

# The problem with doctor rating websites

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Online rating sites for doctors are growing in popularity and influence, but the accuracy of information they contain can be lacking, according to new research from the University at Buffalo School of Management.

Recently published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, the study reviewed literature on patient-reported [physician ratings](#) and reviews and found a number of data quality issues affecting physician-[rating](#) websites.

"The phrase 'doctors near me' is now searched almost nine times more than it was five years ago, and more than 30% of consumers compare physicians online before choosing a provider," says the study's lead author Pavankumar Mulgund, Ph.D., clinical assistant professor of management science and systems in the UB School of Management. "But physician-rating websites are less popular than similar sites for [consumer goods](#) because users don't trust the accuracy of the data."

The researchers analyzed 49 papers and identified 18 data quality issues affecting physician rating websites. They classified the issues into

categories, measuring such details as accuracy, objectivity, reputation, relevance, timeliness, completeness and believability of the source. In addition, they evaluated the role of the systems that store the data, interfaces that present the data and the safety and security of the data systems.

Their results show a range of issues across all categories, particularly the impact of inline advertisements and the positioning of positive reviews on the first few pages, which is usually deliberate and result from the business model of the sites.

"The main hurdle affecting the [accuracy](#) of reviews and rating data was the glaring absence of negative ratings," says co-author Raj Sharman, Ph.D., professor of management science and systems in the UB School of Management. "These sites can even allow physicians to become premium subscribers with an option to hide up to three [negative comments](#), which can mislead consumers and raise ethical questions."

**More information:** Pavankumar Mulgund et al. Data Quality Issues With Physician-Rating Websites: Systematic Review, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.2196/15916](#)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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