

Launch Ranking Dynamics and Early Review Amplification

As explained, I watched a competitor repeatedly launch new products and almost immediately accumulate multiple 5-star reviews within a very short window after listing. From a seller's perspective, the pattern is difficult not to notice. Those early reviews appear precisely during the period when the product is benefiting from the platform's launch visibility. I then went about trying to work out if the reviews were fake.

Methodology

I first went to the seller (Forza) profile and got all their product links using a simple xpath query.

I then pulled all the reviews from the seller profile (Forza) into a simple schema based on what the Reviews API returned.

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
id	int	NO	PRI	NULL	auto_increment
tsin_id	bigint	NO		NULL	
customer_id	bigint	YES		NULL	
signature	varchar(64)	YES		NULL	
rating	tinyint	YES		NULL	
uuid	char(36)	YES		NULL	
review_body	text	YES		NULL	
num_upvotes	int	YES		NULL	
customer_name	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
review_date	timestamp	YES		NULL	
variant_info	json	YES		NULL	
created_at	timestamp	YES		CURRENT_TIMESTAMP	DEFAULT_GENERATED

I then ran the following query.

```
SELECT customer_id, COUNT(*) AS review_count, COUNT(DISTINCT TRIM(LOWER(customer_name))) AS
distinct_names, COUNT(DISTINCT tsin_id) AS distinct_products, MIN(review_date) AS
first_review, MAX(review_date) AS last_review FROM reviews WHERE customer_id IS NOT NULL AND
customer_name IS NOT NULL AND TRIM(customer_name) <> " GROUP
BY customer_id HAVING COUNT(DISTINCT TRIM(LOWER(customer_name))) > 1 ORDER BY distinct_names
DESC, distinct_products DESC, review_count DESC;
```

The output looks like this

customer_id	review_count	distinct_names	distinct_products	first_review	last_review
13053252	231	171	231	2023-01-22 00:00:00	2025-06-05 00:00:00
4769263	131	94	131	2021-03-29 00:00:00	2025-12-01 00:00:00
7098672	80	70	80	2021-06-10 00:00:00	2024-03-04 00:00:00
4410951	64	52	64	2021-06-08 00:00:00	2025-12-01 00:00:00
8433315	14	13	14	2021-08-30 00:00:00	2025-03-26 00:00:00
5104392	13	13	13	2024-08-14 00:00:00	2024-09-06 00:00:00

I ran the same query on my data and can tell you it looked very different. Sadly, don't have that screenshot but my seller Id is 785437 if you want to check. I don't think any one customer has reviewed more than 3 of my products. My

seller data the pattern was very different.

I then went and read a lot of those reviews and many of them seem fake the way they were written. What also kicked me off to go and investigate is one customer wrote the following.

★★★★☆ | Colour: Black

Lorenzo - 29 Aug 2025 (Reviewed 7 days after purchase)

It's still too early to judge if this product is worth the premium price asked for. One of my concerns is that the Elite watch strap was advertised as having a brushed stainless steel buckle, which does not appear to be the case on the strap I received. Time will tell if the paint flakes off. It's also appears that some of the reviews for this product may have been posted by "friends".

Let me tell you Lorenzo is not wrong.

I can give a lot of examples of what I think is fake but I highly doubt customer id 13053252 is such a big fan of forza that they have bought all their products and why would they keep changing their name. This is very suspicious. I can go into so much more detail if need be.

Trustd indexed all the product and review data and linked orro to doing fake reviews. Customer 5104392 also left a lot of reviews on orro products on Takealot. The same query above on orro has an interesting pattern except the name is not changing. Some other customers there might be worth investigating. Many of these reviews are quite old.

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customer_id	review_count	distinct_products	first_review	last_review	
+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+					
5104392	43	43	2020-09-27 00:00:00	2023-09-22 00:00:00	
5489965	38	38	2019-12-21 00:00:00	2023-11-28 00:00:00	
5538475	32	32	2020-12-01 00:00:00	2023-10-27 00:00:00	
5755258	22	22	2021-11-12 00:00:00	2023-10-05 00:00:00	
5978610	17	17	2021-11-15 00:00:00	2022-09-02 00:00:00	

Possible solution

High-level approach used to identify suspicious review patterns in the future:

1. For each seller in the database, construct their full product catalogue.
2. For each reviewer(customer) of products in that catalogue, calculate how many distinct products from that seller's catalogue they have reviewed.
3. Compute the percentage of the seller's catalogue that the reviewer has reviewed.
4. Flag cases where:
A single reviewer has reviewed an unusually high number of products from the same seller, or
The reviewer has reviewed more than a defined threshold (e.g., X%) of that seller's catalogue.
5. For reviewers flagged in the above steps, analyse additional signals such as:
 - How frequently the reviewer has changed their display name.
 - The distribution of ratings they gave across the seller's products (e.g., consistently high ratings).
 - The velocity of the ratings how quickly they reviewed products.
 - Is a customer reviewing a large percentage of multiple sellers products like in my example above.

Network correlation: identify clusters of reviewers that frequently review the same sellers' products within similar time windows.

I asked Chatgpt how it would do it. It overlapped on my examples but here are some more. I think you might also think of some better ones as I don't have an understanding of Takealot Systems and architecture.

Additional signals that may indicate coordinated behaviour:

- **Text similarity between reviews** whether review content across different products contains highly similar language or repeated phrases.
- **Cross-seller overlap** whether the same set of reviewers repeatedly review products from the same group of sellers.
- **Reviewer–seller exclusivity** whether a reviewer disproportionately reviews products from one seller relative to the rest of the catalogue.

Final thoughts

Because I come from a technical background, I've paid close attention to how products behave when they're first launched on the platform. Over the years, I've noticed that new listings often receive an initial boost in search results.

For example, if I launch a new camping chair, it will typically rank above many existing camping chairs at least temporarily. That makes sense. If a new product were buried at the bottom from day one, it would never get seen and would have no chance to compete. The platform seems to give new listings a window of visibility.

Where it becomes powerful is what happens next.

If that camping chair quickly receives strong reviews, it can start outranking older, established products and hold its position near the top. I may be simplifying the mechanics, but in principle, that's how momentum builds: visibility → clicks → reviews → stronger ranking.

Now consider what happens if a seller seeds that initial boost with fake 5-star reviews.

That artificial early validation amplifies the effect of the ranking bump. Reviews influence buyer psychology there's a strong herd dynamic at play. When the first review is 5 stars, subsequent customers are often predisposed to view the product positively. That initial signal shapes perception.

So fake early reviews don't just inflate ratings they distort the entire competitive dynamic. They leverage the platform's launch mechanics and compound into a sustained, unfair advantage.