

Online shopping fake reviews



Half of the population use online review websites such as Amazon, Tripadvisor, Expedia, and Checkatrade - but can you trust everything you read?



Shoppers who use the internet to research hotels, books, electronics, and other purchases are being misled by millions of "fake" reviews orchestrated by companies to trick potential customers, the consumer watchdog warns today as it begins an inquiry.

More than half of the adults in Britain, around 25 million people, use online review websites such as Amazon, and Tripadvisor to find the best deals. But their impressions are "distorted" by the growth of a "Clandestine" market for fake reviews, the Competition and Market Authority has discovered. It found some companies wrote fake reviews about themselves as a marketing tool. Others were offering money, free product samples, or other "rewards" in exchange for five-star reviews.

In some cases, rival firms were posting disparaging remarks each other to cloud the judgment of potential customers. And some review websites were hiding negative reviews because they had commercial arrangements with the companies facing criticism.

The scale of the issue is unknown because fake reviews are difficult to spot, the CMA said. However, it expressed concern that abuse could be widespread.



An investigation will now start and firms found to be acting illegally will be fined and their bosses may face prison.

Consumer groups welcomed the move because research showed around £23 billion of purchases a year were influenced by online reviews.

Guy Anker, a director of consumer advice experts at MoneySavingExpert.com, said: "It is utterly appalling that companies are engaging in practices where they are duping potential customers who just want an honest appraisal of their services. Review websites are a vital part of people's research, whether that's booking a hotel or buying a product, and so visitors need to be able to trust them."

Online reviews have grown into big and influential businesses in Britain. Nisha Arora, consumer director of the CMA, said they were "important information tools", that customers found "valuable".

One of the best-known specialist sites is Tripadvisor, which hosts hundreds of millions of reviews written by and for holidaymakers.

Some sites have developed systems to detect and verify fake reviews, but others have not, the CMA said. It warned that websites were in some cases "selectively ordering" reviews so that positive ones came to the front. "Hiding" negative reviews is against the law, it said. The different commercial arrangements that might influence the reviews and the way they were obtained were not always clear to users. Customers were also trying to abuse the system by "blackmailing" companies by threatening to leave a negative review.

I- Read the article and decide if these statements are TRUE or FALSE.

1. This article is about buyers misled into buying expensive articles. _____
2. Over 25 million people in the UK read online reviews. _____
3. There are companies that give money and rewards to those who write good reviews. _____
4. The article says nobody cares about reviews when buying a product. _____
5. Rival companies never write negative comments about each other. _____
6. It's easy to see when a review is fake. _____
7. A person who writes a negative review on a rival company can't be sent to jail.

8. Reviews could affect \$32 billion of consumer spending in the UK. _____
9. The industry for writing online reviews has been growing. _____
10. Some review websites only show reviews with good opinions. _____