
Online consumer reviews — Principles and requirements for their collection, moderation and publication

*Avis en ligne de consommateurs — Principes et exigences portant sur
les processus de collecte, modération et publication des avis*



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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for whom a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

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Introduction

Online review sites offer consumers the chance to give feedback about their experience of using products and services, for the benefit of other consumers who might be considering buying or using them, as well as valuable feedback for the suppliers that provide the products and services.

A vast number of consumer transactions and interactions now take place via the internet, and millions of consumers each year read and write online reviews. The rapid growth of consumer review sites, covering a wide range of products (e.g. clothes, electrical appliances, toys, cars) and services (e.g. restaurants, hotels, builders, plumbers, electricians, lawyers), has the potential to empower consumers and drive industry improvements, by creating a more dynamic way to exchange information. Not only are suppliers asking for consumer reviews, consumers are talking back, and talking to each other.

Review sites can benefit consumers, making it easier to research products and services, and identify those that best suit their needs in terms of function, price, quality and value for money. They allow consumers to share information about their experiences, and to seek feedback and opinions from thousands of other users. Online reviews can also be a valuable resource for suppliers, helping them to meet the needs and expectations of their customers. Consumers with personal experience of using their products or services can help to identify areas of improvement leading to better quality products, better systems, procedures and customer service. Smart suppliers understand that proactively encouraging user reviews, and responding quickly and positively to feedback, can help them to keep customers and win new ones.

As online reviews are increasingly influential to consumers' purchasing decisions, it is vital to both consumers and suppliers that sites are managed effectively to build confidence in the quality, integrity, accuracy and transparency of reviews. Both consumers and suppliers have reported some problems with online reviews. These problems might be intentional or unintentional, but can lead to a degradation of trust in the online review process. Some problems reported include:

- false positive reviews written by the supplier itself intending to mislead consumers;
- false negative reviews written by a supplier's competitors intending to ward off consumers from the organization;
- the activity of businesses specialized in "online reputation management" who offer e-commerce companies services to improve their online reviews;
- consumers using their newfound position of public critic and in effect obtaining better circumstances or other benefits from a supplier that they review;
- a lack of trust concerning the veracity of consumers' reviews, and whether organizations select the better reviews, and remove the negative ones;
- suppliers that use consumers to write positive reviews or penalize them for writing negative reviews, in some cases contracting consumers out of the right to write a negative review.

These issues form the basis for the principles in this document that are designed to resolve them.

This document offers requirements to organizations that manage consumer review sites, detailing good practice throughout the process, from collection to moderation and to publication. It gives recommendations in order to increase consumer trust in online consumer reviews, increase the protection of suppliers from exploitation and mischief, and improve the purchase decisions of consumers and the quality of products and services provided by organizations.

Organizations that choose to follow this document can be considered to be demonstrating that they value their customers and are committed to providing reviews that consumers can trust.

Online consumer reviews — Principles and requirements for their collection, moderation and publication

1 Scope

This document provides requirements and recommendations for the principles and methods for review administrators to apply in their collection, moderation and publication of online consumer reviews.

This document is applicable to any organization that publishes consumer reviews online, including suppliers of products and services that collect reviews from their own customers, a third party contracted by the supplier, or an independent third party. It is recognized that the different processes related to the collection, moderation and publication can at various times be performed by different organizations. This document is applicable to reviews published online, collected by any methodology.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

consumer review

recorded information made publicly available by a consumer [deemed to be a *review author* (3.8)] about a specified product or service provided or sold by a *supplier* (3.6)

3.2

consumer

member of the general public purchasing or using products or services from a supplier

3.3

consumer experience date

calendar date and time when the consumer made use of the product or service

3.4

identification

process for obtaining information necessary to confirm the review author as a real person

3.5

geolocation

process whereby the geographical coordinates (latitude and longitude) of a review author can be obtained automatically to identify their location

3.6

supplier

organization or individual providing a product or service being reviewed by consumers on the online review site