

Topic 3:

The voice of tourists: reviews & co.

*DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR TOURISM: CHANNELS, QUALITY, CO-CREATION,
AND COLLABORATION*

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content

- The role of user reviews for products' reputation
- Honest, bought, invented reviews
- Exercise

The role of user reviews

A **user/consumer review** is a review written by a user or consumer of a product or service **based on the author's experience as a user of the reviewed product.**

Popular sources for consumer reviews are e-commerce sites like Amazon.com, Tripadvisor and Google Maps.

E-commerce sites often have **consumer reviews for products and sellers separately.**

Usually, consumer reviews are in the form **of several lines of text and a numerical rating.**

This text is meant to **aid in the shopping decision** of a prospective buyer. Reviews discuss **performance, reliability, quality defects,** and **value for money.**

The role of user reviews

Consumer reviews, also called word of mouth, are a form of **user-generated content**. They differ from the **marketer-generated range** in their evaluation from the user's point of view.

Observations are factual as well as subjective in nature.

Consumer reviews of sellers usually comment on **service experience** and **trustworthiness**. Usually, they comment on factors such as **timeliness of delivery, packaging, the correctness of delivered items, shipping charges, return services against promises made**, and so on.

Online consumer reviews have become a **significant factor in business reputation and brand image**. A negative review can damage the importance of a business.

They **created a new industry of reputation management** where companies attempt to remove or hide bad reviews so that more favourable content is found when potential customers do research.

Reputation management

Reputation management, originally a public relations term, refers to **influencing, controlling, enhancing, or concealing an individual's or group's reputation.**

The growth of the internet and social media led to the development of **reputation management companies**, with search results as a core part of a client's reputation. **Online reputation management**, sometimes abbreviated as **ORM**, focuses on managing product and service search engine results.

Ethical grey areas include **astroturfing** (the practice of **masking the sponsors of a message** or organisation to make it appear as though it originates from and is supported by grassroots participants), **customer review sites, censoring complaints**, and using **SEO tactics** to influence results. In some cases, the **ethical lines are clear.**

Unethical companies charge thousands of dollars to **remove negative posts and comments** from websites temporarily.

Bought review

A **bought review** is the system where **the creator of a new product pays a reviewer to review his new product**. Primarily used in the car, movie, and game industry this system creates **a kind of undercover advertising**.

In some cases, **a bought review may be independent**, if the person hired to do the review has a strong reputation for independence and integrity (**expert review**). Even if a bought review from a respected critic is independent, the **perception of potential bias will remain**, due to the financial relationship between the company and the critic.

A similar type of review that may be biased is the so-called **puff piece**, a review of a product, film, or event **written by a sympathetic reviewer** or an individual who has a **connection to the product or event in question**, either in terms of an employment relationship or other links.

Amazon Vine

“Amazon Vine invites the **most trusted reviewers on Amazon** to post opinions about products to help their fellow customers make informed purchase decisions.

Amazon offers Vine members **free products that have been submitted to the program by participating selling partners**. Vine reviews are the **independent opinions of the Vine Voices** and the selling partners cannot influence, modify or edit the reviews. Amazon does not modify or edit Vine reviews, as long as they comply with our posting guidelines.”

Amazon Vine is an **invitation-only program**.

Customers who consistently write helpful reviews and develop a reputation for expertise in specific product categories are most likely to be invited into the program.

TripAdvisor Marketing Case Study

How a Journalist Made a Shed the #1 Restaurant in London

How reliable are e-commercial sites, and how easily can they be manipulated?

Over the course of 7 months, a journalist for the **Vice**, **Oobah Butler** managed to **transform the garden of his home into the hottest and most exclusive restaurant in London**. One problem though. The **restaurant did not exist!** Let's see [this video](#) and [this reportage](#).



Butler created an exclusive Icelandic cuisine restaurant, a phone number to serve as the restaurant's contact, and [a website](#). To avoid giving his shed's address, he defined it an "appointment only restaurant." Photos of dishes made out of household products like shaving foam, paint, and bleach.

The restaurant needed real reviews written on different computers in order to beat the [anti-scammer technology](#) used by TripAdvisor and sought reviews from friends and family. Read a list of best reviews.

Six months after registering, The Shed became #1.

Exercise (to be discussed)

#1 – Compare these two reviews and comment on their language/efficacy:

a

The whole experience was fantastic. Our waiter was so attentive, nothing was too much for him. As the sun was setting we were offered blankets – we politely declined (one had a stain on) – but a nice touch, adds to the al fresco feel!

b

Service was exceptional. Prices are very reasonable. We did not find the food to be to our taste. It's really unfortunate because there are so many things that are great about this diner.

2 – Look at your **chosen hotel and restaurant in Urbino**, read the reviews on TripAdvisor and analyse them: are they sincere, helpful, coherent?

#3 - What is your «expert» position about reviews?