

Facebook fake review factories uncovered by investigation

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Which of these do you use? Why do you use them? Why do you think so many people around the world use them?

- Facebook
- Amazon
- TripAdvisor
- PayPal
- WhatsApp
- Instagram

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

refund

investigator

consumer

review

fake

1. An _____ is someone who tries to find out the facts about something, usually a crime or an accident. (para 1)
2. A _____ is someone who buys and uses products and services. (para 1)
3. If something is _____, it is made to look like something real in order to trick people. (para 1)
4. A _____ is an article or short report in which someone gives their opinion about the quality of something. (para 1)
5. If you _____ someone, you give them their money back for something they have bought. (para 2)

set up

fee

impartial

refuse

guidelines

6. A _____ is money that you pay someone for their work. (para 2)
7. If you _____ an account, you open or start it. (para 3)
8. If you _____ to do something, you say you will not do something that someone has asked you to do. (para 5)
9. An _____ opinion is not connected to or influenced by a particular person or group. (para 8)
10. _____ are official instructions or advice about how to do something. (para 9)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. What is *Which?*
2. How many Facebook members may be writing fake reviews?
3. How many members does the Amazon UK Reviewers Facebook group have?
4. According to the *Which?* poll, what percentage of people use online reviews when researching a product?
5. What percentage of people in the *Which?* poll said they were disappointed after buying a product that had received excellent reviews?
6. Where was a man sent to prison for selling fake TripAdvisor reviews?

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Facebook fake review factories uncovered by *Which?* investigation

Patrick Collinson
20 October, 2018

- 1 Investigators from the consumer group *Which?* have discovered fake review groups on Facebook. They produce fake five-star reviews on Amazon. *Which?* said two large Facebook groups – Amazon Deals Group and Amazon UK Reviewers – were writing fake reviews, together with smaller groups. Together, these groups may have up to 87,000 members.
- 2 Inside the Facebook groups, companies post details of products and ask for positive reviews. The reviewers have to pay for the products – so Amazon believes the buyer is real – but after they write a positive review, the company refunds the buyer through PayPal and sometimes pays an extra fee.
- 3 Researchers for *Which?* set up special Amazon and Facebook accounts and asked to join several of the “rewards for reviews” groups. “They were told to order a specific product through Amazon, write a review and share a link to the review. A refund for the cost of the product would then be paid via PayPal,” said *Which?*
- 4 But the *Which?* investigators posted their honest opinion on the product. In one example, the investigator gave a product a two-star review. “They were told by the seller to rewrite it because the product was free, so you have to give it a five-star review,” said *Which?*
- 5 In another example, the researcher was told that they would get a refund after a good five-star review with some photos. But after posting a three-star review with photos, they were told they would not get a refund unless they wrote a five-star review. The investigator refused so did not get a refund.
- 6 A search of the Amazon UK Reviewers Facebook group – which has more than 25,000 members – found new postings almost every couple of minutes from companies around the world offering to pay for positive reviews. The postings show these review groups are all around the world, with mostly far-eastern companies looking for consumers in the West to post the reviews on Amazon.
- 7 Fake online reviews have been a big problem on the internet for years, but *Which?* said they still have a strong influence. As part of its investigation, it found that 97% of *Which?* members read online reviews when researching a product – but three in ten (31%) were disappointed after buying a product because of excellent feedback scores.
- 8 Alex Neill of *Which?* said: “Sellers are taking people’s money in a dishonest way. The reviews are not honest and impartial opinions but instead encourage people to buy products that they would normally not buy.”
- 9 *Which?* shared its findings with Amazon and Facebook. In its response, Amazon said: “We do not allow reviews in exchange for money. Customers and sellers must follow our review guidelines and if they don’t, we may close their account.” It added that a “small number of reviews” went against its guidelines, that it had closed some accounts and, in some cases, had taken legal action.
- 10 Facebook said: “Encouraging the use of fake reviews is not allowed on Facebook. We ask people to report postings that they believe go against our standards so that we can take action.”
- 11 In September, 2018, a man was sent to prison in Italy for selling fake TripAdvisor reviews. He wrote fake reviews for hundreds of hotels and restaurants across Italy, but a court found that writing fake reviews under a false identity was a crime under Italian law.

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. People who write fake reviews ... | a. ... from the Far East and they want consumers in the West to buy their products. |
| 2. Companies that pay people to write fake reviews ... | b. ... will close the accounts of reviewers who do not follow their guidelines. |
| 3. Many of the companies looking for fake reviewers are ... | c. ... he sold fake reviews of hotels and restaurants. |
| 4. According to <i>Which?</i> , ... | d. ... get a refund for the product and sometimes an extra fee. |
| 5. Both Amazon and Facebook say that they ... | e. ... fake reviews still have a strong influence on people. |
| 6. A man was sent to prison in Italy because ... | f. ... want them to give their products five-star reviews. |

5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- every minutes almost of couple
- crime law under Italian a
- to share review a the link
- a star good review five-
- members more twenty- thousand five than
- to eighty- thousand up members seven

6 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. order | a. guidelines |
| 2. write | b. a refund |
| 3. get | c. action |
| 4. follow | d. a product |
| 5. take | e. a fee |
| 6. pay | f. a review |

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7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	post	
2.	produce	
3.	investigate	(person)
4.	investigate	
5.	respond	
6.	research	(person)

8 Discussion

- Do you only buy products with good reviews?
- Do you leave reviews for products that you buy?