



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

28th May 2023

Jean Contreant

**RE: DIGITAL MARKETS, COMPETITION AND CONSUMER BILL - FAKE
REVIEWS**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about fraudulent reviews of businesses. I have read your comments with interest.

I share your concerns about fake reviews, such as when a supposed customer writes a review, or provides a rating of a business, such as a pub or restaurant, when they have not visited or experienced the goods or service personally. I know how these fake reviews can cause serious harm to businesses and livelihoods, and also affect the mental health of individuals.

You may be interested to know that in July 2021, the Government consulted on a number of proposals concerning consumer protection law. The Government's response set out its approach to ensuring consumers are supported with a robust set of rights. In particular, the Government confirmed it will consult in due course on adding fake reviews to the list of banned practices – giving greater clarity to businesses on the current law and, where fake reviews are posted, allowing enforcers to take effective action quickly.

However, it is important to stress that companies that post fake reviews are breaking consumer law. In the past, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has taken enforcement action against a UK marketing company that wrote fake online reviews for small businesses. It has also taken enforcement action against a number of review sites to improve their systems and practices. The CMA continues to monitor the sector closely and will consider further enforcement work if necessary.

Indeed, following work conducted by the CMA, Facebook, Instagram and eBay have all taken action to tackle the trading of fake reviews. You can find out more about these actions here: <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/fake-and-misleading-online-reviews>.

I am aware of an amendment to the *Online Safety Bill* which seeks to widen the Bill's false communications offence to include financial harm and harm to a person or organisation, including a business, due to false communication. Ministers do not support this amendment, which has been tabled in the House of Lords, as the *Online Safety Bill* will specifically add greater protections for individuals online, not businesses.

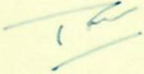
Overall, I welcome the work the Government is undertaking to strengthen protections. For example, the *Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill* will ensure businesses and consumers are protected from rip-offs and can reap the full benefits of the digital economy with confidence.



Fake reviews that cheat customers, subscription traps that cost more than a billion pounds a year, and new powers for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to tackle businesses that breach consumer rights law, are all elements of today's far-reaching Bill. In competitive markets, firms strive to give consumers the best products, most choice, and lowest possible prices. The Bill will provide the CMA with stronger tools to investigate competition problems and take faster, more effective action, including where companies collude to bump-up prices at the expense of UK consumers.

I hope that this will give greater clarity to businesses and, where fake reviews are posted, allow enforcers to take effective action quickly.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,


**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**