

# GOVT. TO DEVELOP FRAMEWORK TO CURB FAKE E-COMMERCE REVIEWS

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The government on Saturday said it will develop a framework to keep a check on fake reviews posted on e-commerce websites to protect consumer interest.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry, along with the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), held a virtual meeting on Friday with stakeholders, including e-commerce entities, to discuss the magnitude of fake reviews on their platforms. Fake reviews mislead consumers into buying online products and services.

According to an official statement, the Department of Consumer Affairs will develop these frameworks after studying the present mechanism being followed by the e-commerce entities in India and best practices available globally.

Consumer fora, law universities, lawyers, FICCI, CII and consumer rights activists participated in the meeting. Since e-commerce involves a virtual shopping experience without any opportunity to physically view or examine the product, consumers heavily rely on reviews posted on platforms to see the opinion and experience of users who have already purchased the product or service.

“Traceability by ensuring the authenticity of the reviewer and the associated liability of the platform are the two key issues here. Also e-commerce players must disclose as to how they choose the ‘most relevant reviews’ for display in a fair and transparent manner,” Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh said.

All stakeholders agreed that the issue deserves to be monitored closely and an appropriate framework governing the fake reviews should be developed for protection of consumer interest, the statement from the Ministry said.

Stakeholders from e-commerce companies said they have frameworks in place by which they monitor fake reviews and would be pleased to take part in developing a legal framework on the issue, it added.

Nidhi Khare, Additional Secretary, and Anupam Mishra, Joint Secretary, in the Department of Consumer Affairs also attended the meeting. Manisha Kapoor, CEO, Advertising Standards Council of India, highlighted the categories of fake and misleading reviews and their impact on consumer interest.

The issues discussed included how paid reviews, unverifiable reviews and absence of disclosure in case of incentivised reviews make it challenging for consumers.

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