

Ranking of motives for posting fake reviews

Anjali Thukral

Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Nidhi Aggarwal

*Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi, India, and
Manav Rachna University, Faridabad, India*

Chand Prakash Saini

SGT University, Gurgaon, India, and

Pooja Kapoor

Manav Rachna University, Faridabad, India

Spanish Journal of
Marketing - ESIC

Received 2 July 2024
Accepted 2 July 2025

Abstract

Purpose – Prior research has investigated the motivations behind posting fake reviews however, a ranking mechanism is required to determine the prominence of these motives. This paper aims to address this gap by identifying and ranking key motives, offering new insights and recommendations.

Design/methodology/approach – Grounded in self-determination theory, this study combined qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative ranking of motives. Data were collected from eight Facebook review groups, each exceeding 1,000 members, targeting Indian respondents who admitted to posting fake reviews. A semi-structured questionnaire gathered responses from 44 participants. NVivo was used for thematic analysis, followed by quantitative ranking of identified motives.

Findings – The analysis identified three prominent motives namely “Prosocial,” “Product as a Reward” and “Monetary Reward” from a total of 12 motives explored through thematic analysis. In addition, the study introduces two previously unexplored motives “Fear” and “Ranting” enhancing the understanding of fake review behavior. The findings reveal how different motivations influence fake review engagement, offering insights for consumer research and helping policymakers and platforms ensure review authenticity.

Practical implications – By prioritizing the most prominent motives, this research enables businesses and policymakers to develop targeted strategies for detecting and mitigating fake reviews. Understanding these motives allows for more effective resource allocation in combating deceptive online practices.

Originality/value – This study advances the existing literature by not only identifying new motives but also ranking them based on their prominence, moving beyond traditional discussions centered on financial incentives or promotional benefits.

Keywords Online reviews, Fake reviews, Prominent motives, Self-determination theory

Paper type Research paper



© Anjali Thukral, Nidhi Aggarwal, Chand Prakash Saini and Pooja Kapoor. Published in *Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Spanish Journal of Marketing -
ESIC
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2444-9709
p-ISSN: 2444-9709
DOI 10.1108/SJME-07-2024-0188

Resumen

Objetivo – Investigaciones previas han explorado las motivaciones detrás de la publicación de reseñas falsas; sin embargo, se requiere un mecanismo de clasificación para determinar la prominencia de estos motivos. Este artículo aborda dicha brecha identificando y clasificando los motivos clave, ofreciendo nuevas perspectivas y recomendaciones.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Basado en la teoría de la autodeterminación, este estudio combinó el análisis temático cualitativo con la clasificación cuantitativa de motivos. Se recopilaron datos de ocho grupos de reseñas en Facebook, cada uno con más de 1.000 miembros, enfocándose en participantes indios que admitieron haber publicado reseñas falsas. Se recogieron respuestas de 44 participantes mediante un cuestionario semiestructurado. Se utilizó NVivo para el análisis temático, seguido de una clasificación cuantitativa de los motivos identificados.

Resultados – El análisis identificó tres motivos destacados: “Pro-social”, “Producto como recompensa” y “Recompensa monetaria”, de un total de doce motivos explorados. Además, el estudio introduce dos motivos no explorados anteriormente: “Miedo” y “Desahogo”, lo que amplía la comprensión del comportamiento de reseñas falsas. Los hallazgos revelan cómo diferentes motivaciones influyen en la participación en reseñas falsas, aportando ideas útiles para la investigación del consumidor y ayudando a los responsables políticos y plataformas a garantizar la autenticidad de las reseñas.

Implicaciones prácticas – Al priorizar los motivos más destacados, esta investigación permite a empresas y responsables políticos desarrollar estrategias específicas para detectar y mitigar reseñas falsas. Comprender estos motivos facilita una asignación de recursos más eficaz para combatir prácticas engañosas en línea.

Originalidad/valor – Este estudio amplía la literatura existente al no solo identificar nuevos motivos, sino también clasificarlos según su prominencia, yendo más allá de las discusiones tradicionales centradas en incentivos financieros o beneficios promocionales.

Palabras clave Reseñas en línea, Reseñas falsas, Motivos prominentes, Teoría de la autodeterminación

Tipo de artículo Trabajo de investigación

虚假评论发布动机的排序研究

摘要

研究目的 – 尽管已有研究探讨了发布虚假评论的动机，但尚缺乏对这些动机显著性进行系统排序的机制。本文旨在填补该研究空白，通过识别并排序主要动机，为虚假评论行为研究提供新的视角与政策建议。

研究设计/方法 – 本研究以自我决定理论为基础，结合质性主题分析与量化排序方法展开。研究数据采集自8个Facebook评价群组（每组成员均超过1,000人），调研对象为承认曾发布虚假评论的印度用户。通过半结构式问卷，共获得44份有效回应。研究先使用NVivo进行主题分析以识别动机，再对动机的重要性进行量化排序。

研究发现 – 研究共识别出12类动机，其中最突出的三类为：“利他动机”、“产品作为奖励”以及“金钱奖励”。此外，研究还提出了两个此前较少涉及的新动机：“恐惧”与“宣泄”，丰富了对虚假评论行为的理解。研究结果揭示了不同动机对虚假评论行为的驱动机制，为消费者行为研究及评论真实性监管提供参考。

实践意义 – 本研究通过识别并优先排序关键动机，帮助企业及政策制定者更有针对性地制定识别与干预虚假评论的策略，从而优化资源配置，提高应对虚假评论的效率与精准性。

研究创新与价值 – 本研究在已有文献基础上实现突破，不仅识别出新的虚假评论动机，更通过显著性排序的方式深化对其影响机制的理解，突破了传统研究中对经济或推广性动机的单一关注。

关键词 网络评论, 虚假评论, 动机排序, 自我决定理论

文章类型 研究型论文

1. Introduction

In the continuously growing world of online businesses, customers have new incentives to publish fake reviews. With the increasing reliance on digital platforms for purchasing

decisions, 97% of consumers now see reviews as powerful tools to shape their perceptions and influence their buying behavior (Ganguly *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, there is a surge in posting intentionally manipulated reviews or “fake” reviews to deliberately influence online customers (Wu *et al.*, 2020). Fake reviews are artificial marketing outputs as they are not the genuine opinions of one’s own experience related to products and services posted by customers (Salminen *et al.*, 2022). The valence of fake reviews can be positive, negative or neutral (Liang *et al.*, 2025). In 2022, Trip Advisor identified 1.3 million fake reviews, comprising 4.37% of all submissions. Nearly half of the fake reviews identified on TripAdvisor originated from six countries: India, Russia, the USA, Turkey, Italy and Vietnam. India emerged as the leading contributor of paid reviews on the platform. (TripAdvisor, 2023). It is an indication that there is a large group of Web users who are engaged in writing reviews that are inconsistent with the genuine experiences of products and services. In addition to traditional incentives like monetary rewards, individuals are driven by a desire for social validation, seeking to enhance their standing within online communities through the dissemination of fake reviews.

This necessitates the urgency of studying the motives of customers to post fake reviews on different online platforms. However, to date, many studies empirically explored the motives of customers to post fake reviews (Zaman *et al.*, 2023; Moon *et al.*, 2021), these efforts have largely been confined to identifying and categorizing the motives qualitatively. However, a significant research gap remains: Which motives are the most prominent and influential in driving customers to post fake reviews, and how can they be quantified and ranked? To our knowledge, no study has attempted to address this question, leaving a critical gap in understanding the relative impact of these motives on consumer behavior.

This research aims to bridge this gap and rank the motives based on their prominence that exert the greatest influence on customers’ engagement in posting fake reviews through quantitative analysis after exploring motives through qualitative analysis. By identifying key motives, this study provides actionable insights for platforms and marketers to develop targeted strategies against fake reviews. Understanding these drivers enables more effective detection, consumer education and resource allocation, ultimately strengthening trust and preserving platform integrity.

To address this gap, the paper poses the following research questions:

- RQ1. What are the motives (intrinsic and extrinsic) of customers to post fake reviews on different online platforms?
- RQ2. How to rank motives based on their prominence from the motives explored in RQ1 for posting fake reviews?

In this research online platforms are defined as search engines, social networks and e-commerce platforms (Graef, 2015). The remaining paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background. Based on the theoretical background hypothesis were framed. Section 3 presents the methodology and the details of data collection and analysis. Section 4 presents the findings, followed by the discussion in Section 5. In Section 6, contributions and implications are discussed, whereas Section 7 addresses the limitations and directions for future research followed by a conclusion in Section 8.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1 Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory posits two types of motivations, namely, intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EM) (Deci and Ryan, 1985). It explains human behavior

through six mini-theories which are Cognitive Evaluation, Organismic Integration, Causality Orientations, Basic Psychological Needs, Goal Content and Relationships Motivation (Gilal *et al.*, 2019). SDT is about basic psychological needs which are important for optimal functioning and personal well-being. Those needs can be identified as autonomy, competence and relatedness. Cognitive Evaluation Theory highlights that IM thrives in autonomously supportive conditions. It suggests that IM arises when people engage in activities, they find enjoyable or interesting (Deci *et al.*, 1991). This enhances performance, well-being, engagement and joy, unlike EM, which is undermined by external pressure. EM and IM differ in terms of their degree of self-determination. Individuals' internal motivations are compromised when they experience external controls like pressure, rewards or punishment (Deci *et al.*, 1991). EM is therefore either desirable or necessary for specific activities, making IM less useful or even irrelevant. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) addresses EM and the perceived *locus* of causality (Gilal *et al.*, 2019). Besides, IM, the most self-determined of these is "integrated" motivation, followed by "identified", "introjected" and "external" given by OIT. By integrated motivation we mean hierarchical synthesis of goals, identified motivation means conscious valuing of activity, introjected motivation means approval from self or others and external motivation means reward or punishment. OIT is the only theory in which people's EM becomes self-determined (Gilal *et al.*, 2019). Past research shows that SDT helps in gaining insights from marketing perspectives like understanding consumer behavior in terms of brand preference, word-of-mouth, customer experience, purchase intention, behavior change, customer satisfaction and basic need for satisfaction (Zaman *et al.*, 2023; Gilal *et al.*, 2019). Based on the SDT framework, the frequency of posting fake reviews increases when grounded by IM and EM (Zaman *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, this research uses SDT to examine the motivations behind customers' posting fake reviews on different online platforms.

2.2 Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation behind posting fake reviews

IM and EM have unique impacts on individuals' behavior, and each can be analyzed to understand why individuals might post fake reviews (Pocchiarri *et al.*, 2024). Research links fake reviews to IM, as customers with a strong brand preference may fabricate reviews (Thakur *et al.*, 2018). According to Wu *et al.* (2020), customers intentionally write fake negative reviews to companies to further their own interests. For instance, the actions of self-appointed brand managers are linked to the actions of review spammers. They often passionately submit feedback on products they have not bought, to help improve the brand products, acting independently and without any financial motive. Prosocial customers are less likely to create fake negative reviews and more likely to post fake positive reviews, according to research (Moon *et al.*, 2021). However, a recent study by Zaman *et al.* (2023) revealed that customers might post fictitious, unfavorable reviews to express support for their family and friends. Moreover, the primary IM driving reviewers to post fake reviews was the sense of enjoyment they experienced (Wu, 2019). According to research, upset customers and the urge to "get even" or "return harm for harm" by leaving negative fake reviews about a company's goods, is one potential motive for revenge (Anderson and Simester, 2014). In some cases, people even leave extremely unfavorable reviews for goods they have never used. Negative reciprocity on the part of a client might result from either hatred for the firm/brand or a bad experience with it (Thakur *et al.*, 2018). There are several inherent motivations for creating fake negative reviews, including brand hatred, brand ambassador hatred, environmental carelessness

and unoriginal publicity (Zaman *et al.*, 2024). Based on this reasoning and previous findings, we offer the following hypothesis (H1):

H1. There are significant intrinsic motivations of customers to post positive, negative or neutral fake reviews on different online platforms.

Fake reviews are also linked to external motivational factors. Research showed that to entice customers to write positive fake reviews businesses can offer financial incentives such as discount coupons, cash backs, extended warranties and free delivery (Aljadani *et al.*, 2024). In addition, businesses can employ noncash rewards also like exclusive badges, first access to products and social media mentions. In addition to rewards, a business can use targeted nudges to encourage customers to leave reviews. Hotels, for instance, can ask guests to provide evaluations before they check out (Verma *et al.*, 2023). Some producers and retailers offer free samples of their goods in exchange for positive reviews from customers (Wu, 2019). A study by Y. Wu *et al.* (2020), publishing fake negative reviews is mostly motivated by the desire for social prestige. The distinction between fake and genuine reviews is often blurred, as some reviewers receive financial incentives through gamification (Zaman *et al.*, 2024). For the sake of enhancing their self-esteem, people with narcissistic personalities are more inclined to exaggerate good reviews of products or services they've used (Kapoor *et al.*, 2021). A recent study by Moon *et al.* (2021) found that consumers are more likely to publish fake reviews to feel a sense of mastery and express their power of opinion. According to Wu (2019), individuals may post fake reviews to earn a reputation badge, driven by a desire for recognition and attention. Recent studies show that if reviewers are financially paid, especially those who have had unpleasant or dissatisfactory experiences with a company, they are more likely to give it a good rating or turn their negative remarks neutral ones (Ai *et al.*, 2022). Thus, based on previous research, we anticipate that customers are primarily driven by EM to post fake reviews. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis (H2):

H2. There are significant extrinsic motivations of customers to post positive, negative or neutral fake reviews on different online platforms.

3. Methodology

A comprehensive methodology for identifying motives and ranking prominent motives behind fake reviews is presented, as depicted in Figure 1.

3.1 RQ1. What are the motives (intrinsic and extrinsic) of customers to post fake reviews on different online platforms?

3.1.1 RQ1: *Research design.* To answer the RQ1, we followed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research will give us a deep insight into the motives of customers through the interpretation of human behavior (Vo-Thanh *et al.*, 2021).

3.1.2 RQ1: *Data collection.* The data was collected telephonically through semi-structured interviews with customers in India. We recruited only those customers who had posted fake reviews, using purposive sampling to ensure accurate insights into their motivations. Purposive sampling is widely "used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). Eight review groups on Facebook were identified with at least 1,000 members each. Respondents from India were

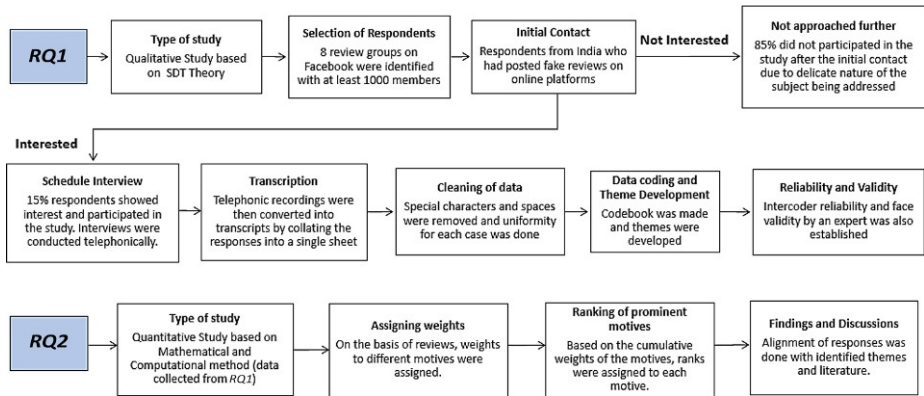


Figure 1. Comprehensive methodology for the proposed research

identified and approached from these groups who had posted fake reviews. Data was collected from 44 respondents, over three months, from March 2024 to May 2024. Out of 44, 18 were females and 26 were male respondents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached. According to [Malterud et al. \(2016\)](#) in a qualitative study, the typical data saturation happens at 30. Each interview lasted 40–55 min. The multilingual researchers performed the interviews in both Hindi and English (masters both Hindi and English perfectly). The researchers agreed on the research procedure to ensure consistency before conducting the interviews. The sample questions were designed based on the theoretical framework and literature review. These questions included: *How frequently did you post the fake reviews? Since when you are posting fake reviews? What are the various platforms on which you have posted the fake reviews? What were the motives for posting fake reviews? What was the valence of fake reviews posted?*

The profile of customers and valence of reviews posted by respondents are presented in [Table 1](#) below.

3.1.3 RQ1: Data analysis. The “Bottom-up” approach of the grounded theory is being used to classify the motives into sub-sub themes, sub-themes and the main themes as suggested by [Glaser and Strauss, 1967](#). Grounded theory is recommended as one of the most cited methods for the analysis of qualitative data [O’Reilly et al., 2012](#). First, the interviews were coded into text and converted into the transcript by compiling the responses into a single response sheet for every research question separately. In the next step, data cleaning was done to eliminate special characters and spaces from the transcript. Finally, these transcripts were imported into NVivo for analysis. Researchers used line-by-line open coding to analyze the data by giving descriptive codes to specific sections of the interview transcripts. The in-vivo coding method was applied whenever possible by using the interviewee’s own words as codes [Wu, 2019](#). The researchers analyzed the interviews individually to ensure inter-coder reliability, and differences were settled through discussion. An expert in the field who was familiar with the subject matter being investigated evaluated the research procedure and the transcript data to validate the themes identified by the researchers and come to a consensus with them. The exploration of these subthemes (motives) and main themes (motives) gives us the base for the second research question RQ2, i.e. to predict and rank the prominent motives among the motives explored in RQ1 for posting fake reviews. Hence, to answer the second research question, the methodology followed is given below.

Table 1. Profile of customers and valence of reviews ($n = 44$)

Variable	Cases (%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	26 (59.09)
Female	18 (40.91)
<i>Age group</i>	
Less than 21	21 (47.72)
21–30	18 (40.90)
31–40	5 (11.38)
<i>Education level</i>	
Undergraduate	20 (45.45)
Graduate	19 (43.17)
Postgraduate	5 (11.38)
<i>Valence of fake reviews</i>	
Positive	36 (81.81)
Negative	9 (20.45)
Neutral	4 (9.09)
<i>Frequency of fake reviews posted</i>	
1–10	33 (75)
11–20	8 (18.18)
Above 20	3 (6.82)
<i>Duration of fake review (months)</i>	
1–12	24 (54.54)
13–24	11 (25)
25–36	6 (13.63)
More than 36	3 (6.83)

3.2 RQ2. How to rank motives based on their prominence from the motives explored in RQ1 for posting fake reviews?

3.2.1 RQ2: *Research design.* As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), a quantitative methodology was employed to address RQ2, using mathematical and computational techniques for data analysis. Unconventional methods offer fresh perspectives on traditional topics and pave the way for new avenues of inquiry. The boundary between conventional and unconventional methodologies is often indistinct, as methods can deviate from norms in various dimensions ([Buchanan and Bryman, 2018](#)). The study involves the numerical representation of data to assess the prominence of motives. The study aims to establish weights and ranking based on objective, measurable data rather than subjective interpretation. For this the data is collected from respondents' interviews transcripts, and the frequency and weights of motives are quantified to derive insights. The study constructs set (respondents and motives) and uses mathematical equations to compute frequency and cumulative weights of each motive. Then ranking of motives was done in descending order based on their cumulative scores. It is important to note that the motives explored in RQ1, exhibit varying degrees of significance and importance, necessitating a nuanced understanding of their weightage respectively, in shaping deceptive customer behavior. Therefore, our second objective is to rank the motives based on their prominence from the motives explored in RQ1. The derivation of the formulae used in RQ2 is given in Section 3.2.1.

3.2.2 RQ2: Quantitative data analysis.

Step 1. Identification of prominent motives

It involves the following steps

a) Different sets used in the study

Researchers assume a set of respondents denoted as R , and their corresponding motives to post online reviews on the products, denoted as M for identifying the prominent motives among the customers on online shopping platforms. Thus,

$R = \{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$ is a set of n respondents, and $M = \{m_1, m_2, \dots, m_k\}$ is a set of k -motives, in a given data set.

b) Frequency of posting fake reviews

Next, researchers identify the frequency of posting fake reviews per month for each reviewer (the term respondents and reviewer are used interchangeably henceforth) considering a given set of motives P_i (such that $P_i \subseteq M$) for an i th reviewer. Here, researchers aim to discern a reviewer (R_i) and their corresponding motives (P_i) that prominently emerge from the larger group of n respondents and k motives. This implies that R_i has P_i motives for posting the reviews under the study.

Let the frequency, fR_i be the number of reviews posted by the i th reviewer in a month.

c) Calculating the weight of a respondent's motives

To measure the significance of each motive within P_i for each corresponding reviewer R_i , researchers considered all motives equally significant for a reviewer. Let's say, m_j is a motive in P_i with the total number of motives in P_i as z . Since $P_i \subseteq M$, and $m_j \in P_i$, it implies $m_j \in M$ and $z |S| P_i$, where $|S|$ denotes "size of." Considering all motives equally significant of a particular reviewer, the weight of the respondents is calculated as follows:

$$W(R_i, P_i(m_j)) = fR_i/z, \forall P_i (m_j) \tag{1}$$

d) Cumulative weight for a specific motive of M

As a result, using [equation \(1\)](#), the cumulative weight of a specific motive, $W(R_i, P_i (m_j))$ across all respondents is defined as:

$$W_c(m_j) = \sum_{i=1}^n W(R_i, P_i(m_j)) \tag{2}$$

By summing up these weights for all respondents, researchers derive the cumulative weight associated with the particular motive across the entire group.

Step 2. Ranking the motives in a given data set

Finally, researchers rank the motives in descending order based on their scores, as shown in Step 1, thereby creating a comprehensive documentation of the prominent motives. By following these steps, one can effectively identify and evaluate the prominent motives among the respondents, aiding in a better comprehension of their underlying motivations and behaviors. This is illustrated in the [Figure 2](#).

4. Findings

4.1 RQ1

The thematic analysis results for $RQ1$ supported $H1$, confirming the presence of significant IMs for posting fake reviews across various online platforms. Similarly, the results supported $H2$, demonstrating the existence of significant EMs for the same behavior. The analysis

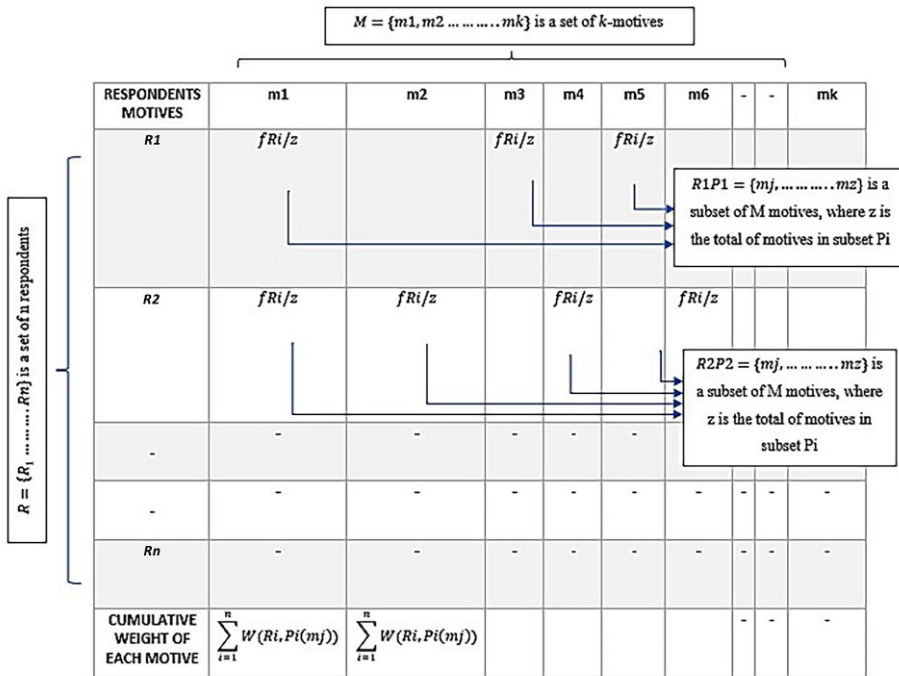


Figure 2. Illustrations showing the identification of prominent motives

identified two main themes, *Emotional* and *Reciprocity*, encompassing 12 subthemes and 41 sub-sub-themes. Under the Emotional theme, both IM and EM were observed, including m1 – Altruism (IM), m2 – Revenge (IM), m3 – Joy and Pleasure (IM), m4 – Loyalty (IM), m5 – Ranting (IM), m6 – Fear (EM), m7 – Self-Recognition (EM) and m8 – Prosocial (IM). The Reciprocity theme consisted solely of EM, including m9 – Gamification (EM), m10 – Product as a Reward (EM), m11 – Monetary Reward (EM) and m12 – Obligation (EM). The two main themes are explained below:

4.1.1 *Emotional theme*. The emotional theme broadly illustrates the crucial role played by emotions (positive and negative) in an individual:

- Intrinsic motives of respondents for writing fake reviews under emotional theme.

Ranting is discovered as a new IM to manipulate reviews negatively. Engaging in ranting offers individuals a momentary sense of calm and relief by expressing their negative sentiments through reviews. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that this method of emotional release is deemed unhealthy:

R43. I usually rant after fighting with my friends as this is a nice way to release my pent-up emotions and frustrations. I have written negative fake reviews many times randomly against games like Ludo King and various products on playstore.

Our findings reveal that strong attachment to a game drives individuals to post negative fake reviews against competitors, aiming to boost their preferred game’s visibility and loyalty:

R34. I love playing PUBG game and I am a great fan of it. Free Fire and COD is a competitor of PUBG and since I am a great lover of PUBG so I wrote negative fake reviews against free fire and COD many times on Play Store. It will help in attracting more people towards PUBG and to demote its competitor followers. I hope this way I will be able to promote PUBG.

This is consistent with research by [Zaman et al. \(2023\)](#) that highlights customers' motive brand love for writing a review to promote the brand that they love.

To support the businesses of their relatives and friends, the majority of customers left favorable fake reviews:

R8. My brother, who works as a manager for a digital marketing firm, requested me to post positive fake reviews for a hotel on Google, so I posted it. I just wanted to help him out else I won't be doing it because he is my brother.

Prosocial incentives have been identified as an underlying driver of positive review manipulation. However, customers create fake positive reviews as well as negative ones to aid their friends and relatives. This solidarity has been explained by [Zaman et al. \(2023\)](#) in their research:

R9. One of my friends told me to post a fake order on Amazon as a customer so that he gets a positive fake review. So, I posted a fake order for him on Amazon, made the payment, and in return, I got an empty box just to show that the order was fulfilled. Then I posted a positive fake review and after that, I got my full refund of the amount in my Paytm account.

This shows that customers can also post fake orders and fake reviews online if the seller and customer are known to each other which can aggravate the problem of fake reviews.

Some respondents posted fake reviews and ratings for delivery boys by giving them fake five-star ratings on apps on humanity basis:

R4. I have given fake 5-star ratings on a humanity basis for delivery boys who came from Zomato, Swiggy, and Blinkit to deliver the food or groceries to me. Even though if they come late then also, I give them full rating as just a five-star rating can make their day in terms of money and happiness as well.

Some of the respondents posted negative fake reviews because of revenge:

R28. The reason I created a fake negative review was out of retaliation since I ordered a product from Meesho but it was delayed and I had to give it to someone in my office.

This has been stated in [Wu et al. \(2020\)](#) that customers who have had unfavorable experiences with their purchases are more prone to create misleading reviews to take revenge from the company.

Some respondents also posted fake reviews out of joy and pleasure.

R11. I created a fake negative review on Zomato just for fun and to see if my food would be changed or not. Even though the food was not bad but I wanted to see whether I would get food in return or the cashback.

[Salehi-Esfahani and Ozturk \(2018\)](#) assert that adopting monetary service recovery could assist businesses in handling or removing unfavorable complaints but also promote people's opportunistic behavior to provide negative spam reviews:

- Extrinsic motives of respondents for writing fake reviews under Emotional theme

Fear is discovered as a new EM to manipulate reviews in either a positive or negative way. Such revelations have the potential to worsen the already complex web of fraudulent activities on the internet, resulting in more disinformation and manipulation in the digital marketplace. The valence can be positive or negative depending upon the situation the reviewer is in:

R12. I posted a fake review for a gym online. The machines were properly working but I posted a negative fake review regarding the machines of the gym so that in the evening time when I visit the gym, so will not face much rush and I won't have to wait for long to work out on the machines. So, out of fear, I did that.

R2: I was given a task to post positive fake reviews regarding the company itself in which I was an intern to get the LOR and the certificate for my internship. So, I did that as I was afraid that if I didn't post the fake reviews then I would not get the certificate of internship.

In addition, one of the respondents explained that writing positive fake reviews is due to showing a sense of mastery or to get self-recognition:

R18. I posted positive fake reviews to gain recognition as a verified reviewer and to take advantage of the offer I would receive as the top reviewer. Also, I feel happy and confident when others think of me as an expert and find my review helpful.

This is consistent with research by [Wu et al. \(2020\)](#) that highlights customers' motivation for writing a review to get recognition.

4.1.2 Reciprocity theme. Reciprocity is a sense of mutual indebtedness and obligation in the act of favor giving and receiving. The reciprocity theme broadly represents the "give and take" relationship:

- Extrinsic motives of respondents for writing fake reviews under the reciprocity theme

The majority of respondents claim that they posted fake reviews to receive free goods or financial benefits like cashback, free coins, etc. We identified that many respondents posted fake reviews for free products as they got a chance to try new products for free:

R22. There was an agreement that if I purchase a product and post a positive review about the same, they will pay back me the full money of the product and I will get the product free of cost. Money directly gets credited to my bank account or at times credit goes to my Paytm account also. I will keep on posting the reviews in the future too as this is a good way to try new products for free.

This is also explained in past research that some producers and retailers offer free samples of their goods in exchange for positive reviews from customers to entice them to post fake reviews ([Wu, 2019](#)):

R26. I posted the fake reviews as I want to make easy money. I was getting money on per review basis. I was getting Rs.100/- to Rs.150/- for writing per review.

It was explained by [Thakur et al. \(2018\)](#) in research that monetary incentives influence customers' willingness to participate in the cyber shilling.

Some respondents also posted fake reviews out of obligation:

R18. I posted a positive fake review because I was obliged as I got a discount from the seller for my purchase and he requested me to write a review for him.

We also find that one of the respondents stated that online contest encourages him to post fake reviews and ratings:

R13. I took part in various contests where I earned free coins which I was able to use for my next purchase and get discounts just by posting some fake reviews and giving some ratings. The more you engage yourself in these contests the higher are the chances of yours to earn more and to get more deals like this.

This finding is consistent with the study [Zaman et al. \(2023\)](#), which discovered gamification as an extrinsic motive for posting fake reviews.

4.2 RQ2

Using the data from Table 1 and applying equation (1) and (2) outlined in Steps 1(c) and 1(d) of Section 3.2.1, researchers identified three key motives associated with posting fake reviews. These prominent motives are denoted as m8, m10 and m11, namely, *Prosocial, Product as a Reward and Monetary Reward* as given in Table 2. Although there are other motivations also but they are much less significant than these three. The analysis through NVivo software also supports these findings. The hierarchy chart by the number of coding references in Figure 3 depicts that “prosocial” is the most frequent motive used in the responses followed by product as a reward, monetary reward and others.

Interestingly, all three of these motives together contribute to more than 50% of the total weight in the posting of all the identified fake reviews. It can be concluded that by focussing on these three motives only marketers can combat the issue of fake reviews up to 50%. The calculated weight and ranks of motives from the data set collected in RQ1 is given below.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the motivations driving individuals to post fake reviews across various online platforms in India. The thematic analysis addressing RQ1 identified six (IM) namely altruism, revenge, joy and pleasure, loyalty, ranting and prosocial and six (EM), namely, fear, self-recognition, gamification, monetary reward, obligation and product as a reward supporting H1 and H2. The diversity and complexity of the motives suggest that a wide range of psychological and situational factors influence the act of posting fake reviews. The quantitative analysis highlights prosocial motivation (m8) as a key driver, reflecting individuals’ intent to benefit their family and friends by endorsing products, consistent with prior research (Zaman et al., 2023). Moreover, customers who had bad experiences with a brand are often upset or feel betrayed, seeks to retaliate against the brand by posting negative fake reviews. This is in line with the study by Wu et al. (2020). Our study also reveals that a sense of loyalty to certain brands drives individuals to fabricate positive reviews, consistent with the findings of (Vo-Thanh et al., 2021). Our study identifies ranting as a novel IM for posting negative fake reviews, serving as an emotional outlet for frustration. This aligns with Marr et al. (2022), who describes venting

Table 2. Table showing ranking of motives

Motives	m1	m2	m3	m4	m5	m6	m7	m8	m9	m10	m11	m12
Cumulative weight ($W(R_i, m_j)$)	3.88	0.45	0.24	1.25	2.42	3.17	0.02	14.67	0.05	10.20	7.43	0.44
Ranks	4	8	10	7	6	5	12	1	11	2	3	9

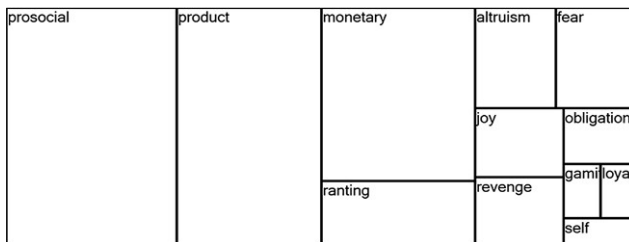


Figure 3. Hierarchy chart by number of coding references

as akin to rumination, and (Bushman, 2002), who links it to cognitive and behavioral challenges. While ranting offers temporary relief, it may reinforce distress and hinder constructive problem-solving, underscoring its psychological impact on online engagement. Customers also posted positive fake reviews driven by kindness, a desire to bring happiness to others or simply for their enjoyment. This finding is in line with Wu (2019).

EM, characterized by external rewards or pressures, were also found to play a pivotal role. Among the explored EM “product as a reward” (m10) and “monetary reward” (m11) stood out prominently in the quantitative analysis, aligning with the growing trend of incentivized online behaviors consistent with prior research (Thakur *et al.*, 2018). Customers post fake reviews due to incentive-driven obligations, as brands offer discounts or rewards in exchange. This practice can pressure customers into posting biased reviews, supporting research on financial rewards, encouraging opportunistic online behavior (Wu, 2019). Individuals post fake reviews to enhance their profile levels, earn badges and attain expert status, reinforcing research by Huotari and Hamari (2017) on gamification driving user engagement. Our results support findings by Moon *et al.* (2021), confirming that self-esteem, opinion leadership and mastery drive positive review manipulation. Fear has emerged as a novel extrinsic motivator for fake reviews, shaping individuals’ fraudulent behavior through psychological and situational influences. Unlike traditional EM such as monetary incentives or free products, fear arises from perceived external threats or pressures, compelling individuals to act in ways that may not align with their genuine experiences or opinions. The valence of fear-based reviews depends heavily on the reviewer’s specific context. Reviewers may post positive fake reviews to protect incentives, relationships or opportunities, whereas negative reviews can result from coercion or fear of reputational loss. This aligns with research by Chanel *et al.* (2009), suggesting emotional and cognitive biases shaping individuals’ decisions. This dual nature makes fear a particularly complex and impactful motivator in the domain of fake reviews. Customers also post positive fake reviews as a means to receive free products, often incentivized by brands. This behavior aligns with findings from studies like the one conducted by Wu (2019), which highlights how brands leverage the promise of free goods to encourage customers to write favorable reviews.

The quantitative analysis addressing RQ2 provided a more focused view by identifying three dominant motives: prosocial (m8), product as a reward (m10) and monetary reward (m11). Together, these three motives accounted for over 50% of the total weight in the data set of fake reviews, highlighting their critical role. The prominence of prosocial motives suggests that individuals often rationalize their actions as beneficial, even if ethically questionable. Interestingly, the NVivo-generated hierarchy chart reinforced these findings, with “prosocial” emerging as the most frequently mentioned motive, followed closely by “product as a reward” and “monetary reward.” This consistency across qualitative and quantitative analyses strengthens the reliability of the results. In particular, the study broadens the comprehension of fake reviews by exploring two new motivations, i.e. fear and ranting, surpassing traditional understandings such as financial gain or promotional activities.

6. Contribution and implications

The present study offers significant contributions with implications for both research and practice.

6.1 Theoretical contribution

First, this study highlights the relevance of SDT in understanding IM and EM as demonstrated by (Zaman *et al.*, 2023). It contributes to the body of literature because it is one of the earliest attempts to conduct a thematic analysis and provides two key themes in which

all the motives for posting fake reviews may be grouped, and it adds to the existing literature on the motives of customers to post fake reviews.

Second, fear is identified as a new EM for manipulating reviews. Fear is a negative emotion that is stimulated when a person's self-determination is undermined. To our knowledge, no study has identified fear as an external motivation for posting fake reviews, either in a good or bad sense.

Third, ranting is identified as a new IM behind the act of posting negative fake reviews. Discovering that posting fake negative reviews is motivated by ranting highlights the need for more constructive online platforms for expressing dissatisfaction instead of perpetuating negative feedback. Thus, theoretically, we add to the existing literature on fake reviews by putting out a fresh classification of motives behind posting fake reviews online.

6.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, this research provides actionable insights for brands and platforms to better strategize the problem of fake reviews.

First, this research proposes an empirical framework to identify prominent motives behind fake reviews, offering brands actionable insights for targeted intervention. Prioritizing prominent motivations enables platforms to allocate resources efficiently, enhance detection methods and implement effective countermeasures.

Second, customers should be educated about the consequences of fake reviews and techniques to identify them. They should be empowered to report fake reviews on the respective platform's website or app. By actively involving customers in the review process, there is a greater potential to mitigate the impact of fake reviews and uphold the integrity of online platforms (Salminen *et al.*, 2022).

Third, review platforms can boost credibility by publishing transparency reports and using AI and manual verification to detect fake reviews. Techniques like pattern recognition, behavioral analysis and fraud detection help identify suspicious activity and enhance consumers' trust (Wu *et al.*, 2020).

Fourth, retaliation through fake reviews by customers can be mitigated by developing relationships with them through personalized interactions and dedicated customer care.

Fifth, to reduce incentives for fake reviews, platforms should strengthen policies by clearly outlining consequences such as account suspension, penalties or legal action for those involved in creating or incentivizing fake content. Moreover, platforms must actively monitor and penalize vendors who offer monetary or other benefits to reviewers, effectively discouraging external influence and promoting ethical practices.

Finally, brands should enforce strict penalties on fake review brokers, aligning with global efforts to combat the issue. For example, TripAdvisor penalized 33,194 property owners (TripAdvisor, 2023), and Amazon delisted 50,000 Chinese seller accounts for soliciting fake reviews (Bloomberg, 2021). Table 3 summarizes the findings and implications.

7. Limitation and future research

Regardless of its potential benefits, this study has some limitations. We restricted our attention to the IM and EM of customers only. Future research should take the viewpoint of merchants or managers to better understand the phenomena of fake reviews. Second, respondents were selected from Facebook only. Future research can consider other online platforms also like Instagram, websites and others. Finally, this study focuses on respondents from India, limiting the broader generalizability of the findings and needs statistical inference. Future research could enhance this by incorporating larger and more diverse data sets that allow for the application of statistical techniques. In addition, future research may

Table 3. Conclusions and theoretical and managerial implications

Conclusions	Theoretical and managerial implications
Customers post fake reviews due to IM and EM, categorized under emotional and reciprocity themes. Fear is identified as a new EM, while ranting is a new IM. Prosocial, product as a reward and monetary reward are the most prominent motives for posting fake reviews	Managers can curb fake reviews by leveraging SDT insights to understand consumer motivations, including fear and ranting. Platforms should enhance consumer engagement to prevent negative emotional outbursts. Using ranking mechanisms to identify prominent motivations behind fake reviews, managers can focus on primary motivations to implement targeted strategies and efficient countermeasures
Enhancing AI-driven detection, educating consumers and strengthening seller accountability can reduce fake reviews, protecting consumer trust	Brands can curb fake reviews by educating consumers, enhancing transparency, using AI-driven detection, strengthening customer relationships and enforcing stricter policies with penalties to deter fake reviews and promote ethical practices

focus on cross-national comparisons to explore whether motivations for creating fake reviews vary across different countries.

8. Conclusion

This research explores the key motivations driving customers to post fake reviews, providing a quantitative framework for ranking the motives that are explored qualitatively based on their prominence. Prosocial behavior, product as a reward and monetary reward emerged as the most significant drivers. In addition, the study introduces two new motivations: fear (extrinsic) and ranting (intrinsic), further categorizing motivations into two global themes emotional and reciprocity. The findings are crucial for businesses, regulators and consumers. Companies can use these insights to combat fake reviews, protect their brand and build customer trust, whereas regulatory bodies can develop more effective policies to ensure transparency in online reviews. This research underscores the importance of consumer trust in e-commerce, emphasizing the need for continuous adaptation to maintain a fair and reliable online marketplace.

References

- Ai, J., Gursoy, D., Liu, Y. and Lv, X. (2022), "Effects of offering incentives for reviews on trust: role of review quality and incentive source", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 100, p. 103101.
- Aljadani, E., Assiri, F. and Alshutayri, A. (2024), "Detecting spam reviews in Arabic by deep learning", *The International Arab Journal of Information Technology*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 495-505.
- Anderson, E.T. and Simester, D.I. (2014), "Reviews without a purchase: low ratings, loyal customers, and deception", *Journal of Marketing Research*, American Marketing Association.
- Bloomberg (2021), "Amazon (AMZN) cracks down on fake reviews, hitting Chinese retailers - Bloomberg", August 19, 2021, available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-18/amazon-amzn-cracks-down-on-fake-reviews-hitting-chinese-retailers#xj4y7vzkg
- Buchanan, D.A. and Alan Bryman (Eds) (2018), "'Not another survey': the value of unconventional methods", *Unconventional Methodology in Organization and Management Research*, Oxford Academic, (accessed 19 April 2018)

- Bushman, B.J. (2002), "Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger, and aggressive responding".
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D. and Walker, K. (2020), "Purposeful sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples", *Journal of Research in Nursing*, Vol. 25 No. 8, pp. 652-661.
- Chanel, O., Chichilnisky, G., Bertrand, P., Kast, R., Kirman, A., Sweetko, M. and Vergnaud, J.-C. (2009), "The influence of fear in decisions: experimental evidence and of Columbia's Consortium for risk management (CCRM). We thank Dominique", *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, Vol. 39 No. 3, available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1522277>
[copyavailableat:https://ssrn.com/abstract=1522277](https://ssrn.com/abstract=1522277)
- Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (1985), "The general causality orientations scale: self-determination in personality", *JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN Personality*, Vol. 19 No. 2.
- Deci, E.L., Vallerand, R.J., Pelletier, L.G. and Ryan, R.M. (1991), "Motivation and education: the self-determination perspective", *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 26 Nos 3-4, pp. 325-346.
- Ganguly, B., Sengupta, P. and Biswas, B. (2024), "What are the significant determinants of helpfulness of online review? An exploration across product-types", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 78 No. May.
- Gilal, F.G., Zhang, J., Paul, J. and Gilal, N.G. (2019), "The role of Self-Determination theory in marketing science: an integrative review and agenda for research", *European Management Journal*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 29-44.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago, Aldine.
- Graef, I. (2015), "Market definition and market power in data: the case of online platforms", available at: <https://secure.edps.europa.eu/>
- Huotari, K. and Hamari, J. (2017), "A definition for gamification: anchoring gamification in the service marketing literature", *Electronic Markets*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 21-31.
- Kapoor, P.S., M S, B., Maity, M. and Jain, N.K. (2021), "Why consumers exaggerate in online reviews? Moral disengagement and dark personality traits", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 60 No. May.
- Liang, W.Y., Chun, C.H., Tzu, L.(B.)T. and Jia, C.C. (2025), "The impact of mandatory disclosure on rewarding online reviews based on S-O-R theory", *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*.
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V.D. and Guassora, A.D. (2016), "Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power", *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 26 No. 13, pp. 1753-1760.
- Marr, N.S., Zainal, N.H. and Newman, M.G. (2022), "Focus on and venting of negative emotion mediates the 18-Year Bi-directional relations between major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder diagnoses", *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 303 No. April, pp. 10-17.
- Moon, S., Kim, M.Y. and Iacobucci, D. (2021), "Content analysis of fake consumer reviews by survey-based text categorization", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 343-364.
- O'Reilly, K., Paper, D. and Marx, S. (2012), "Demystifying grounded theory for business research", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 247-262.
- Pocchiarri, M., Proserpio, D. and Dover, Y. (2024), "Online reviews: a literature review and roadmap for future research".
- Salehi-Esfahani, S. and Ozturk, A.B. (2018), "Negative reviews: formation, spread, and halt of opportunistic behavior", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 74 No. August, pp. 138-146.

- Salminen, J., Kandpal, C., Kamel, A.M., Soon, G. J. and Jansen, B.J. (2022), "Creating and detecting fake reviews of online products", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 64 No. January.
- Thakur, R., Hale, D. and Summey, J.H. (2018), "What motivates consumers to partake in cyber shilling?" *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 26 Nos 1-2, pp. 181-195.
- Tripadvisor (2023), "Transparency report 2023", available at: <http://www.tripadvisor.com/TransparencyReport2023>
- Verma, D., Prakash Dewani, P., Behl, A. and Dwivedi, Y.K. (2023), "Understanding the impact of EWOM communication through the lens of information adoption model: a meta-analytic structural equation modeling perspective", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 143 No. June, p. 107710.
- Vo-Thanh, T., Zaman, M., Hasan, R., Rather, R.A., Lombardi, R. and Secundo, G. (2021), "How a mobile app can become a catalyst for sustainable social business: the case of too good to go", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 171 No. October, p. 120962.
- Wu, P.F. (2019), "Motivation crowding in online product reviewing: a qualitative study of amazon reviewers", *Information and Management*, Vol. 56 No. 8, p. 103163.
- Wu, Y., Ngai, E.W.T., Wu, P. and Wu, C. (2020), "Fake online reviews: literature review, synthesis, and directions for future research", *Decision Support Systems*, Vol. 132 No. May.
- Zaman, M., Vo-Thanh, T., Nguyen, C.T.K., Hasan, R., Akter, S., Mariani, M. and Hikkerova, L. (2023), "Motives for posting fake reviews: evidence from a cross-cultural comparison", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 154 No. January.
- Zaman, M., Ching Tan, C., Islam, M.S. and Selem, K.M. (2024), "Hospitality customer intentions to write fake online reviews: a cross-cultural approach", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 120 No. July.

Corresponding author

Nidhi Aggarwal can be contacted at: nidhi.aggarwal@keshav.du.ac.in