

Mixed-Methods Study of Arabic Online Review Influence on Purchase Intention (AOCR-PI)

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Abstract—Online customer reviews (OCRs) have become vital for shoppers, aiding their purchase decisions amidst the rapid growth of user-generated content. However, limited attention has been paid to studying the impact of OCRs on the purchase intentions of Arab consumers. Therefore, applying Western online review systems to other cultures without further consideration may pose challenges. This study aims to examine how various factors of OCRs affect Arab consumers' buying intentions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from a survey questionnaire (633 responses) and qualitative insights from interviews (15 participants) were collected and analysed sequentially. The findings reveal that review central cues (valence, comprehensiveness, readability and images) and some peripheral cues (volume and reviewer experience) significantly influence purchase intention. By contrast, reviewer identity disclosure and reputation are not deemed important by Arab book shoppers. The semi-structured interviews validated the significance of reading OCRs before purchase, offered insights into the impact of various related factors, and revealed a new factor that is shared perspectives between the reviewer and OCR receiver. The study contributes theoretical insights and provides managerial implications for ORP developers and book publishers, aiming to enhance user experience and drive sales.

Index Terms—E-Commerce; Independent online review platform; Online book reviews; Online consumer reviews; Elaboration likelihood model.

I. INTRODUCTION

ONLINE consumer reviews (OCRs) allow consumers to gain valuable insights and evaluations of products from other customers before making a purchase decision. This abundance of information empowers customers to refine their future purchase decisions based on valuable insights. In contrast to traditional product promotions that merely emphasise product advantages, the emergence of OCRs has transformed the way consumers access information. OCRs have become a trusted source of unbiased insights, offering diverse perspectives from fellow customers. Supporting this notion, a recent study found that around 90% of participants said that OCRs influence their buying decisions [1], which directly impacts sales [2]. Understanding the role of OCRs and their influence

on purchase intentions forms the central focus of our mixed-method explanatory sequential study.

An OCR is defined as “peer-generated product evaluations on company or third-party websites” [3]. OCRs can be classified as internal or external, depending on whether they are hosted by retailers (e.g. Amazon) or independent review platforms (e.g. Goodreads), respectively [4]. Although many studies focus on OCRs and consumer buying behaviour, most examine only internal OCRs, despite the significant impact of external OCRs on product sales [5]. Additionally, the effect of OCRs on buying intention varies across cultures. Neglecting users' cultural backgrounds when developing online review systems and designing websites can affect customer evaluations and perceived value [6], [7]. However, few researchers have considered the cultural background of OCR users, limiting the generalisation of current works. Therefore, future research needs to consider these factors to improve our understanding of OCRs and enhance their effectiveness in different cultural contexts.

In summary, OCRs are essential in shaping consumer choices. However, the research has primarily focused on internal OCRs, despite the greater impact of external OCRs. Moreover, the impact of OCRs on consumers' decisions varies depending on the cultural backgrounds of consumers, which may have been overlooked in the development of review systems. To overcome these limitations, this research seeks to investigate the impact of OCRs on the purchase intention of Arab consumers. Guided by the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) [8], Hall's cultural model (HCM) [9] and Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (HCDf) [10], the research model was built and presented in our previous paper (see [11]). This paper presents the findings from data analysis and discusses the implications derived from the study.

A sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was adopted to examine the correlation between OCR factors and purchase intention and to explain the results. First, quantitative data were collected from Arab users of Goodreads.com using online questionnaires to test the research model proposed in [11]. Then, qualitative data were used to explain the

quantitative results considering Hall's and Hofstede's cultural theories. A subset of survey respondents has been recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews for collecting the qualitative data. The sample was selected from Goodreads because it is the largest online review platform (ORP) for books [12]. Therefore, this methodology provides a thorough approach to studying the correlation between OCR factors and purchase intention among Arab users of Goodreads.com.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: In Section II, the theoretical foundation of the research model is briefly reviewed, and the research model is provided (detailed hypotheses discussion is provided in [11]). In Section III, the research methodology is presented, including details of the sample and methods of data collection, followed by the analysis procedures of the empirical data. In Section IV, the quantitative and qualitative results of this study are reported. In Section V, a detailed discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings is provided with theoretical and practical implications. Finally, concluding remarks are presented including the research limitations and suggestions for future works in Section VI.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND RESEARCH MODEL

ELM suggests two decision-making routes: central (entails high cognitive efforts) and peripheral (depending on simple cues) [8], [13]. This study examines online reviews as persuasion pathways for Arab consumers, considering review content (central cues) and numerical and reviewer-related factors (peripheral cues). Additionally, considering the high-context (HC) and collectivist nature of Arab culture [9], [10], the study utilises Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance (UA) and individualism (IND) dimensions to guide hypotheses and examine their influence on how Arabs use OCRs. This combined approach aims to understand the persuasive processes in action and their impact on Arab consumer purchase intentions.

Building upon these theories, our previous paper proposed the research model presented in Fig 1, discussed the associated research hypotheses and provided an extensive review of the current literature that led to the hypotheses H1 - H8 [11].

III. METHODOLOGY

A sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was adopted. Quantitative data were collected and analysed first, while qualitative interview data were collected second to explain and expand upon the results of the initial quantitative findings [14]. This study focuses on the factors of OCRs on independent ORPs that influence purchase intention. Questionnaire data was gathered from Arab users of Goodreads.com, an online reader community, and was used to test the research model. Two reasons led to the selection of Goodreads users: first, Goodreads is the largest and most popular independent platform for book reviews, and second, books are considered experience products where consumers cannot evaluate their quality before purchase. Thereby, customers often pursue the opinions of others to reduce uncertainty related to future purchases [15], especially in high UA cultures such

as Arab culture. Accordingly, purposive sampling was employed to obtain results that could be representative of a particular segment of the online population, in this study, Arab users of OCRs.

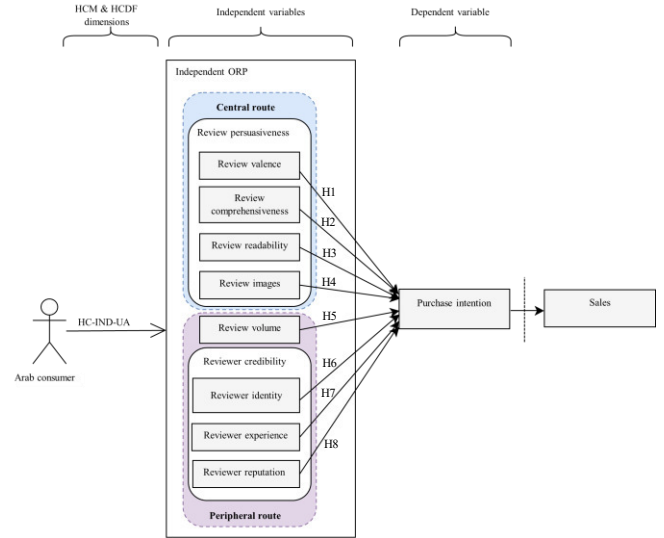


Fig 1. Research model (AOCR-PI) [11]

A. Quantitative survey design and measures (first phase)

To reach the target population, an online survey was posted in different Arabic discussion groups on Goodreads.com. Qualtrics web-based survey platform was used to design the questionnaire, which was configured to show only completed responses. The survey was initially created in English language and then provided for participants in Arabic. It was divided into two sections: the first section comprised 8 questions that covered the participant demographics and their OCR usage experience, and the second section consisted of 34 questions addressing nine research model constructs. To maintain the content validity, the questionnaire relied on established measures from past research, with modifications made to some items to fit this study. Face validity evaluation was conducted by piloting the survey with 25 participants from the target population (Arab users of Goodreads) to assess the wording and clarity of the questions. After the pilot study, some questions were clarified, and enhancements were made to the survey layout. All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The questionnaire is available from the corresponding author upon request.

For both the quantitative and qualitative studies, the Institutional Review Board approval was obtained at the University of Sussex. Furthermore, before commencing data collection, all participants in both studies provided informed written consent before completing the questionnaire and oral consent before the interview. The quantitative data was collected from May 15 to June 15, 2023.

B. Quantitative data analysis

SPSS software was used to address data screening issues and report demographic information of respondents and their OCR usage experience. Using the partial least squares (PLS) approach, the valid survey responses were entered into SmartPLS software to evaluate the survey measurements and test the research hypotheses. This method has been widely employed in information systems research [16]. PLS is a prominent method that combines factor analysis and regression analysis to simultaneously evaluate both the measurement and structural models. It is well-suited for handling complex models with many indicators [16]. Moreover, it is the most appropriate approach for predictive research [16], which is the main objective of the current study. A two-stage approach is used to execute partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM): first, assessing the reliability and validity of the study constructs through the measurement model, and second, testing the research hypotheses by assessing the structural model [16]. Section IV describes the data analysis procedures and results.

C. Qualitative data collection and analysis (second phase)

As previously discussed, qualitative interview data were collected to provide deeper insights into the quantitative findings obtained from the questionnaires, enriching the overall understanding of the research outcomes. Accordingly, a semi-structured interview was selected, as it is suitable for exploratory and explanatory research [17]. Thus, the second part of the study was conducted using convenience sampling to interview a subset of quantitative respondents. In Arabic, the interview was piloted before conducting the final interviews to test the understandability and clarity of the questions and to estimate the average interview duration. The final semi-structured interviews were then conducted in June 2023.

During the interviews, the participants freely responded to a series of questions about online review and reviewer factors. In addition, the questions addressed the cultural characteristics of Arab OCR users (HC, IND and UA). To ensure that the interviewees considered only the factors relevant to this study and to eliminate other influencing factors, the interviews began with the following statement: ‘Imagine you know nothing about a book, its author and its publisher, and then answer the following questions’.

Using Zoom software, the Arabic interviews were transcribed verbatim after each session, ensuring comparability, reliability, and consistency [18]. The duration of each interview ranged from fifteen to twenty-five minutes. The Arabic transcriptions were carefully translated into English and then imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software for thematic analysis.

The qualitative interview questions were developed based on the quantitative data, and thematic analysis with its six-step process, as outlined by Braun and Clarke [19], was employed. The thematic analysis was conducted inductively and deductively. Each question represented a theme (i.e. OCR factor and related cultural characteristics) and was followed by

explanatory questions such as ‘Why?’ or statements such as ‘Please explain further’ to obtain deeper insights and uncover new factors related to participants’ OCR usage.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents the demographic statistics of the samples from the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study. Next, the steps of the statistical analysis to test the research hypotheses using PLS-SEM are discussed. Following that, the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews are reported.

A. Sample profiles of quantitative and qualitative phases

During the quantitative stage of the research, 633 legitimate responses were gathered from Arab users of Goodreads; there were no invalid responses. Among them, 46% were male, while the majority (54%) were female. The vast majority of respondents (83%) were young adults 18–35 years old. Regarding their education level, two-thirds of them had a bachelor’s degree. Most of the respondents were from Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

The demographics of the sample align closely with the overall Goodreads audience statistics as analysed by Similarweb.com, a popular platform that provides insights and data about website traffic, audience demographics and other key metrics. Goodreads’ latest statistics reveal women constitute the majority (>60%) of the website audience, individuals younger than 35 years form the largest age group of visitors, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia rank among the top 30 countries for Goodreads.com traffic [20]. Thus, we can argue that the sample was representative of Arab users of Goodreads, and therefore the findings can be generalised across this population.

Regarding the participants’ experience with the OCRs, most of the respondents have long experience with using OCRs to aid their purchase decisions, with over two-thirds of them using OCRs for more than four years. Moreover, the participants reported checking OCRs very frequently before making purchases, with 30% always doing so and 40% often doing so. They typically spend a short amount of time reading reviews, with 54% spending less than 15 minutes. Furthermore, OCRs about both fiction and non-fiction books are important to the respondents, with almost two-thirds often reading reviews about both genres, whereas only 19% about fiction books and 17% about nonfiction books.

Regarding the qualitative research phase, fifteen online interviews with participants from the quantitative stage were conducted. Eight men and seven women comprised the sample, with the majority falling within the 26–35 age group. Different useful perspectives and explanations for the questionnaire data are presented in Section V.

B. Common method bias

When data are obtained from the same population at a single point in time, the validity of the study may be affected if the issue of common method bias exists [21]. Following the approach of most previous studies that addressed this issue

(e.g. [22], [23]), Harman’s single-factor test was employed in SPSS. it involves loading all the items into a single factor. The result shows that the first factor explains only 25.5% of the data variation, well below the 50% level recommended by [21]. Therefore, the findings demonstrated that this study is not affected by the common method bias.

C. Measurement model

The initial stage of structural equation modelling (SEM) is examining the measurement models to verify the reliability and validity of the survey constructs. The internal consistency (reliability) is assessed by evaluating the value of Cronbach’s alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity is verified by examining the factor outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The measurement model should meet all criteria as recommended by Hair et al [16] before the structural model can be assessed. First, indicator loadings are recommended to be above 0.7. Second, to establish construct reliability, α and CR values should be above 0.7, and for convergent validity, AVE value should be above 0.5. All results exceeded the thresholds except for loadings of two items (Img2 = 0.559 and Exp1 = 0.675), but loadings above 0.5 are acceptable if construct reliability and convergent validity are established [24], [25]. Thus, we retained them because convergent validity and internal reliability were achieved (see Table I).

Third, to establish discriminant validity, the square root of AVE for each construct should surpass the highest squared correlation with any other construct in the model (Fornell–Larcker criterion) [26]. Furthermore, Henseler et al. [27] developed a new and more accurate measurement for discriminant validity called the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations. The HTMT ratio should be below 0.85 [27]. As Table II illustrates, Fornell–Larcker and HTMT criteria were met, indicating that discriminant validity was achieved.

TABLE I.

CONSTRUCTS’ RELIABILITY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY.

| Constructs | α | CR | AVE |
|--------------------------|----------|-------|-------|
| Valence (Val) | 0.793 | 0.866 | 0.617 |
| Comprehensiveness (Com) | 0.811 | 0.876 | 0.639 |
| Readability (Read) | 0.808 | 0.887 | 0.723 |
| Image (Img) | 0.831 | 0.873 | 0.638 |
| Volume (Vol) | 0.820 | 0.881 | 0.649 |
| Experience (Exp) | 0.811 | 0.876 | 0.641 |
| Reputation (Rep) | 0.873 | 0.913 | 0.725 |
| Identity disclosure (ID) | 0.901 | 0.931 | 0.772 |
| Purchase intention (PI) | 0.840 | 0.903 | 0.757 |

TABLE II.

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

| | Val | Com | Read | Img | Vol | Exp | Rep | ID | PI |
|-----|--------------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Val | 0.786 | 0.463 | 0.421 | 0.051 | 0.494 | 0.462 | 0.396 | 0.403 | 0.490 |
| Com | 0.371 | 0.799 | 0.512 | 0.050 | 0.425 | 0.515 | 0.349 | 0.308 | 0.522 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Read | 0.338 | 0.418 | 0.850 | 0.073 | 0.445 | 0.562 | 0.417 | 0.353 | 0.461 |
| Img | 0.017 | 0.042 | 0.053 | 0.799 | 0.077 | 0.084 | 0.048 | 0.058 | 0.107 |
| Vol | 0.402 | 0.349 | 0.362 | 0.057 | 0.806 | 0.503 | 0.472 | 0.478 | 0.486 |
| Exp | 0.378 | 0.418 | 0.455 | 0.042 | 0.413 | 0.800 | 0.498 | 0.502 | 0.497 |
| Rep | 0.327 | 0.292 | 0.352 | 0.014 | 0.401 | 0.423 | 0.852 | 0.469 | 0.323 |
| ID | 0.338 | 0.264 | 0.301 | 0.002 | 0.413 | 0.432 | 0.424 | 0.878 | 0.301 |
| PI | 0.405 | 0.436 | 0.383 | 0.112 | 0.410 | 0.421 | 0.279 | 0.267 | 0.870 |

Underlined values = Fornell and Larcker criterion; italic values = heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion.

D. Multicollinearity

This is an important step for ensuring that the model constructs are not strongly correlated with each other. Values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) statistic above 5 indicate critical collinearity issues [16]. The results showed that the VIF values of the inner model range between 1.01 and 1.63, which is less than the conservative threshold of 3 [16]. Thus, multicollinearity is not a concern in this study.

E. Structural model

Having established an adequate measurement model, the structural model will be evaluated to test the research hypotheses. Using SmartPLS software, a bootstrapping approach with 5000 subsamples was used to address the significance (p-values) of the relationships between the research factors in the model [16]. As shown in Table III, review valence ($p < 0.01$), comprehensiveness ($p < 0.001$), readability ($p < 0.05$), image ($p < 0.05$), volume ($p < 0.001$) and reviewer experience ($p < 0.01$) positively and significantly impact the purchase intention. By contrast, reviewer identity disclosure and reputation were not statistically significant. Hence, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5 and H7 were accepted while H6 and H8 were rejected. The path coefficient, T-value and p-value for each research hypothesis are listed in Table III.

TABLE III.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

| Hypothesis | β | T values | P values | Decision |
|----------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| H1: Val -> PI | 0.169 | 3.344 | 0.001 | Accepted |
| H2: Com -> PI | 0.205 | 4.617 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H3: Read -> PI | 0.109 | 2.250 | 0.025 | Accepted |
| H4: Img -> PI | 0.078 | 2.194 | 0.028 | Accepted |
| H5: Vol -> PI | 0.169 | 3.534 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H6: ID -> PI | -0.012 | 0.277 | 0.781 | Rejected |
| H7: Exp -> PI | 0.155 | 3.251 | 0.001 | Accepted |
| H8: Rep -> PI | -0.004 | 0.072 | 0.943 | Rejected |

Next, the endogenous construct’s coefficient of determination (R^2) value was calculated to assess the model’s explanatory power. The model explains 33.8% of the variance in purchase intention, exceeding the benchmark often observed in customer decision-making research [28], [29]. In other words, review valence, comprehensiveness, readability, images, volume and reviewer experience can explain around one-third of

the change in the purchase intention. Fig 2 shows the revised research model with the significant paths.

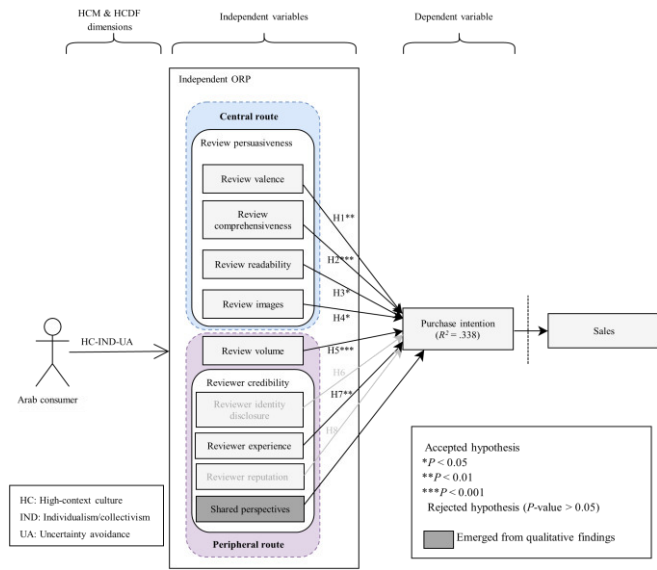


Fig 2. The revised AOCR-PI model

Finally, the value of cross-validated redundancy (Q2) determines the predictive relevance of the model, which estimates how well the model matches expectations. For the model to have predictive power, the Q2 value should be greater than zero [16]. The result shows that the Q2 value of the dependent construct (purchase intention) is 0.313. Hence, the model demonstrates predictive power.

F. Qualitative phase results

This section presents the thematic analysis findings from the qualitative interviews. Before delving into the main questions related to the OCR factors, the interviewees were asked about their usual usage of OCRs, specifically whether they prefer independent online review platforms (IORPs) such as Goodreads (external OCRs) or e-commerce websites such as Amazon (internal OCRs). As expected, most of them expressed a preference for IORPs. This question was followed by asking ‘Why?’ to gain insights into the reasons behind their preference for IORPs over e-commerce websites. The interview questions are available from the corresponding author upon request.

The following are the seven reasons reported by the interviewees for preferring external over internal OCRs. First, the most frequent reason revealed by the interviewees is trusting the reviews posted on IORPs, indicating that external OCRs are considered more reliable than internal OCRs. Second, the reviewers on IORPs are perceived as more credible by respondents. Third, the participants emphasised the widespread availability of OCRs on Goodreads compared to e-bookstores, which enables them to assess others’ opinions about books. Fourth, the reviewers on IORPs can freely provide their opinions without attempting to promote books. Fifth, IORPs offer better social features that allow users to follow each other and send private messages, indicating the

importance of social ties in Arab societies (HC culture). Sixth, Goodreads provides a feature called ‘reading challenge’ that allows users to set reading targets for the next twelve months, which was found to be influential according to the interviewed participants. Finally, some participants believe that external OCRs on IORPs provide a deeper evaluation of books compared to those found on e-commerce websites, which tend to be more superficial.

Following our deductive and inductive thematic analysis approach, we initially (deductively) coded interview responses to the pre-defined OCR factors from the research model (Fig 1). Inductive coding was also used to capture additional OCR-related factors not covered by the study framework. Information reported by at least two interviewees was classified under the ‘other factors’ theme. One code was found and added to the research model as represented in Fig 2 that is ‘shared perspectives’ between OCR users and reviewers. Fig 3 shows the thematic analysis findings, including themes related to OCR factors and associated child codes.

Moreover, while coding the transcripts, texts related to the cultural characteristics of Arabs (HC, IND and UA) were highlighted. Many words and phrases were found that align with HCM and HCDF. The next section discusses these findings in detail.

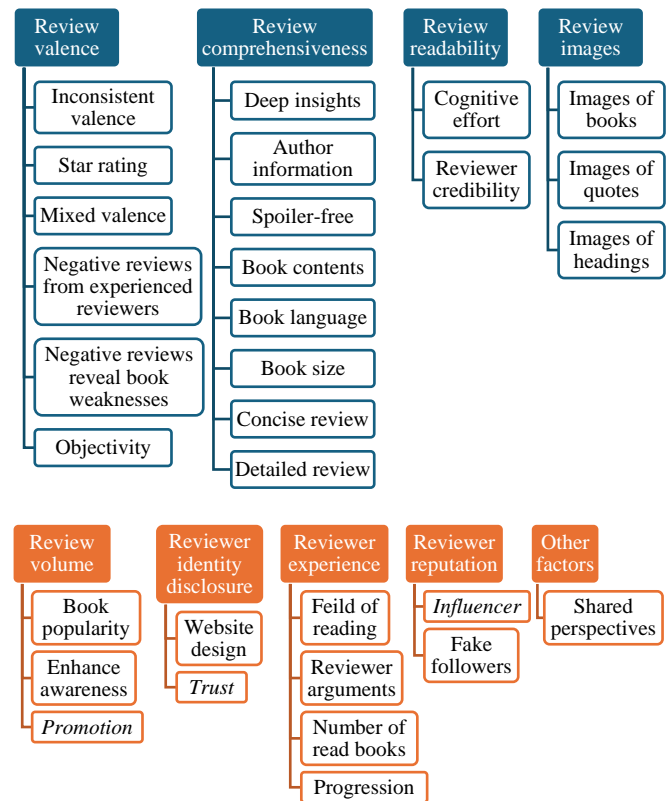


Fig 3. Thematic analysis results (text in italics indicates opposite viewpoints to the quantitative results)

V. DISCUSSION

According to prior research cultural backgrounds play a significant role in consumer decisions and Internet usage [30], [31], [32]. Drawing on ELM, HCM and HCDF, this study reports the effect of OCRs on the purchase intention of Arab book readers. Using PLS-SEM, eight hypotheses were tested. The study found that factors representing the content of the OCRs significantly influenced the study participants (H1, H2, H3 and H4). These factors represent the central cues of the review and require high cognitive effort from the reader. Review volume (H5) and reviewer experience (H7), which represent peripheral cues, also played significant roles in consumer purchase intention. Hence, the study asserts that to inform their buying decisions, Arab consumers primarily focus on the review content, particularly in the context of book reviews. This implies that ELM is an appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding how consumers use OCRs to aid their purchasing decisions. These findings are broadly supported by earlier research works (e.g. [31], [33], [34], [35]). A more detailed discussion of the findings is provided in the next sections.

A. Review-related Factors

The first central route factor investigated in this study is review valence. The results show that review valence was a significant construct that influenced Arabs' purchase intention of books. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g. [36], [37], [38]) and can be attributed to the tendency of people from high UA cultures to be more emotional [39]. The valence of information is significantly influenced by emotional strength [40], meaning that positive and negative reviews often contain emotionally charged words. Because Arabs are strongly uncertainty-avoidant, their reviews may also be of high valence, consequently extreme OCRs could elicit emotional responses from readers and significantly affect the purchase intention of consumers. Therefore, consumers in this context value intense positive emotions as they seek reassurance and support before making product purchases.

The qualitative phase of this study revealed that both positive and negative reviews affect participants' purchase intentions. Interviewees indicated that they consider purchasing a book when there is a higher number of positive reviews compared to negative ones, which can be quickly determined from the overall rating. In addition, some interviewees revealed that the impact of review valence (H1) becomes more prominent when the reviewer has more experience (H7) with the book topic. This is supported by Casaló et al. [41], who found that reviewer expertise increases the value of positive OCRs. Another point mentioned by some interviewees was that reviewers should include details and reasons (H2) behind the positive and negative reviews, rather than providing very short reviews such as 'the book is well-translated' or 'bad book'. Therefore, consumers' likelihood of making a purchase is significantly influenced if positive/negative OCRs are informative (comprehensive) and posted by trustworthy (credible) users [42]. Some interviewees use star ratings as an easily

interpreted sign of valence, and this finding is consistent with previous studies which used them to represent valence [43]. Thus, this study confirms that star ratings can be used as an indicator of review valence.

The results reveal the crucial role of comprehensiveness and volume of reviews in shaping the purchase intention of OCR receivers. Their importance is likely due to the fact that detailed reviews provide much information, enabling receivers to evaluate products precisely. Hence, a comprehensive review is perceived as valuable and persuasive. This aligns with Bosman et al. [44] who found that users consider the length of book reviews a good measure of review credibility, thus enhancing the effectiveness of their purchasing decisions. This impact is particularly significant for Arab consumers since they are more inclined to avoid uncertainty [45] and therefore seek to reduce ambiguity by obtaining additional information. Furthermore, because books are experience products, readers require considerable information to evaluate their quality. Additionally, as the qualitative data showed, consumers interpreted a substantial quantity of reviews as a sign of product popularity, consequently enhancing their purchase intentions. This finding aligns with Zhao et al. [46] who state that "an increase in the number of a product's online reviews will result in an increase in customers' intention to initiate the purchase of that product". Their study was conducted with Chinese consumers, who share characteristics with Arabs, such as being HC, collectivistic and uncertainty-avoidant. Therefore, the comprehensiveness and quantity of reviews significantly influence the purchasing intention of Arab customers by providing valuable information, reducing ambiguity and indicating product popularity.

Another finding is the persuasive impact of images on review readers. A similar result was reported regarding cultures similar to the Arab culture. For instance, Cheng and Ho [47] found that photos of dining (an experience good) are very important to Chinese consumers during the decision-making process because images provide additional information (i.e. improve argument quality). In the qualitative phase of this study, most interviewees stated that images such as book covers and contents affect their purchase intention. Therefore, we argue that when both textual and visual information is provided, OCR receivers can have a more complete knowledge of a product, which reduces their uncertainty and aids them in their purchasing decisions. This result adds to previous studies that confirmed the impact of images posted by customers on individual intentions to visit destinations [48], [49]. Moreover, it confirms that Arabs, an HC culture, prefer visual information, which significantly influences their purchase intentions.

Moreover, the results show that Arab consumers prefer easy-to-read and understandable OCRs. The qualitative findings provide several explanations for this result. One interviewee stated that a readable review written in formal language "indicates the maturity of the reader [reviewer] and their deeper understanding" of the topic of the reviewed book.

This explanation indicates that OCR receivers can identify experienced reviewers by the way they write their reviews. Similarly, another interviewee believes that a review that is error-free ‘gives the impression that the reviewer is someone whose words can be trusted’. In addition, the readability of the text has an impact on how reviews are perceived as valuable [50] and consequently, the purchase intention of consumers. With respect to the ELM, simple text requires less cognitive effort and is therefore more useful than complicated text [51]. Hence, consumers can evaluate the product quality and make purchase decisions more easily and quickly from a readable OCR.

B. Reviewer-related Factors

The reviewer credibility factors are represented by the reviewer identity disclosure, experience and reputation. These act as peripheral cues that define the believability of the information. The results reveal that Arab users of book ORPs infrequently check reviewers’ profile information and pattern factors to rationalise their buying decisions. Experience was found to be the most important reviewer characteristic affecting consumers’ intention to purchase books. In other words, the more reviews provided by a reviewer, the higher their credibility [52] and the more effective the message delivered to the receiver [53], which, in turn, affected the consumer purchase intention. This finding is supported by Baek et al. [54] who indicated that reviews originating from an experienced source are more meaningful in the minds of readers and have a more significant influence compared with reviews from sources without expertise.

Interestingly, this study found that reviewer identity disclosure and reputation, as defined by the number of followers and friends, have no impact on Arabs reading OCRs to aid their purchasing intentions. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Baek et al. [54], which demonstrated that the reviews provided by top-ranked reviewers exert a substantial impact on the helpfulness of the review, but disclosing the reviewer’s real name does not. However, most current research illustrates that reviewer identity and reputation have a significant impact on consumer behaviour (e.g. [55], [56]). These inconsistent results may be explained by the fact that most previous studies were conducted on e-commerce websites, whereas this research focused on Goodreads, a third-party ORP. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, none of them studied the impact of these reviewer-related factors on Arab OCR users.

The qualitative findings offer insight into the unexpected quantitative results regarding the impact of the reviewer identity disclosure and reputation on purchase intention. For example, one interviewee mentioned not being concerned about the number of followers, as reviewers can purchase fake followers to be in the ‘most followed’ list. Another interviewee argued that some reviewers have many followers not due to the quality of their reviews but because they are celebrities or well-known book authors. The non-significant impact of the personal reviewer information on purchase intention can be

explained by the concept of egocentric anchoring, which suggests that when consumers have insufficient information about the reviewer, they tend to mentally fill in the gaps in the reviewers’ identities with their own assumptions [57]. As a result, consumers are more likely to be influenced by reviews written by anonymous reviewers compared with reviews from dissimilar reviewers [57]. This explanation is further supported by the emergent qualitative theme of similarity between the interests of the reviewer and the OCR receiver. Although the reviewer’s identity and reputation are not significant, over half of those interviewed emphasised the importance of checking the reviewers’ profiles. Therefore, this research asserts that book reviewers should make their profiles public, allowing ORP users to access their previous reviews and book genres.

The qualitative study encouraged participants’ freedom of expression, revealing an important factor: similarity in perspectives between reviewers and OCR recipients. When reviewers share similar interests and viewpoints with the OCR recipients, their credibility increases, and their reviews have a more pronounced impact on purchase intention compared to those expressing contrasting opinions. This concept is known as ‘homophily’ in previous research, defined as “the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes” [58]. Homophily typically relates to similarity in demographic characteristics or perceived attributes (preferences and values) [53]. However, in this study, we introduce the term ‘shared perspectives’ to emphasise the homophily in perceived attributes between the OCR sender and receiver, given that the demographic information was found to be non-significant, as discussed earlier. Therefore, this factor was added later to the AOOCR-PI model, as shown in Fig 2.

This finding aligns with HCM and HCDF theories and previous studies. For instance, since HC cultures (e.g. Arabs) have a high tendency to use implicit cues and shared common knowledge [9], the similarity of perspectives between the reviewer and the OCR receiver leverages this cultural preference for shared understanding. Furthermore, as a collectivist culture, Arabs emphasise cohesive in-groups and the opinions of others [39]. This finding is in agreement with Cheong and Mohammed-Baksh’s [59] research, which demonstrated the significant influence of reference group recommendations on the purchase decisions of South Korean consumers. They further suggested that their findings are potentially applicable to other countries with cultural similarities to South Korea, particularly those that exhibit HC cultures, such as Arabic culture. Therefore, this finding highlights the importance of considering this when designing online review systems.

C. Theoretical Contribution

This research provides a new understanding of OCR usage to aid the purchase intention of Arab book readers. The findings from this study make several theoretical contributions to the current literature. First, this work contributes to the ELM by providing empirical evidence that supports the validity of the model in the context of the OCR research field. The ELM

suggests that individuals need high cognitive effort when processing messages (i.e. use the central route), whereas when they lack interest or motivation towards the message or encounter challenges in comprehending arguments pertaining to the relevant issue, they use the peripheral route [60]. This study found that Arab users of OCRs start by seeking the needed information from the textual reviews while the quantity of reviews and reviewer information act as peripheral cues that aid in their purchasing decision-making. Moreover, the qualitative results illustrate the interaction effect between central and peripheral routes. For instance, OCR receivers use review readability and comprehensibility as indicators of a reviewer's experience. This provides new evidence that the central and peripheral routes complement each other and work simultaneously. Therefore, this study confirms that the ELM is a suitable theoretical foundation for exploring the impact of OCRs on purchase intention.

Second, this research applies HCM and HCDM theories to explain Arab consumer behaviour in the online environment. Although these theories were initially developed to describe face-to-face communication, this study confirms their relevance in explaining the impact of OCRs on consumer purchase intention. The main findings of this paper support Hofstede's [10] and some aspects of Hall's [9] theories regarding OCR usage by Arabs. Specifically, the results affirm the collectivism and uncertainty-avoidant nature of Arab consumers, indicating that they are influenced by the collective consensus when forming purchasing decisions. In addition, Arab book consumers exhibit a marked preference for extensive information gathering, through OCRs, to mitigate perceived risk associated with future purchases. Furthermore, this research reveals that the previous activity of a reviewer (experience) significantly influences Arab OCR users and that is in line with HCM, which states that Arab individuals may take a longer time to build relationships with others [61]. However, direct and explicit language is preferred by Arab users of OCRs, at least in the context of book readers, although Arab societies tend to use indirect and implicit messaging [9]. These results may also apply to other countries with HC cultures, such as Asian, Eastern European and Latin countries.

Third, this study reveals an interesting finding regarding the impact of reviewer identity and reputation on purchase intention. In contrast to previous studies which emphasised the significance of a reviewer's personality and popularity on consumer decisions (e.g. [56], [62]), the findings of this research indicate that Arab consumers prioritise the experience of the reviewer over their identity and number of followers. However, it is important to note that this outcome may not be applicable to other cultures and products since, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first of its type conducted on book reviews in the Arabic context. To confirm or contradict these findings, further work is needed to address the impact of reviewer-related attributes on purchase intention, accounting for varying types of products and ORPs.

D. Practical Implications

This study provides valuable insights for ORP developers, book authors and publishers seeking to understand the factors influencing Arab consumers when purchasing books. The outcomes of this study could be employed to enhance online review systems that align with Arab preferences, ultimately leading to increased book sales.

Considering that current online review systems are predominantly designed in the West, the findings can guide web developers of Arabic ORPs in building or customising current systems by prioritising the reviews based on the most important factors for Arab users. For example, rather than simply sorting reviews by posting date, developers may employ natural language processing methods, such as sentiment analysis, and develop new machine learning algorithms that consider review readability and comprehensiveness. Therefore, the outcomes of this study can assist researchers and professionals in minimising cultural bias when creating, evaluating and validating algorithms that rely on OCRs.

Moreover, the outcomes of this study have implications for managing OCRs and reducing consumer uncertainty. Administrators of e-commerce and publisher websites should refrain from editing or removing negative reviews but rather encourage reviewers to share more information freely, which enables authors and publishers to identify weaknesses and work towards satisfying readers in the next edition. This is because a large number of reviews can enhance consumer confidence, which, in turn, can reduce consumer uncertainty and increase purchase intentions [35]. However, it is important to note that the abundance of OCRs available to consumers may cause information overload [50], [63]. Therefore, these results need to be interpreted with caution, and further research is required to determine the optimal number of reviews required for Arab consumers to make informed purchase decisions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to determine the effect of OCRs on the purchase intention of Arab consumers. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods research design was adopted, consisting of an exploratory quantitative study followed by an explanatory qualitative study. The data were collected from Arab users of Goodreads. The study revealed that customers place great importance on the central cues related to the review content, namely, the review valence, comprehensiveness, images and readability. In addition, the empirical data analysis indicated that the review volume (number of reviews) and reviewer experience (number of reviews provided by a reviewer) work as peripheral cues affecting the purchase intention of Arab book readers. Furthermore, the qualitative results showed that shared perspectives between reviewers and OCR receivers significantly impact the purchase intention of Arab consumers. However, the reviewer's identity and number of friends and followers (reputation) were found to be non-significant factors for Arabs when using OCRs for book purchases. The findings that emerged from

this research offer useful insights for ORPs and recommendation system developers as well as book authors and publishers on how to enhance the experience of OCR users, encourage book purchases and consequently increase sales.

Several important limitations need to be considered, and the results must be interpreted cautiously. Nevertheless, these limitations provide insights into new opportunities for further research. First, this research was conducted on Arabs from various countries, with data collected exclusively from Goodreads users. The findings of the study might have varied if the participants' nationalities were considered, as there may be cultural differences between Arab countries, as indicated by Hofstede's dimensions. Additionally, to test the model with different audiences, it would be interesting to collect and compare data from different ORPs.

Second, this study focused solely on OCRs of books, which are considered experience products. Therefore, the results may not be directly applicable to search products. To broaden the scope, it is recommended that further research be undertaken on other types of goods.

Third, the dependent variable, purchase intention, is a weaker predictor of book sales compared with actual purchases. However, because sales data are difficult to access and Goodreads is the largest and most popular online platform for book reviews, with over 120 million users [64], we argue that purchase intention is an appropriate, available and easily measured predictor. Nevertheless, it is recommended that future research use actual sales data and compare the results with the findings of this study.

Finally, due to time constraints and to limit the survey completion time, this study investigated the most important OCR factors reported in the literature. However, further research could explore other review and reviewer factors, such as the similarity in interests and perspectives between the reviewer and the OCR user. These two factors represent the peripheral route in the ELM as they are not directly related to the content of the review. Although these two factors have been studied extensively, insufficient attention has been paid to their influence in the Arabic context.

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