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Ask the Expert: Do Bad Online Reviews Violate Jewish Law?

What the laws of lashon hara have to say about online speech.

By [Rabbi Menachem Creditor](#)



Question: My understanding is that Jewish laws around evil speech, or *lashon hara*, prohibit speech that is harmful to someone even if it's true. If that's right, would it be prohibited to post a negative restaurant review on the internet?

In the digital age, online reviews have become a standard way to share experiences and express our opinions publicly. But it's questionable whether such practices align with Jewish ethics.

The laws of [lashon hara](#) derive from Leviticus, which states: "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people." But on a deeper level, "words create worlds," in the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. That is to say, the words we use create reality. Rarely has that been as true as in the digital age.

Certainly, posting fake reviews, whether positive or negative, is strictly prohibited and violates the Torah's command: "Distance yourself from falsehood." ([Exodus 23:7](#)). But as you note in your question, even truthful reviews are problematic.

According to Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, better known as the [Chofetz Chaim](#) and one of the leading authorities on the laws of lashon hara, sharing truthful information must meet an ethical threshold. First, the issue must be addressed directly. That would mean raising any concerns about the quality of a restaurant experience directly with the owner before sharing one's concerns more widely. Second, the information should be shared only with those who need to know it. And finally, the decision to share the information must be made with pure intentions — not out of anger and revenge.

With respect to online reviews, their public nature risks harming beyond necessity, violating the need-to-know principle. Some would argue that modern norms imply consent for such critiques, but as the Talmud reminds us, even when someone "forgoes their own honor, their honor remains inviolable." ([Bava Metzia 58b](#)) Though this principle is traditionally applied only to parents and teachers, not businesses, shifting societal expectations do not override ethical responsibilities, especially when the negative impact of an online review can be irreversible, and often severe.

Because of all of these intersecting concerns, it is my opinion that sharing a negative restaurant review on the internet is prohibited. Jewish tradition challenges us to use our words wisely, even online. By conducting our online speech with integrity and humility, we transform everyday actions into sacred service, ensuring our digital footprints reflect our Jewish values.

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