

## **Centre launches framework for safeguarding and protecting consumer interest from fake and deceptive reviews in e-commerce**

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- **Verification of review author, Moderation and Publication process among provisions of the Standard**
- **Conformity Assessment Scheme for the framework to be developed in 15 days**

The Department of Consumer Affairs launched the framework for safeguarding and protecting consumer interest from fake and deceptive reviews in e-commerce here today. Shri Rohit Kumar Singh, Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, along with senior officers of the department and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) launched the framework titled Indian Standard (IS) 19000:2022 'Online Consumer Reviews — Principles and Requirements for their Collection, Moderation and Publication. The standards will be applicable to every online platform which publishes consumer reviews.

The standard will initially be voluntary for compliance by all e-commerce platform. BIS will also develop a Conformity Assessment Scheme for the standard to assess compliance.

The guiding principles of the standard are integrity, accuracy, privacy, security, transparency, accessibility and responsiveness. The standard prescribes specific responsibilities for the review author and the review administrator. For review author, these include confirming acceptance of terms and conditions, providing contact information and for review administrator, these include safeguarding personal information and training of staff.

Once made mandatory, if required, the violation of the standards by any entity may be considered as an unfair trade practice or violation of consumer rights and a consumer may submit such grievances to the National Consumer Helpline, Consumer Commissions or the CCPA.

The standard provides for responsibilities of organization including developing a code of practice, and necessary stipulations for terms and conditions like accessibility, criteria, and ensuring content does not contain financial information etc.

The standard also provides for methods for verification of review author through email address, identification by telephone call or SMS, confirming registration by clicking on a link, using captcha system etc. to check traceability and genuineness of the review author.

With respect to moderation, the standard provides for both automated and manual moderation and provides checks for analyzing the review content. As regards to publication, the standard includes considerations for the review administrator at the time of publication process and after the publication process. The accuracy of the review, default display and weightage of ratings are defined in the publication process.

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## **Making Corporate India Comply**

The standard is expected to benefit all stakeholders in the e-commerce ecosystem i.e., consumers, e-commerce platforms, sellers etc. It will help usher in confidence among consumers to purchase goods online and help them take better purchase decisions.

Over the last few years, there has been a steady rise in e-commerce transactions across the country. Reviews posted online play a significant role in making purchase decisions and consumers exceedingly rely on reviews posted on e-commerce platforms to see the opinion and experience of users who have already purchased the good or service. Given that e-commerce involves a virtual shopping experience without any opportunity to physically view or examine the product, it is essential that reviews are genuine, authentic and trustworthy.

Taking cognizance of the impact of fake and deceptive reviews and protection of consumer interest in e-commerce, the Department of Consumer Affairs constituted a committee to develop framework on checking fake and deceptive reviews in e-commerce on 10th June, 2022. The committee included various stakeholders including e-commerce companies, industry associations, consumer organizations and law chairs.