

Fakes, frauds, and fictitious accounts: How bots and spam are influencing advertising, commerce, and media

Article

The news: From product reviews to major social media acquisitions to even media decisions, there's a common thread: spam and fraud. Here are a few examples from this week's headlines.

See you in court: A judge has ordered an October trial for a lawsuit between **Elon Musk** and **Twitter**. The platform is [taking Musk to court](#) for calling off the [\\$44 billion deal](#) he agreed to in April over his concerns about spam bots.

- Twitter has estimated that less than 5% of its daily active accounts are spam bots; Musk has asserted (without evidence) that the figure **could be four times that**. ([We've speculated a bit on this topic.](#))
- Automated accounts—aka bots—*can* be helpful, but can also be used for shady activities like get-rich-quick schemes that reduce platform trust.
- To crack down on malicious bots, the platform freezes millions of accounts each week until the owners pass anti-spam checks, eliminating around 1 million spam bots daily.
- Twitter's advertising income makes up the vast bulk of its total revenue—and Musk's claims have cast a shadow over a platform he purports to love.

#ReleaseTheSnyderBots: The internet effort to make **Zack Snyder's** version of "Justice League" available on **HBO Max** was boosted by phony accounts, bots, and potentially a now-defunct advertising firm, [per](#) Rolling Stone.

- Following the box office failure of the original cut of the movie, completed by Joss Whedon after a personal loss forced Snyder to step away, the hashtag #ReleaseTheSnyderCut was used in a viral internet campaign.
- That campaign convinced **WarnerMedia** to release Snyder's four-hour version on HBO Max in March 2021.
- Two studies commissioned by WarnerMedia found that **13% or more of the users that took part in the Snyder cut conversation were bogus**.
- Bots helped Snyder's "Justice League" cut and another Snyder film, "Army of the Dead," win the fan-voted categories of Oscars Fan Favorite and Oscars Cheer Moment at the 2022 Academy Awards.

Humans, too: Fakery to influence decisions, of course, goes beyond bots.

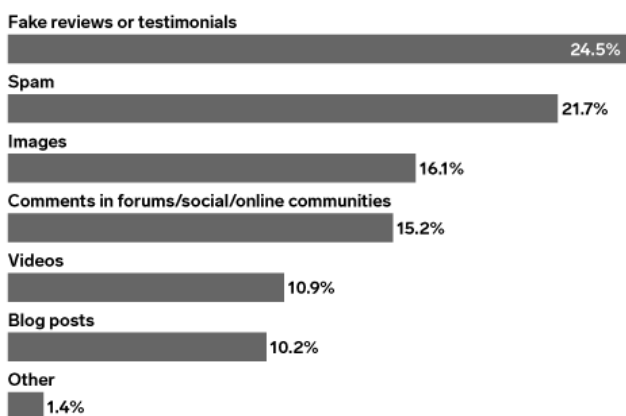
- This week, the moderators of more than 10,000 **Facebook** groups that plan fake review campaigns on **Amazon** products were sued by the retailer.
- These group moderators allegedly solicited bogus reviews on the company's websites in the US and other major markets in return for free goods or cash—a practice prohibited by Amazon.
- It's not the first time Amazon has had to take such measures: In Q1, Amazon sued AppSally and Rebatest, purveyors of phony reviews.
- Amazon claims it prevented over 200 million fake reviews from reaching customers in 2020.

Why it matters: Fraud and bots are having a gargantuan impact on advertisers and media platforms.

- For platforms like Twitter, too many bots mean advertisers won't receive their money's worth when they make ad buys since, well, bots don't buy stuff.
- Major media firms like WarnerMedia risk greenlighting the wrong projects if they misread consumer sentiment by virtue of bots and gamification by bad actors.
- Major retailers like Amazon need to continue efforts to show their reviews are legitimate, which gives them an advantage against competitors whose reviews look more suspect. But since most consumers won't buy products with negative reviews, there's a profit motive that will inspire shady actors to provide fake reviews.

Which Types of Inaccurate/Inappropriate User-Generated Content Do US Consumers Find Most Frustrating?

% of respondents, June 2021



Note: n=1,000 ages 18+

Source: TELUS International, "Understanding the Impact of User-Generated Content Management on Consumers' Relationships with Brands," June 29, 2021

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