



Customer Experience, The E-commerce Battleground, Winning with Reviews





Introduction

In the fast-paced world of e-commerce, every pixel counts, and every interaction shapes the customer journey. Understanding how users arrive on your site and what they seek is crucial.

Landing pages and traffic sources typically correlate with brand familiarity, and the stage of the buying journey the customer sits in.

Users who land on the homepage, often come either direct to the site, or via brand related search terms. This infers a familiarity with the brand and a potential preference. The homepage has multiple jobs depending on the stage of the buying journey.

If they are on your site having decided you are the merchant they want to buy from, it's important to make it as simple as possible for the user to get back to the product they want. Alternatively, a user may start to look for the product they want and your site is the destination of choice to find the product they want, meaning they are at the beginning of their journey, it is all about product discovery for this user, whether it's through search, navigation or promotional hotspots.

When initial engagements happen on the Product Detail Page (PDP) it is typically as a result of product related searches. The user knows what they want, but they may not have decided where they plan to buy it from. As a result, the PDP becomes more than just a page; it can be the first, and sometimes only, chance you have to convert a prospective buyer.

This report is a collaborative effort between Trustpilot and the Columbus CX team, leveraging Trustpilot's in-depth knowledge of the impact reviews have on users alongside Columbus' broader UX and CX expertise. It provides practical examples of how this combined insight has been applied to help e-commerce businesses maximise the effectiveness of their customer reviews.

01 Critical Aspects of the Modern E-commerce Customer Journey.

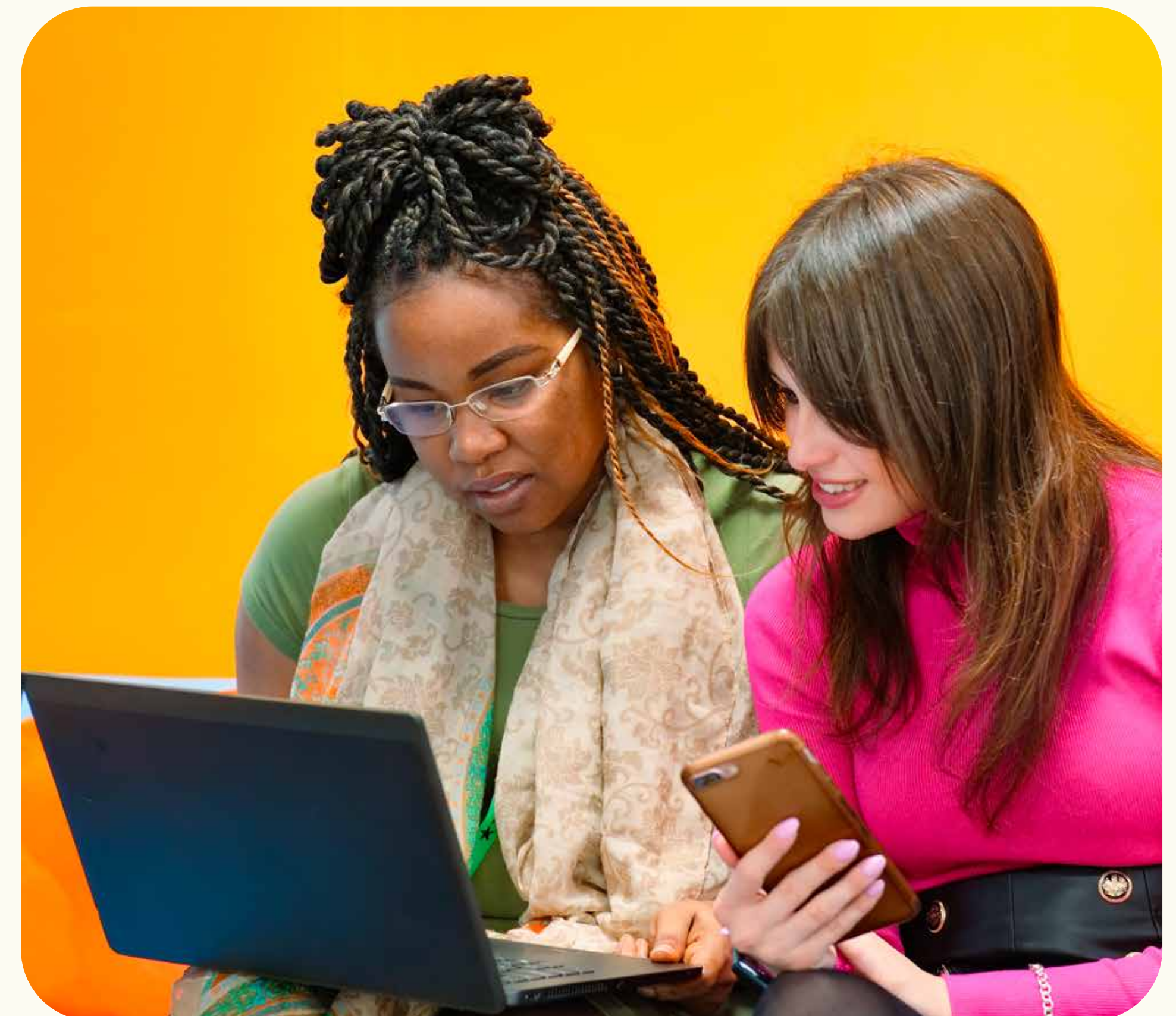
The PDP's Pivotal Role

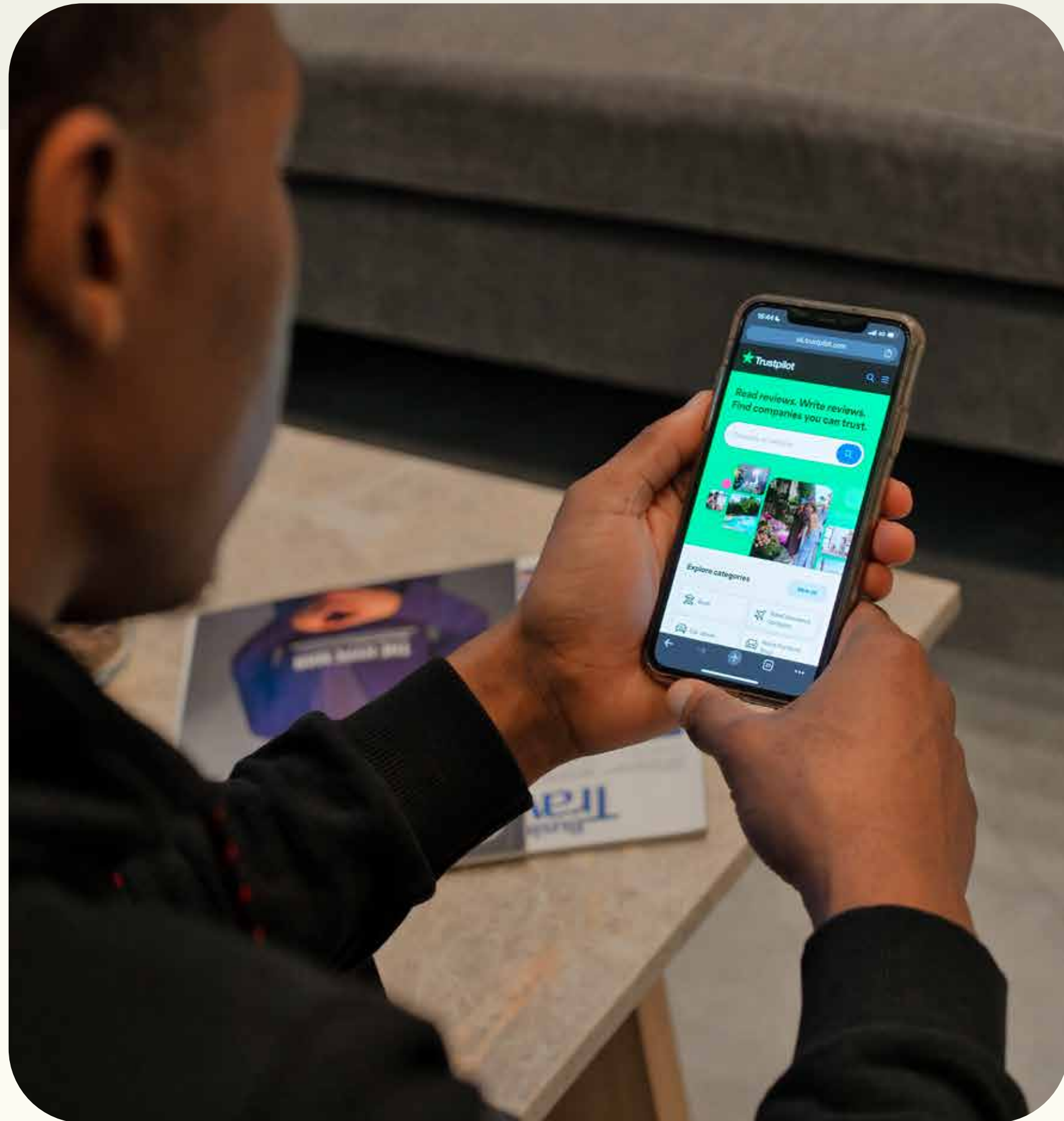
Digital marketing strategies are often heavily dominated by driving traffic from platforms like Google Shopping and Meta. As a result, the Product Detail Page (PDP) is frequently the most common landing page for many businesses. When a user clicks an ad for a specific product, they expect to land directly on that product's page.

Because of this, the PDP has a multifaceted job to do:

- ★ **Showcase the Product:** For users in the upper funnel who are still evaluating, the PDP must clearly present the product itself – high-quality images, compelling descriptions, detailed specifications, and an affirmation of its quality.
- ★ **Showcase the Offer:** For users moving down the funnel, it needs to present the deal – the price, any discounts, available sizes and colors, and crucial details like delivery cost and speed.
- ★ **Showcase the Merchant:** Crucially, it must also build trust in your brand. It needs to convey who you are and why a user should buy from you instead of a competitor. This is especially vital for users further down the funnel who are closer to conversion but may still be weighing their options between different sellers.

Given that only a fraction of users actually scroll, the further below the fold any of this crucial information is, the less likely it is that users will find it and take it on board. This is precisely why the prioritization and strategic placement of your on-page content are absolutely key.





Mobile Dominance is Key

The digital landscape is overwhelmingly mobile-first with social commerce on the rise.

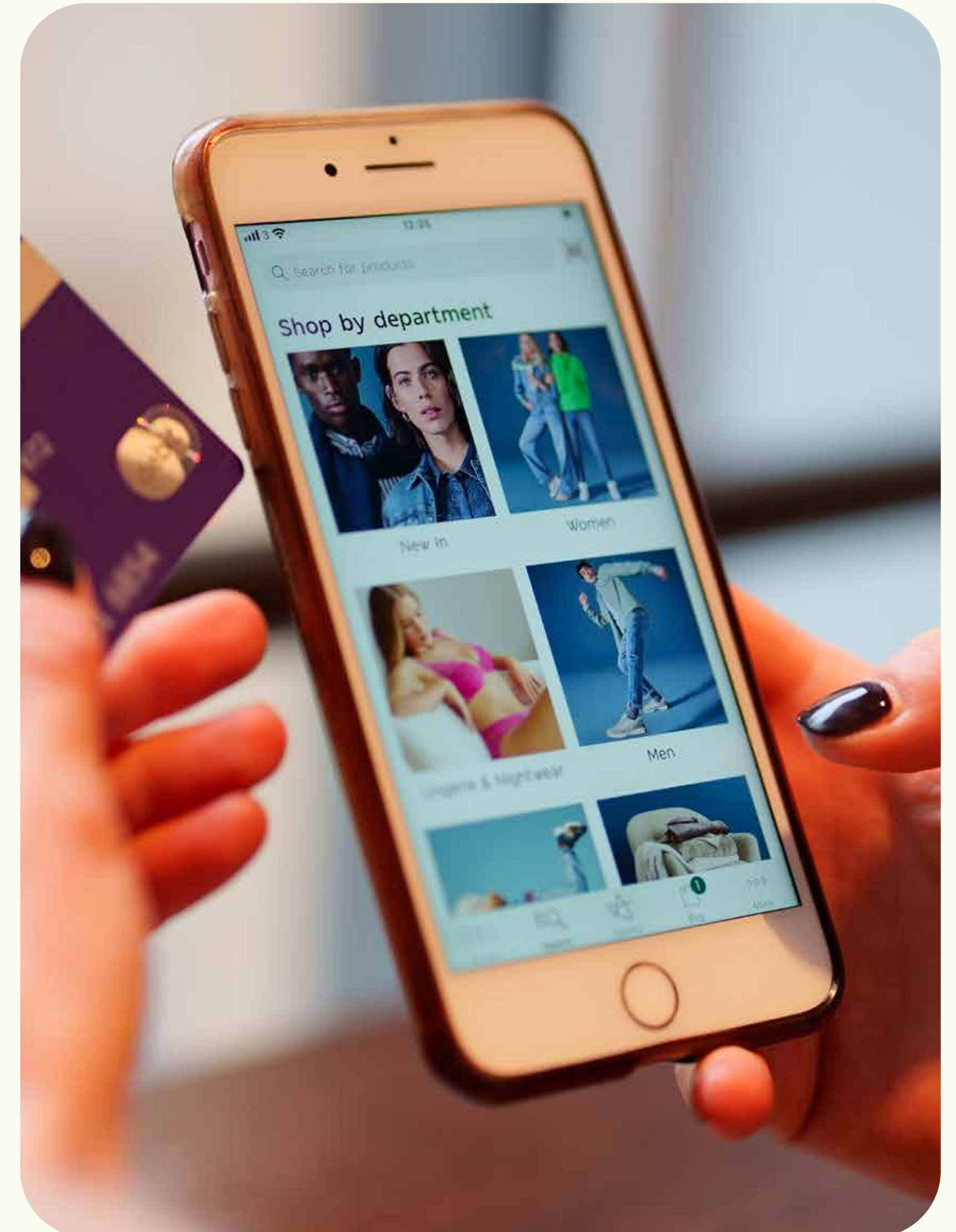
Mobile Dominance: In 2024, mobile devices accounted for approximately **58.54%** of global internet traffic, and this trend continues to grow. Mobile commerce sales are projected to reach over the European e-commerce market is projected to reach **€915.9 billion** in 2025, with 60% of that due to be spent on mobile devices according to Statista.

Above-the-Fold Implications: This mobile dominance has profound implications for page real estate. While users do scroll, eye-tracking studies by the Nielsen Norman Group have shown that **57% of viewing time is still spent on content above the fold**. On mobile, this "above the fold" area is significantly smaller, making every pixel in that initial view precious. Content pushed below this initial view is significantly less likely to be seen or engaged with. (Omniconvert, The Mobile Spoon)

02 Reviews: Winning the Battle for Retailers

In this high-stakes environment, we consistently see users turn to reviews as an independent, unbiased source for key information to aid their decision-making. As you would expect, reviews directly influence buying decisions.

In fact, 89% of buyers read reviews online before making a purchase, treating them with similar trust to personal recommendations from friends and family. Furthermore, the importance of reviews increases with product price; for higher-priced products, conversion rates can increase by as much as **380% when reviews are displayed.** (Canvas8, The Good)



Users turn directly to reviews for four critical insights

1. Validating Merchant Trust

- ★ **Independent Third-Party Validation:** Reviews from independent sources or verified buyers lend immense credibility. In fact, 68% of European consumers agree that a good Trustpilot score makes them more likely to buy from a brand. (London Research)
- ★ **Quantity and Quality:** The sheer volume of reviews, coupled with a healthy average score, signals reliability. The overwhelming majority of EU consumers (84%) say they avoid buying or signing up to something because of poor reviews or poor ratings and when Trustpilot five-star is added as content to a marketing asset that includes 500+ reviews, it's 5.4 times more compelling as a marketing asset with no Trustpilot branding nor the number of reviews. (London Research)

3. Customer Experience: Delivery Experience

- ★ **Speed and Reliability of Delivery:** Reviews often comment on delivery speed, packaging, and whether products arrived in good condition. Issues here can be a major detractor.

2. Assessing Customer Experience

- ★ **Context of Negative Reviews:** Customers look at how often negative reviews appear and, more importantly, the context surrounding them. Are they isolated incidents or recurring issues?
- ★ **Recency and Frequency:** Recent and frequent reviews indicate an active, responsive business and up-to-date product information.
- ★ **Merchant Responsiveness:** How the merchant deals with negative feedback is crucial. Do they genuinely seem to seek to resolve issues, or do they deflect responsibility? The majority (64%) of consumers across Europe would prefer to buy from a responsive company over one that has a perfect score - it's about how they handle the responses that makes the difference. (Trustpilot)

4. Product Specifics

- ★ **Sizing and Fit:** For apparel, beauty, and other categories, reviews are invaluable for understanding how an item truly fits (e.g., "runs big/small"), applies, or looks on actual people.
- ★ **User-Generated Content (UGC):** User-submitted images and videos are incredibly powerful, showing the product in real-world scenarios, which can significantly reduce purchase uncertainty.



03 How psychology plays a part with reviews

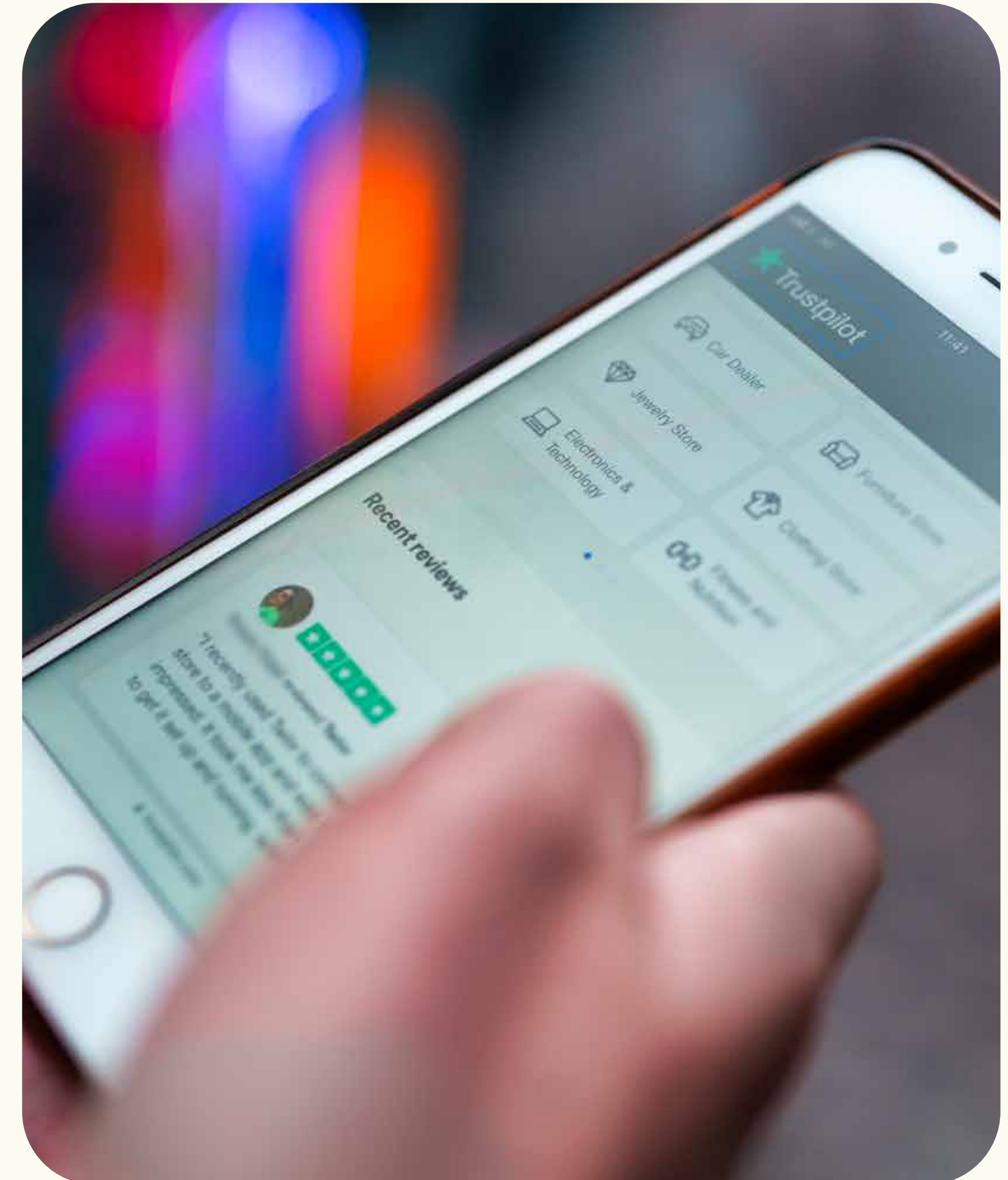
In user testing, reviews strongly influence purchase decisions. Shoppers seek reassurance from other buyers, not brands. Some even start with negative reviews, looking for reasons not to buy.

For example, a user might be considering a new season model or a more expensive, upgraded version of a product. By dismissing the cheaper option through flaws found in reviews, they can justify the higher spend. Reviews therefore shape not only product choice but also spending decisions.

Research shows content with Trustpilot reviews achieves

4.9x higher CTR

than similar content without reviews—even when the price is 20% higher. (London Research)



How the Brain Processes Buying Decisions

Over millions of years, our brains have evolved a dual processing system:



System 2

Slow

Often absent

Rational and logical

Conscious

Reasons and rules

Effortful

Future

Controlled

System 1

Fast

Always on

Emotional

Subconscious

Intuitive and associative

Effortless

WYSIATI

Automatic

The dynamic interaction between System 1 and System 2

In the context of shopping online, the interaction between System 1 and System 2 is both complex and dynamic:

- ★ Initial attraction (System 1) followed by analysis (System 2):

When a consumer is first drawn to an aesthetically appealing item, System 1 activates, generating an immediate emotional response.

Once this attraction occurs, System 2 takes over to assess whether the product is the right size, fits the consumer's budget, and meets quality expectations.

- ★ This helps consumers make a more rational buying decision.

Anchoring and framing (System 1) influencing deliberation (System 2):

Retailers often employ pricing strategies, like highlighting a large discount or framing an item as "best-selling." These tactics engage System 1 to create a fast, positive judgement, which can bias System 2's evaluation. This might lead the consumer to weigh positive aspects more heavily, feeling anchored to the idea of a "great deal."

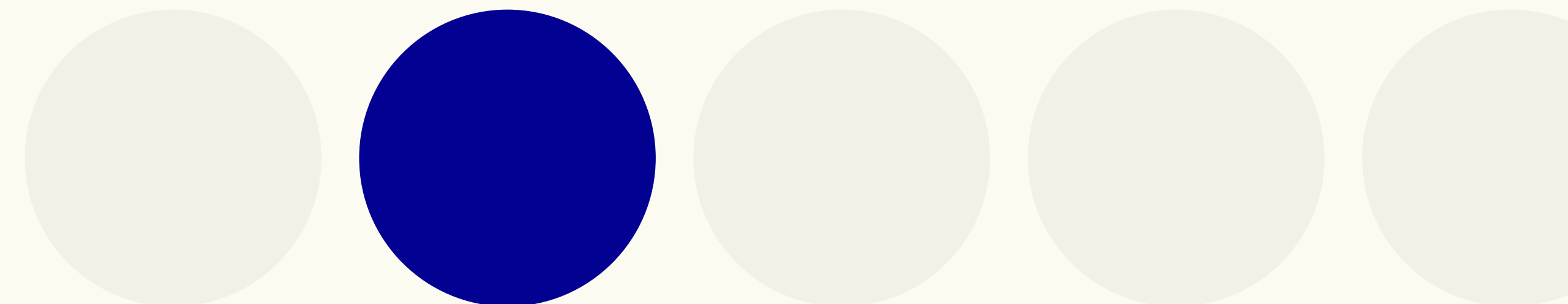
Urgency triggers quick reactions (System 1) vs. Deliberate decision-Making (System 2):

Limited-time discounts or prompts like "only Limited-time" offers or stock scarcity messages, such as "Only 2 left!", engage System 1, creating a sense of urgency. While System 1 might encourage a swift decision, System 2 may intervene to assess whether this urgency is necessary, or if waiting could lead to a better outcome.

Balancing both systems with social proof for complex purchases:

System 1 may help consumers quickly filter out options based on the number of reviews and the scoring, while System 2 takes over for in-depth evaluation within the content of the reviews. considers aspects like price, durability, and fit for purpose.

For high-investment items like outdoor furniture or major home improvement tools, consumers must balance both systems.



04 Key Learnings from User Testing with Reviews Over the Years

Extensive experimentation by Columbus Global has yielded several crucial insights into optimizing the impact of reviews.

1. Context Matters: Desktop vs. Mobile Review Experience

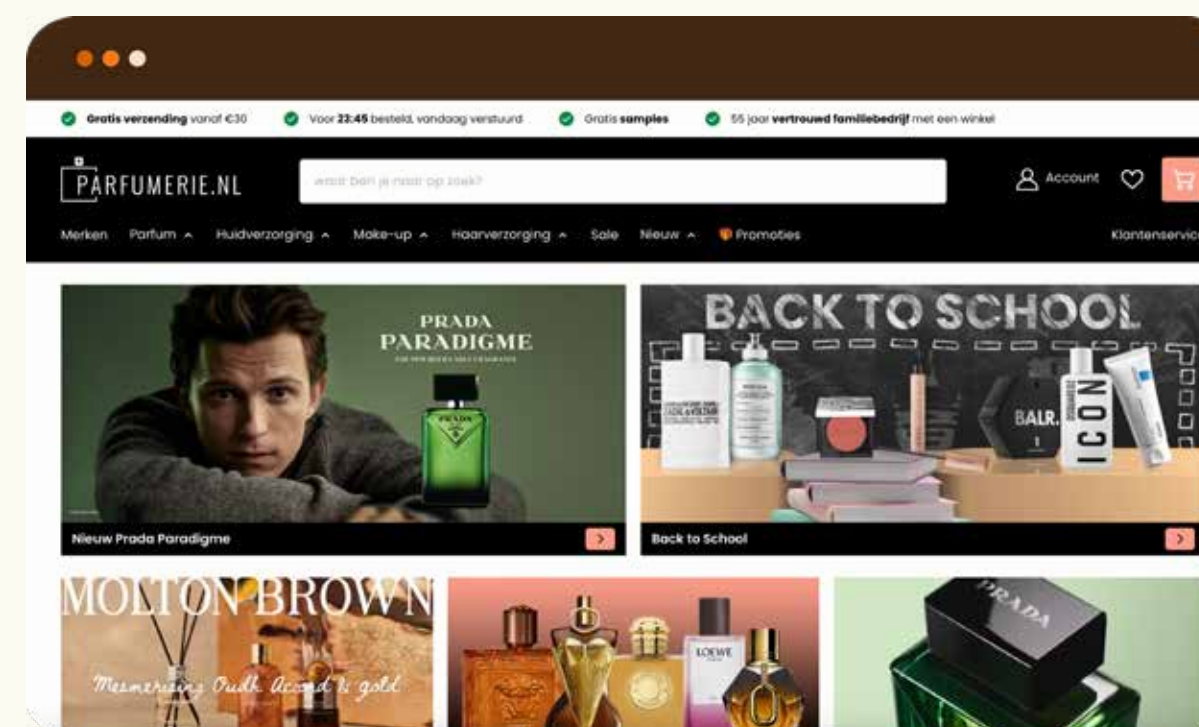
When it comes to merchant reviews, desktop users often want to see the full review, scroll through, and read detailed feedback. For mobile, however, star ratings alone can often be sufficient to establish trust in the merchant due to limited screen space. But for product-specific reviews, particularly for complex or high-value items, think of furniture or electronics, access to full, detailed reviews remains necessary on mobile as well.



2. Reviews are Better Than No Reviews (Period):

Users expect reviews as a standard part of the online shopping experience. Not having them present can lead to several negative outcomes:

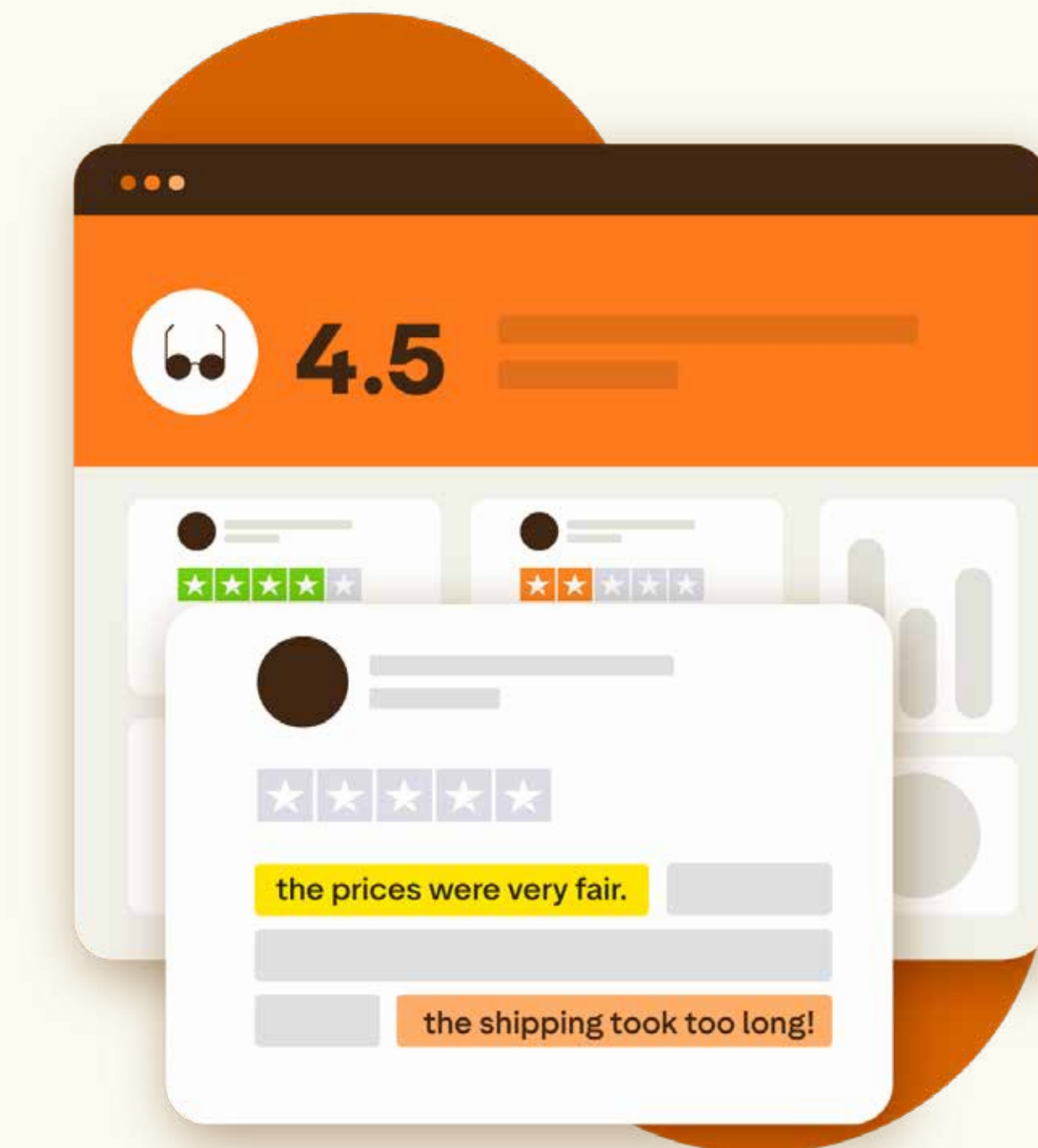
- ★ **Site Abandonment:** Users may leave your site to search for reviews elsewhere, risking losing them for good to a competitor.
- ★ **Distrust:** Users may mistrust your brand, assuming the merchant is either not legitimate or that the product/experience will be poor. **The overwhelming majority of EU consumers (84%) say they have avoided buying or signing up to something because of poor reviews or poor ratings. (London Research)**



- 14% reduction in bouncerate.

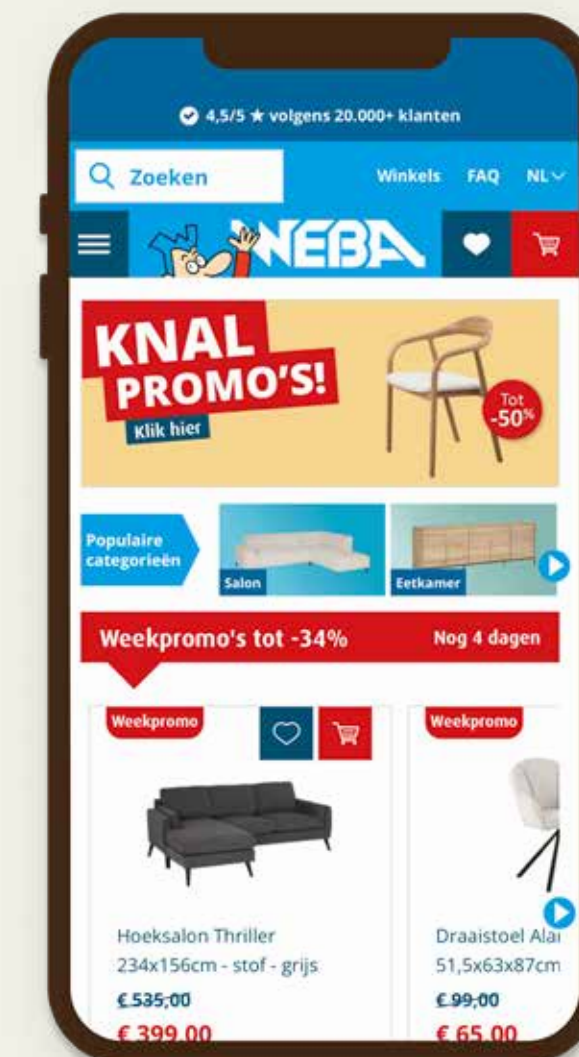
3. Negative Reviews are Expected and Can Build Trust:

Having nothing but perfect 5-star reviews can actually be a red flag for savvy consumers. 77.5% of customers are more likely to trust a site with reviews ranging from 1 to 5 stars than a site that only has 5-star reviews (Trustpilot), while **30% suspect censorship or fake reviews** when only positive ones are present. (TrustYou) How you respond to and address these negative reviews becomes key. A thoughtful, solution-oriented response demonstrates transparency and a commitment to customer satisfaction, often turning a negative experience into a positive perception of your brand.



4. Smart Placement of Review Widgets:

While showcasing star ratings and review widgets in nudge bars can be a great way of getting social proof to users above the fold, avoid the common mistake of relying on a bar at the very top of the page that perfectly matches your brand's aesthetic. These often go unnoticed because they blend in "too well" and don't draw enough attention from the user. For maximum impact, widgets need to subtly stand out.



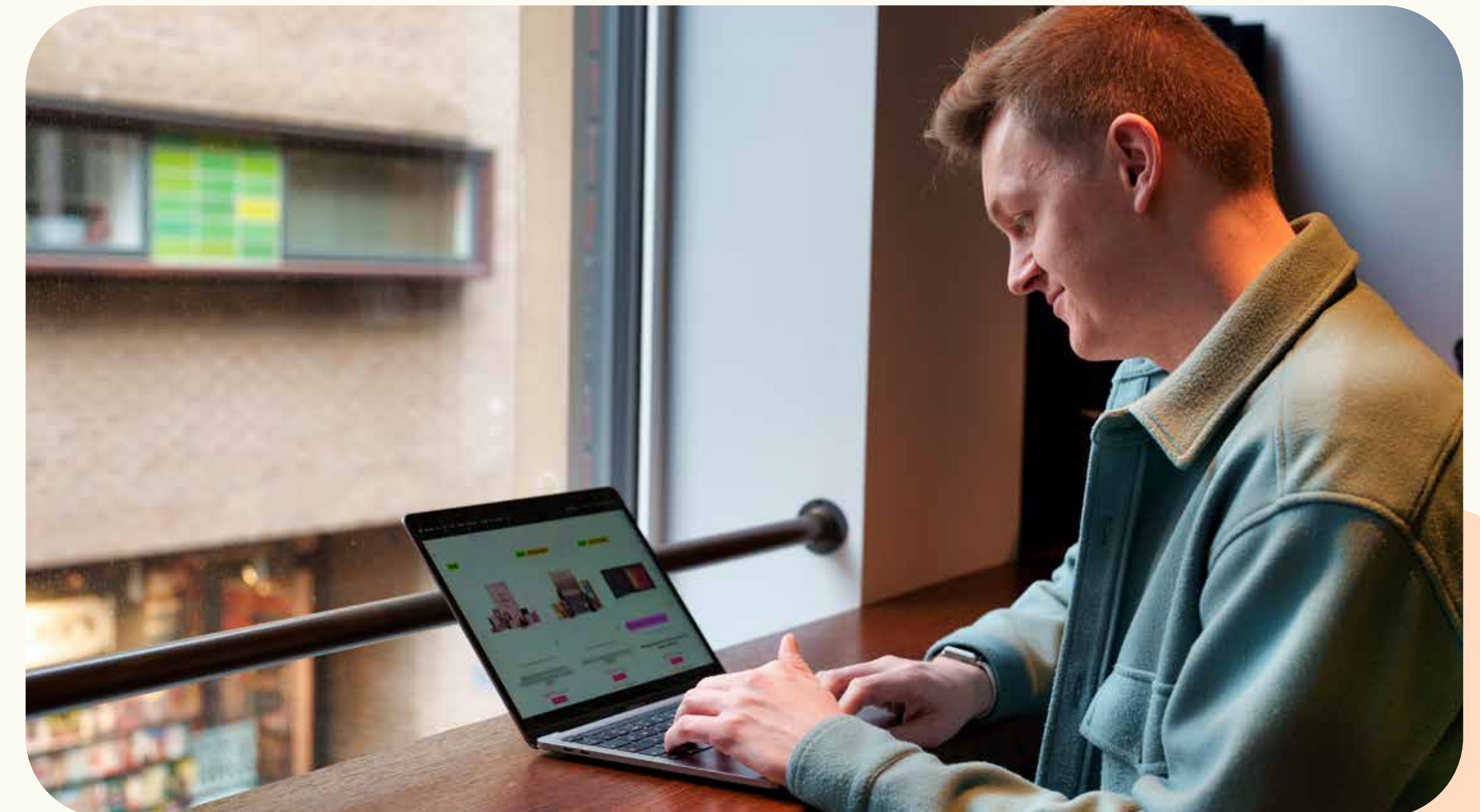
5. User Reviews with Product Recommendations:

An effective product recommendation strategy is a powerful way to keep users engaged through complimentary and alternative product suggestions on the PDP. Showing the star ratings and review counts for these recommended products gives extra weight to why users should check them out. This can be particularly effective if the product a user is currently viewing has negative reviews or if they've found a reason not to buy it, offering a clear path to other trusted options.



6. Leveraging the Von Restorff Effect for "North Star" Products:

The Von Restorff effect (also known as the isolation effect) states that what stands out the most is most likely to be remembered. We've seen positive impacts on click-through rates and conversion rates when we added "Top Rated" badges or similar visual cues to products with an average rating of 4.5 stars and above, provided they also met a minimum number of reviews. This highlights best-performing products, drawing immediate attention and signaling quality.



7. Prioritize Above-the-Fold Ratings:

Don't make users scroll to find product ratings. They are a winning source of social proof, instantly building trust in your brand and reassuring customers about product quality. Ensure star ratings and review counts are prominently visible and easily digestible in the primary viewing area of your PDPs, especially on mobile.



Summary

By meticulously integrating reviews throughout the customer journey, from initial product discovery to final purchase decision, retailers can harness their immense power to build trust, reduce friction, and ultimately drive conversions in an increasingly competitive market.

Use the 7 Key learnings to test optimizing your reviews and see better results for your business during the full customer journey. Trustpilot customers often see a 23% increase in conversion when properly implementing reviews throughout the buying journey.



05



Company summary 1:

Columbus

Columbus is a global IT services and consulting company with more than 2,000 employees serving 5,000+ customers worldwide.

Columbus helps ambitious companies transform, maximize and futureproof their business digitally.

We are specialised within the industries retail, distribution, food and manufacturing. We offer a comprehensive solution portfolio with deep industry knowledge, extensive technology expertise and profound customer insight. Columbus has offices and partners all over the world and we can deliver our solutions and services locally – on a global scale.

[More info](#)

Company summary 2:

★ Trustpilot

Trustpilot is open, independent, and impartial — we help consumers make the right choices and businesses to build trust, grow and improve.

Trustpilot began in 2007 in Denmark with a simple yet powerful idea that is more relevant today than ever — to be the universal symbol of trust, bringing consumers and businesses together through reviews.

With more than 300 million active reviews written about more than 1.27 million websites, we are well on our way to empowering more than 64 million active users on average per month (31st Dec 2024), to make confident, informed buying decisions. While allowing businesses to credibly signal the quality of their services and to gain actionable insights to improve them.

Be part of the change to a more honest and transparent space for consumers online.

[Book a demo](#)