how digital review systems evolve from merely numerical ratings to the mapping of consumer preferences in a more dynamic and personalized way, while considering the limitations of previous studies, which were mainly research-based and thus require development into a literature review. The bibliometric study proposed in

this research offers novel insights into trends, thematic maps, and the direction of OCR research worldwide, from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes consumer behavior, digital marketing, and information technology. As emphasized by Donthu et al. (2021), Bibliometric methods can fill this gap by providing objective insights into the evolution of research themes, collaboration patterns, and influential publications.

To address this gap, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed articles published between 2005 and 2025 to explore trends, dominant themes, and theoretical contributions in customer experience research, with a specific focus on e-commerce platforms and marketers. Using tools such as VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), this study maps relationships among keywords, identifies emerging clusters, and highlights under-researched areas, particularly in developing countries.

This study aims to map, analyze, and understand the scientific development regarding customer review research in the digital era, focusing on the shift from merely evaluating reviews to understanding consumer preferences. The study also aims to identify dominant themes and theoretical contributions that have emerged globally. By examining the structure and development of existing literature, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the direction, trends, and research focus related to customer reviews in the digital era.

To achieve this goal and address the identified research gaps, this study is guided by three main Research Questions (RQ) that bridge the gap between bibliometric descriptive findings and their theoretical and practical implications. The research questions posed are designed to analyze the shifts and intellectual structure found in the literature on customer reviews and consumer preferences: RQ1: How has the focus of research shifted over time from rating-based analysis to predictive modeling based on consumer preferences through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)? RQ2: How have the intellectual structure and main research themes (thematic clusters) regarding customer reviews and consumer preferences evolved and been structured in the digital context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer reviews on e-commerce platforms are consumers' opinions about products or services purchased online. These reviews are a form of digital word-of-mouth, containing both positive and negative statements from consumers who have used the product or service (Farki et al., 2016). In the era of e-commerce, online reviews serve as an important source of information for other consumers. Positive reviews generally build consumer trust in a product or seller, while negative reviews increase buyers' perception of risk. Thus, customer reviews become a signal of quality and credibility in the online market. Recent research shows that product reviews and ratings play a crucial role in building customer trust and reducing uncertainty, thereby affecting consumer purchasing behavior (Kintan Oktadinna & Rachmat Fauzan, 2024).

Customer preferences, or consumer purchasing preferences, refer to consumers' tendencies to choose a particular product or brand from among

several alternatives. Specifically, consumer purchasing preferences are the stage at which consumers choose among several brands and eventually purchase one of the alternatives (Gabriela, 2022). These preferences are influenced by various factors, including product attributes (quality, features, price), brand reputation, and trust built through previous experiences (Barkhoya, 2024). In other words, consumers prefer products with good reputations and reviews, as this reflects expected quality and reduces perceived risk.

In the e-commerce ecosystem, customer reviews and consumer preferences are closely related. Online reviews reflect users' personal experiences and their general preferences regarding specific products. In other words, the collection of online reviews shows what customers like and dislike. This mechanism enhances trust transfer because new buyers can assess the credibility of sellers or products based on previous customer reviews. It fosters trust and preference for specific products. Additionally, the content and validity (positive-negative) of reviews can influence customer preferences toward products that receive positive reviews (Barkhoya, 2024).

Purchase decisions on e-commerce platforms are directly influenced by two ideas: customer reviews and customer preferences. Negative reviews increase the perception of risk and reduce purchase intention, while positive reviews build consumer trust and increase purchase intention (Kintan Oktadonna & Rachmat Fauzan, 2024). In addition, formed customer preferences, such as preferences for specific brands, serve as the final step before purchase; in other words, customers will buy items that match their preferences (Gabriela, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive bibliometric approach to map trends, developments, and key themes in the scientific literature on customer reviews, aiming to provide a more dynamic, personalized view of consumer preferences. The bibliometric method was chosen for its strengths in providing a systematic and comprehensive review of scientific knowledge production over time and in revealing the intellectual structure and evolving discourse within a research domain (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

To ensure a rigorous data collection process, this study adopts the four-step procedure proposed by Page et al. (2021), which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. At the identification stage, relevant keywords were entered into the Scopus database using the search string: "Customer Review" AND "preference". This search initially yielded 288 publications. The screening stage involved selecting only the keywords, namely customer review, online customer reviews, and customer preferences, resulting in 110 documents that met the criteria.

The feasibility stage focused on language refinement, retaining only articles published in English to maintain consistency in the analysis. Two documents were excluded, leaving a total of 108 publications. These publications were then included in the final analysis. Bibliometric data were analyzed using VOSviewer software, which allows visual mapping of co-author networks, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic clusters. The resulting maps provide

insights into the field's intellectual structure, highlighting dominant research themes and potential gaps for further study.

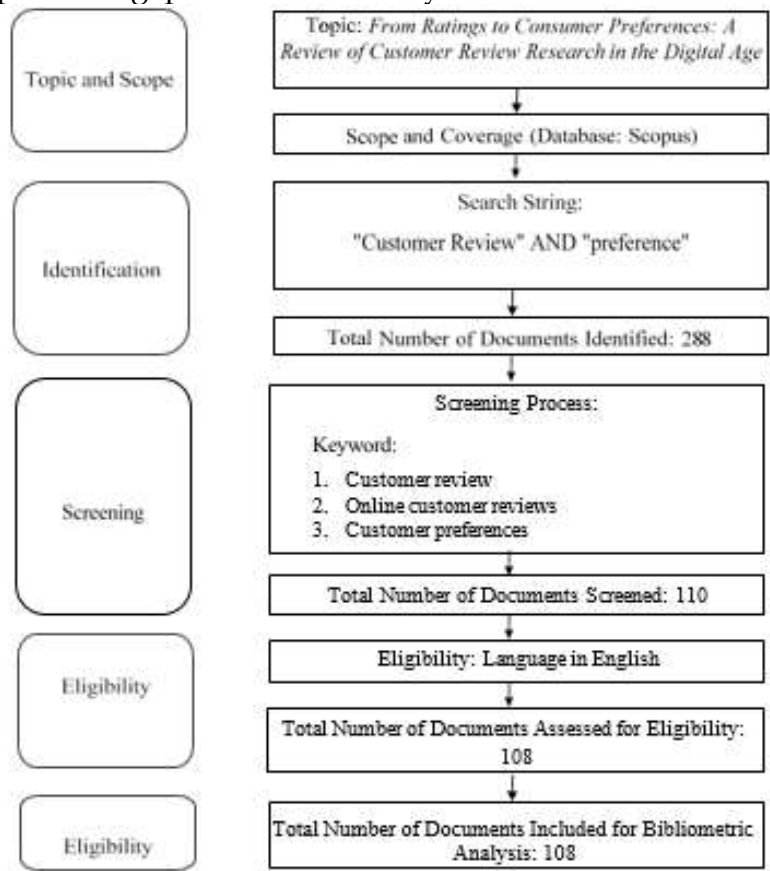


Figure 1. Data Collection Process

Through this methodological design, this study focuses on the main themes of customer reviews and customer preferences, aiming to uncover publication patterns, thematic evolution, and collaborative trends in research related to customer reviews and consumer preferences in the e-commerce sector, thereby providing a conceptual foundation that can support the development of research on customer reviews and consumer preferences in the digital era (Donthu et al., 2021).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance Analysis

Based on data retrieved from the Scopus database using the keyword combination "Customer Review" AND "preference", a total of 108 relevant articles published between 2005 and 2025 were identified after the eligibility screening process.

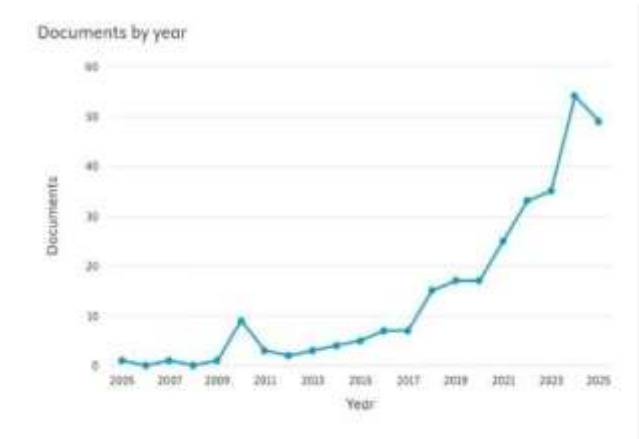


Figure 2. Publication Trends

Figure 2 shows that research on customer reviews and consumer preferences has increased significantly over the past two decades, in line with the shift in academic focus from rating-based assessments to a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences in the digital context. During the period 2005–2015, the number of publications remained low and fluctuated, reflecting the early stage of scientific exploration of customer reviews as a source of behavioral data. However, since 2016, the trend has shown a steady increase, which then surged dramatically after 2020, mainly driven by the growth of e-commerce, the intensity of user interactions on digital platforms, and advances in analytical methods such as sentiment analysis, machine learning, and recommendation models. The peak in publications in 2024–2025 indicates that research on customer reviews is becoming increasingly strategic in understanding consumer preferences, experiences, and decision-making in the digital era.

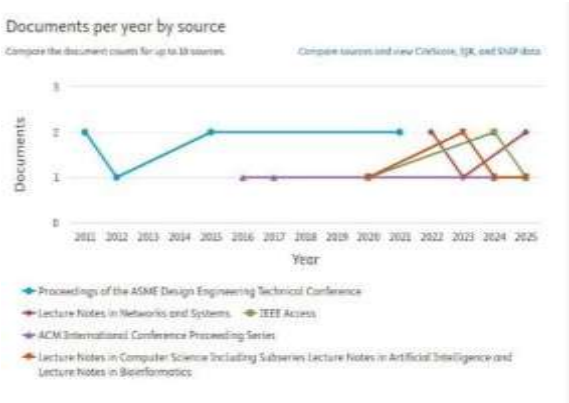


Figure 3. Trend of Journal Sources

Figure 3 shows that customer reviews and consumer preferences are distributed across various scientific outlets, particularly in engineering, computer science, and information systems, in line with the digital and computational nature of these fields. In the early period (2011–2015), contributions were limited and dominated by the Proceedings of the ASME Design Engineering Technical Conference, reflecting an initial focus on product design based on customer preferences. From 2020 onwards, significant

diversification is observed with the emergence of sources such as Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, IEEE Access, ACM International Conference Proceedings Series, and Lecture Notes in Computer Science, indicating a shift towards more technical and data-driven research. This pattern illustrates that the study of customer reviews has evolved from a design and engineering perspective toward advanced computational approaches, such as AI, machine learning, and text mining, to understand consumer preferences.

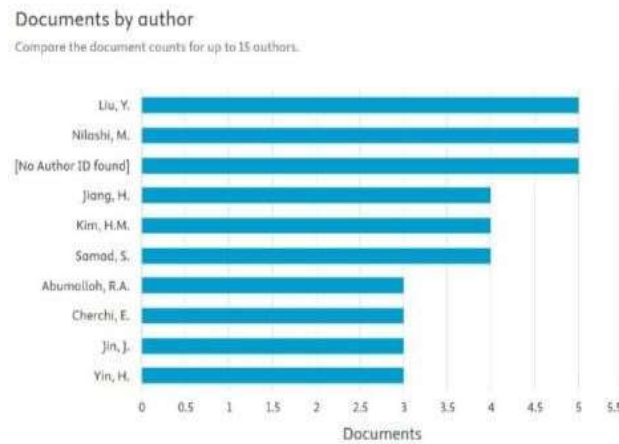


Figure 4. Documents by Author

Figure 4 shows that research contributions related to customer reviews and consumer preferences are dominated by several key authors, such as Liu Y., Nilashi M., Jiang H., Kim H.M., and Samad S., each producing three to five publications. The consistent productivity of these authors indicates that studies on how customer reviews are used to understand consumer preferences are a continuing and growing research area within the scientific community. The presence of the category 'No Author ID Found' also suggests that some documents may come from broad collaborations or sources that have not been fully indexed. Overall, this pattern reflects the increasing academic interest in mapping the transition from traditional rating systems to the interpretation of consumer preferences based on review data.

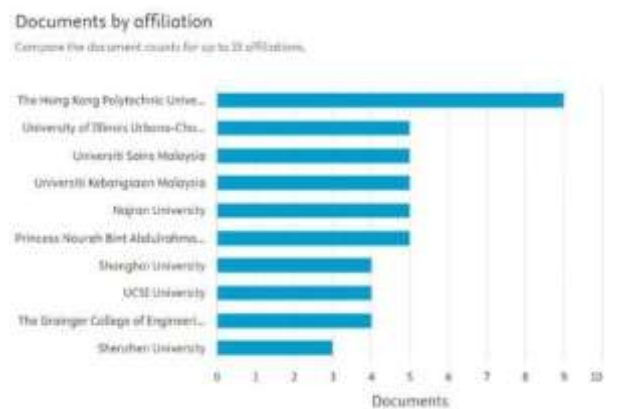


Figure 5. Institutions with the Highest Contribution in Publications

Figure 5 shows that research related to customer reviews and consumer preferences is dominated by institutions with strong reputations in technology research, data science, and consumer behavior. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is the most significant contributor with nearly ten publications, reflecting the institution's strong focus on customer analytics and recommendation systems. It is followed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, as well as several universities in Malaysia, such as Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, indicating a growing interest in the Asian region in research combining customer reviews, consumer preferences, and modern computational approaches. The involvement of universities from Saudi Arabia and China, and of engineering institutions such as The Grainger College of Engineering, also demonstrates that this topic is multidisciplinary and driven by the rapid development of digital technology. Overall, this pattern of affiliation underscores that research on the transition from ratings to a preference-based understanding is a rapidly growing global focus in the digital era.

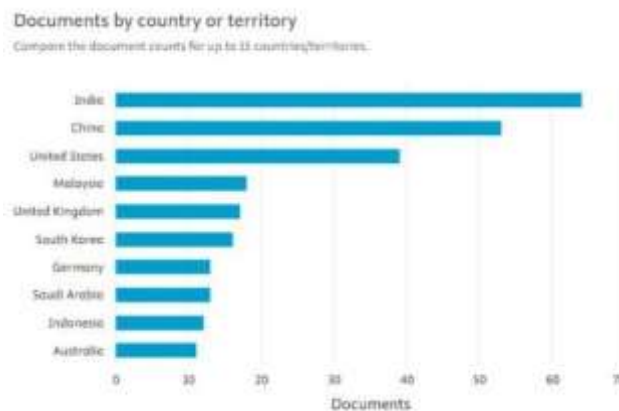


Figure 6. Distribution of Publications by Country

Figure 6 shows that countries with strong capabilities in digital technology and data analytics dominate research on customer reviews and consumer preferences. India emerges as the most significant contributor, with more than 60 publications, followed by China and the United States, which have historically advanced research infrastructure in e-commerce, artificial intelligence, and consumer behavior. Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and South Korea also make significant contributions, reflecting growing interest in Asia and Europe in understanding consumer preferences through reviews in the digital ecosystem. Countries such as Germany, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Australia also play a role, underscoring the global and multidisciplinary nature of research on this topic. Overall, this distribution confirms that the transition from ratings to preference analysis has become a focus of rapidly growing international research.

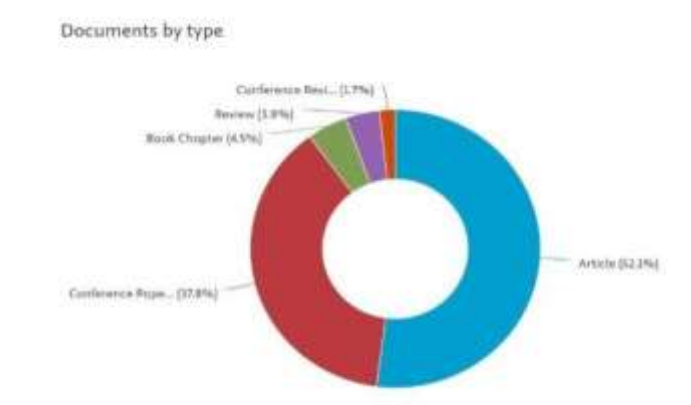


Figure 7. Distribution of Document Types in Publications

Figure 7 shows that more than half of the publications on customer reviews and consumer preferences are journal articles (52.1%), reflecting the dominance of high-quality empirical and theoretical research. The significant contribution from conference papers (37.8%) indicates that this field is also rapidly developing within the scientific community focused on technology, data science, and information systems, where early findings are often presented at international conferences before being published in journals. Meanwhile, book chapters, reviews, and conference reviews make a minor contribution but remain important for enriching theoretical and methodological perspectives on the interpretation of customer reviews and consumer preferences.

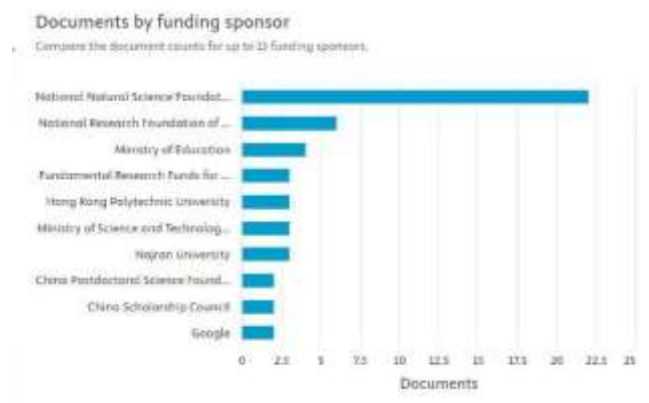


Figure 8. Top Funding Agencies in Research

Figure 8 shows that research on customer reviews and consumer preferences is primarily supported by significant funding institutions focused on the development of digital technology, artificial intelligence, and data science. The National Natural Science Foundation of China is the largest funder, with more than 20 publications, followed by the National Research Foundation of Korea and various educational and research institutions, including the Ministry of Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The dominance of funding from Asia reflects the region's strong commitment to research on digital analytics and consumer preference modeling, especially amid the growth of the digital economy and e-commerce. The presence

of sponsors like Google also indicates the industry's relevance in supporting innovation to understand consumer behavior from online reviews. Overall, this funding pattern confirms that the shift in research from ratings to preference analysis in the digital era is a strategic agenda strongly supported by global research institutions.

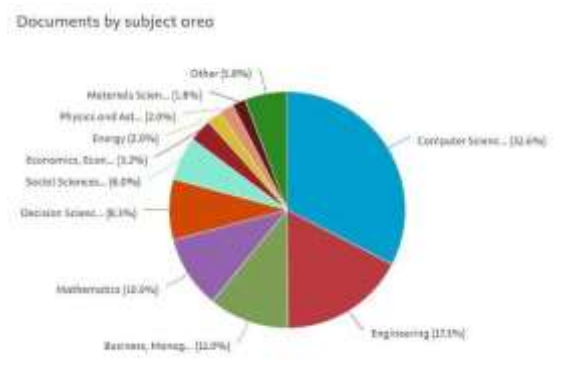


Figure 9. Distribution of Publications by Field of Study

Figure 9 shows that research on customer reviews and consumer preferences is dominated by Computer Science (32.6%), followed by Engineering (17.3%), Business and Management (11.0%), Mathematics (10.0%), and Decision Sciences (8.3%). The dominance of computer science and engineering reflects the strong role of digital technology, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics in processing customer reviews and extracting consumer preferences in the digital era.

Meanwhile, contributions from management, social, and economic sciences indicate that this topic is also considered important from the perspectives of consumer behavior, business strategy, and decision-making. The diversity of the scientific fields involved confirms that the shift from ratings analysis to a preference-based understanding is multidisciplinary, drawing on computational, behavioral, and business expertise.

Science Mapping

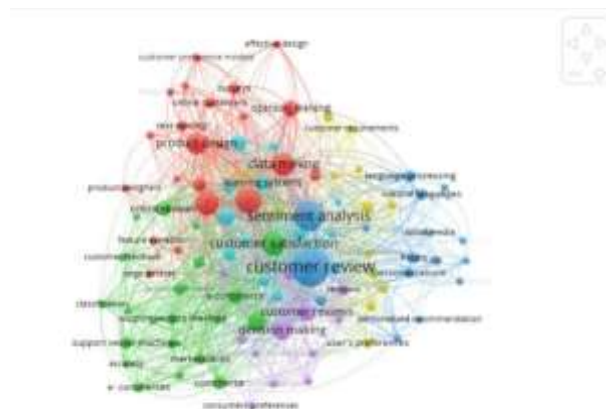


Figure 10. Bibliometric Network Visualization

Keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer reveals a complex yet well-organized thematic structure in the literature on customer experience. The

visualization identifies six main clusters, each representing a different but complementary research direction.

Cluster 1: Customer-Centric Product Design & Preference Modelling

This cluster illustrates how customer reviews are used to understand consumer needs, preferences, and expectations in the product design process. The research focus within this cluster is on integrating customer requirements, product attributes, and affective design to create designs that better align with user preferences. Approaches such as data mining and product feature analysis indicate that customer reviews are not only used for evaluation purposes but also serve as a strategic source of information for customer-driven product innovation.

Cluster 2: E-Commerce Customer Review Analytics & Performance Evaluation

This cluster focuses on using customer reviews as evaluative data to assess the performance of e-commerce platforms and services, as well as the quality of customer interactions. Dominated by methods such as classification, SVM, machine learning models, and performance analysis, research in this cluster examines how customer feedback can be used to improve service quality, user experience, and customer satisfaction levels in the digital commerce ecosystem.

Cluster 3: Sentiment Analysis & Personalization in Customer Reviews

This cluster stands out for its focus on interpreting the meaning and emotions contained in customer reviews through sentiment analysis and aspect-based sentiment analysis. In addition to understanding customer perceptions and emotions, this cluster emphasizes the importance of personalization through recommendations, with reviews analyzed to generate more relevant suggestions. The role of NLP, emotion recognition, and language processing demonstrates how reviews become a key source in creating a more personalized customer experience.

Cluster 4: AI-Driven Recommendation & Feature-Based Review Analysis

This cluster demonstrates the strong integration of AI technology in the utilization of customer reviews. Its primary focus is on artificial intelligence, collaborative filtering, clustering, and recommender systems, which automatically process consumer preferences and product features. Research in this cluster emphasizes how artificial intelligence maps consumer preference patterns from reviews to improve the accuracy of product recommendations across various digital platforms. **Cluster 5: Consumer**

Decision-Making & Online Purchasing Behavior

In this cluster, the research highlights the relationship between customer reviews, product perception, and the consumer decision-making process. Key focus words such as consumer behavior, decision-making, purchasing, and online shopping indicate that reviews play an important role in shaping customer preferences and purchase decisions. Reviews are no longer just a source

of information; they are also a psychological component that affects user experience and purchasing decisions in the digital environment.

Cluster 6: Machine Learning & Text Mining for Customer Satisfaction Analysis

This last cluster is oriented towards the use of machine learning algorithms and text mining techniques to comprehensively understand customer satisfaction from extensive review data. Focusing on topic modeling, text mining, and performance measurement, research in this cluster aims to extract topic patterns, key issues, and aggregated sentiments that reflect customer experiences. The ultimate goal is to predict or evaluate customer satisfaction levels based on automated analysis of review texts.

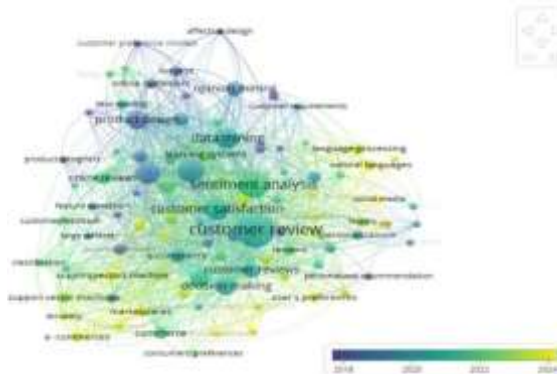


Figure 11. Visualisasi Overlay Bibliometrik

The analysis results indicate that customer reviews are the central focus of research, with strong connections to terms such as sentiment analysis, customer satisfaction, decision-making, and consumer preferences, reflecting the evolution of research from an emphasis on evaluation to a deeper understanding of consumer preferences. Dominant keywords during the 2018–2020 period, such as product design, data mining, opinion mining, and e-commerce, depict the initial phase of research focused on processing review data for service evaluation and product design. Entering the 2021–2024 period, research has rapidly evolved with the emergence of more advanced keywords such as personalization, user preferences, personalized recommendations, natural language processing, and social media, reflecting the increased use of artificial intelligence and natural language analysis to understand consumer behavior.

The density of relationships between keywords indicates that this topic is multidisciplinary, combining computational approaches, consumer behavior, and business strategies. Overall, this map confirms that from 2018 to 2024, there has been a growing trend towards using customer reviews as a primary source to uncover consumer preferences, experiences, and decision-making processes comprehensively.

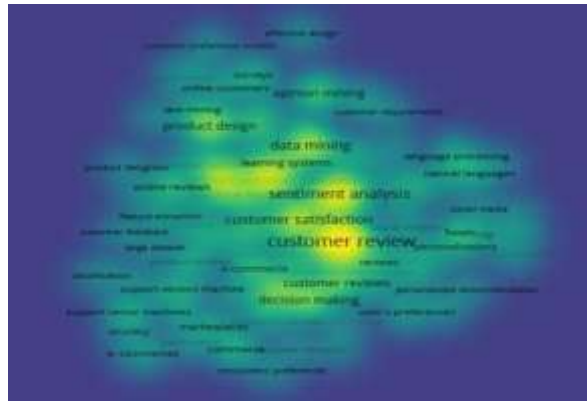


Figure 12. Visualisation of Bibliometric Density

The analysis results indicate that customer reviews are the primary focus of the research, followed by frequently occurring terms such as sentiment analysis, customer satisfaction, decision-making, and customer reviews, confirming that customer reviews are a key source for understanding consumer behavior and preferences. Keywords like data mining, opinion mining, product design, and online customer reviews also show high intensity, reflecting the use of analytical techniques and artificial intelligence to extract information from digital reviews.

Meanwhile, terms such as user preferences, personalized recommendations, language processing, and natural language processing indicate that recent research is moving towards modeling preferences and personalizing services based on review data. Overall, this visualization shows that scientific focus is not only on rating measurement but also on a deeper understanding of consumer preferences through more complex, technology-based review analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, this study shows that research on customer reviews and consumer preferences has experienced significant development over the past two decades, marked by a shift from rating-based analysis to a more complex, preference-based, predictive approach. Research trends have shifted with the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and big data analytics, transforming customer reviews into a strategic data source for deeper mapping of consumer needs, preferences, emotions, and decision-making processes. From the keyword analysis using VOSviewer, six main clusters were identified, namely Customer-Centric Product Design & Preference Modelling, E-Commerce Customer Review Analytics & Performance Evaluation, Sentiment Analysis & Personalization in Customer Reviews, AI-Driven Recommendation & Feature-Based Review Analysis, Consumer Decision-Making & Online Purchasing Behavior, and Machine Learning & Text Mining for Customer Satisfaction Analysis.

Based on the findings of this research, several strategic recommendations can guide future research and practice. First, studies on customer reviews and customer preferences need to strengthen a multidisciplinary approach by

integrating perspectives from technology, marketing, consumer psychology, and digital communication to generate a more comprehensive understanding of purchasing behavior. Second, the development of predictive models based on AI, deep learning, and big data analytics should continue to be advanced so that consumer preference mapping can be carried out more accurately, adaptively, and in real time as digital interactions evolve. Third, research needs to be expanded to the context of developing countries, including Indonesia, to understand better cultural differences, market dynamics, and the more diverse consumer characteristics that remain underrepresented in the global literature. Fourth, future studies are recommended to integrate data from various digital platforms such as marketplaces, social media, and community forums to build a more holistic map of consumer preferences. Finally, a longitudinal analysis is needed to capture temporal changes in consumer preferences and behavior, enabling dynamic adjustment of recommendation models and marketing strategies.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Further research should be directed towards developing a more integrative approach to understand the relationship between customer reviews and consumer preferences in greater depth. Until now, research has been dominated by technical approaches such as machine learning, data mining, and sentiment analysis, leaving the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of consumers underexplored. Therefore, future studies could develop a hybrid model that combines NLP-based linguistic analysis with behavioral and psychological variables such as trust, risk perception, and consumer emotions to provide a richer understanding of the meaning of reviews. Additionally, longitudinal studies have great potential to trace the evolution of consumer preferences and changes in decision-making patterns.

Future research can also explore the application of Explainable AI (XAI) to create review analysis and product recommendation systems that are more transparent and ethically accountable. On the other hand, the integration of multimodal data combining text reviews, images, video reviews, and social media interactions will enable more holistic and real-time preference modeling. By developing this research direction, the literature is expected to increasingly bridge quantitative ratings-based analysis with qualitative understanding of consumer preferences, thereby enriching both academic contributions and practical implementation in managing customer experiences in the digital era.

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