

# The Takealot Review Integrity Report 2026

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An independent analysis of 6.4M product reviews

**6.4M**

Reviews Analysed

**394,613**

Products

**1.6M**

Unique Reviewers

**78/100**

Trust Score

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February 2026 | Data collected 24-26 February 2026

*Trustd is a free, independent tool that helps South African shoppers see the real rating behind any Takealot product.*

## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the most comprehensive independent audit of Takealot product reviews ever conducted. We analysed every publicly accessible review on South Africa's largest online marketplace - 6.4M reviews across 394,613 products - to assess the health and integrity of the review ecosystem.

Our goal was not to be adversarial. Takealot operates a broadly functional review system. Most reviews are genuine. Most ratings are directionally accurate. But the data reveals measurable inflation, identifiable manipulation patterns, and important nuances that consumers and sellers deserve to understand.

### Five Key Findings

Takealot's review ecosystem scores 78/100 on our composite trust metric. The system is functional but shows measurable positive bias.

5-star reviews exceed the expected natural distribution by 7.9 percentage points. An estimated 508,431 excess 5-star reviews exist in the dataset.

2.97% of reviewed products (11,710 products) show detectable review anomalies - but the majority of these are likely innocent duplicates, not fraud.

Takealot eliminated unverified reviews in May 2022 - a significant and commendable platform improvement that raised the cost of review manipulation.

A small but identifiable set of coordinated review networks exists, concentrated in high-margin product categories like cosmetics, workwear, and home textiles.

# 1. Methodology

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## Data Collection

All product URLs were enumerated from Takealot's publicly accessible XML sitemaps (1,278,823 products catalogued). For each product with reviews, every review was retrieved via Takealot's public review API. No login credentials were used, no terms of service were violated, and no rate limits were exceeded. Data collection took place between 24 and 26 February 2026.

## What We Measured

Each review was analysed for: star rating, verified purchase status, review date, reviewer identity (customer ID and display name), review text length and content, and helpful vote count. Reviews were then cross-referenced at the product, seller, category, and customer level to detect anomalous patterns.

## Anomaly Detection

Two tiers of anomaly were detected inline during data collection:

**Duplicate review:** The same customer ID posted two or more reviews on the same product using the same display name.

**Identity manipulation:** The same customer ID posted two or more reviews on the same product using different display names.

## Limitations

This analysis has important limitations. Review dates reflect publication date, not purchase date. Seller identification is not available for all products in Takealot's API. Our anomaly detection identifies patterns consistent with manipulation but cannot definitively prove intent. Some flagged anomalies will have innocent explanations, and some genuine manipulation may use techniques we do not yet detect.

## 2. The Review Landscape

6.4M

Total Reviews

1.6M

Unique Reviewers

394,613

Products Reviewed

4.40

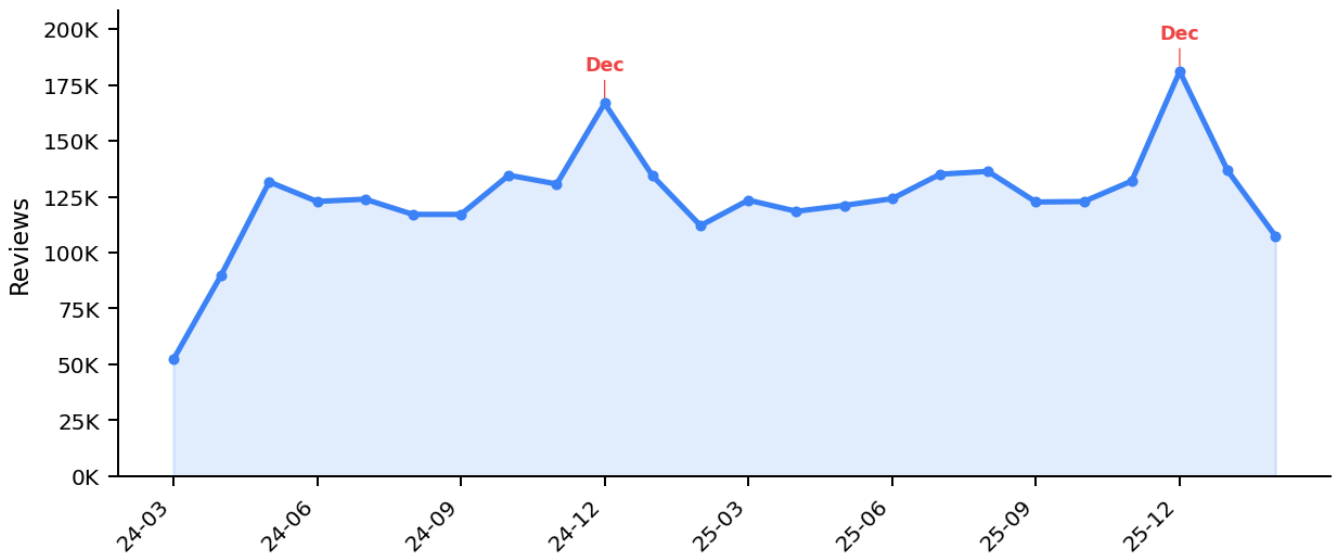
Average Rating

92.9%

Verified Purchases

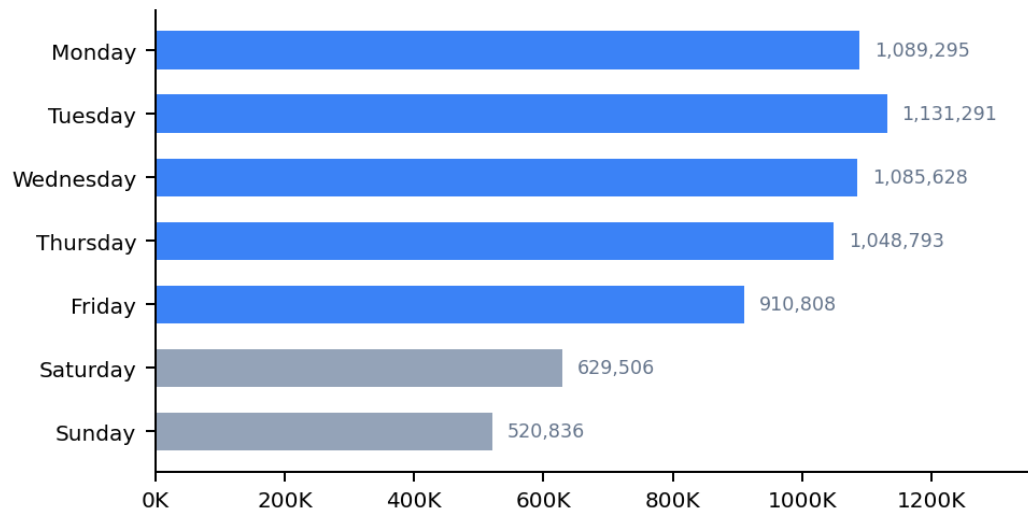
### Monthly Review Volume

Takealot's review ecosystem is growing steadily, with recent monthly volumes ranging from 107K to 181K reviews. December consistently sees the highest volume, driven by holiday shopping.



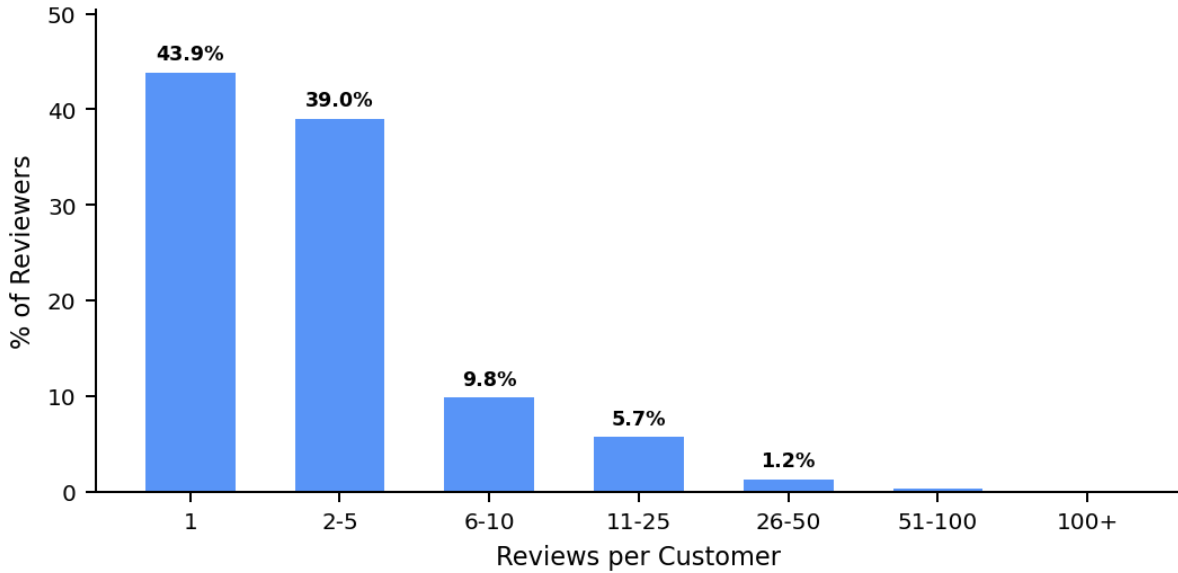
### When Do People Review?

Reviews follow a clear weekday pattern. Tuesday is the peak day (17.6%), while Saturday and Sunday together account for just 17.9% of weekly volume - a 45% drop from weekday averages. South Africans review products at their desks, not on the couch.



## The Reviewer Ecosystem

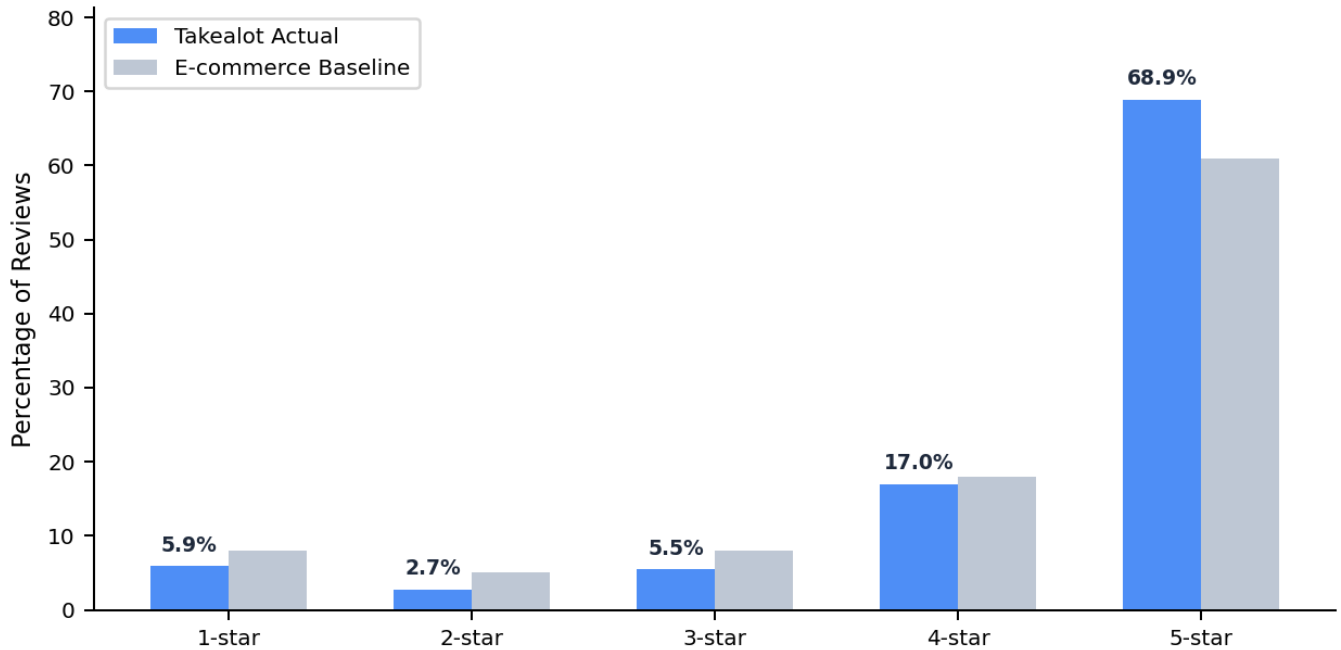
Review activity follows a classic power law distribution. Nearly half of all reviewers (43.9%) write a single review and never return. At the other extreme, 1,043 power reviewers - just 0.06% of all customers - have each written over 100 reviews. The most prolific reviewer has contributed 747 reviews, 100% of which were rated 5 stars.



The Gini coefficient of the review distribution is 0.56, indicating moderate concentration. This is typical for e-commerce platforms and does not, by itself, indicate manipulation - it reflects the natural reality that most people rarely write reviews, while a small number are highly engaged.

### 3. The Rating Health Check

Every rating bucket below 5-star is underrepresented relative to global e-commerce benchmarks. The 5-star excess of 7.9 percentage points suggests the system is amplifying positivity beyond what natural buyer behaviour alone would produce.



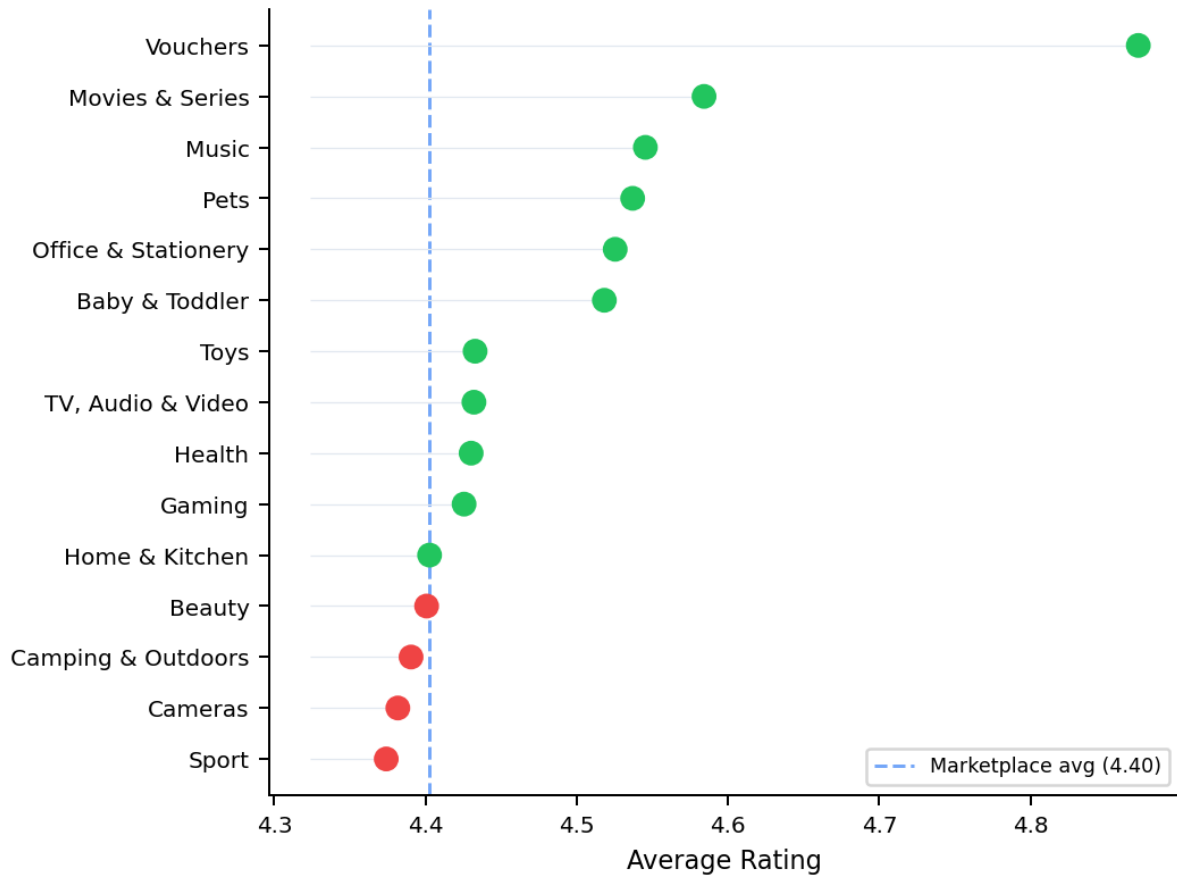
Compared to established e-commerce review benchmarks, Takealot's rating distribution shows a clear positive skew. 5-star reviews account for 68.9% of all ratings, versus an expected baseline of approximately 61%. Meanwhile, 1-star (5.9% vs 8%), 2-star (2.7% vs 5%), and 3-star (5.5% vs 8%) reviews are all underrepresented.

This does not prove widespread fraud. Review systems naturally skew positive for several legitimate reasons: satisfied customers are more responsive to post-purchase review prompts, dissatisfied customers often seek refunds rather than leaving reviews, and many 'neutral' experiences go unreviewed. However, the magnitude of the excess - roughly 508,431 additional 5-star reviews beyond the expected distribution - warrants investigation into what is driving it.

#### Perfect Scores

We identified 1,845 products with 10 or more reviews and a perfect 5.00 average - every single review rated 5 stars. While some beloved products genuinely earn universal praise, the probability of zero negative feedback decreases rapidly with review count. A product with 30 consecutive 5-star reviews and not a single 4, 3, 2, or 1 deserves closer scrutiny.

#### Ratings by Department

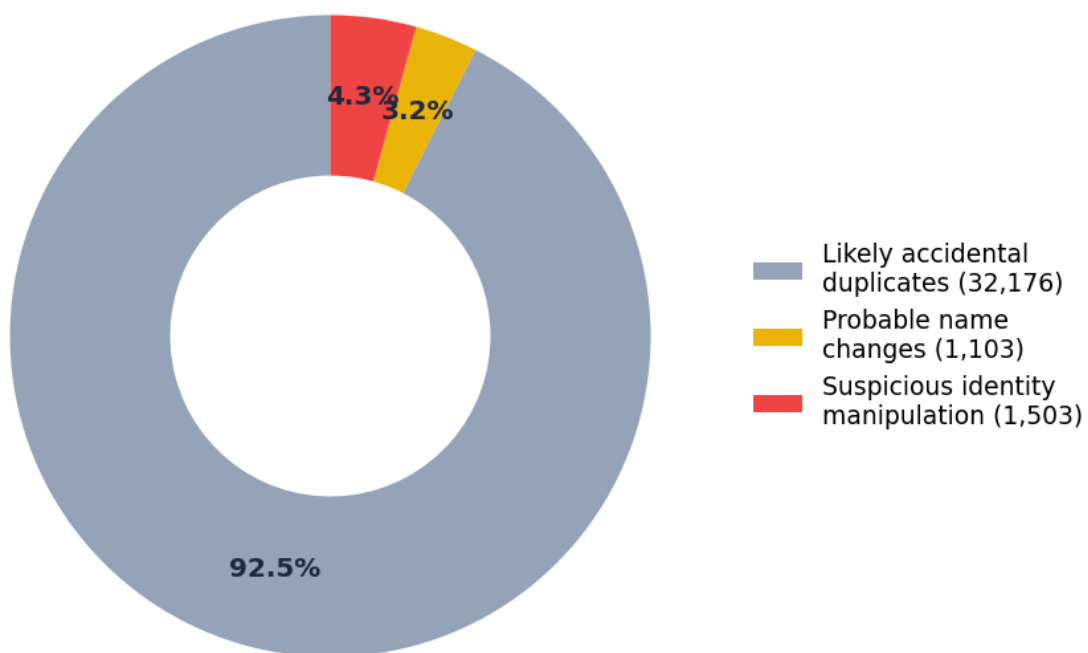


Most departments cluster within a narrow band around the marketplace average of 4.40. Vouchers rates highest, while Cellphones & Wearables rates lowest - a category where product quality variance is genuinely high.

## 4. Innocent Anomalies vs Review Manipulation

*Not every anomaly is fraud. The difference between a credible analysis and a sensational one lies in the willingness to distinguish the two.*

Our automated detection flagged 34,782 review anomalies across 11,710 products. But anomaly detection is not fraud detection. Before drawing conclusions, we examined the patterns behind these flags to separate innocent explanations from genuinely suspicious behaviour.



### The Innocent Explanations

Duplicate reviews account for 32,176 of our 34,782 flags - 92.5% of all detected anomalies. When a customer submits two identical reviews on the same product using the same name, the most likely explanation is technical: double-clicks, network timeouts, repeat purchase prompts, or the customer updating a review they previously wrote. The vast majority involve the same name, same rating, and near-identical text - consistent with accidental duplication, not deliberate manipulation.

We detected 2,606 instances where the same customer ID reviewed the same product using different display names. Takealot allows customers to change their display name at any time. When someone updates their profile from 'K' to 'Kayla,' old reviews retain the old name while new ones use the updated name. In 1,103 cases (42%), all names used share the same first letter - a pattern far more consistent with profile updates than with someone pretending to be a different person.

## The Patterns That Warrant Scrutiny

While the majority of flags have innocent explanations, a smaller but clearly identifiable subset does not.

**Coordinated single-seller review accounts:** We identified customer accounts whose entire review history is dedicated to a single seller, with near-perfect ratings across multiple products. In one case, 8 distinct accounts each reviewed between 10 and 28 products from the same seller - every review 5 stars, every review a verified purchase. The probability of this occurring naturally is vanishingly small.

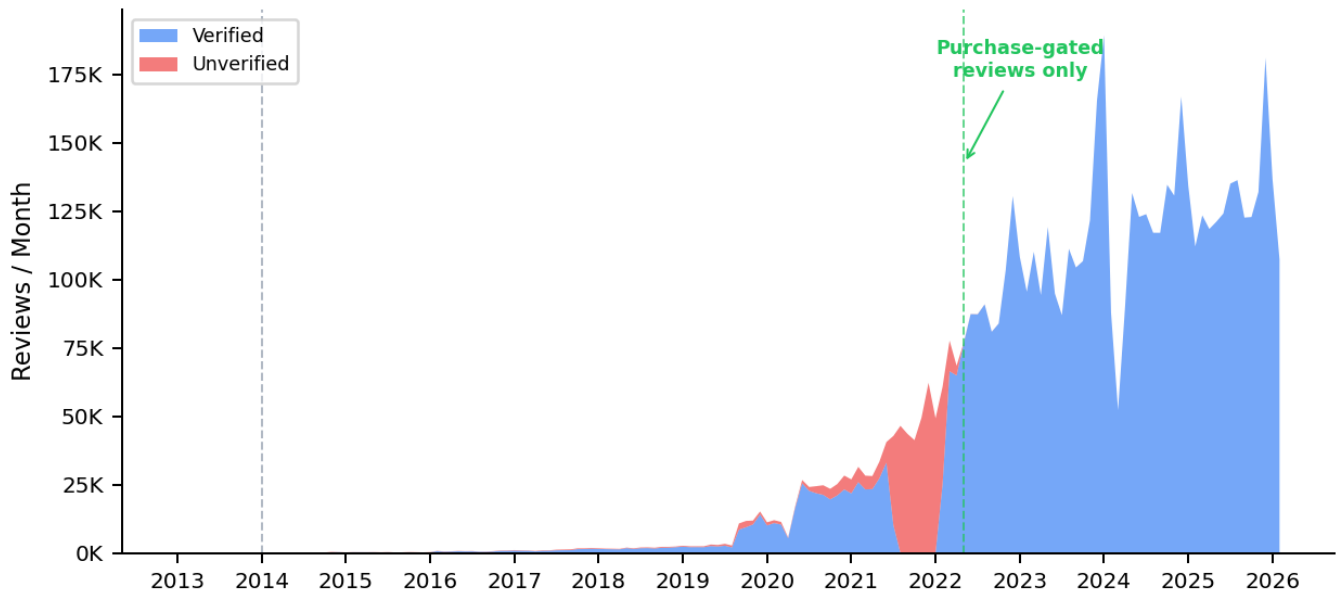
**Serial identity manipulation:** While most name-change cases are innocent, we found customers who used 3, 5, and even 16 different display names while reviewing the same product - each time posting a 5-star review. One customer used identity manipulation across 70 different products. These are not profile updates.

**Temporal clustering:** Products with detected anomalies show measurably more concentrated review dates than clean products (date-diversity ratio: 0.898 vs 0.965). Products where all 5+ reviews arrive on the same day exist - and while some reflect legitimate product launches, the pattern correlates with inflated ratings.

**Review volume disparity:** Products with detected anomalies have an average of 73 reviews, compared to 15 for clean products - a 5x difference. Manipulation concentrates on popular, high-traffic products where the economic incentive is greatest.

## 5. The Verified Purchase Story

*Takealot eliminated unverified reviews in May 2022. This was arguably the platform's most important trust investment - and it deserves recognition.*



The history of purchase verification on Takealot falls into three distinct eras:

**Before 2014:** No verification existed. Every review appears as unverified in the historical record. Review volumes were tiny (single digits per month), reflecting Takealot's early growth phase.

**2014 to mid-2022:** Partial verification. Takealot introduced purchase verification, but it was not mandatory. Roughly 10-20% of reviews in this period are unverified. A notable anomaly occurred between August 2021 and January 2022, when the verification system appears to have experienced a six-month outage - 100% of reviews in this period appear unverified, regardless of purchase history.

**May 2022 onwards:** Purchase-gated reviews. Takealot made verification effectively mandatory. Since May 2022, the unverified rate has been essentially 0%. You must have bought the product to review it.

### A Counter-Intuitive Finding

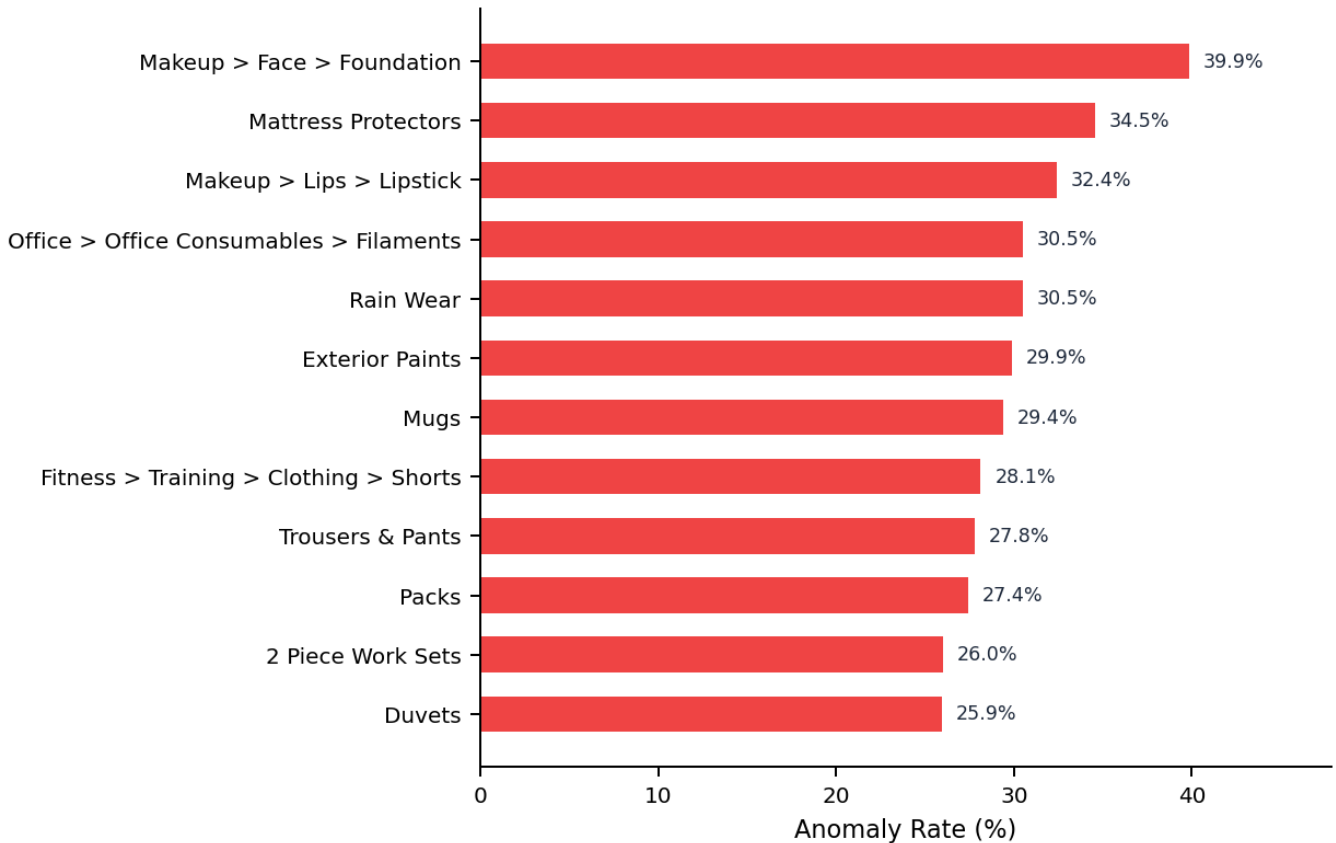
Across the full dataset, verified reviews actually rate higher (4.41) than unverified reviews (4.34). This demolishes the simple assumption that 'unverified equals fake positive.' In fact, the people who actually bought the product are more positive than those who did not - likely because they chose to buy it in the first place.

This has an important implication: the review manipulation that still exists on Takealot is happening through verified purchase accounts. Manipulators are buying the product (or using incentivised purchase programmes) and then leaving inflated reviews. This is more sophisticated and more expensive than anonymous drive-by reviews - and it requires more sophisticated detection methods.

## 6. Category Intelligence

Anomaly rates vary dramatically by product category. Understanding which categories are most and least affected helps consumers calibrate their trust and helps sellers contextualise their competitive landscape.

### Highest Anomaly Rates by Category



The categories with the highest anomaly detection rates share a common profile: high margins, strong competition, and products that are difficult to differentiate on features alone. Foundation (39.9%), Mattress Protectors (34.5%), Lipstick (32.4%) lead the list. These are categories where a higher star rating can directly translate into purchase decisions - and where the incentive to game reviews is therefore strongest.

### Department Overview

Department	Reviews	Avg Rating	vs Avg	5-star %	1-star %
Vouchers	16,527	4.87	+0.47	90.9%	0.7%
Specials	546	4.82	+0.41	87.7%	1.3%
Movies & Series	5,430	4.58	+0.18	72.8%	2.4%
Music	26,182	4.55	+0.14	72.5%	3.3%
Pets	182,298	4.54	+0.13	73.6%	3.7%
Office & Stationery	361,005	4.53	+0.12	73.0%	4.0%
Baby & Toddler	263,522	4.52	+0.12	73.1%	3.9%
Toys	240,558	4.43	+0.03	69.3%	4.8%
TV, Audio & Video	193,832	4.43	+0.03	69.6%	5.6%

Health	649,855	4.43	+0.03	69.7%	5.4%
Gaming	86,067	4.43	+0.02	69.1%	5.5%
Home & Kitchen	1,401,361	4.40	+0.00	69.1%	5.9%
Beauty	668,075	4.40	-0.00	69.3%	5.8%
Camping & Outdoors	192,369	4.39	-0.01	67.0%	5.7%
Cameras	107,075	4.38	-0.02	67.8%	6.3%

## 7. What This Means

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### For Shoppers

A 4.5-star product with 50 reviews is probably genuine. A 5.0-star product with 15 reviews in a high-anomaly category deserves a second look. Pay attention to the distribution of ratings, not just the average - a product with a healthy mix of 4-star and 5-star reviews (and a few 3s) is more trustworthy than one with nothing but perfect scores.

Read the text of negative reviews carefully. Our data shows that 1-star reviews average 129 characters - 37% longer than 5-star reviews (94 characters). Negative reviewers take more time to explain their experience. If the negative reviews on a product are detailed and specific, they are almost certainly genuine.

### For Sellers

Honest sellers are disadvantaged when competitors manipulate reviews. Understanding which categories have the highest anomaly rates helps you contextualise your own ratings. If you sell in a high-anomaly category and your competitor has a perfect 5.0 average, this report suggests that scepticism - not panic - is the right response.

The data also shows that Takealot's marketplace sellers have significantly lower anomaly rates (0.4%) than Takealot Retail products (6.7%). This is partly a function of review volume - higher-traffic products surface more detectable patterns - but it means marketplace sellers operate in a relatively cleaner environment than the headline numbers might suggest.

### For the Platform

Takealot's decision to require purchase verification was the right call, and the data confirms it worked. The next frontier is detecting manipulation by verified purchasers - coordinated review networks, sock puppet accounts, and incentivised review programmes that operate within the verified purchase system. This is harder, but the patterns are detectable with cross-product analysis.

## 8. About This Report

This report was published by Trustd (trustd.co.za), a free and independent tool that helps South African shoppers see the real rating behind any Takealot product, with suspicious reviews identified and stripped out.

Trustd is not affiliated with Takealot. This analysis was conducted using publicly accessible data and does not rely on any proprietary Takealot systems or credentials. Our findings reflect patterns in the data, not allegations against any individual seller, customer, or the platform itself.

We believe that review integrity is a public good. Consumers deserve to make informed purchasing decisions, honest sellers deserve a level playing field, and marketplaces benefit when their review systems are trusted.

### Data & Methodology

Parameter	Value
Data collection period	24-26 February 2026
Products catalogued	1,278,823
Products with reviews	394,613
Reviews analysed	6,416,157
Unique reviewers	1,638,830
Review date range	2002 - February 2026
Data source	Takealot public API (no authentication)
Anomaly detection	Inline duplicate + identity analysis

Questions about this report or its methodology can be directed to [hello@trustd.co.za](mailto:hello@trustd.co.za). This report may be freely shared and cited with attribution to Trustd.