

Online hotel reviews may not reflect the whole truth

By Hugo Martín, Los Angeles Times

If you choose a hotel based on glowing online comments – “OMG, I love this place!” – you may be relying on bogus or insufficient information.

That assessment came from Market Metrix, a San Francisco Bay Area hotel market research company, in a study that found as much as 40 percent of reviews could be made up or even paid for by the hotels.

And even if those online comments are genuine, the study said the reviews could be skewed because hotel guests with bad experiences are three times more likely to write a review than those who had a good or neutral experience.

The study also argued that young people are overrepresented in online reviews. Only 20 percent of adults older than 50 submit such reviews, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center.

“There is a big segment that doesn’t play in that area,” said Jonathan Barsky, co-founder and chief research officer for Market Metrix.

But Market Metrix may be biased on the subject. The company is in the business of offering hotels what it says is a better way to gauge guest sentiments: guest surveys.

Last week TripAdvisor, one of the world’s largest travel websites, defended the value of online reviews with a survey that found 98 percent of those questioned said TripAdvisor hotel reviews accurately reflected their experience. The study was conducted by PhoCusWright.

The survey of 2,739 visitors to the website also found that 74 percent said they write reviews, not to critique, but to share good experiences with other travelers.