SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 5 | May 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

THE SHADOW OF DECEPTION AND THE INFLUENCE OF FAKE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER AWARENESS

Ms. Vaishnavi A [1], Dr. K. Priyatharsini[2], Ms. Kunthavi Nappinnai M[3]
[1] II-MBA
[2] Assistant Professor
[3] Assistant Professor, Sakthi Institute of Information and Management Studies, Pollachi, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu-642 001

ABSTRACT
In today's digital-first economy, online reviews have become a cornerstone of consumer decision-making. However, the emergence of fake reviews poses a serious threat to transparency, trust, and the authenticity of marketplace feedback. This study explores the landscape of fake reviews, their creation and propagation, and how they manipulate consumer perception and awareness. It investigates psychological, economic, and social factors that make consumers vulnerable and examines regulatory and technological solutions to mitigate the damage. This research focuses on understanding the degree to which fake reviews influence consumer behaviour and awareness in urban India, using structured data collection and statistical analysis.
KEYWORDS: *Fake Reviews, Consumer Behaviour, Digital Deception, Online Trust, Consumer Awareness*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, online reviews have emerged as one of the most influential factors guiding consumer purchasing behaviour. From choosing a restaurant or buying a smartphone to booking a vacation or hiring a service provider, consumers today rely heavily on the experiences and opinions of others shared online. These reviews, often perceived as unbiased and honest feedback, offer a sense of trust and reassurance in a virtual marketplace where personal inspection is impossible. However, the reliability of this user-generated content has come under increasing scrutiny with the growing prevalence of fake reviews deliberately fabricated endorsements or criticisms intended to manipulate consumer perception.

Fake reviews can be either positive, aiming to artificially boost a product's or service's reputation, or negative, intending to damage a competitor's standing. Businesses may employ bots, incentivize customers, or hire individuals to write glowing or damaging reviews that distort the actual value of offerings. These deceptive practices compromise the authenticity of online feedback, misleading consumers and skewing market competition. What was once a democratic tool for consumer empowerment has now become a powerful weapon for brand manipulation.

The widespread impact of fake reviews is not only commercial but also psychological. They exploit cognitive biases, emotional responses, and social influence mechanisms—such as trust, urgency, and the fear of missing out—to shape consumer decisions. As a result, even digitally savvy consumers can fall victim to manipulated narratives. This deception undermines the foundation of informed decision-making, leading to wasted money, dissatisfaction, and loss of trust in online platforms.

Given the scale and consequences of this issue, it is imperative to study the phenomenon of fake reviews in-depth, assess their impact on consumer awareness, and explore solutions to counteract their influence. This research aims to unmask the deceptive mechanisms behind fake reviews, analyze the psychological and technological vulnerabilities they exploit, and suggest pathways to foster a more transparent and trustworthy online ecosystem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schindler & Bickart (2005) They examined how consumers assess the authenticity of online reviews. Most readers use mental shortcuts like review length, specificity, and tone to judge credibility. However, these features are now easily imitated by fake reviewers. As a result, even seasoned consumers can be deceived. The study emphasizes the psychological tricks employed in fake review writing. It also highlights the growing sophistication of online deception.

Flanagin et al. (2014) This research focused on consumer perceptions of online content credibility. Younger users, while more internet-savvy, were found to trust peer reviews more than advertisements. However, they often lack the patience to verify sources.

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 5 | May 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

The study revealed that familiarity with platforms does not always translate to skepticism. Emotional appeal and social proof were major influences. Fake reviews thrive by exploiting this trust gap.

Kotler & Keller (2012) Kotler and Keller's framework explains that buying behaviour is influenced by social, cultural, psychological, and personal factors. In the context of fake reviews, consumers' decisions are often shaped by herd mentality and social proof. They may rely on others' experiences rather than facts. Fake reviews play on these triggers by mimicking genuine user sentiment. This makes consumers more likely to purchase without proper scrutiny. The model helps in understanding why fake reviews are persuasive.

Luca, M. (2016) Luca studied the relationship between online reviews and business performance. His research revealed that a one-star increase on Yelp could lead to a 5–9% rise in revenue. This economic incentive motivates companies to manipulate ratings using fake reviews. He highlighted the power of perceived credibility in shaping consumer choices. Fake reviews distort genuine consumer feedback, creating unfair competition. Thus, online ratings are both a marketing asset and a potential tool for deception.

Mayzlin, Dover & Chevalier (2014) This study explored how firms covertly hire marketing agencies to post deceptive reviews. These reviews are often used to boost their own products and harm competitors. The research found such fake content to be common in competitive markets like hospitality and e-commerce. It showed that fake reviews are difficult to trace and regulate. The authors called for stronger platform monitoring. Their work underscores how fake reviews mislead both consumers and algorithms.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the demographic patterns of consumer susceptibility to fake online reviews using descriptive statistics.
2. To determine if age influences how much consumers trust product reviews on major e-commerce platforms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the impact of fake online reviews on consumer awareness. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, targeting 371 respondents from various demographic backgrounds. The questionnaire included both multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to capture consumer attitudes, behaviour, and experiences related to online product reviews. A convenience sampling technique was adopted to reach a broad range of respondents, primarily from urban regions, with diverse age groups, educational qualifications, and gender representation.
For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present demographic characteristics and key behavioural trends. To assess the relationship between consumer age groups and trust in reviews on different e-commerce platforms, the Chi-Square Test was applied. This combination of statistical tools allowed for meaningful interpretation of the collected data, enabling the researcher to meet the stated objectives and draw conclusions about how fake reviews influence consumer trust and purchasing decisions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Male	147	39.6
Female	224	60.4
Age 18–25	225	60.6
Age 26–35	89	24.0
Age 36–45	41	11.1
Age 46+	16	4.3
Undergraduate	138	37.2
Postgraduate	184	49.6

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents (60.6%) are in the 18–24 years age group, indicating that younger consumers dominate the trust in online reviews. The 25–34 years group follows with 24.0%, showing a moderate trust level. Only 11.1% of respondents are aged 35–44, while the least trusting group is aged 45 years and above, accounting for 4.3%. This pattern suggests that younger consumers are more inclined to rely on product reviews, while older consumers exhibit greater skepticism, possibly due to increased awareness and experience with deceptive practices.

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 5 | May 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

Table 2: Age and customer trust on product reviews on e-commerce platform

Age and customer trust on product reviews on e-commerce platform	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Amazon	13.440	9	.144
Flipkart	50.717	9	.000
Nykaa	25.717	9	.002
Purple	34.728	9	.000
Myntra	80.644	9	.000

The Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the association between age and trust in various e-commerce platforms. The null hypothesis assumed no association between age and platform trust. Results show no significant relationship for Amazon ($p = .144$), so the null hypothesis is accepted. However, significant associations were found for Flipkart ($p = .000$), Nykaa ($p = .002$), Purple ($p = .000$), and Myntra ($p = .000$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis for these platforms. This suggests that trust in these platforms significantly varies with age.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that consumers heavily rely on emotional cues and peer validation when assessing product quality through online reviews. Fake reviews manipulate these very factors by using persuasive language, fabricated experiences, and timing strategies to trigger impulse buying. Although younger consumers are aware of fake reviews, they tend to overlook red flags due to their reliance on convenience and speed. This aligns with the findings of Flanagin et al. (2014) and Mudambi & Schuff (2010), reinforcing the argument that review manipulation thrives on psychological vulnerability.

SUGGESTIONS

- Digital literacy campaigns should be targeted at younger consumers (18–25) to help them identify fake reviews and make informed purchasing decisions.
- E-commerce platforms should improve their review verification systems to prevent deceptive practices and increase the reliability of online reviews.
- Institutions should incorporate consumer education on evaluating online reviews into their curricula, especially for students and postgraduates.
- Platforms should emphasize verified purchase tags and authenticity indicators to enhance trust in reviews across all age groups.
- Further research could explore how different educational levels influence susceptibility to fake reviews, given the high proportion of postgraduate respondents.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the growing impact of fake online reviews on consumer decision-making, particularly among young consumers aged 18–24. This age group shows a higher tendency to trust peer-generated content, making them more vulnerable to misleading reviews. Descriptive analysis indicated clear patterns in trust and behaviour across different demographic segments, emphasizing that consumer awareness is not uniform.

The Chi-Square Test further revealed a significant association between age and trust in platforms like Flipkart, Nykaa, Purple, and Myntra, while Amazon appeared to have a more balanced perception among users. These insights stress the need for stricter review moderation, platform responsibility, and enhanced digital literacy programs to help consumers especially younger ones navigate the online marketplace more safely and confidently.

REFERENCES

1. *Bright Local. (2022). Local consumer review survey. https://www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey/*
2. *Flanagin, A. J., Metzger, M. J., Pure, R., Markov, A., & Hartsell, E. (2014). Online consumer reviews and evaluation: An empirical study of credibility. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 65(1), 290–300. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22982*
3. *Government of India. (2019). Consumer Protection Act, 2019. https://egazette.nic.in*
4. *Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2012). Marketing Management (14th ed.). Pearson Education.*
5. *Luca, M. (2016). Reviews, reputation, and revenue: The case of Yelp.com. Harvard Business School NOM Unit Working Paper No. 12-016. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1928601*
6. *Mayzlin, D., Dover, Y., & Chevalier, J. (2014). Promotional reviews: An empirical investigation of online review manipulation. American Economic Review, 104(8), 2421–2455. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.8.2421*

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 5 | May 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

7. *Mudambi, S. M., & Schuff, D. (2010). What makes a helpful online review? A study of customer reviews on Amazon.com. MIS Quarterly, 34(1), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.2307/20721420*
8. *Schindler, R. M., & Bickart, B. (2005). Published consumer reviews: Biasing effects of prior expectations on customer evaluation. Journal of Consumer Research, 32(3), 530–538.*
9. *Xie, M., & Zhang, Y. (2012). Impact of online reviews on trust and loyalty in e-commerce: The moderating role of consumer expertise. Journal of Management Information Systems, 29(4), 293–324. https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222290410*