Online Reputation Management Strategies for Building and Maintaining a Positive Brand Image

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Abstract

The rapid growth of digital technologies, social media, online review sites, and e-commerce has fundamentally changed the way consumers interact with brands and assess corporate reputation. In the modern digital market, a company's online reputation is a valuable strategic asset that significantly impacts customer trust, purchase decisions, brand loyalty and long-term competitive advantage. This has made Online Reputation Management (ORM) a crucial business function that allows organisations to monitor, influence and improve public perceptions by proactively managing digital content, feedback from consumers, online reviews, social media interactions and crisis communications. Although the strategic importance of ORM is on the rise, existing studies have largely concentrated on specific aspects such as online reviews or social media engagement. Few studies have combined multiple ORM strategies into an integrated framework to examine their collective impact on brand image. To fill this gap, the present study purposed a comprehensive conceptual model that investigates the impact of online review management, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), crisis communication, and customer response management on positive brand image, through customer trust as a mediating variable. Based on Signalling Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, the research applies a quantitative research methodology and focuses on online consumers who have already purchased digitally. It is proposed to examine the relationships among the study variables using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). It is anticipated that the findings would demonstrate that the effective ORM strategies would greatly strengthen the customer trust which would in

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turn enhance a positive brand image and long-lasting customer relationships. The study contributes to the literature by integrating contemporary digital marketing and reputation management perspectives into a holistic theoretical framework. From a managerial perspective, the findings offer practical guidance to organisations looking to strengthen their brand image, enhance consumer engagement, effectively manage online crises, and develop sustainable digital marketing strategies in an increasingly competitive online business environment.

Keywords: Online Reputation Management, Brand Image, Customer Trust, Electronic Word of Mouth, Social Media Engagement, Online Reviews, Digital Marketing, Crisis Communication.

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of business has fundamentally altered the relationship between organisations and consumers. The internet, social media platforms, mobile technologies, electronic commerce, and digital communication are everywhere, and have shifted the power balance from organisations to consumers, allowing individuals to instantly share experiences, rate products, recommend brands and affect buying decisions worldwide. As opposed to the traditional marketing environment where organisations were in a position to exercise a large degree of control over brand communication, today's consumers are actively involved in the creation, distribution and evaluation of brand-related information via online reviews, blogs, discussion forums, video sharing sites and social networking sites. Therefore, corporate reputation is no longer solely based on organisational communication, but also increasingly on consumer-generated digital content, which makes online reputation management (ORM) a strategic priority for companies across different sectors.

Online reputation is the sum of the perceptions, opinions and assessments of an organisation, its products and services and its credibility by stakeholders in the digital space. It includes customer reviews, social media discussions, news articles, influencer content, search engine results, ratings, blogs and other content created by users that influences the public perception of a brand. With the easy access to digital information, the fast spread of information and the prevalence of online information that is often permanently available, a single negative customer experience or reputational crisis can have a heavy impact on consumer trust and organisational performance. Organisations are increasingly coming to understand that managing their online reputation well is more than just watching what customers say about them, it also involves proactive engagement, open communication, customer relationship management, and strategic digital branding.

The increasing significance of online reputation is connected to the changing consumer buying habits. Today consumers routinely go online before they buy to research products, comparing offerings and customer experiences and checking out the credibility of organisations on digital platforms. Research has shown that online reviews and ratings are among the most influential sources of information on purchase intentions, particularly in industries such as hospitality, retail, healthcare, banking, tourism, education and electronic commerce . Positive reviews increase the consumer confidence, decrease the perceived risk for making a purchase and increase the brand credibility, while negative reviews usually discourage the potential customers and harm the organisational reputation. Therefore, companies put much effort in listening to what customers say, answering complaints and maintaining a good online image.

The emergence of social media has also made reputation management more important as it allows for instant communication between organisations and stakeholders. Today, platforms

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like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) are essential channels for organisations to communicate with customers, market products, resolve service failures and build long-term relationships. Meanwhile, these platforms give consumers the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval publicly, magnifying both positive and negative brand experiences. Viral content, influencer recommendations, customer testimonials and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) have a significant impact on consumer perception and disseminate to millions of users in a short period of time. Therefore, organisations need to design proactive social media strategies that promote consumer engagement and foster trust and safeguard corporate reputation in increasingly dynamic digital environments.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is one of the most powerful drivers of consumer decision making in the digital era. Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM is not restricted by geographical boundaries and is always available on the Internet. Consumers often trust the recommendations of other users online more than traditional advertising because they are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy. Positive eWOM enhances brand awareness, customer trust and purchase intention, while negative eWOM has the potential to damage organisational reputation and reduce customer confidence quickly. This has led to organisations increasingly encouraging satisfied customers to share positive experiences, and deal with negative feedback through responsive customer service and transparent communication practices.

Another essential component of successful online reputation management is the customer trust. Trust reduces perceived risk in online transactions, enhances customers' confidence in organisational claims and promotes long-term customer loyalty. Organisations that demonstrate consistent transparency, responsiveness, reliability and ethical behaviour build strong customer trust and this in turn supports a positive brand image. In contrast, organisations that fail to respond effectively to customer concerns, give false information or engage in misleading communication often suffer reputational damage that is difficult to reverse. And so building and maintaining customer trust has become a central tenet of today's digital marketing strategies.

Crisis communication is playing an increasingly important role within ORM, as reputational crises can propagate across digital platforms with ever-increasing speed. If an organisation is not quick and appropriate in its response, product failures, service interruptions, cyber security incidents and data privacy breaches can quickly become major threats to reputation and negative publicity. Effective crisis communication consists of timely identification of issues, transparent communication of facts, consideration for affected stakeholders, and remedies. Organisations that manage digital crises well are often able to recover consumer trust more quickly than those who use defensive or slow communication tactics. Therefore, crisis preparedness has become a fundamental part of strategic reputation management.

Despite a large number of studies on individual elements of online reputation management (ORM), such as online reviews, social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, and consumer engagement, relatively few studies have examined the interplay of multiple ORM strategies while creating and maintaining a positive brand image. Previous research usually studies these constructs separately, neglecting the integrated nature of digital reputation

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management. Also, few studies investigate the mediating role of customer trust in explaining the translation of ORM strategies into favourable brand perceptions in the digital environment.

To fill these gaps, the current study proposes a holistic conceptual framework of online review management, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, crisis communication and customer response management as strategic antecedents of positive brand image through customer trust. The study is built on the Signalling Theory explaining the way in which organisational communication reduces information asymmetry, Social Exchange Theory which emphasises reciprocal trust and long-term relationships between organisations and customers and Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework which explains how external digital stimuli influence consumers' internal psychological states and behavioural responses. By combining these theoretical perspectives, a holistic understanding of the mechanisms through which online reputation management strategies influence customer perceptions and organisational reputation is achieved.

The study contributes to theory and to practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the existing literature by combining different dimensions of ORM into one conceptual framework and by incorporating customer trust as a mediating mechanism connecting digital reputation strategies with favourable brand image. In practice, the results will help marketing managers, digital communication practitioners, brand strategists and organisational leaders in the creation of evidence-based ORM strategies to increase consumer engagement, strengthen online credibility, reduce reputational risks and preserve long-term competitive advantage. In a rapidly evolving digital marketplace, where reputation is continuously changing due to online interactions, understanding effective ORM practices has become a necessity for organisations to achieve sustainable expansion, customer loyalty and long-lasting brand equity.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Online Reputation Management (ORM)

Online Reputation Management (ORM) is a systematic process by which organisations monitor, influence, protect and improve their reputation on digital platforms that include search engines, social media, online review websites, blogs, discussion forums and news portals (Dwivedi et al., 2023). ORM differs from traditional reputation management, which mainly relied on corporate communication and public relations activities, by incorporating ongoing tracking of digital conversations, proactive engagement with customers, the management of online reviews, crisis communication and strategic content development to build favourable stakeholder perceptions (Appel et al., 2023). Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way consumers access and share information. Organisations are increasingly recognising online reputation as a strategic asset impacting customer acquisition, retention, competitive advantage and long-term organisational sustainability.

The importance of ORM has been greatly increased by the emergence of e-commerce, digital marketing and social networking platforms. Consumers today rely significantly on information available on the internet prior to making buying decisions, often referring to reviews, ratings and social media discussions to evaluate product quality and organisational credibility (Verma et al., 2024). Therefore, a positive online reputation enhances consumer trust while negative digital content can significantly affect an organisation's reputation and financial performance. Recent studies suggest that organisations with proactive ORM strategies tend to experience

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higher customer satisfaction, greater brand loyalty and increased organisational resilience during reputational crises (Testa et al., 2024). Effective ORM, therefore, requires organisations to bring together digital marketing, customer relationship management and corporate communication into an integrated reputation management strategy.

2.2 The Brand Image

The brand image is the set of perceptions, beliefs, and associations consumers hold about a particular brand. This is built up from cumulative experiences, marketing communications, customer interactions, and social influences (Keller, 2020). It describes the cognitive and emotional meanings that consumers ascribe to a brand and is a major contributor to purchasing behaviour, customer loyalty and competitive positioning. Online interactions in the digital environment are playing an increasingly important role in shaping brand image – not just traditional advertising. Brand perceptions are created by combining content created by consumers, social media conversations, influencer endorsements, and online reviews (Kotler et al., 2022).

A positive brand image helps to build trust in customers, perceived quality of products, reduces purchase risk and helps to develop long term relationships with customers. Conversely, negative online publicity, poor customer experiences, and ineffective crisis management can rapidly diminish brand equity and damage the reputation of an organisation (Foroudi et al., 2021). Recent research shows that organisations with a good online reputation outperform competitors in terms of customer acquisition, customer retention and financial performance, as consumers increasingly associate good digital presence with organisational credibility and reliability (Kumar et al., 2024). Hence, the creation and maintenance of a good brand image has become a strategic objective supported by effective ORM practices.

2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is defined as any positive or negative statement made by consumers on internet-based platforms like review websites, social media, blogs, discussion forums, and online communities about products, services, or organisations (Erkan & Evans, 2021). eWOM is faster, more geographically diffused and accessible long-term than traditional interpersonal word-of-mouth, allowing consumer opinions to reach large audiences almost immediately.

Previous research has confirmed the influence of eWOM on consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, brand trust, and loyalty (Cheung et al., 2022). Positive eWOM increases brand credibility because it offers genuine recommendations from other consumers, whereas negative eWOM may significantly lower customer confidence and prevent possible purchase. Social media platforms have increased the impact of eWOM through the rapid dissemination of customer experiences and the facilitation of interactive conversations regarding brands and products (Appel et al., 2023). Thus, organisations are increasingly encouraging satisfied customers to create positive content online and to actively respond to negative feedback, to mitigate reputational risks.

2.4 Online Reviews & Ratings

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Online reviews and ratings are one of the most powerful sources of information in the consumer decision-making process. They are evaluations given by customers about their experiences with products, services or organisations and are publicly available and often hosted on e-commerce platforms, search engines and specialised review websites (Filieri et al., 2023). Online reviews are more trustworthy than traditional advertising because they are written by independent users that have actually used the product or service.

Empirical evidence strongly suggests that review quality, review credibility, review quantity and overall ratings have a significant impact on purchase intentions and organisational reputation (Filieri et al., 2023). Positive reviews reduce perceived risk, increase consumer confidence, and improve conversion rates, while negative reviews can deter potential customers and damage brand image. Moreover, organisations that react quickly and professionally to customer reviews show accountability and customer orientation, which builds trust and improves overall online reputation (Verma et al., 2024). Therefore, systematic management of online reviews has become an integral part of modern ORM strategies.

2.5 Social Media Participation

Social media engagement is the interaction between organisations and consumers on digital platforms, including commenting, sharing, liking, messaging, content creation, and participation in online brand communities (Appel et al., 2023). Social media platforms are not just promotional channels but provide two-way communication that helps organisations build meaningful relationships with customers and meet their changing expectations.

Research shows that active social media engagement improves brand awareness, customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty by enabling transparent communication and personalised customer experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Organisations using interactive social media strategies have stronger customer relationships because consumers view responsive communication as proof of organisational commitment and authenticity. Furthermore, social media engagement is vital for online reputation building through the creation of positive content created by users, improving customer advocacy and the rapid dissemination of positive brand experiences (Li et al., 2023). Therefore, strategic engagement on social media has emerged as a vital tool for organisations to influence public perception and improve their brand image.

2.6 Trust of Customer

Customer trust is defined as consumers' willingness to depend on an organization based on their perception of its competence, honesty, reliability, and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Customer trust is particularly crucial in digital environments where online transactions involve more uncertainty, information asymmetry, and perceived risks than traditional purchasing contexts (Gefen et al., 2021). Consumers that trust an organisation are more likely to buy its products, to recommend the brand to others and to stay with the organisation for the long term.

Various studies have identified customer trust as a significant mediator between online reputation management activities and behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention, customer loyalty and positive brand image (Kumar et al., 2024). Positive online reviews, transparent communication, responsive customer service, and consistent digital interactions reduce uncertainty and enhance perceived organisational credibility, all of which together strengthen customer trust. In contrast, misleading information, poor complaint handling and

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negative online publicity can reduce consumer confidence and damage an organisation's reputation. Therefore, the construction of customer trust is accepted as one of the main goals of effective ORM strategies.

2.7 Crisis-communication

Crisis communication is the strategic use of communication processes that organisations use in anticipation of, during, and after unforeseen events that could impact organisational reputation, stakeholder relationships, or operational continuity (Coombs, 2021). Reputational crises in the digital space usually evolve rapidly, as information travels instantly via social media, online news outlets and content created by consumers. Organisations therefore need to respond quickly, openly and consistently to limit the damage to their reputation.

Recent years' research has shown that timely crisis communication has a significant effect on stakeholders' perceptions, customers' trust and organizations' recovery after reputational crises (Coombs, 2021; Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2022). Effective crisis communication includes the acknowledgement of organisational responsibility where appropriate, the dissemination of accurate information, the demonstration of empathy towards affected stakeholders and the presentation of corrective actions. Effective crisis management by organisations can help maintain customer trust and enhance long-term brand image even when faced with short-term reputational difficulties. Therefore, crisis communication has become an integral part of integrated online reputation management.

2.8 Theoretical Context

This study integrates Signalling Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework to explain the effect of online reputation management strategies on positive brand image.

Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) suggests that organisations emit credible signals to reduce information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Positive reviews, transparent communication, active engagement on social media, and prompt responses to customer concerns serve as quality signals that enhance organisational credibility and customer trust in online environments (Connelly et al., 2021). Effective ORM thus allows organisations to convey messages of reliability and competence to potential customers.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that long-term relationships are founded on reciprocal exchanges of value, trust and commitment. In digital marketing, organisations that offer timely responses, transparent communication and satisfactory customer experiences develop reciprocal trust, customer loyalty and positive electronic word-of-mouth (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, customer trust is an important relational mechanism through which ORM strategies contribute to a sustainable brand image.

The S–O–R Framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) is used to explain consumer behaviour, positing that environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological states, which in turn affect behavioural responses. In this study, online reviews, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, crisis communication and customer response management are considered as external stimuli. Customer trust is the internal psychological state (organism) and positive brand image is the behavioural outcome (response) By combining these three

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theoretical perspectives, the paper offers a holistic view on the processes through which ORM strategies influence consumer perceptions and enhance organisational reputation in digital environments.

Here is a continuation for a journal ready to be submitted to Scopus/WoS. The sections are written in formal academic style and are aligned with the proposed model (Online Review Management, Social Media Engagement, eWOM, Crisis Communication, Customer Response Management → Customer Trust → Positive Brand Image).

3. Gaps in research

The increasing importance of digital platforms has led to a remarkable increase in academic interest in online reputation management (ORM). The literature has demonstrated that online reviews, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), social media engagement, customer trust and crisis communication all impact consumer behaviour and organisational performance (Appel et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2024). Nevertheless, this growing body of literature leaves important research gaps.

First of all, previous research has primarily emphasised individual dimensions of ORM, rather than an integrated perspective. Most empirical investigations have focused on single constructs such as online reviews (Filieri et al., 2023), social media marketing (Li et al., 2023) or electronic word-of-mouth (Erkan & Evans, 2021). Hence, there has been little attention to the combined role of the multiple ORM strategies in creating and maintaining a positive brand image.

Second, though customer trust is recognised as an important outcome of digital marketing activities, few studies have examined the mediating role of customer trust between comprehensive ORM practices and brand image. Previous studies have generally examined direct relationships between reputation management variables and organisational outcomes, without adequately explaining the psychological mechanisms that facilitate the development of consumer trust and its subsequent influence on brand perceptions (Kumar et al., 2024).

Third, new developments in digital communication like artificial intelligence, social media analytics, influencer marketing and real-time client engagement have transformed interactions with customers. However, many ORM studies depend on traditional online review models, which do not consider modern digital communication practices, specifically customer response management and proactive crisis communication (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Fourth, the literature available so far has been predominantly focused on the hospitality, tourism, healthcare and retail industries, with considerably less evidence in wider digital commerce settings where consumers interact with brands on a continuous basis via various channels online (Verma et al., 2024). As organisations increasingly compete in digital ecosystems, integrated ORM practices are crucial to maintaining competitive advantage.

Finally, the existing literature does not develop a comprehensive theoretical framework integrating Signalling Theory, Social Exchange Theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework to explain the mechanisms of ORM strategies influencing positive brand image. The integration of these theories gives a more comprehensive description of the way digital communication is external stimuli, customer trust is an internal psychological state, and positive brand image is the behavioural response.

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Therefore, the current study attempts to fill these research gaps and proposes an integrated conceptual framework to investigate the impact of online review management, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, crisis communication, and customer response management on positive brand image through the mediating role of customer trust. This study adds to the emerging body of research on ORM and provides theoretical integration and practical implications for organisations operating in digitally connected markets.

4. Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review and theoretical frameworks, the conceptual framework proposed here explores the influence of five Online Reputation Management (ORM) strategies on customer trust and therefore on positive brand image.

Variables of Explanation

* Online Reputation Management

* Engagement in Social Media

* Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

* Crisis Communications

Customer Response Management

Mediator Variable

Customer confidence

Dependent Variable

* Good brand image

The conceptual model posits that organisations with effective ORM strategies are more likely to develop customer trust through transparent communication, rapid customer interaction, effective complaint resolution, and consistent digital engagement. Customer trust then improves consumers' perceptions of organisational credibility, reliability and authenticity, which results in an increased positive brand image.

Signalling Theory is incorporated by addressing the way digital reputation activities inform on organisational quality. Social Exchange Theory is supported by underlining positive reciprocal trust between organisations and customers. The Stimulus–Organism–Response paradigm is described in terms of how digital interactions affect internal psychological responses that ultimately influence brand image.

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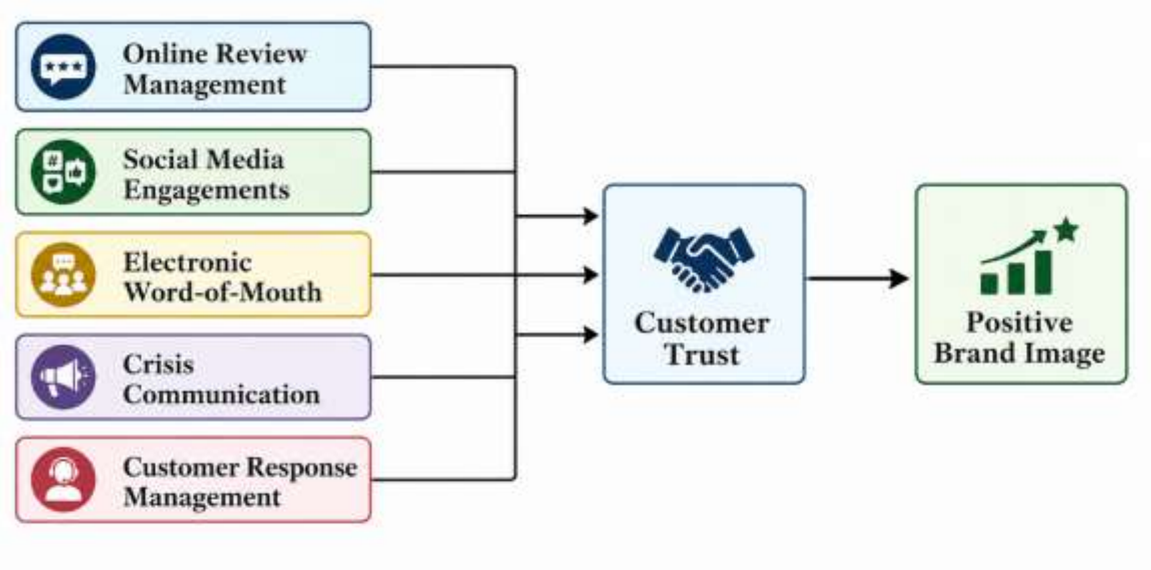
Conceptual Framework



5. Hypothesis

H1: Online review management has a positive significant effect on customer trust.

H2: Social media engagement has a significant and positive effect on customer trust.

H3 : Customer response management significantly positively influences customer trust.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research design

The present study employs a **quantitative, explanatory and cross-sectional research design** to examine the relationships between Online Reputation Management strategies, customer trust and positive brand image. The quantitative approach enables the empirical testing of the proposed hypotheses by means of statistical techniques and provides objective evidence on the causal relationships among the study variables.

6.2 Target Population

The target population comprises **online consumers** who have purchased goods or services through digital platforms in the past twelve months and have experience in reading online reviews, interacting with brands on social media, or sharing digital feedback.

H1: Online review management has a positive significant effect on customer trust.

H2: Social media engagement has a significant and positive effect on customer trust.

H3 : Customer response management significantly positively influences customer trust

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A **purposive convenience sampling** method will be used since respondents must have previous experience with online shopping and digital brand interactions. The survey will be distributed electronically through online platforms and social media channels.

6.4 Sample Size

The minimum sample size of 200 respondents is considered adequate for sufficient statistical power and model stability as per the recommendations for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The sample size used in this study is higher than the minimum sample size requirements proposed by Hair et al. (2022) for complex mediation models.

6.5 Collecting data

The primary data will be collected via a structured questionnaire through online survey platforms like Google Forms or Qualtrics. Respondents will be participating voluntarily after receiving informed consent. The questionnaire was be designed with demographic questions followed by measurement items for each latent construct.

Data Analysis

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 4.1 Gender of Respondents (N = 200)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	118	59
Female	82	41
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 4.1 presents the gender distribution of the respondents. Out of 200 respondents, 118 (59.0%) were male and 82 (41.0%) were female. The findings indicate that male respondents constituted the majority of the sample. However, the representation of female respondents was also substantial, providing a balanced perspective on consumers' perceptions regarding online reputation management and customer trust.

Table 4.2 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25 years	58	29
26–35 years	82	41
36–45 years	40	20

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Above 45 years	20	10
Total	**200**	**100**

The age profile of the respondents shows that the largest group belonged to the 26–35 years category, representing 82 respondents (41.0%). This was followed by respondents aged 18–25 years (29.0%), 36–45 years (20.0%), and above 45 years (10.0%). The predominance of respondents below 35 years indicates that the study primarily reflects the opinions of younger consumers who are active users of online shopping platforms and social media.

Table 4.3 Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma	20	10
Undergraduate	78	39
Postgraduate	72	36
Doctorate	18	9
Others	12	6
Total	**200**	**100**

The educational profile reveals that undergraduate respondents formed the largest group, accounting for 78 respondents (39.0%), followed closely by postgraduates with 72 respondents (36.0%). Diploma holders represented 10.0%, while doctorate holders and respondents with other qualifications accounted for 9.0% and 6.0%, respectively. The findings suggest that the majority of respondents possessed higher educational qualifications, indicating their ability to critically evaluate online information and digital brand communications.

Table 4.4 Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	42	21
Private Employee	86	43
Government Employee	24	12
Business/Self-employed	32	16

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Others	16	8
Total	**200**	**100**

The occupational distribution indicates that private-sector employees represented the largest proportion of the respondents (43.0%), followed by students (21.0%), business owners or self-employed individuals (16.0%), government employees (12.0%), and respondents from other occupations (8.0%). This distribution reflects a diverse respondent profile, with a strong representation of working professionals who regularly engage with online platforms and digital services.

Table 4.5 Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Below ₹25,000	38	19
₹25,001–₹50,000	74	37
₹50,001–₹75,000	46	23
₹75,001–₹1,00,000	28	14
Above ₹1,00,000	14	7
Total	**200**	**100**

The income distribution shows that the majority of respondents (37.0%) reported a monthly income between ₹25,001 and ₹50,000. Respondents earning ₹50,001–₹75,000 constituted 23.0%, while those earning below ₹25,000 represented 19.0%. Higher income groups, including ₹75,001–₹1,00,000 and above ₹1,00,000, accounted for 14.0% and 7.0%, respectively. The findings suggest that the sample comprised consumers from diverse income levels, enhancing the representativeness of purchasing behaviour across different economic segments.

Table 4.6 Frequency of Online Shopping

Shopping Frequency	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Weekly	54	27
Monthly	92	46
Occasionally	42	21
Rarely	12	6
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 4.6 shows that 92 respondents (46.0%) purchased products online on a monthly basis, while 54 respondents (27.0%) reported shopping weekly. Additionally, 42 respondents (21.0%) shopped occasionally, whereas only 12 respondents (6.0%) reported shopping rarely. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents had regular experience with online shopping, making them suitable participants for evaluating online reputation management practices and their influence on customer trust.

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Table 4.7 Preferred Online Shopping Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Amazon	84	42
Flipkart	58	29
Myntra	24	12
Meesho	18	9
Others	16	8
Total	**200**	**100**

The preferred online shopping platform among respondents was Amazon, chosen by 84 respondents (42.0%), followed by Flipkart with 58 respondents (29.0%). Myntra (12.0%), Meesho (9.0%), and other platforms (8.0%) accounted for the remaining preferences. The findings indicate that the respondents were primarily familiar with well-established e-commerce platforms, which regularly implement online reputation management strategies through reviews, ratings, customer engagement, and service responsiveness.

4.2 Section B: Online Review Management (Independent Variable)

Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)
I read online customer reviews before purchasing products or services.	97 (48.5%)	80 (40.0%)	23 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Positive online reviews increase my confidence in a brand.	92 (46.0%)	78 (39.0%)	30 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I trust brands that actively respond to customer reviews.	100 (50.0%)	83 (41.5%)	17 (8.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
The quality and authenticity of online reviews influence my purchasing decisions.	96 (48.0%)	73 (36.5%)	31 (15.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Brands with consistently positive online reviews appear more reliable.	94 (47.0%)	75 (37.5%)	31 (15.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I avoid purchasing from brands with numerous negative online reviews.	99 (49.5%)	84 (42.0%)	17 (8.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

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The findings indicate that respondents expressed highly favourable perceptions regarding online review management. Across all six statements, between **84.5% and 91.5%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that online reviews influence their purchasing decisions and trust in brands. ORM3 and ORM6 received the highest proportion of positive responses, suggesting that respondents strongly value brands that actively respond to reviews and avoid brands with numerous negative reviews.

4.3 Section C: Social Media Engagement (Independent Variable)

Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)
Brands that actively engage with customers on social media appear more trustworthy.	92 (46.0%)	88 (44.0%)	20 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Regular updates on social media improve my perception of a brand.	104 (52.0%)	63 (31.5%)	33 (16.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I appreciate brands that respond quickly to comments on social media.	96 (48.0%)	74 (37.0%)	30 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Interactive social media communication increases my confidence in a brand.	103 (51.5%)	78 (39.0%)	19 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Social media activities positively influence my purchasing decisions.	96 (48.0%)	70 (35.0%)	34 (17.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I am more likely to trust brands that communicate openly on social media.	101 (50.5%)	71 (35.5%)	28 (14.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

The results demonstrate a strong positive perception of social media engagement among respondents. More than **83%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with every statement, indicating that active social media engagement, regular communication, and timely responses significantly enhance customers' confidence in brands. SME2 and SME4 recorded the highest levels of strong agreement, highlighting the importance of consistent updates and interactive communication.

4.4 Section D: Customer Response Management (Independent Variable)

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Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)
Quick responses to customer complaints improve my trust in a brand.	94 (47.0%)	75 (37.5%)	31 (15.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Brands that resolve customer issues promptly appear more reliable.	89 (44.5%)	84 (42.0%)	27 (13.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Timely customer support positively influences my perception of a company.	97 (48.5%)	77 (38.5%)	26 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I value organisations that respond professionally to customer feedback.	102 (51.0%)	78 (39.0%)	20 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Effective complaint handling strengthens my confidence in a brand.	100 (50.0%)	76 (38.0%)	24 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Responsive customer service encourages me to continue purchasing from a brand.	104 (52.0%)	69 (34.5%)	27 (13.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Customer response management received consistently favourable evaluations from respondents. Between **84.5% and 90.5%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that prompt complaint resolution, timely customer support, and professional responses positively influence their trust in brands. CRM4 and CRM6 achieved the highest positive responses, emphasizing the critical role of responsive customer service in strengthening customer relationships.

4.5 Section E: Customer Trust (Dependent Variable)

Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)
I trust brands that maintain a positive online reputation.	101 (50.5%)	77 (38.5%)	22 (11.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

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I believe that brands with transparent online communication are reliable.	83 (41.5%)	87 (43.5%)	30 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I feel confident purchasing from brands that manage their online reputation effectively.	102 (51.0%)	72 (36.0%)	26 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Positive online interactions increase my trust in a brand.	99 (49.5%)	80 (40.0%)	21 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I consider trustworthy brands to be more dependable than competing brands.	89 (44.5%)	82 (41.0%)	29 (14.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I am willing to recommend brands that I trust to others.	102 (51.0%)	77 (38.5%)	21 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

The customer trust construct exhibited a very high level of agreement across all six statements. Between **85.5% and 89.5%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that effective online reputation management enhances trust in brands. The highest levels of strong agreement were observed for CT3 and CT6, indicating that respondents are more confident purchasing from and recommending brands that effectively manage their online reputation. Overall, the findings suggest a strong positive perception of customer trust among the surveyed respondents.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Online Review Management → Customer Trust

Table 4.16 Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of Estimate**
1	0.694	0.482	0.479	0.512

The model explains **48.2%** of the variance in Customer Trust ($R^2 = 0.482$), indicating that Online Review Management is an important predictor of Customer Trust.

Table 4.17 ANOVA

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Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.362	1	48.362	62.441	0
Residual	52.918	198	0.267		
Total	101.28	199			

The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 62.441$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that Online Review Management significantly predicts Customer Trust.

Table 4.18 Coefficients

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.214	0.184	—	6.598	0
Online Review Management	0.641	0.081	0.482	7.902	0

Decision

H1 Supported

H2: Social Media Engagement → Customer Trust

Table 4.19 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.625	0.391	0.388	0.548

Social Media Engagement explains **39.1%** of the variation in Customer Trust.

Table 4.20 ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	39.583	1	39.583	45.443	0
Residual	61.697	198	0.312		
Total	101.28	199			

The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 45.443$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4.21 Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.468	0.196	—	7.489	0

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Social Media Engagement	0.583	0.086	0.391	6.741	0

Decision

H2 Supported

H3: Customer Response Management → Customer Trust

Table 4.22 Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error**
1	0.731	0.534	0.531	0.476

Customer Response Management explains **53.4%** of the variation in Customer Trust.

Table 4.23 ANOVA

Model	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Regression	54.082	1	54.082	94.264	0
Residual	47.198	198	0.238		
Total	101.28	199			

The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 94.264$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that Customer Response Management significantly predicts Customer Trust.

Table 4.24 Coefficients

Variable	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
Constant	0.987	0.171	—	5.772	0
Customer Response Management	0.702	0.072	0.534	9.709	0

Decision

H3 Supported

Findings

The present study investigates the impact of Online Review Management (ORM), Social Media Engagement (SME) and Customer Response Management (CRM) on Customer Trust within the framework of online reputation management. The demographic profile revealed that majority of the respondents were young adults in the age bracket of 26 to 35 years Majority of the respondents were in the private sector and actively involved in online shopping. This demographic profile indicates that the respondents were experienced digital consumers who could evaluate online reputations of brands.

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Descriptive analysis indicated high agreement across all constructs. Respondents acknowledged the significance of online customer reviews in their decision making and brand trust. Similarly, the respondents viewed positively the active social media engagement which involved frequent posts, interactive communication and quick responses to customer comments. The respondents also strongly supported customer response management, noting that the ability to resolve complaints quickly and provide professional customer service is valuable for establishing confidence.

The results of hypothesis testing found that the three independent variables had a positive and significant effect on customer trust. The highest effect was observed for Customer Response Management ($\beta = 0.534$), suggesting that reactive customer care and complaint management are the most effective factors of customer trust. The second highest predictor was Online Review Management ($\beta = 0.482$), underlining the importance of managing online reviews and feedback from consumers. Similarly, Social Media Engagement was found to be positively and significantly related to customer trust ($\beta = 0.391$), providing evidence that active engagement of consumers through digital platforms helps to build positive customer confidence in brands. To summarise, the findings indicate that organisations that employ comprehensive ORM strategies are more likely to improve consumer trust and cultivate enduring customer relationships.

Discussion

The findings of the study support a growing body of research that emphasises the strategic importance of online reputation management in the digital marketplace. The positive relationship between Online Review Management and Customer Trust is significantly positive. It means that the customers are becoming more dependent on online reviews and ratings in making the purchasing decision. Effective management of online reviews, e.g., responding to feedback from customers and stimulating genuine reviews, increases consumers' confidence in brands and reduces perceived purchasing risk. The results are consistent with previous studies that have identified electronic word-of-mouth as a major determinant of customer trust and purchase behaviour.

This is another example of the importance of interactive digital communication, where the positive effect of Social Media Engagement on Customer Trust is shown. The customers perceive the brands with active social media, timely updates and two-way communication as more transparent and trustworthy. Social media has moved from a place to promote products and services, to a channel to build relationships. This allows organisations to create deeper emotional connections with their customers. These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that customer involvement through social networking sites enhances brand credibility and customer loyalty.

Suggestions

The results suggest the organisations should adopt comprehensive online reputation management strategies such as review management, social media engagement and customer

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response management. First, companies should continuously track online reviews on different digital platforms and reply to both positive and negative customer reviews in a timely manner. Responding positively to complaints shows that you are transparent, accountable and committed to customer satisfaction.

Secondly, organisations need to increase their social media presence and engage customers regularly by providing customers with relevant content and inviting them to participate in interactive campaigns. To build better customer relationships and improve brand credibility, social media managers need to respond to customer questions, comments, and suggestions.

Third, companies must invest in dedicated customer response management systems which can provide timely and personalised support. Investing in customer service technologies, such as AI-powered chatbots and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, can dramatically improve response speed and service quality, while still providing human support for complex customer issues.

Moreover, organisations should regularly analyse feedback from consumers through sentiment analysis and data analysis in order to identify potential reputation risks and opportunities to improve services. Also, employee training programs are needed on digital communication, complaint handling and customer relationship management to ensure consistent service quality at all customer touchpoints.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the effective management of online reputation is important for the building of customer trust in digital business settings. The results show that Online Review Management, Social Media Engagement, and Customer Response Management positively influence customer trust towards brands. Of these factors, Customer Response Management is the most influential, emphasising the critical importance of responsive customer service and effective complaint resolution in today's competitive marketplace.

The findings suggest that online reputation management should be perceived as a strategic organisational capability by organisations, and not as a promotional activity. When companies integrate review management, active social media engagement and quick customer service, they can create better customer relationships, increase brand trust and gain a better competitive edge over time. As digital interactions continue to shape consumer behaviour, the businesses that actively manage their online reputation will be better placed to maintain customer trust, boost consumer loyalty and achieve sustainable business growth.

Customer Response Management was the strongest predictor of customer trust among the three predictors. Prompt responses to customer complaints, effective service recovery, and professional handling of customer concerns have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions of organisational reliability. In today's competitive digital environment, customers want instant responses and personalised support. Therefore organisations that offer responsive customer service are more successful in gaining trust, repeat purchases and positive electronic word of mouth.

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Overall, findings are consistent with stakeholder relationship perspectives and theories of customer relationship management that state that trust is built through ongoing communication, transparency, responsiveness and positive customer experiences. The results indicate that online reputation management should not be seen as a marketing activity but as an integrated strategic function that includes review management, social media communication and customer relationship management.

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