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**SHOPPERS WARNED TO WATCH OUT FOR BOGUS ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS AS A  
RECORD E-CHRISTMAS APPROACHES**

- **Britons expected to spend £42 billion online this Christmas**
- **New study finds that customer opinions and reviews have five times more impact than advertising on customer buying decisions online**
- **Leading independent customer review publisher, Reevoo, calls for a kitemark for online reviews to reassure shoppers as a forecast £42 billion e-Christmas approaches**

British shoppers are being warned to watch out for bogus customer reviews this Christmas. The warning comes as new research from YouGov reveals that customer reviews are five times more likely to influence online shoppers to part with their cash than advertising.

The study, commissioned by independent customer review service Reevoo, shows the increasing impact of shopper opinion on British online shopping habits as Britain heads towards what is predicted to be a record £42 billion e-Christmas this year.

Six out of ten people (60%) say online opinions written by consumers who have already bought a product would affect their choice of what to buy. In contrast, just 12% said they would be

swayed by online advertising.

Richard Anson, chief executive of Reevo, said: "The influence of reviews is no longer in doubt and we think it is time that regulators looked at the way that customer reviews are presented online. Are they edited? Are they legitimate? Given the influence that customer reviews have, now is the time for regulation and standards to be applied, so that customers are not misled."

The call for regulation follows several high-profile cases of bogus online reviews highlighted by the consumer organisation, Which?.

The study also reveals that shoppers are beginning to wake up to the possibility of fake reviews and won't believe everything they read online. While eight out of ten (79%) are influenced by impartial ratings from shoppers who have definitely bought a product, only 14% would trust review programmes that are directly managed by retailers. More than a third (36%) of consumers are worried about the authenticity of retailer-managed customer review programmes.

Which? recently warned that some glowing internet profiles of hotels and restaurants are actually written by the hotel owners themselves. Amid concerns that some online ratings are just too good to be true, eight out of ten online shoppers agree that it should be a regulatory requirement for published reviews to be written by customers who have genuinely bought a product. Another 84% think genuine customer reviews should carry a kite mark making it clear they are from a real purchaser and fully independent of the retailer.

Reevo collates reviews from shoppers who have genuinely bought goods from internet stores including Woolworths, Currys, the Carphone Warehouse, Dixons and the fashion website koodos. The organisation emails confirmed purchasers within a month of purchase and asks them to rate

the product against a range of criteria. Reviews are not edited or used selectively. They then appear on the retailers' websites adjacent to the product.

"In the online world opinion increasingly matters," said Richard Anson. "Savvy shoppers are sharing opinions and exerting huge influence. Whilst this is a great thing, it is important that opinions can be trusted."

The YouGov survey of 2,035 online adults shows shoppers of all ages are influenced by online reviews, although the figures are highest for those aged between 35 and 44, at 64 per cent.

Among the over-55s and 18-24 year-olds, 58 per cent said shopper ratings would influence their choice of product. Men are more likely to read and act on internet opinions, at 62% compared with 57% for women.

Despite growing controversy over price comparison websites, which don't always reveal their commercial relationships with product providers, 71% of people said these would influence their decision whether or not to buy.

The top ten categories of products that customers review via Reevoo are:

1. Digital cameras
2. TVs
3. Washing machines
4. Fridges
5. Mobile phones
6. Toys
7. Dishwashers
8. MP3 players
9. Vacuum cleaners
10. TV stands

— Ends —

**For more information please contact:**

Hamish Thompson, Twelve Thirty Eight Ltd, 07702 684290

Tracey Harrison, Twelve Thirty Eight Ltd, 07708 044671

**Notes to editors:**

1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,035 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 19th October 2007. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all online GB adults (aged 18+)

**About Reevo:**

Reevo is an independent company which collates and publishes genuine reviews, to help online shoppers decide what to buy (and what not to buy). Its retail partners include Currys, Dixons, Woolworths, the Carphone Warehouse and online fashion website koodos.