Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management

An Official Publication of the Informing Science Institute InformingScience.org

IJIKM.org

Volume 21, 2026

UNMASKING SELLERS' MOTIVATIONS AND TYPOLOGY BEHIND FAKE REVIEWS: AN EXPECTANCY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Shubham Garg	Department of Commerce, Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi, India	pgp17shubhamg@iimrohtak.ac.in
Anjali Thukral	Department of Computer Science, Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi, India	athukral@keshav.du.ac.in
Nidhi Aggarwal*	Department of Commerce, Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Delhi, India	nidhi.aggarwal@keshav.du.ac.in

* Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of the study is to find the seller's motivations to engage in posting fake reviews on different online platforms and to develop the sellers' typology based on these diverse motivations.
Background	Fake reviews pose many problems on online platforms. While existing literature has focused on consumer motivations to post fake reviews and their impact on trust and purchase intention, the seller motivations to post fake reviews across different online platforms have largely been overlooked.
Methodology	This study follows a cross-sectional exploratory qualitative research approach. Data were collected from 32 respondents who posted fake reviews through semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was then conducted to identify key themes grounded in expectancy theory.
Contribution	This study advances the literature by extending expectancy theory and identifying 10 seller motivations (themes) for engaging in fake reviews across different online platforms. Among the ten motivations, three emerged as novel, namely Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews, Getting More Prepaid Orders Compared to Cash-on-Delivery Orders, and Qualifying for Platform-Based

Accepting Editor Ahmad Samed Al-Adwan | Received: July 26, 2026 | Revised: September 19, October 6, 2026 | Accepted: October 7, 2026.
Cite as: Garg, S., Thukral, A., & Aggarwal, N.. (2026). Unmasking sellers' motivations and typology behind fake reviews: An expectancy theory perspective. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management, 21,* Article 20. https://doi.org/10.28945/5896

(CC BY-NC 4.0) This article is licensed to you under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. When you copy and redistribute this paper in full or in part, you need to provide proper attribution to it to ensure that others can later locate this work (and to ensure that others do not accuse you of plagiarism). You may (and we encourage you to) adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any non-commercial purposes. This license does not permit you to use this material for commercial purposes.

	Rewards or Incentives. The study further develops a seller typology comprising four types: Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers. These findings offer a broader understanding of sellers' motivations for engaging in fake reviews beyond the conventional emphasis on sales maximization.
Findings	The analysis revealed 10 seller motivations (themes), with increasing product visibility emerging as the most frequently reported. The findings also highlighted that seller engagement in fake reviews is influenced by the expectation of increased performance, perceived outcomes of increased performance, and the value attached to the outcomes. The ten motivational themes were further examined in terms of their underlying common purposes, resulting in the development of a seller typology comprising four distinct types.
Recommendations for Researchers	To examine the platform's algorithms to test the findings of this study empirically.
Impact on Society	This study contributes to society by enhancing understanding of the motivations driving fake review practices, thereby supporting the development of more effective interventions to protect consumers and promote fair competition in online marketplaces.
Future Research	Future research may adopt longitudinal and quantitative research designs to validate the identified seller motivations and seller types across different e-commerce platforms and contexts. In addition, investigating how platform governance mechanisms, algorithmic visibility, review systems, and competitive conditions shape sellers' motivations would provide deeper insights into fake review practices and inform the development of more effective preventive and regulatory interventions.
Keywords	fake reviews, seller motivation, expectancy theory, fake review-based seller typology, e-commerce

INTRODUCTION

The rise of e-commerce platforms has transformed the marketplace, creating a vast digital ecosystem where millions of sellers compete to capture the attention of customers and increase sales. In this environment, many sellers resort to posting fake reviews to enhance their visibility, sales, and profitability. Fake reviews refer to manipulated or deceptive feedback posted to artificially enhance or damage the reputation of a product or seller (Fiedler & Kissling, 2020). In today's digital marketplace, where more than 80% of consumers rely on online reviews before making a purchase decision, the presence of fake reviews poses a significant problem (Kim, 2019). Fake reviews affect consumers' perception of the trustworthiness of reviews and ratings, which may cause consumers to make less informed purchase decisions (Gandhi et al., 2024). Not only consumers but also online platforms are negatively influenced by fake reviews. Fake reviews harm genuine sellers by distorting competition and making it difficult for sellers with superior products to enter the market (He et al., 2022). As sellers' reputation increases, the likelihood of clicks and purchases increases (Mu & Zhang, 2021); hence, sellers indulge in posting fake reviews. A study of the online platform eBay, conducted by Zhou et al. (2022), revealed that consumers were willing to pay an 8% premium for items offered by reputable sellers than for those offered by somewhat new sellers. Research conducted by He et al. (2022) showed that fake reviews can help improve several sellers' outcomes, such as search position rank and sales rank.

Past studies (Thukral et al., 2026; Zaman et al., 2023) have examined consumers' motivations for posting fake reviews. Although prior research has examined seller-related motivations in specific contexts, the existing literature offers only a limited understanding of the broader range of motivations that may influence sellers' engagement in fake review practices across different online platforms. Existing research has often associated sellers' engagement in fake review practices with sales and profit maximization as important business outcomes. However, sales and profit maximization may represent broader business outcomes rather than the only immediate motivation for engaging in fake reviews. Sellers' decisions may also be influenced by a broader, more nuanced set of motivations arising from competitive pressures, platform mechanisms, customer behaviour, and marketplace dynamics.

In this study, sellers refer to individuals or businesses that offer products for sale on online marketplaces and who have engaged in posting fake reviews. Understanding these diverse motivations may further reveal whether sellers can be classified into distinct seller types based on the underlying purposes of their engagement in fake review practices.

Hence, drawing on the expectancy theory of motivation, this study addresses these gaps through the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the motivations for sellers to engage in posting fake reviews on different online platforms?

RQ2: What different seller types can be identified based on the motivations explored in RQ1?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of seller behaviour and offer insights for online platforms and other stakeholders to develop more targeted approaches to addressing fake review practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

EXPECTANCY THEORY OF MOTIVATION

Expectancy Theory, given by Vroom (1964), is a cognitive theory of motivation that explains how an individual makes decisions based on the expected outcomes of their actions. The theory suggests that individuals are motivated to engage in a particular behaviour. Suppose they believe that their effort will be rewarded by improved performance, which will subsequently lead to desirable outcomes for that individual (Chopra, 2019). Vroom proposed the Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) framework, which views motivation as a decision-making process. Decisions depend on whether effort will lead to higher performance (Expectancy), whether higher performance leads to better outcomes or rewards (Instrumentality), and how much those rewards or outcomes are valued by the individual (Valence) (Thu & Van, 2024; Vroom, 1964). Expectancy theory has been used in organizational research to explain why employees/workers choose certain actions (Lawler, 1968; Thu & Van, 2024). Prior studies confirm that higher instrumentality and valence help in predicting stronger motivation. For instance, Ellingson and McFarland (2011) used the VIE framework to study why job applicants fake personality test results. They found that applicants were more likely to engage in such behaviour when they perceived it would increase the likelihood of achieving a favourable outcome and when that outcome was highly valued. Similar logic can be applied to sellers' engagement in fake review practices. In the present study, sellers' motivations are examined through the VIE framework by considering whether fake review practices are perceived to improve listing performance (Expectancy), whether improved performance is perceived to lead to desired outcomes (Instrumentality), and the value sellers attach to those outcomes (Valence).

Expectancy (efforts → performance)

Expectancy, in the context of sellers, refers to their belief that engaging in fake review practices will improve the performance of their product or listing. In online marketplaces, performance can be reflected in measurable listing-related indicators such as visibility, search ranking, and ratings. Thus, the

expectancy relationship in this study concerns the perceived link between the seller's action of posting fake reviews and improvements in these performance indicators. Previous research suggests that sellers may engage in fake review practices, expecting that positive reviews will improve product visibility and search rankings (Gandhi et al., 2024). Competitive retaliation may also reflect expectancy when sellers perceive that adopting similar review practices will help maintain or improve their listing's competitive performance (Zaman et al., 2023). This again can be categorized as expectancy, where the seller expects his efforts to restore the performance metric. Sometimes, when competitors engage in fake reviews, sellers do the same to improve their listing's performance relative to the competitors (Zhou et al., 2022). Platform-related pressures can also be understood through expectancy. Sellers may perceive that maintaining positive reviews will help them avoid deterioration in listing performance, such as reduced visibility or other adverse platform consequences (Sahut et al., 2024). Thus, expectancy in the present study reflects sellers' belief that engaging in fake review practices will directly improve or protect relevant performance indicators for their product or listing.

Instrumentality (performance → outcomes)

Instrumentality refers to the seller's belief that improved listing performance will lead to specific desired outcomes. Unlike expectancy, which concerns the relationship between the seller's action and performance, instrumentality concerns the subsequent relationship between improved performance and the outcomes valued by the seller. In online marketplaces, higher visibility, stronger rankings, and favourable ratings may enhance customer engagement and contribute to customer acquisition and retention (Song et al., 2023). Higher ratings may also increase the likelihood that consumers click on product listings and consider purchasing them (Mu & Zhang, 2021). Thus, sellers may perceive improved listing performance as instrumental in achieving broader commercial and customer-related outcomes. Previous research has also linked greater product visibility and improved rankings with higher sales performance (Chen et al., 2019; Gandhi et al., 2024). Accordingly, the instrumentality component in this study captures sellers' belief that improvements in listing performance resulting from fake review practices will subsequently contribute to outcomes such as customer engagement, customer acquisition, customer retention, and sales.

Valence (value of outcomes)

Valence refers to the subjective value or desirability that an individual attaches to an expected outcome (Vroom, 1964). In the context of the present study, sellers may attach value to different outcomes associated with improved marketplace performance. Sales and profit represent important, valued outcomes because sellers generally associate successful marketplace performance with financial benefits (Gandhi et al., 2024). Chen et al. (2019) noted the relationship between sales performance and sellers' efforts to enhance reputation through fake reviews. Similarly, prior research has identified financial gain and product promotion as motivations for sellers' use of fake reviews (Thukral et al., 2026). However, sales and profit are not the only outcomes that may carry value for sellers. Customer trust, customer engagement, prepaid orders, competitive protection, and platform-based rewards may also be valued outcomes depending on the seller's circumstances. Thus, in this study, valence represents the value sellers attach to the outcomes they expect to obtain through improved marketplace performance, rather than being limited exclusively to sales or profit maximization. In fact, it is clear that sellers value sales (profit), which justifies classifying the motivation of increasing sales and similar motives under valence. The conceptual framework of sellers' motivations to post fake reviews is presented in Table 1.

Collectively, the literature shows that fake reviews can improve sellers' visibility, ratings, and sales, and that sellers' engagement in such practices varies with reputation, competition, and platform mechanisms. However, three gaps remain. Firstly, most studies have either focused on detecting fake reviews (Das et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2020), examined consumers' motivations for posting fake reviews (Thukral et al., 2026; Zaman et al., 2023), or inferred sellers' motives from secondary data and analytical models (Luca & Zervas, 2016; Mayzlin et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2025) rather than exploring motiva-

tions from sellers' own perspectives. Second, seller engagement in fake reviews has largely been explained through sales and profit maximization, which may not capture more immediate operational, customer-related, or platform-related motivations. Third, recent studies show that platform design choices, such as the way ratings are displayed, directly affect sellers' sales (Aziz et al., 2023) and that merchants' decisions to manipulate reviews change in response to platform supervision and penalties (Xu et al., 2025). The VIE framework provides a structured basis for addressing these gaps by distinguishing sellers' beliefs about effort, performance, and outcomes. Thus, this study explores sellers' motivations to post fake reviews (RQ1) and identifies seller types based on these motivations (RQ2).

Table 1. Conceptual framework based on the literature

Seller's motivation	VIE component
Increasing product visibility (Gandhi et al., 2024)	Expectancy
Counteracting competitors' fake negative reviews (Zaman et al., 2023)	Expectancy
Competitive retaliation (Zaman et al., 2023)	Expectancy
Platform policy compliance (He et al., 2022)	Expectancy
Attracting new customers or retaining existing ones (Song et al., 2023)	Instrumentality
Stronger buyer trust and engagement (Mu & Zhang, 2021)	Instrumentality
Increased sales and profit (Gandhi et al., 2024)	Valence

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research methodology for RQ1 and RQ2 was followed, as depicted in Figure 1.

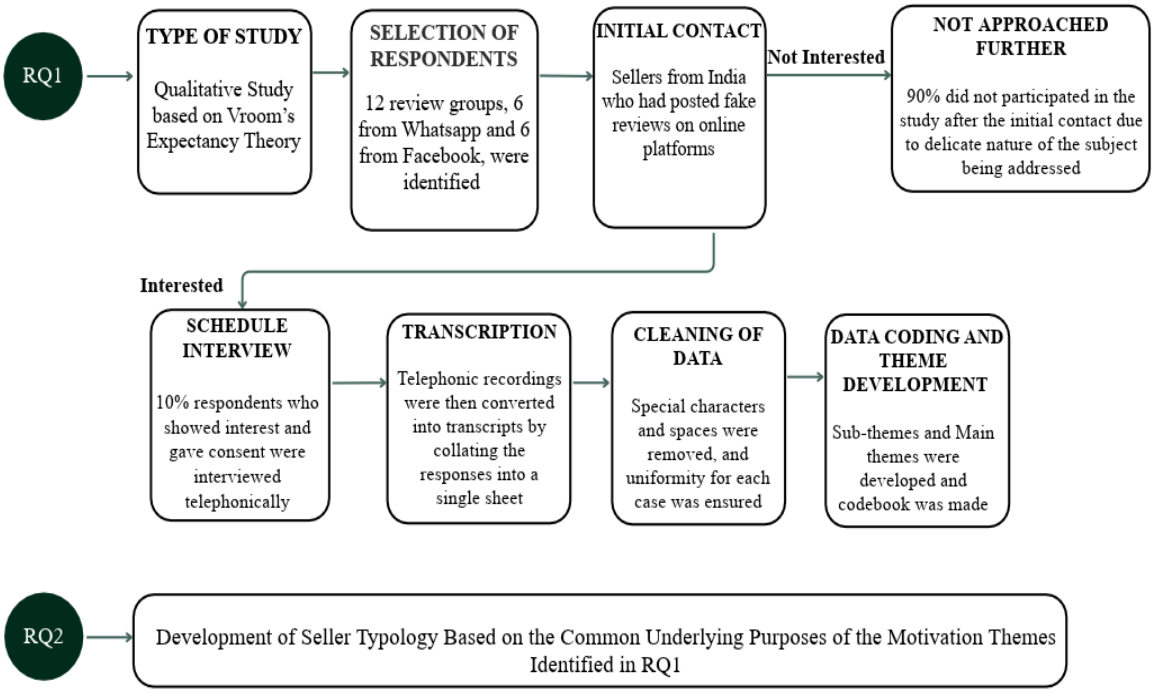

Figure 1. Research methodology for the proposed research

Research Design

To address the RQs, this study employs a cross-sectional, exploratory qualitative research approach. Given the sensitive nature of fake review practices and the limited understanding of sellers' motivations to engage in fake reviews, a qualitative approach is most suitable for understanding the depth of sellers' perspectives and motivations (Fossey et al., 2002).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which enabled respondents to provide detailed insights into their experiences and motivations. Before data collection began, the study was granted an exemption from formal ethical approval because it was determined to be a minimal-risk qualitative social science study involving competent adult participants. Only sellers who had previously engaged in posting fake reviews were recruited for the study. Given the sensitive nature of the research, respondents were identified through snowball sampling, which is considered appropriate for accessing hidden or hard-to-reach populations (Zaman et al., 2023). The recruitment process began with the researchers contacting potential participants through seller communities on Facebook and WhatsApp. Individuals who met the eligibility criterion (i.e., having posted fake reviews) and voluntarily agreed to participate were invited to the interviews.

Before each interview, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the intended academic use of the information collected, their right to refuse to answer any question, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced, including explicit consent for audio recording.

Data were collected from 32 respondents. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of existing codes and themes and the absence of substantially new themes in the subsequent interviews (Malterud et al., 2016). Of the 32 respondents, 19 were male, and 13 were female. The participants had varying levels of experience selling on e-commerce platforms, thereby ensuring diversity in perspectives. The interviews were conducted telephonically, lasted approximately 30 - 45 minutes each, and were carried out over a period of approximately two months, from January 2026 to February 2026. The interviews were conducted by multilingual researchers who were fluent in both Hindi and English, allowing participants to communicate in their preferred language. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' explicit consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Prior to data collection, the researchers agreed upon a standardized interview protocol to ensure consistency throughout the interview process. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and an extensive review of the literature. The interview schedule, participant information sheet, consent statements, and confidentiality and data management information are provided in the Appendix.

To protect participants' privacy, all identifying information, including names, contact details, business names, and platform account information, was stored separately from the research data and not used in the analysis. During transcription, each respondent was assigned a unique identification code (e.g., R1-R32), and only anonymized transcripts were used for coding, analysis, and reporting. Access to the audio recordings, interview transcripts, and consent records was restricted to the researchers directly involved in the study. All electronic records were securely stored in password-protected files. Audio recordings and identifiable research records, including consent records, will be securely deleted after completion of the research and publication process, while anonymized transcripts will be retained solely for academic record and research verification purposes in accordance with institutional data management practices. The demographic profiles of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent profile (N=32)

Variable	Cases (%)
Gender	
Male	19 (59.37)
Female	13 (40.63)
Age Group	
Less than 21	8 (25)
21-30	13 (40.62)
31-40	11 (34.37)
Education Level	
Undergraduate	10 (31.25)
Graduate	19 (59.37)
Postgraduate	3 (9.37)
Number of Years Selling on Online Platforms	
Less than 2 years	7 (21.87)
2-5 years	17 (53.12)
5-10 years	6 (18.75)
More than 10 years	2 (6.25)

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were classified into sub-themes and the main themes using the "Bottom-up" approach of grounded theory, which is recommended for the analysis of qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, all the interview recordings were transcribed and then cleaned by removing any special characters and formatting inconsistencies. Finally, the prepared data were imported into NVivo 15 software for analysis. The analysis began with line-by-line open coding to identify meaningful units of data. Descriptive codes were assigned to specific sections of the interview transcripts. Whenever possible, the in vivo coding method was applied, using the interviewee's own words as codes (Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018). The coding process involved all three authors, who independently reviewed and coded the interview transcripts to identify and develop initial codes. The coding outcomes were subsequently compared among the three authors, and any differences in coding were discussed collectively until consensus was reached. This process helped establish consistency in the interpretation and categorization of the interview data.

Following the initial coding, codes were grouped into sub-themes. The sub-themes were then consolidated into broader themes representing the motivations underlying sellers' engagement in fake review practices. Through this iterative coding process, ten distinct motivation themes were identified. The identified themes were systematically reviewed against the original interview data to assess their coherence with participants' accounts and to ensure that each theme represented a distinct dimension of sellers' motivations.

Following the identification of the ten motivation themes, the three authors jointly examined them in relation to the broader purposes they served in sellers' engagement in fake review practices. Motivational themes that reflected a common, broader purpose were organized into four seller types. The three authors discussed the proposed groupings and reached consensus on the final classification of the ten motivation themes into four seller types: Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers. The seller typology was not predetermined before data collection or analysis; rather, it emerged inductively from patterns identified in the interview data.

FINDINGS

SELLER MOTIVATIONS

RQ1: What are the motivations for sellers to engage in posting fake reviews on different online platforms?

The thematic analysis of data collected from respondents identified 10 motivations (themes) underlying engagement in fake review practices across different online platforms. These themes were derived through a systematic coding process. Collectively, these themes capture a range of performance-driven and outcome-oriented considerations that influence seller behaviour in online marketplaces. The identified themes, sub-themes, respondents' details, and frequency (references) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes, sub-themes, respondents' details, and frequency (references)

Theme (motivation)	Sub-theme	Respondents	References
Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones	Attracting new customers; Retaining existing customers; Influencing purchase decisions	R2, R6, R10, R13, R15, R1, R14, R21, R27, R31	10
Competitive Retaliation	Responding to competitors' unfair practices; Remaining competitive; Adapting to market norms	R2, R12, R18, R20, R24, R26, R27, R31	8
Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews	Compensating for lack of genuine reviews; Balancing negative review dominance; Increasing review availability	R1, R3, R4, R10, R22, R6, R11, R19, R21, R25, R30	11
Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews	Protecting product listings; Responding to fake negative reviews; Restoring product reputation	R7, R9, R11, R12, R26, R31	6
Get More Prepaid Orders Compared to Cash-on-Delivery Orders	Encouraging prepaid purchases; Reducing cash settlement cycle; Improving financial efficiency	R11, R13, R14, R21, R25, R13, R16, R17, R29	9
Increased Sales and Profit	Increasing sales; Moving inventory; Supporting business livelihood	R11, R15, R23, R25, R29, R30, R1, R7, R12, R15, R18, R24, R31	13
Increasing Product Visibility	Improving search ranking; Increasing marketplace visibility; Standing out among competing sellers	R2, R5, R7, R8, R14, R20, R23, R26, R11, R12, R19, R22, R31, R1, R11, R14, R27	17
Platform Policy Compliance	Maintaining seller ratings; Preventing loss of platform visibility; Responding to platform requirements	R12, R16, R23, R27, R1, R9, R11, R14, R19, R21, R26	11

Theme (motivation)	Sub-theme	Respondents	References
Qualify for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives	Obtaining platform badges; Achieving reward eligibility; Leveraging platform incentive mechanisms	R3, R4, R7, R28, R11, R16, R30	7
Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement	Enhancing buyer trust; Increasing customer engagement; Improving listing credibility	R2, R3, R4, R17, R28, R10, R13, R14, R30, R32	10

The ten motivations identified are: Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones, Competitive Retaliation, Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews, Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews, Get More Prepaid Orders Compared to Cash-on-Delivery Orders, Increased Sales and Profit, Increasing Product Visibility, Platform Policy Compliance, Qualify for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives, Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement While seven out of ten motivations align with prior research, three motivations (themes) emerge as distinct contributions of this study, i.e., Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews, Get More Prepaid Orders Compared to Cash-on-Delivery Orders, and Qualify for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives. The explored themes are explained below in detail.

Customers' unwillingness to post genuine reviews

One of the key findings of this study is that respondents believe that customers are unwilling to write reviews when they are satisfied with the product, which creates a need to post fake reviews. This highlights the imbalance in review generation, where dissatisfied customers are more vocal than satisfied ones.

> **R22:** When customers are dissatisfied even with a small detail of the product, they immediately give a negative review, but when they are completely satisfied, they do not give any review at all. Because of this, only negative reviews are visible, and therefore, I need to post fake positive reviews.

Get more prepaid orders compared to cash-on-delivery (COD) orders

The respondents also highlighted that positive reviews led to more prepaid orders due to increased trust in the product, which benefited respondents by reducing the cash settlement cycle (Anjum & Chai, 2020). This reflects the importance of reviews in building trust, which not only increases sales but also improves operational and financial efficiency.

> **R13:** I prefer prepaid orders over COD orders because the cash settlement cycle is shorter in prepaid orders. If my product's reviews are positive, it increases credibility and customer trust, which makes them more likely to make prepaid orders.

Qualify for platform-based rewards or incentives

Respondents reported posting fake reviews to qualify for platform-based rewards, such as badges and recognition tags. This finding sheds light on the role of Platform-Based rewards structure in shaping seller engagement in fake reviews.

> **R32:** When my product comes with the 'Amazon Choice' tag in search, its click-through doubles. I have experienced this myself. For that tag, I need to maintain a strong number of reviews. And yes, it brings stability to my business also.

Increasing product visibility

Respondents reported that fake reviews enhance the product's visibility in search rankings. This aligns with prior research highlighting the role of reviews in influencing product ranking and visibility (Gandhi et al., 2024).

> **R8:** So many sellers have come on the platform now that it feels like everyone is standing in the jungle and trying to be noticed. What shows on top sells, what is below keeps thinking. I have to stay on top if it will happen through reviews then so be it.

Counteracting competitors' fake negative reviews

Respondents also reported engaging in fake reviews to counteract the negative fake reviews posted by competitors. Such behaviour is consistent with findings that sellers manipulate reviews to counter competitors' attacks (Zaman et al., 2023).

> **R9:** There is a competitor who keeps coming on my listing and writes negative reviews. I know because that review comes right after the product that he also sells. I reported to Amazon nothing happened. So, to protect my listing, I have to do something myself.

Competitive retaliation

Some respondents actively engage in fake reviews in retaliatory efforts against competitors. This reinforces the existing literature that suggests that fake reviews can escalate into competitive cycles (Zaman et al., 2023).

> **R24:** I heard a fellow seller saying that he posts reviews on his own listing. I felt bad at first. But then my sales dropped to half of his. Since then, I decided that if you want to stay in the market, you have to play by the market's rules.

Platform policy compliance

Respondents also reported engaging in fake reviews due to platform policy pressure, i.e., policies that incentivize manipulation by linking positive reviews to visibility and seller viability (He et al., 2022).

> **R27:** My sister also has a store on Amazon. She never let her rating drop. Says 'if rating drops, the platform itself pushes you back, no external thing does it. 'Hearing this, I also get scared. Since then, no matter what, I kept my reviews high, no matter the means.

Attracting new customers or retaining existing ones

Respondents highlighted that positive reviews are necessary in influencing customers' decisions and maintaining a steady customer base. This reflects the established role of online reviews in shaping and maintaining a customer base, consistent with prior literature (Song et al., 2023).

> **R13:** Old customers only return when they have trust. A new customer only trusts you when the reviews are good. That's the reason I have to post fake reviews to maintain a good number of positive reviews.

Stronger buyer trust and engagement

Respondents highlighted that fake reviews resulted in increased customer engagement (Clicks on product listings, adding to cart) and in the perceived trustworthiness of their listings. This aligns with existing literature showing reviews as a signal of seller credibility (Mu & Zhang, 2021).

> **R17:** When there are good reviews on my listing, I can myself see in analytics impression go up, clicks go up, conversion also goes up a little. It is all one chain. If one step breaks, everything stops.

Increased sales and profit

Respondents highlighted that engaging in posting fake reviews was important for financial gains, i.e., increased sales and profits. This aligns with prior research showing a relationship between reviews and sales performance (Gandhi et al., 2024).

> **R25.** I'll be blunt, I want sales. I have to run a business, move stock, and look after my family. When reviews are good, it sells. When they aren't, it doesn't.

The hierarchy chart in Figure 2 shows that 'Increasing Product Visibility' is the most frequently reported motivation, indicating that respondents are most driven to post fake reviews to increase product visibility. The hierarchy chart is derived from the number of coding references.

Figure 2. Hierarchy chart by number of coding references (from NVivo 15 software)

Types of Sellers

RQ2: What different seller types can be identified based on the motivations explored in RQ1?

To address RQ2, the ten motivation themes identified under RQ1 were compared according to the underlying purpose and behavioural objective represented by each theme. Motivational themes that reflected similar purposes were grouped under a broader, common underlying purpose. This process resulted in the development of four distinct seller types: Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Seller typology based on data collected from respondents

Seller types	Motivation themes
Visibility Maximizers	Increasing Product Visibility; Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones; Increased Sales and Profit
Defensive Seller	Competitive Retaliation; Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews; Platform Policy Compliance
Trust Builders	Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews; Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement; Get More Prepaid Orders Compared to COD Orders
Platform Gamers	Qualify for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives

The seller typology emerged from the interview data and was not predetermined before the analysis. It represents a broader, underlying purpose rather than classifications of individual sellers based on a single motivation, since an individual seller could experience multiple motivations simultaneously. The four seller types are explained below.

Visibility Maximizers

Visibility Maximizers represent a common underlying purpose centred on improving marketplace visibility and commercial performance. This seller type comprises three motivation themes identified under RQ1, namely Increasing Product Visibility, Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones, and Increased Sales and Profit. Increasing Product Visibility reflects sellers' perception that fake reviews could help their products gain greater visibility and attention in competitive online marketplaces. Sellers associated reviews with a product's ability to become more noticeable and attract potential buyers. Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones reflects sellers' perception that positive reviews could encourage potential customers to consider their products and reinforce the confidence of existing customers. Thus, fake reviews were perceived as a means of influencing customer response towards the product. Increased Sales and Profit represents the expected commercial outcome of improved visibility and customer response. Sellers perceived greater product exposure and customer interest as contributing to improved business performance. Although these three motivations differ in their immediate outcomes, they serve a common underlying purpose: improving the seller's marketplace performance by increasing product exposure, influencing customer responses, and ultimately generating favourable commercial outcomes. Therefore, Increasing Product Visibility, Attracting New Customers or Retaining Existing Ones, and Increased Sales and Profit were organized under the Visibility Maximizers type.

Defensive Sellers

Defensive Sellers represent a common underlying purpose centred on protecting the seller's competitive position and responding to perceived marketplace pressures. This seller type comprises Competitive Retaliation, Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews, and Platform Policy Compliance.

Competitive Retaliation refers to situations in which sellers perceive fake review practices as a response to competitors' actions. Sellers viewed such practices as a way to respond to competitive actions in the marketplace. Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews represents a more specific competitive response. Sellers reported engaging in fake review practices when they believed that competitors were using negative fake reviews against their products. Fake reviews were consequently perceived as a means of protecting their products from perceived competitive threats. Platform Policy Compliance reflects sellers' perceptions of platform-related expectations and requirements. Sellers indicated that platform rules, requirements, or perceived performance expectations could influence their engagement in review-related practices. These three motivations arise from different situations,

but they serve a common underlying purpose of protecting the seller's marketplace position in response to competitive or platform-related pressures. Competitive Retaliation addresses competitive actions, Counteracting Competitors' Fake Negative Reviews addresses perceived attacks on the seller's products, and Platform Policy Compliance reflects responses to platform-related pressures. Therefore, these three motivation themes were organized under the Defensive Sellers type.

Trust Builders

Trust Builders represent a common underlying purpose centred on strengthening customer confidence and influencing customer-related outcomes. This seller type comprises Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews, Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement, and Getting More Prepaid Orders Compared to COD orders. Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews reflects sellers' perception that customers were sometimes unwilling or unlikely to provide genuine reviews. Sellers perceived the resulting lack of customer-generated feedback as a gap that could affect the perceived credibility of their products. Fake reviews were therefore used to compensate for the limited availability of genuine customer feedback. Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement reflects sellers' perception that positive reviews could strengthen customer confidence and encourage greater engagement with their products. Reviews were perceived as signals that could reduce purchase uncertainty and enhance perceived product credibility.

Getting More Prepaid Orders Compared to COD Orders represents a transaction-related motivation. Sellers associated greater customer confidence with a higher likelihood that customers would choose prepaid transactions over cash-on-delivery. From the sellers' perspective, this purchasing behaviour could provide operational and financial benefits. These three motivations serve a common underlying purpose: influencing customer perceptions and purchasing behaviour by strengthening perceived credibility and reducing uncertainty. Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews reflects the need to overcome limited genuine feedback, Stronger Buyer Trust and Engagement reflects the objective of strengthening customer confidence, and Getting More Prepaid Orders compared to COD Orders reflects the desired transaction-related outcome. Therefore, these motivation themes were organized under the Trust Builders type.

Platform Gamers

Platform Gamers represent a common underlying purpose centred on obtaining benefits through platform-specific mechanisms. This seller type comprises Qualifying for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives. Qualifying for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives reflects sellers' efforts to obtain recognition, rewards, incentives, or other benefits associated with platform mechanisms. Sellers perceived review-related activities as potentially contributing to their eligibility for such platform-based benefits.

The underlying purpose of this motivation is to use review-related activity to obtain benefits offered or facilitated by the platform. Unlike the motivations associated with visibility, competitive defence, or customer confidence, this motivation is directly linked to platform-specific reward and incentive structures. Therefore, Qualifying for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives was organized under the Platform Gamers type.

Consequently, the findings establish a direct analytical relationship between RQ1 and RQ2. RQ1 identified the motivations underlying sellers' engagement in fake review practices, whereas RQ2 organized these motivations by the purposes they served and identified four broader seller types. Together, these four seller types demonstrate that a single universal motivation does not drive the generation of fake reviews. Instead, sellers engage in such practices for various strategic purposes, highlighting the heterogeneity of the motivations underlying fake review behaviour. Figure 3 presents the conceptual mapping of the identified seller motivations to the four seller types.

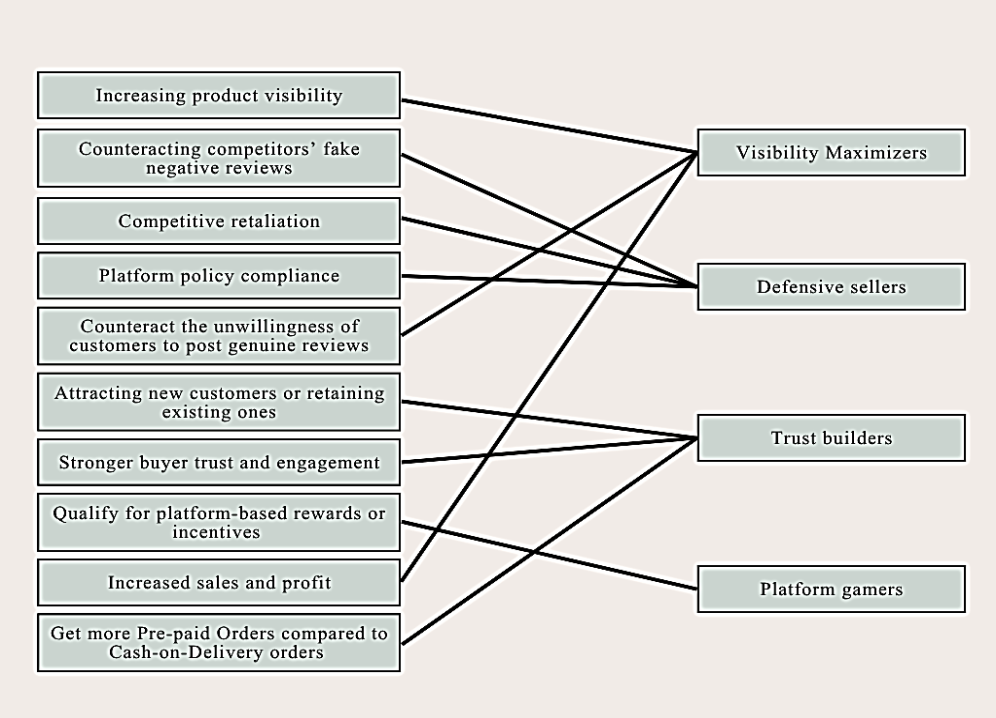

Figure 3. Mapping of different seller motivations with different seller typologies

DISCUSSION

The first research question sought to identify the motivations underlying sellers' engagement in fake review practices. The findings of this study extended Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory by classifying sellers' motivation to post fake reviews across different online platforms within the VIE framework. The present study highlights how seller engagement in fake reviews is shaped by multiple motivations that can be understood within the VIE Framework. Upon thematic analysis, the researchers explored ten distinct motivations (themes). Among these, three motivations emerge as novel contributions of this study and are particularly significant in understanding seller behaviour in contemporary marketplace settings. The three new motivations were Customers' Unwillingness to Post Genuine Reviews, Get More Prepaid Orders Compared to Cash-on-Delivery Orders, and Qualify for Platform-Based Rewards or Incentives. Although these motivations may ultimately contribute to improved sales and profitability, the interview findings suggest that sellers perceived them as immediate, distinct reasons for engaging in fake review practices rather than merely as expressions of a general profit motive.

Customers' unwillingness to post genuine reviews suggests that sellers may perceive a gap in the review ecosystem and resort to fake reviews to compensate for limited customer-generated content. The motivation to obtain more prepaid orders than cash-on-delivery orders highlights an operational and financial consideration that has received limited attention in research on fake reviews. Qualifying for platform-based rewards or incentives further demonstrates how platform structures can indirectly shape seller behaviour by creating incentives around review-related performance. Collectively, these motivations suggest that fake review practices may arise from the interaction between seller objectives, customer behaviour, and platform mechanisms. Thus, the findings extend existing research by shifting the explanation of fake reviews from an individual profit-seeking perspective towards a broader seller–customer–platform perspective.

For instance, respondents frequently described customers' unwillingness to post genuine reviews despite satisfactory purchase experiences as creating an imbalance in online review ecosystems. In response, sellers perceived fake reviews as a means of compensating for the lack of positive customer-generated content. Likewise, several respondents reported posting fake reviews to increase prepaid orders relative to COD orders, indicating a shift from sellers' purely sales-driven concerns to financial efficiency concerns. Sellers reported that prepaid orders usually have a shorter cash settlement cycle than COD orders; therefore, they post fake reviews to increase their prepaid orders (Anjum & Chai, 2020). Similarly, respondents described maintaining high review volumes to qualify for platform-based rewards and recognition, such as badges and recommendation labels, which were perceived as beneficial independently of immediate sales outcomes. These motivations, therefore, represent distinct operational and platform-related considerations that influence sellers' decision-making. The findings suggest that while increased sales and profitability may be the ultimate business objective, sellers do not necessarily engage in fake review practices solely for this reason. Rather, fake review generation is driven by multiple immediate motivations that reflect the realities of operating within online marketplaces. Distinguishing between immediate motivations and broader business outcomes contributes to a more nuanced understanding of seller behaviour and extends the existing fake review literature by highlighting the complexity of motivations underlying fake review generation.

In addition to these three, seven motivations were consistent with existing literature. Increasing product visibility emerged as the most prominent motivation, as shown in Table 3. A higher number of positive reviews is perceived to be directly influencing a product's search ranking and visibility (Gandhi et al., 2024). Motivations to attract new customers, retain existing ones, and increase customer engagement underscore the importance of reviews as signals of trust and credibility (Luca & Zervas, 2016; Mu & Zhang, 2021). Competitive dynamics also play an important role in shaping seller engagement in posting fake reviews. Sellers engage in fake reviews to counteract negative fake reviews by competitors as well as due to competitive retaliation, i.e., competitors posting positive fake reviews to promote their own listing, therefore compelling the seller to use the same strategy (Zaman et al., 2023). Platform policy pressure is also a major reason for sellers' persistence in posting fake reviews. Sellers reported that platform mechanisms create a need to maintain positive reviews. Lower or negative reviews can lead to reduced visibility and potential penalties, which reinforces the importance of maintaining positive reviews (He et al., 2022). Finally, increasing sales and profits remain important motivations for sellers' engagement in posting fake reviews. Consistent with prior literature, sellers associate a higher number of positive reviews with higher sales (Ye et al., 2009), indicating that sales continue to play an important role in shaping engagement. Posting fake reviews on different online platforms is shaped by a combination of diverse motivations.

The second research question sought to identify different seller types in relation to fake review practices. The findings demonstrate that sellers engaging in fake review practices do not constitute a homogeneous group. Although all respondents acknowledged posting fake reviews, they differed in the motivations underlying their behaviour. This variation led to the emergence of a seller typology comprising four conceptually distinct seller types: *Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers.*

The seller typology provides a more comprehensive understanding of fake review behaviour by demonstrating that similar behaviours may originate from different strategic motivations. Visibility Maximizers, i.e., those sellers who engage in posting fake reviews to enhance their product discoverability, search ranking, and increase the perceived credibility of their product listing. For these sellers, reviews function as signals that directly influence their product visibility on online platforms, increase customer engagement, and also influence customers' purchase decisions. Defensive Sellers, i.e., those sellers who engage in posting fake reviews to survive competition in online platforms and in response to the action of competitors, including both negative and positive fake reviews by the com-

petitor. Their engagement in fake reviews is for their survival rather than rapid growth. Trust Builders, i.e., those sellers who view fake reviews as a mechanism for strengthening customer confidence, compensating for the limited availability of genuine positive reviews, and encouraging purchasing behaviours that improve business efficiency. Platform Gamers strategically engage in fake-review practices to obtain platform-based rewards and recognition tied to review metrics. They are sellers motivated by platform-induced pressures, in which fake reviews are used not just for sales maximization but also as a response to platform policy pressure. Collectively, these findings indicate that sellers differ not in the behaviour itself, but in the strategic purpose they associate with fake review generation.

An important contribution of this study is the development of a seller typology that provides a structured classification of broader motivational patterns underlying sellers' behaviour based on the common underlying purposes of the identified motivation themes. Unlike the individual motivation themes identified under RQ1, the seller types capture broader behavioural patterns that emerged inductively from the interview data. Each motivation theme was assigned exclusively to one seller type based on its underlying purpose, thereby minimizing conceptual overlap and ensuring clear conceptual boundaries among the identified seller types as given in Figure 3. The identified seller types represent distinct motivational patterns based on common underlying purposes rather than mutually exclusive categories. Because sellers may simultaneously experience multiple motivations for engaging in fake review practices, an individual seller may exhibit characteristics associated with more than one seller type. However, for analytical purposes, each motivation theme was assigned exclusively to a single seller type based on its underlying purpose, thereby maintaining conceptual clarity while capturing the multidimensional nature of sellers' motivations. This approach enables the typology to distinguish among common underlying purposes while acknowledging that multiple coexisting motivations may drive seller behavior in practice. Consequently, the typology represents four distinct groups of motivation themes based on their common underlying purposes, rather than overlapping individual-level categories.

The findings should also be interpreted within the context of the study sample. The typology was developed exclusively from interviews with sellers who acknowledged engaging in fake-review practices and therefore reflects variation within this specific group of sellers. Accordingly, the identified seller types should not be interpreted as representative of the broader population of online sellers or as suggesting that all sellers respond similarly to marketplace conditions. Rather, the typology provides insight into how participating sellers perceived and justified their engagement in fake review generation.

Overall, the seller typology advances the fake review literature by demonstrating that fake review generation is driven by diverse strategic motivations rather than a single universal objective. By moving beyond a one-dimensional explanation of seller behaviour, the typology offers a richer conceptual understanding of the heterogeneity among sellers who engage in fake-review practices. It provides a useful framework for future research examining differences across seller groups.

If seller engagement in posting fake reviews across different online platforms were driven solely by the sales-maximization motive, it could have been addressed through stricter regulations and enforcement. However, these typologies suggest that fake reviews are perceived not as optional but as necessary responses to platform policies and the competitive environment. This shifts the explanation from individual intent to system-level dynamics, in which platform design, algorithmic visibility, and market norms collectively shape how sellers behave in these situations. Without such typologies, the complexity of seller behaviour remains difficult to interpret, limiting both theoretical and practical insights. Based on the discussion, a new conceptual framework of sellers' motivation to post fake reviews on different online platforms is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. New conceptual framework

Seller's motivation	VIE component
Increasing product visibility	Expectancy
Counteracting competitors' fake negative reviews	Expectancy
Competitive retaliation	Expectancy
Platform policy compliance	Expectancy
Customers unwillingness to post genuine reviews **(Newly identified theme)**	Expectancy
Attracting new customers or retaining existing ones	Instrumentality
Stronger buyer trust and engagement.	Instrumentality
Qualify for platform-based rewards or incentives **(Newly identified theme)**	Instrumentality
Increased sales and profit	Valence
Get more Prepaid Orders compared to Cash-on-Delivery orders **(Newly identified theme)**	Valence

CONCLUSION

This exploratory qualitative study examined sellers' motivations for engaging in fake review practices across online platforms. The study identified ten motivation themes, including three novel motivations: customers' unwillingness to post genuine reviews, obtaining more prepaid orders compared with cash-on-delivery orders, and qualifying for platform-based rewards or incentives. The findings demonstrate that sellers' engagement in fake review practices is driven by diverse motivations that extend beyond conventional objectives of profit and sales maximization. The study further developed a seller typology comprising four types: Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers. These findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of fake review practices by linking sellers' motivations with the underlying purposes that drive their behaviour.

The findings have important theoretical and practical implications for understanding and addressing fake review practices. The theoretical implications are discussed first, followed by the practical implications for e-commerce platforms and other stakeholders. The limitations of the study and directions for future research are then presented.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

First, this research confirms all the motives of the seller for engaging in posting fake reviews identified in the extant literature (Table 1). Additionally, this research also allows for the extension of the spectrum of Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory by shedding light on the relevance of this theory in investigating the motives for engaging in fake reviews.

Second, it advances the literature on fake reviews by adding three new motives (themes) through thematic analysis, i.e., customers' unwillingness to post genuine reviews, to get more prepaid orders compared to COD orders, and to gain platform-specific rewards or incentives, out of a total of ten motivations(themes). Thus, we theoretically contribute to the current literature on fake reviews by proposing a new conceptual framework of sellers' motivation for engaging in fake reviews (Table 5).

Finally, an important contribution of the study is the development of a seller typology that provides a structured classification based on the common underlying purposes of the identified motivation themes. Four seller types were identified: Visibility Maximizers, Defensive Sellers, Trust Builders, and Platform Gamers. Thus, the study extends the existing fake review literature by providing a novel

classification of seller types based on the different motivations underlying their engagement in fake review practices.

Practical Implications

First, platforms should redesign ranking algorithms to reduce over-reliance on review volume and incorporate verified behavioural signals, such as repeat purchases and return rates. This may particularly address the behaviour of Visibility Maximizers, who use fake reviews to improve product visibility and search ranking.

Second, platforms should facilitate genuine review generation, particularly for new sellers. For example, Early Reviewer Programs can encourage verified buyers to provide reviews for new products through small incentives. Such mechanisms may reduce the dependence of Trust Builders on artificially generated reviews to establish customer confidence.

Third, platforms should develop an overall seller credibility score based on parameters such as return rates, order defect rates, cancellation rates, and other verified seller-performance indicators. This can reduce sellers' dependence on reviews as the primary signal of credibility and help identify Visibility Maximizers whose activities are linked to competitive or visibility-related pressures.

Fourth, platforms should review reward and recognition mechanisms associated with review-related metrics. Excessive emphasis on badges, incentives, or other platform rewards may unintentionally encourage Platform Gamers to manipulate review systems. Platforms should therefore ensure that such rewards are linked to verified customer experiences rather than review volume alone.

Final, platforms can encourage cross-platform data sharing to identify repeat offenders and coordinated manipulation networks. For example, Coalition for Trusted Reviews (CFTR) represents an important early step in this direction.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. *First,* it is a cross-sectional study and therefore does not capture the ever-changing marketplace dynamics and evolving motivations due to changes in platform policies and competitive conditions. Future researchers can conduct a longitudinal study, which could provide deeper insights into how motivations evolve. *Second,* the qualitative approach and the relatively small, purposively selected sample limit the transferability of the findings to other seller populations and platform contexts. Future research could adopt quantitative or mixed-methods approaches with larger, more diverse samples to further validate the identified motivations and seller typology. *Third,* while the study highlights platform-induced incentives, it does not directly examine platform algorithms or internal mechanisms that shape seller behaviour; therefore, future studies could deepen the investigation to uncover the structural mechanisms that incentivize or deter fake review practices. *Finally,* future research may compare sellers who engage in fake review practices with those who do not to examine whether similar seller types emerge across different seller populations.

Overall, this study provides a seller-centric understanding of fake review practices by identifying the diverse motivations underlying such behaviour and developing a corresponding seller typology. By connecting seller motivations with platform structures and incentives, the study provides a foundation for future research and for the development of more targeted platform and regulatory interventions.

Acknowledgement

Nil.

Author Contributions

All the authors of this paper made an equal contribution.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest associated with the content of this paper.

Ethics Approval

The study was granted an ethical exemption by the Advisory Committee for Research (ACR), Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, prior to the commencement of data collection (Reference No. ACR/2026/22035504041-01, dated 4 February 2026).

Funding

This research has not received any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, not-for-profit, or commercial sectors.

REFERENCES

Anjum, S., & Chai, J. (2020). Drivers of cash-on-delivery method of payment in e-commerce shopping: Evidence from Pakistan. *Sage Open, 10*(3), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020917392

Aziz, A., Li, H., & Telang, R. (2023). The consequences of rating inflation on platforms: Evidence from a quasi-experiment. *Information Systems Research, 34*(2), 590–608. https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2022.1134

Chen, L., Li, W., Chen, H., & Geng, S. (2019). Detection of fake reviews: Analysis of sellers' manipulation behavior. *Sustainability, 11*(17), 4802. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11174802

Chopra, K. (2019). Indian shopper motivation to use artificial intelligence: Generating Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation using grounded theory approach. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 47*(3), 331–347. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-11-2018-0251

Das, R., Ahmed, W., Sharma, K., Hardey, M., Dwivedi, Y. K., Zhang, Z., Apostolidis, C., & Filieri, R. (2024). Towards the development of an explainable e-commerce fake review index: An attribute analytics approach. *European Journal of Operational Research, 317*(2), 382–400. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2024.03.008

Ellingson, J. E., & McFarland, L. A. (2011). Understanding faking behavior through the lens of motivation: An application of VIE theory. *Human Performance, 24*(4), 322–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/08959285.2011.597477

Fiedler, M., & Kissling, M. (2020). Fake reviews in e-commerce marketing. *Herald of Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics, 130*(2), 77–86. https://doi.org/10.31617/visnik.knute.2020(130)07

Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 36*(6), 717–732. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.01100.x

Gandhi, A., Hollenbeck, B., & Li, Z. (2024). *Misinformation and mistrust: The equilibrium effects of fake reviews on Amazon.com*. American Economic Association. https://doi.org/10.3386/w34161

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine. https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-196807000-00014

He, S., Hollenbeck, B., & Proserpio, D. (2022). The market for fake reviews. *Marketing Science, 41*(5), 896–921. https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2022.1353

Kim, R. Y. (2019). Does national culture explain consumers' reliance on online reviews? Cross-cultural variations in the effect of online review ratings on consumer choice. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 37*, Article 100878. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2019.100878

Lawler, E. E. (1968). A correlational-causal analysis of the relationship between expectancy attitudes and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 52*(6), 462–468. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0026499

Luca, M., & Zervas, G. (2016). Fake it till you make it: Reputation, competition, and Yelp review fraud. *Management Science, 62*(12), 3412–3427. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2015.2304

Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1753–1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Mayzlin, D., Dover, Y., & Chevalier, J. (2014). Promotional reviews: An empirical investigation of online review manipulation. *American Economic Review, 104*(8), 2421–2455. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.8.2421

Mu, J., & Zhang, J. Z. (2021). Seller marketing capability, brand reputation, and consumer journeys on e-commerce platforms. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 49*(5), 994–1020. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00773-3

Sahut, J. M., Laroche, M., & Braune, E. (2024). Antecedents and consequences of fake reviews in a marketing approach: An overview and synthesis. *Journal of Business Research, 175*, Article 114572. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114572

Song, Y., Wang, L., Zhang, Z., & Hikkerova, L. (2023). Do fake reviews promote consumers' purchase intention? *Journal of Business Research, 164*, Article 113971. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113971

Thu, H. L., & Van, H. N. (2024). Applying Vroom expectancy theory to analyse employee motivation: A study of commercial banks in Vietnam. *Humanities and Social Sciences Letters, 12*(4), 792–810. https://doi.org/10.18488/73.v12i4.3902

Thukral, A., Aggarwal, N., Saini, C. P., & Kapoor, P. (2026). Ranking of motives for posting fake reviews. *Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC, 30*(3), 397–413. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-07-2024-0188

Vo Thanh, T., & Kirova, V. (2018). Wine tourism experience: A netnography study. *Journal of Business Research, 83*, 30–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.10.008

Vroom, V. (1964). *Work and motivation.* Wiley. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1964-35027-000

Wu, Y., Ngai, E. W. T., Wu, P., & Wu, C. (2020). Fake online reviews: Literature review, synthesis, and directions for future research. *Decision Support Systems, 132*, Article 113280. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2020.113280

Xu, X., Fan, R., Wang, D., Xie, X., & Du, K. (2025). Mitigating collusive manipulation of reviews in e-commerce platforms: Evolutionary game and strategy simulation. *Information Processing & Management, 62*(4), Article 104080. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2025.104080

Ye, Q., Li, Y., Kiang, M. Y., & Wu, W. (2009). The impact of seller reputation on the performance of online sales: Evidence from TaoBao buy-it-now (BIN) data. *Data Base for Advances in Information Systems, 40*(1), 12–19. https://doi.org/10.1145/1496930.1496935

Zaman, M., Vo-Thanh, T., Nguyen, C. T. K., Hasan, R., Akter, S., Mariani, M., & Hikkerova, L. (2023). Motives for posting fake reviews: Evidence from a cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Business Research, 154*, Article 113359. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113359

Zhou, X., Matsubara, S., Liu, Y., & Liu, Q. (2022). Bribery in rating systems: A game-theoretic perspective. In J. Gama, T. Li, Y. Yu, E. Chen, Y. Zheng, & F. Teng (Eds.), *Advances in knowledge discovery and data mining* (pp. 67–78). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05981-0_6

APPENDIX

DATA GATHERING PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

A. Participants Information and Introduction

Dear Participants,
You are invited to participate in a research study examining sellers' motivation to engage in fake reviews. Your responses will be used solely for academic and research purposes, will remain completely confidential, and will not be shared with any other third party. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any obligation.

B. Informed Consent

Please indicate your consent by answering the following:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Yes ….
No ….

I voluntarily consent to the audio recording of this interview for research purposes. I understand that the recording will be used solely for transcription and analysis, will be kept confidential, and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

Yes ….
No ….

C. Confidentiality, Data Storage and Retention

Access to the audio recordings, interview transcripts, and consent records will be restricted to the researchers involved in this study. All electronic records will be stored securely in password-protected files. Your personal identifying information will be stored separately from the research data, and a unique identification code (e.g., R1, R2, …) will be assigned to ensure anonymity during analysis and reporting. Audio recordings and identifiable research records, including consent records, will be securely deleted after completion of the research and publication process. Anonymised transcripts may be retained for academic record and research verification purposes in accordance with institutional data management practices.

D. Interview Questions

1. Respondent Identification Code: ……
2. Age: …….
3. Gender: ……
4. Qualification: ……
5. How long have you been selling online?
   ……
6. Do you post fake reviews as a seller on different online platforms?

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
7. What motivates you to post fake reviews on different online platforms? Elaborate in detail.

AUTHORS

Shubham Garg is an MBA student at the Indian Institute of Management Rohtak, India. He completed his Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) from Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi. During his undergraduate studies, he conducted academic research on fake reviews and e-commerce. He was a student at Keshav Mahavidyalaya during the research work for this paper. His academic and professional interests include marketing, consumer behaviour, brand management, and sales.

Dr Anjali Thukral is a Professor in the Department of Computer Science at Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, India. She has over 28 years of teaching experience and received her PhD in Computer Science from the University of Delhi in 2013. She has published extensively in international journals and conference proceedings. Her research interests include Information Retrieval, Knowledge Representation and Reasoning, Ontologies, and Knowledge Graphs, particularly in e-learning and disease diagnosis systems. Her recent research focuses on dark patterns, fake online reviews, and ethical issues in digital environments.

Nidhi Aggarwal is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Commerce at Keshav Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, India. She is also currently a PhD student in the Department of Management and Commerce at Manav Rachna University, Faridabad, India. Her research area focuses on fake reviews, dark patterns, social media marketing, eWOM, consumer trust, and consumer behavior.