

RETAIL

## Consumers go online to find word-of-mouth recommendations

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*More than 60 percent of shoppers consider other consumers' feedback. Image credit: Alibaba*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Today's omnichannel consumers are craving more human elements in their shopping journeys, drawing them to user-generated content and personalized experiences.

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Ratings and reviews are integral for shoppers, particularly when there is a visual component, according to Bazaarvoice's Shopper Experience Index. Quality mobile experiences and personalized interactions are other ways for companies to stand out in today's crowded marketplace.

"Through things like ratings and reviews and Q&A, brands and retailers can connect to their shoppers directly, publicly and in real time," said Drew Giovannoli, director of product marketing at **Bazaarvoice**, Austin, TX. "Many brands and retailers are also investing in online personalization to make consumers feel heard and understood."

Bazaarvoice's report is based on a survey of more than 2,000 consumers in the U.S., U.K., France and Germany and feedback from 500 brands and retailers.

### Consumer feedback

Word-of-mouth has always been important for retailers and shoppers, but today those conversations have shifted online.

Nearly two-thirds of shoppers, 64 percent, consider user feedback during their shopping journeys. This includes reviews and ratings, questions and answers and product photos.

The number of online reviews posted grew almost 10 percent from 2017 to 2018, reaching 66.8 million reviews on Bazaarvoice Network sites.



*Online reviews are on the rise. Image credit: BMW*

Value in consumer feedback is clear, according to the data.

Revenue per visit (RPV) jumps 157 percent among shoppers who engage with this user-generated content on best-in-class sites. Apparel and accessories brands lead the way, with a 214 percent increase in RPV among users interacting with UGC.

Product pages with a question and answer component have a 447 percent higher conversion rate compared to product pages with no Q&A, regardless of shopper engagement. RPV also jumps 120 percent when shoppers engage with Q&A content.

Photos are also becoming a more popular way for consumers to share their experiences with a brand, retailer, product or service.

Twenty-five percent more photos were posted by shoppers in 2018 than in 2017. One in three consumers report that product photos are at least important to their buying processes.

More than 90 percent of brands and retailers also believe that visual UGC creates a more engaging shopping experience, and 81 percent also believe it improves brand loyalty.

A growing number of consumers are also visiting ecommerce sites on mobile devices, with 57 percent of all page views across the Bazaarvoice Network happening on mobile devices.

Sixty-eight percent of consumers believe an easy-to-use mobile experience is important or very important as they shop.



*Christian Lacroix is now retailing online. Image credit: Christian Lacroix*

Personalization is also trending in the retail world.

Seventy percent of brands and retailers plan to prioritize personalizing offers and recommendations to individual consumers.

Less than 20 percent of consumers find retailers are making relevant product recommendations. More than four in 10 shoppers report feeling frustrated when retailers do not offer experiences that are both relevant and personalized.

UGC importance

User-generated content also plays an important role outside of brand and retailer Web sites.

According to a report from Olapic, 95 percent of social media users have interacted with consumer-generated images. More than six in 10 view user-generated content several times a week.

The majority of social media users find user-generated content to be more trustworthy and authentic than brand images ([see story](#)).

While retailers continue to leverage product reviews to motivate consumer spending, a growing number of shoppers are also turning to store reviews to evaluate bricks-and-mortar locations.

According to a survey conducted by Uberall, 19 percent of respondents admitted to always checking platforms such as Google or Yelp for store reviews when deciding where to shop. A majority of consumers also believe brands should reply to every review posted about a store ([see story](#)).

"Consumers have infinite choices when it comes to choosing where to shop," Bazaarvoice's Mr. Giovannoli said. "They crave conversations and want to shop with brands that actually take the time to connect with them and understand what they truly want.

"The brick-and-mortar store remains the best method for connecting with customers, and brands are being increasingly challenged to mirror this aspect online."

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