

Why are social media still flooded with scam ads? How to detect them?

Despite efforts to curb fraudulent activity, fraudulent advertising continues to thrive.

Social media platforms have become fertile ground for scammers, exploiting their massive user bases with legitimate services and marketing tools. Here's why this happens and how to spot them.

Why are scam ads so prevalent on social media platforms?

Social media platforms are fertile ground for scammers because they create an ideal environment for scammers. With billions of users sharing personal information online, scammers can easily target specific demographics with sophisticated advertising tools. Social media platforms also allow anyone to create an account and start advertising with minimal verification, making it easy for scammers to quickly create and distribute fake ads.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, social media scams accounted for more than \$2.7 billion in losses in 2023 alone. These scams exploit the legitimate marketing tools provided by social media platforms, leveraging their algorithms to amplify the reach of fraudulent ads to a large number of users. Ultimately, it becomes a numbers game—the more people are exposed to these scams, the more people fall victim and lose money.

How do scam ads pass the review?

While there are policies in place to prevent fraudulent advertising, social media platforms often struggle to enforce them effectively. Fraudulent ads can bypass reviews through a combination of tactics including:

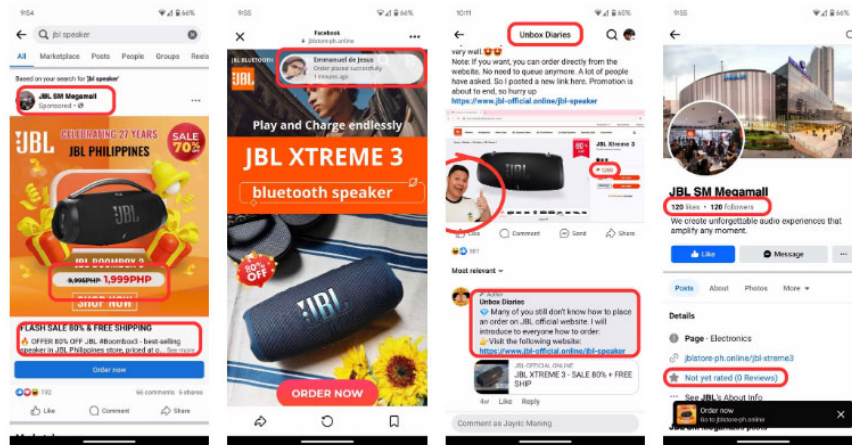
1. **Exploiting loopholes** : Some scammers exploit the platforms' own ad creation tools, using them to mimic legitimate businesses or products. By creating ads that look professional and trustworthy, they can fool both the platform's review system and potential victims.
2. **Too many ads to moderate** : Social media platforms host millions of ads every day. The sheer volume makes it difficult for moderators and automated systems to detect every scam. Even with sophisticated algorithms, some scams slip through due to the sheer volume of submissions.
3. **Layers between advertisers and social media companies** : Many social media ads are placed through intermediaries such as third-party advertising agencies or platforms. These layers create a gap between the actual advertiser and the social media company, making it harder to trace the origin of fraudulent ads.
4. **Deceptive ads are made to look legitimate** : Deceptive ads often mimic well-known brands by using familiar logos, color schemes, fonts, etc. Moderators can have difficulty evaluating ads if they don't fully understand the context or cultural nuances behind the ad. For example, an ad may seem normal to

someone unfamiliar with a particular product, but to a smart user, it may be an obvious scam.

5. **Deepfake AI complicates moderation** : The rise of AI-generated content, including deepfakes, has added another layer of complexity. Fraudsters use AI to create realistic but fake videos, images, and even voices that can fool both users and moderation systems. These tools make it easy for fraudsters to create high-quality, convincing ads that are difficult to distinguish from genuine content.
6. **Continuous adaptation** : Scammers frequently change their ad content, making it difficult for automated systems to spot patterns. They may use slightly altered images or text to avoid filters designed to detect known scams.
7. **Local targeting** : Scammers may target specific regions or smaller groups where ad review policies may be less strict, increasing the chance of them slipping through undetected.

How to spot scams on social media

Recognizing scam ads is crucial to protecting yourself on social media. Ad moderation efforts often fail because there are too many ads to moderate. Luckily, you don't have to. Checking whether an ad is legitimate or a scam only takes a few seconds. Here's how you can verify.



1. Suspicious price

When you see an ad, check to see if the price is right. A common warning sign is deals that seem too good to be true—ads promising big discounts or free products are often scams. If something seems too generous to be true, it probably is. If you don't know the usual price range for a product, you can always check with your favorite online store.

2. The poster is not verified.

Another telltale sign is that scam ads are often posted by unverified accounts or pages. Most social media platforms now offer some form of verification badge. This usually takes the form of a blue check mark next to the poster's name. If a brand is particularly popular, you'll see a verification badge.

3. Confirm fake

Scammers also use fake endorsements, falsely claiming to be endorsed by celebrities or reputable organizations. Always verify such claims through official channels. Also, suspicious URLs are a telltale sign. Scammers often

create URLs that closely resemble legitimate sites but include misspellings or extra characters.

4. Poor grammar

Poor grammar and spelling in ads are also warning signs to watch out for, as many scams are hastily created. Legitimate ads are usually created and posted by professionals and have gone through a grammar and spelling check.

5. Negative reviews

Finally, check the comments and reviews. If you see complaints or warnings from other users, that's usually a clear sign of a scam. You may also see fake reviews. If the ad is full of warning signs and overly positive comments, you're probably looking at a scam.

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