

MARKETING

Fake product reviews slash consumer trust in half: report

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Report findings highlight the roles credible brand ratings, reviews and user-generated content play in building brand trust. Image credit: Bazaarvoice

By AMIRAH KEATON

70 percent of consumers think the retail industry needs a new set of standards to combat fake reviews, according to a new report.

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False content is costing brands in more ways than one, as detailed throughout the 2022 Fake Reviews Report. The new release from Bazaarvoice highlights just how important maintaining credible user-generated content (UGC) is for brands' bottom lines.

"Regardless of whether it is luxury goods or not, executives need to know that consumers want to see negative reviews on product pages," said Zarina Stanford, chief marketing officer at [Bazaarvoice](#), Austin.

"The majority 85 percent think negative reviews are either as or more important than positive ones," she said. "This might be scary for brands to think about, because of course, negative reviews are often one of their worst nightmares, however, they need to stop thinking about negative reviews as threats and start thinking about them as opportunities.

"They provide a chance for the brand to engage with their consumers by responding publicly to the review, starting a dialogue, and showing that customers and others who come across the interaction that they care and are listening to what their customers have to say."

For the report conducted in August 2022, Bazaarvoice commissioned market research group Savanta. 10,606 consumers from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. were surveyed.

Bad reviews rot brand trust

Report findings reveal that the detection of just one false review amid hundreds of thousands can impact product conversion immediately, and can tank consumer trust for a brand in the long run.

Considering 72 percent of shoppers make product selections based on a brand's reputation, Bazaarvoice is urging brands to ensure UGC is genuine.

The shopper engagement platform's report found that, by and large, consumers are pushing back against fake reviews.

Bazaarvoice lists the four ways in which reviews are feigned.



Consumers feel fines for fake reviews are appropriate. Image credit: Bazaarvoice

Reviews can be penned by a real person that didn't actually purchase the product. The brand can also edit reviews to make them more positive.

Reviews written by bots comprise the third category, while incentivized reviews from employees or customers that are not clearly disclosed also prove questionable.

Bazaarvoice found that 56 percent of shoppers said they would abandon their potential purchase upon discovery of fake reviews.

34 percent shared they would not trust other reviews, while 25 percent cited that they would avoid buying from the site entirely.

When done right, organic ratings and reviews drive sales when consumers can trust that the entries have been appropriately vetted. In fact, 48 percent of people like to see some form of UGC when shopping online.

Of note, 42 percent trust UGC when used in an ad over brands advertising without it, at just 31 percent comparatively.

Outraged by the notion of misleading UGC, some respondents even suggested proceeding with plans to take action against the brand.

Faced with false reviews, 48 percent would leave a negative review in response, while 16 percent would voice their opinions about the company on social media.

When it comes to what customers are actually looking for from reviews, 59 percent want stricter rules enabling only verified customers to contribute.



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Rating

Viewing 1-10 of 3.7K reviews

★★★★★ **Verified Purchase**

1 hr ago

One dab does it all!

● Hope - nude mauve

Thrilled with how little it takes of Hope to make my cheeks blush! I'm a warm-neutral blonde.

✓ Recommended

Helpful? △(0) | ▾

Sephora's digital infrastructure supports verified purchase reviews, marked green in a sea of beauty UGC available on its app. Image credit: Sephora

56 percent expressed a preference for all products to be tried and tested with legitimate consumers before launch, proposing a focus group of sorts.

Interestingly, these terms seem to correlate closely with a style of presentation pioneered by digital influencers, who have traditionally produced content in alignment with the aforementioned consumer desires.

After a digital era defined by haul videos and designer unboxings, are consumers still subconsciously holding peer reviewers to a bar set by professional content creators?

"I think that influencers have influenced what consumers have come to expect out of UGC," Ms. Stanford said.

"Influencers, whether they are celebrities with millions of followers or micro-influencers with a niche following, often provide thorough information about products they review," she said. "They themselves are real-life shoppers, just like the people watching them.

"Experiencing this high-quality content on the scale that we do today has caused us to expect more from everyday UGC."

Capitalizing on consumer preference for product trial

Product reviews are just one way that brands can authentically promote product lines. Another method currently making a comeback involves connecting with consumers via video.

Already popular with Chinese consumers ([see story](#)), livestreaming is making its way West.

According to [Coresight Research](#), the U.S. livestream shopping market in particular is expected to reach \$11 billion by the end of 2021 and \$25 billion by 2023.

Using features like Instagram's livestreaming chat function, or by pulling a brand fan up to virtual "stages," as permitted by tools like Twitter Spaces and platforms like Clubhouse, brands are making space for audience involvement online.

Livestreams almost act as live product reviews. Viewers tune in for live product demonstrations and personal entertainment from influential figures who speak to items of interest.

L'Oreal-owned beauty brand Lancme just made use of the mechanism, as global ambassador Lily Collins gave its recent limited-edition capsule a lift during a promotional livestream ([see story](#)).

Companies should rest assured with knowledge of the full spectrum of product trial tactics at their fingertips, made available by way of shopper engagement platforms like Bazaarvoice.

"We're well aware of the importance of UGC and the need to ensure that it is genuine and authentic," said Nicolas Fillat, marketing business leader of customer care and feedback at French home improvement and gardening retailer Adeo, in a statement.

"To do this, we need a trusted third party and a partner with significant functional experience and expertise regarding reviews," he said. "Our partner Bazaarvoice comprehensively delivered on those requirements."

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