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Amazon sellers are bribing users for 'five star' reviews
Amazon sellers are giving discounts, and extended warranties to buy 'five star' reviews on the ecommerce site. Therefore, not all products which have hundreds and thousands of 'five star' reviews could be genuine. The customers are advised to go through the comments, ask their friend circles, and do some due diligence before making their purchases. Claims of fake products, wrong quantity, or damaged products are also quite prominent. However, such claims can be resolved by the Amazon customer care. However, despite media reports in the US, the website has done little to prevent such nefarious vendor practices. The simplest they could do is to have a 'bribery' hotline where the moment they get proof of such a bribe, they can immediately remove such sellers from their site.

We found two instances where sellers were bribing our reporter with cashbacks of Rs 100 for buying a product for Rs 249: One was a SWAB plastic measuring cups and spoon set, and another was a Wazdorf 2-in-1 steel kitchen knife. The vendor inserted a printed white paper with the packaging like the one above. You have to Whatsapp the person who will give the link that you need to click to give a '5 star' review. Before you hit the 'submit' button on Amazon, you have to take a screenshot of it and send it to the seller on Whatsapp as proof. Within a day, we got Rs 100 cashback into our wallet during the sting operation.

Amazon seller scam

While this practice of freebies offered by Amazon sellers was first reported in the US where Amazon is based, nothing much seems to have been done to root out this practice, although the company claims otherwise. A policy change in 2016 highlights the fact that Amazon began discouraging incentivised reviews. However, much more needs to be done. We have found that Amazon's machine-learning practices have actually prevented genuine reviews from showing up. This journalist has had a first-hand experience where his book review never went up despite repeated mails to customer care over several months.

The Los Angeles Times reports that almost 60% of reviews are rigged in this manner. While the three products we came across were not bad products, they certainly did not deserve five stars. At best, they could score 3 or 3.5 points, because there is always room for improvement, particularly when you are not a known brand. More importantly, we need to test the product for at least three months to know their true worth. However, we have come across some users reporting that they were paid for a crappy product as well.

UPDATE (Sept 26, 2020): Amazon sellers of small-priced products who are relying