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Survey reveals what makes reviews trustworthy to consumers

85% of online review readers say they trust review text over ratings

Yelp Editorial Team (<https://blog.yelp.com/author/yelpprblog/>)

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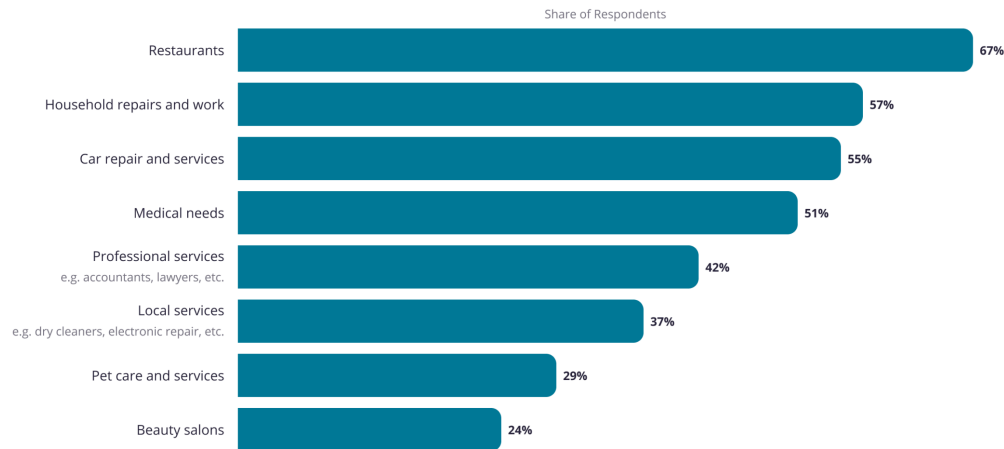


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Online reviews are critical to people’s decision-making and discovery of great local businesses. This is one of many reasons why Yelp invests in extensive measures to surface the most useful and reliable reviews. In a new survey commissioned by Yelp and conducted by Material (<https://www.materialplus.io/>), 2,000 Americans were polled to uncover what they consider to be trustworthy reviews.* Respondents say they read a median of five reviews about a business to inform their spending decisions, and a majority say they’re reading more online reviews now than they ever have before (77%). Therefore, cultivating a platform where online reviews are trusted and helpful is especially important.

For many respondents, doing research and reading reviews is essential prior to patronizing businesses or hiring service providers. A separate Yelp study found that 90% of people on Yelp compare businesses before deciding which one to visit, contact, hire or buy from.** Besides deciding where to eat, the Material survey found that more than half of the respondents research and consider online reviews for services that allow providers to access their home or vehicle — including work and repairs around the house (57%) or for their car (55%).

People Heavily Research Dining Options and Service Providers Before Patronizing the Business



Source: Material 2022. Based on a survey conducted among a sample of 2,000 Americans aged 18+ between August and September 2022.
Chart: The DataFace

Consumers generally trust review platforms, but are wary of being deceived

While fake or untrustworthy reviews aren't always easy for people to identify, for respondents who think they've spotted a fake review, nearly half (49%) tend to read other reviews to gather additional opinions about the business. Others ignore the potentially fake review (34%), find another business (27%) or report the review to its respective platform (24%).

To help maintain safe and reliable online communities, it's important to report content (<https://www.yelp-support.com/article/How-do-I-report-a-review>) that may violate a platform's policies (<https://www.yelp-support.com/article/When-should-I-report-a-review>). Yelp relies on both consumers and business owners to report reviews that they believe violate our policies, and all flagged content is evaluated by our moderators. More than 218,600 reported reviews were removed by Yelp's moderators in 2021. Yelp also regularly investigates content posted to third-party sites to uncover deceptive review practices, including monitoring and infiltrating online groups where people may attempt to trade or pay for reviews. In 2021, our investigators made more than 1,000 reports to third-party sites to warn them of nearly 950 suspicious groups, posts or individuals they found participating in deceptive review practices.

An overwhelming majority of review readers (85%) trust reviews with written text over only a star rating. Yelp requires that ratings be accompanied by actual review text because we believe a star rating without review text is less reliable and useful to other consumers. Relatedly, we recently saw how damaging star ratings with no review text can be when reports of a Google Reviews extortion scheme (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/11/dining/google-one-star-review-scam-restaurants.html>) affected numerous restaurants in major cities. These restaurants experienced an influx of one-star Google reviews without any review text, as scammers tried to extort the restaurants for \$75 Google Play gift cards in order to remove their fake reviews. This did not occur on Yelp because of our mandatory review text policies.

Less than three in 10 people (28%) are looking out for incentivized reviews, and 71% of respondents say they would no longer visit a business if they learned the business has fake or compensated online reviews. This is an area that regulators such as the Federal Trade Commission are increasingly focused (<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/soliciting-paying-online-reviews-guide-marketers>) on and have sued businesses over (<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2022/08/ftc-states-sue-rental-listing-platform-roomster-its-owners-duping-prospective-renters-fake-reviews>). Yelp strictly prohibits offering incentives or other compensation in exchange for writing, changing, or removing a review. This type of activity can artificially inflate a business's rating, is not helpful for people trying to find reliable information about businesses, and is unfair to businesses that work hard to honestly earn their ratings and reviews. If Yelp receives a report that someone has offered cash or other incentives in exchange for reviews, our moderation team will investigate the matter and, where appropriate, remove such reviews. In such cases, we may even place a Compensated Activity Alert (<https://trust.yelp.com/consumer-alerts/>) on the business's Yelp page to warn others of this deceptive behavior.

Consumers value transparency on review platforms

An overwhelming majority of respondents who read reviews say they trust online reviews about local businesses (83%), and most agree that it's important they understand how online review platforms determine which reviews are reliable and which are less trustworthy (88%). Most review platforms use an algorithm to weed out potentially fake reviews, but 79% of people surveyed say they would prefer to see all the reviews for a business or product, including those that a review platform believes are fake or less trustworthy.

Reviews that Yelp's automated recommendation software (<https://trust.yelp.com/recommendation-software/>) doesn't currently recommend, based on hundreds of signals of quality, reliability, and user activity on Yelp, are still accessible to anyone via a link at the bottom of a business's Yelp page, but they don't factor into the business's overall star rating or review count. This allows consumers to see all reviews, even those our recommendation software has determined are less useful or trustworthy. In fact, a forthcoming study from Information Systems Research (<https://delivrypdf.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=960005113067065003093115088119108109059089000008089092099121115027097022098127102127030011115>) found that people trust review platforms more when they display the non-recommended reviews filtered by their algorithm, like Yelp does, instead of simply removing the filtered reviews altogether.

Why Does Yelp Recommend Reviews?



Over the years, economists (<https://blog.yelp.com/2020/10/new-study-compares-yelp-review-quality-with-competitors>), industry experts (<https://searchengineland.com/how-google-and-yelp-handle-fake-reviews-and-policy-violations-374071>), the media (<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/18/technology/yelp-tries-to-halt-deceptive-reviews.html>), and regulators (<https://blog.yelp.com/2013/09/yelp-and-ny-ag-go-after-fake-review-industry>) have acknowledged that Yelp is one of the most aggressive and successful at identifying and weeding out unreliable reviews. To learn about all the ways Yelp maintains the integrity and quality of our content, visit trust.yelp.com (<https://trust.yelp.com/>).

*MATERIAL SURVEY 2022. THIS SURVEY WAS FIELDDED BY MATERIAL ([HTTPS://WWW.MATERIALPLUS.IO/](https://www.materialplus.io/)) AMONG 2,000 PEOPLE AGED 18+ IN THE UNITED STATES. THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED ONLINE DURING THE PERIOD OF AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2022 AND HAS A MARGIN OF ERROR OF +/- 2%. RESULTS OF ANY SAMPLE ARE SUBJECT TO SAMPLING VARIATION. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE VARIATION IS MEASURABLE AND IS AFFECTED BY THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS AND THE LEVEL OF THE PERCENTAGES EXPRESSING THE RESULTS.

**BASED ON A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY YELP IN AUGUST 2022. METHODOLOGY USED COMSCORE DEMOGRAPHICS TO ESTABLISH AGE AND GENDER QUOTAS TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YELP USER POPULATION WITHIN THE U.S. AND WEIGHED DATA ACCORDINGLY. THIS SURVEY WAS FIELDDED AMONG 1,029 PEOPLE AGED 18+ IN THE U.S. PEOPLE ON YELP REPORTED USE OF YELP AT LEAST ONCE IN THE PREVIOUS 3 MONTHS.



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