

Will fake reviews be a thing of past? FHRAI's proposed framework to reveal identity of reviewer

Fake reviews about hotels and restaurants could be a thing of past if the proposed framework to check the malpractice comes to fruition. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India said the proposed framework to check fake reviews on e-commerce websites must provide for sharing the identity of reviewers with business owners. In a letter written to the Minister for Commerce & Industry, Textiles, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution Piyush Goyal, the hospitality industry body also called for treating goods and services separately under the planned regulation to curb fake and deceptive online reviews.

"One of the biggest concerns for the industry has been the lack of traceability of the reviewer, which makes it almost impossible to authenticate their review/opinion. Reviews of anonymous people end up creating a false impression which misleads the potential guests," Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) Vice President Mr. Gurbaxish Singh Kohli wrote. "It is pertinent that the identity of every customer who is writing a review is shared if not with viewers, certainly with business owners, with clear provisions of traceability of the origin of the review," he said while emphasising the necessity of the framework in order to keep fake reviewers at bay. Every review with an identified customer and an identified transaction should form the basis of customer reviews, especially in the case of services since reviews in the domain are already 'subjective' in nature, Mr. Kohli asserted.

On the need to treat goods and services separately under the proposed guidelines, he said, "...It is necessary that even if some of the guidelines are similar, they should always be defined and read differently."

According to Mr. Kohli, the framework should "clearly distinguish between goods and services, with separate set of regulations for both, as the nature, measures, standards and principles of both the transactions are completely different from each other".

He also suggested the setting up of a body to regulate the conduct of online portals, including online travel aggregators and food service aggregators allowing fake, paid, biased or unverified customer reviews. In May, the Centre had said the Department of Consumer Affairs would develop a framework to keep check over fake reviews on e-commerce websites.