

# A picture's worth a thousand purchases

How visual and social content  
increase online sales



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# Introduction

To learn more about visual and social user-generated content, we surveyed over 8,000 consumers across Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the US on the topic. In this e-book, we will explore its impact on customers' approach to online shopping, the buying decisions they make, and the routes they take to purchase.

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## Survey respondents, by country

**1,513**

US

**1,005**

Canada

**1,515**

UK

**1,501**

France

**1,517**

Germany

**1,000**

Australia



Respondents were invited to participate in an online survey via Savanta's international panel access. Verified, double opt-in respondents registered to online consumer opinion panels received an email asking them take part in a survey about their attitudes regarding online shopping and visual user-generated content.

# Making digital feel real

It's no secret that COVID-19 has expedited a massive rise in online retail adoption over the last year. With physical stores having to close their doors and whole countries in lockdown, the IBM Retail Index states that the pandemic has accelerated the move from shopping in physical stores to shopping online by roughly five years.<sup>1</sup> This growth has led to an increase in alternative shopping habits, with the social commerce market predicted to increase to \$604.5 billion by 2027.<sup>2</sup>

## Shoppers are buying online



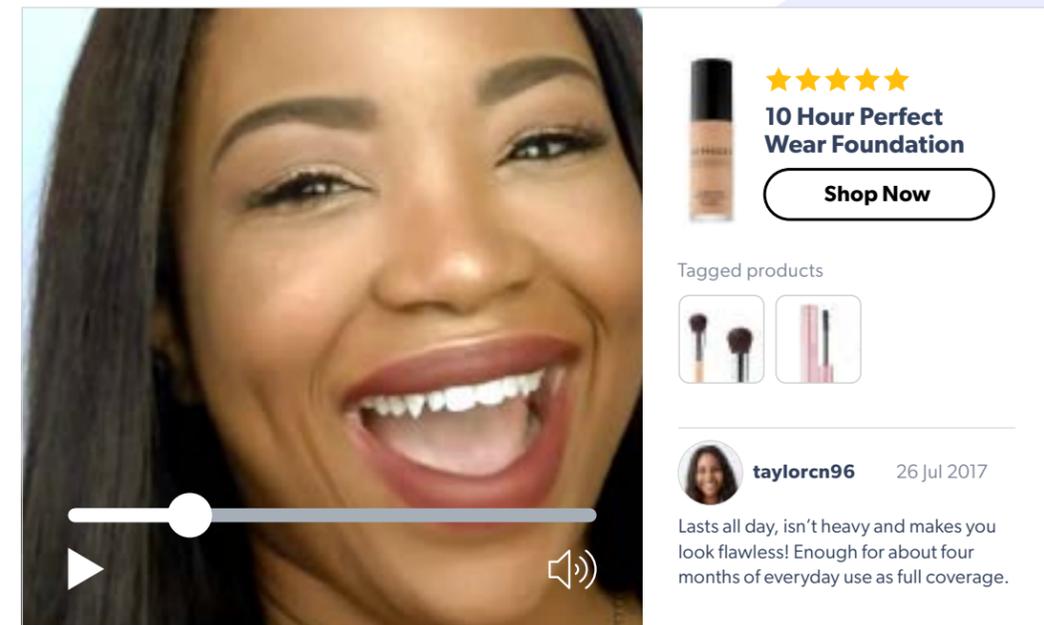
A third of shoppers said they buy something online at least once a week, and 9% said they're buying online daily. This boom has made e-commerce an even more exciting and competitive space to operate in.

Too often, however, digital shopping carts are abandoned. In fact, Baymard reports that this applies to more than two-thirds of purchases.<sup>3</sup> To convert sales, retailers must give shoppers the confidence and validation they need to purchase items online.

More than 2/3 of digital shopping carts are abandoned.

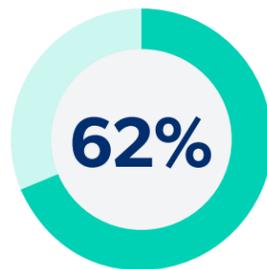


Historically, ratings and reviews have helped retailers solve the problem of cart abandonment. In our research, 81% of our respondents said that written reviews are an important part of the decision making process. However, in an increasingly visual-obsessed, digital world, product photos and videos provided by previous customers are quickly becoming one of the biggest drivers of shopper confidence and education. Visual and social UGC helps brands drive trust in their products, as shoppers see the authentic product and experience the item through their peers as they would themselves in-store.



# The value of seeing for yourself

Visual and social content has become an increasingly popular way for brands to positively impact shoppers' purchasing decisions, with 66% of shoppers finding the availability of photos from previous shoppers important when deciding to purchase online. It's clear that when customers see relatable voices commenting on and reviewing a product, they are more likely to buy. When online shoppers have rich visual information that replicates their in-store experience, the description is perceived as being more reliable and the goods much more real. This trust in the brand and product instills confidence to buy.



Shoppers who are more likely to buy a product if they can view customer photos and videos.

In fact, 62% of shoppers now say they are more likely to buy a product if they can view customer videos and photos. The more realistic and authentic that viewers feel the content is, the more confident they become in their purchase decisions. Rich visual and social content can demonstrate how the product fits or is used, and can help potential customers to imagine how they would use and experience the product in their own lives.

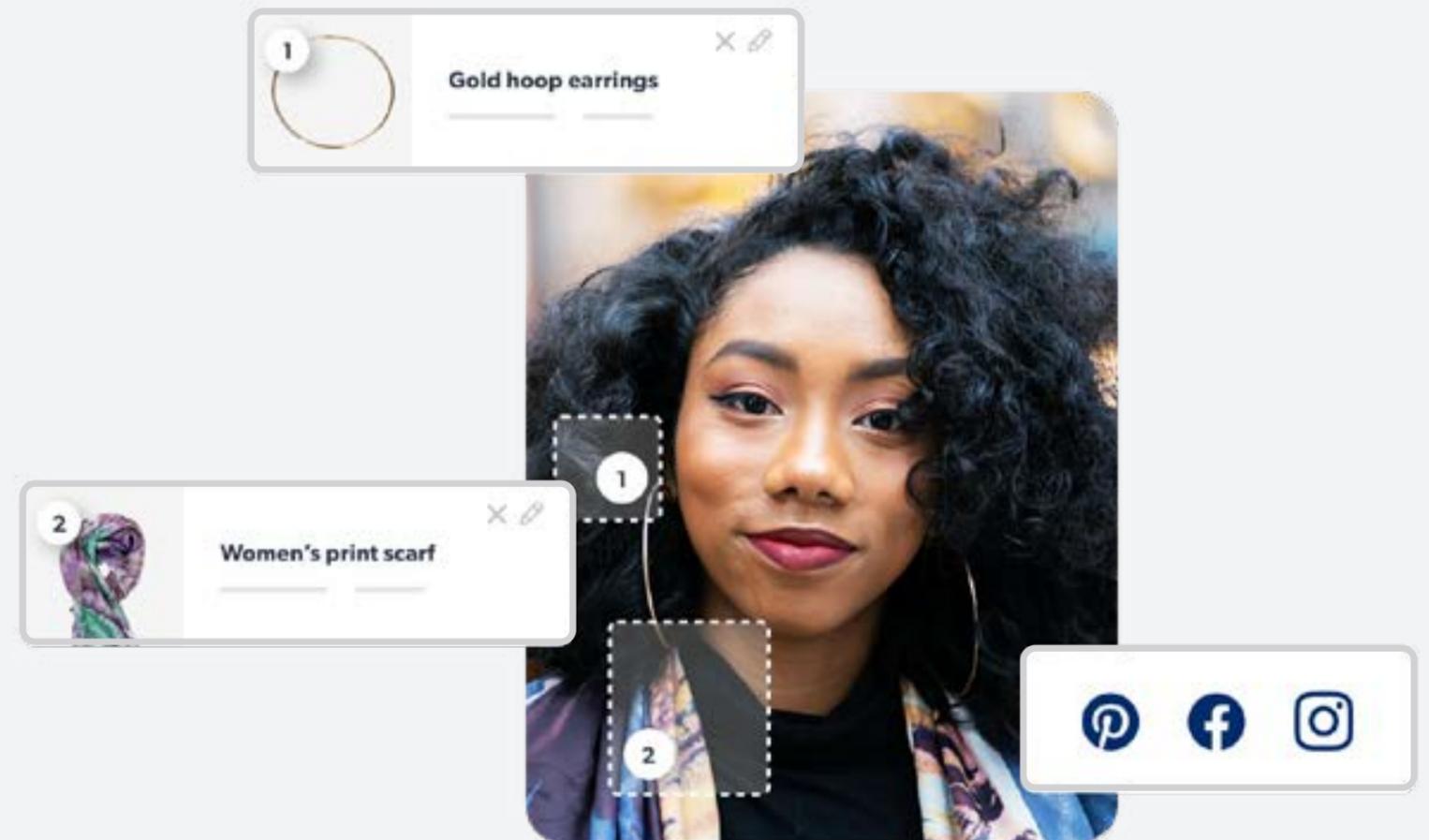
## Videos do more: Shoppers look for extra information and context



For example, visual content of a product – say, a handbag – worn by someone in a photo or video can demonstrate the size of the product, what it could be matched with, and the quality of the material. When asked what the biggest reason for wanting video UGC is, a quarter of shoppers said that it highlights things not obvious from the text and pictures in the product listing. Interestingly, this differed by gender, with men slightly preferring to see the product in action (24%) above seeing something that was not obvious in text descriptions (23%).

### Top 3 reasons for looking at video UGC, by gender

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeing the product in action</li> <li>2. Highlighting something not otherwise obvious</li> <li>3. Seeing the quality of a product</li> </ol>	 MEN
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Highlighting something not otherwise obvious</li> <li>2. Confirming that reviews are accurate</li> <li>3. Seeing the product in action</li> </ol>	 WOMEN

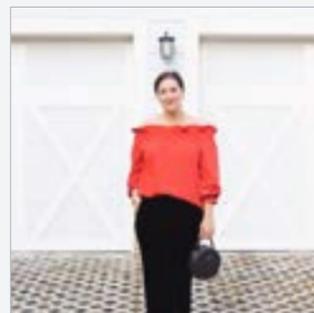


When visual and social content is shared by previous purchasers, that piece of content will rank higher amongst key audiences as a trustworthy piece of content. In fact, almost 75% of respondents say that they prefer seeing customers' photos and videos on online stores over professional imagery.

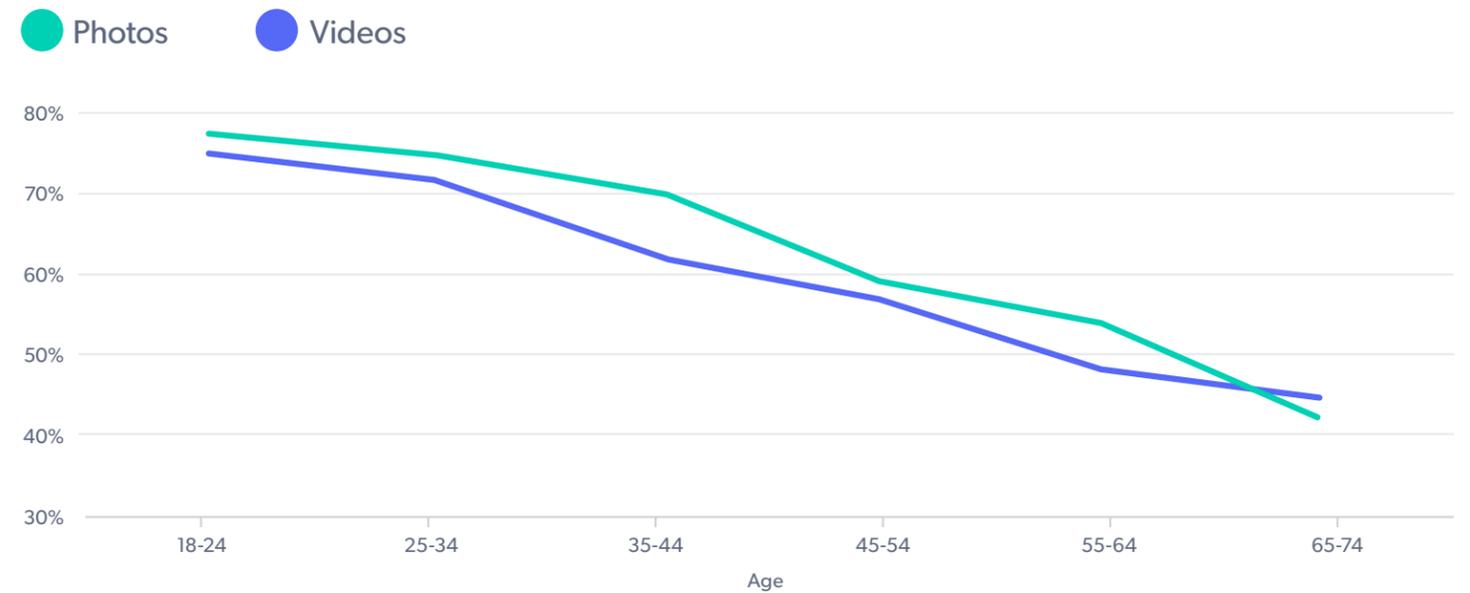
"The variety of looks helps customers better understand fit and how to style the items. When a customer sees other customers and influencers wearing the product, it inspires her or him to purchase."



Kayla Robinson, Marketing Associate



### Importance of visual UGC, by shopper age



By enabling visual UGC on their platforms in addition to text-based reviews, retailers can provide buyers with the important answers that they are after. In fact, the trends across age groups suggest that those most engaged with online shopping find visual UGC most important. This suggests that demand for visual UGC rises as shoppers become more used to seeing the format as part of reviews. Almost 80% of 18-24 year-olds, for example, say that customer photos are important, compared to 43% of 65-74 year-olds – and we can expect these numbers to grow as visual UGC becomes a staple of e-commerce.

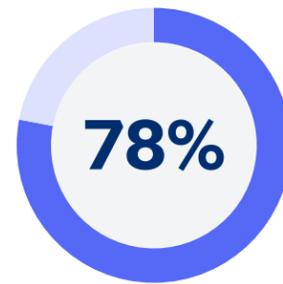
UGC can also help form a marketing strategy to gain awareness and consideration within search results. In 2019, Google announced a major addition to its search algorithms – the UGC attribute. This was created to help Google determine which links are generated by users. In doing so, the search engine indicated that UGC could also help brands gain a competitive advantage by helping them improve their search ranking and appear top of category in search results. From discovery to payment, visual UGC enables the buying funnel.

# Driving trust in products

When shoppers find that they don't have quite enough desire for a product, or quite enough certainty that it fits their requirements, they abandon their purchase instead of clicking the buy button. This is hugely damaging to building long-term loyalty with customers.

When buying online, shoppers can't physically interact with a product before purchasing. Gaining consumer trust is a big issue for all businesses, and Deloitte highlights in its 2021 Global Marketing Trends that the pandemic has only accelerated its importance. As the opportunity for e-commerce continues to grow, retailers will need more effective methods to engender trust. Enter UGC. In our 2020 Shopper Experience Index, we found that 78% of shoppers globally trust online product reviews, and 39% said product reviews are the online shopping feature they rely on most for making an informed purchase decision faster.

## Shoppers trust online product reviews



Global shoppers trust online product reviews.



Four in ten say product reviews are the online shopping feature they rely on most for making an informed purchase decision faster.

There's every sign that shoppers will soon expect not just written UGC but also visual UGC as a prerequisite for choosing to buy from a brand or retailer. To stop valuable sales being lost, retailers must ensure that shoppers feel as comfortable selecting a product they haven't 'seen' online as they feel choosing a product in-store.

Part of that means collecting enough information to inspire trust. For 39% of our respondents, 6 to 25 reviews is the minimum they would consider as forming a reliable view, which demonstrates that shoppers need a considerable amount of evidence to clearly understand and trust a product's attributes before they buy.

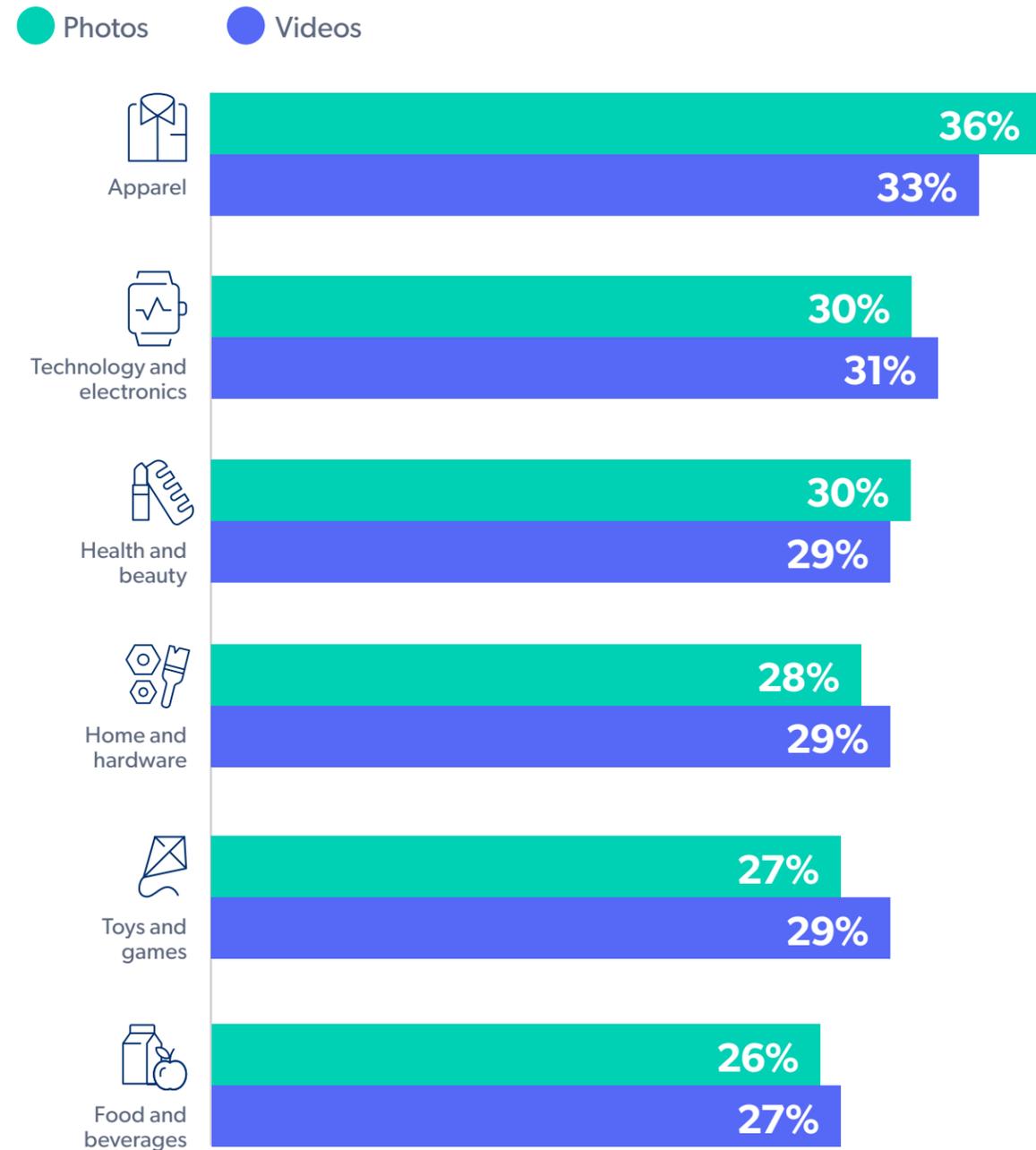
To be successful in delivering this content, brands and retailers need to not only provide shoppers with the content that they crave, but also showcase that content on the channels where they are seeking out and discovering new products. To collect visual UGC is great. To deliver it to shoppers as they are discovering new products is even better, and in some cases, essential.

# Where visuals have most impact

While the importance of rich UGC is key for all product types, the case is even stronger for products that are typically higher in value, as users want more evidence and certainty about the quality of the product and accuracy of the description before buying. When asked, 36% of respondents said that technology and electronics is the most important category for photos and videos from other customers. For food and beverage purchases, by contrast, only 6% of the same respondents found this was the most important category for rich visual media.

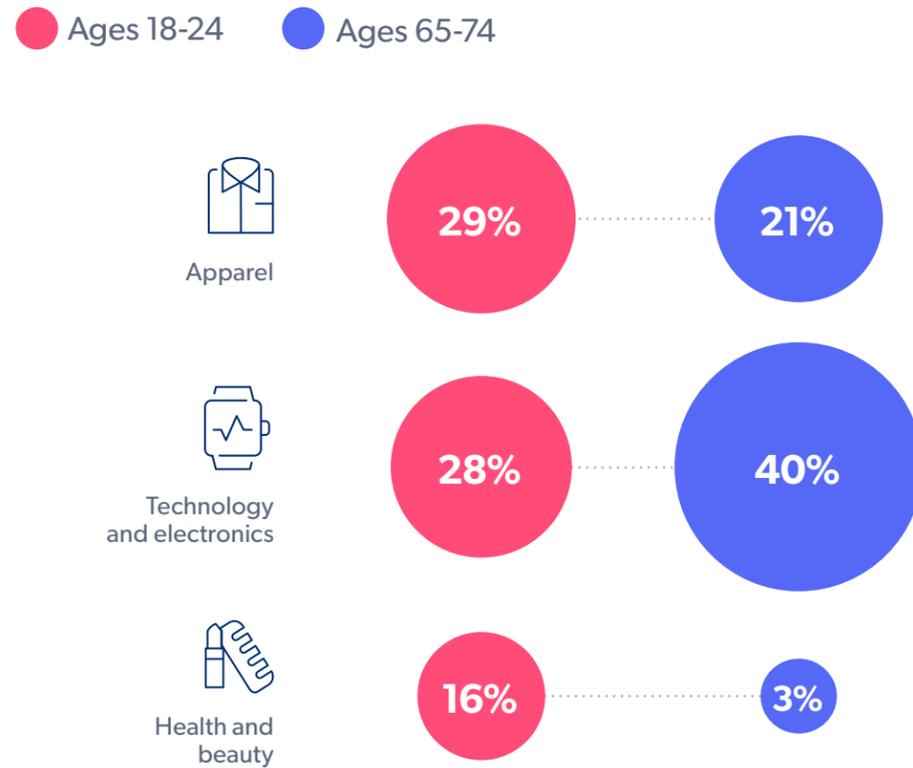
When reviewed globally, Germany topped the list of countries prioritizing visual reviews for technology and electronics at 44% of respondents. In France, by contrast, 29% of respondents felt that visual UGC was most important for apparel, while in the UK this category scored significantly less at 17%.

## Purchasing influence of visual UGC by category



However, there are generational differences on the impact of visual UGC as a purchase driver within product categories. The graph below highlights the categories with the biggest difference by age group.

### Purchasing influence of visual UGC, by generation



By understanding which products and categories would be best served by visual UGC, brands can prioritize their UGC strategies accordingly. Enabling customers to provide visual and social content, and encouraging them to do so for higher-value products, will allow brands to increase the sales of more profitable products while also satisfying and prioritizing the highest customer demand for UGC.

★★★★★  
**Pro Quadcopter with Remote Control**  
[Shop Now](#)

**Jman** 1 month ago  
Takes great photos for its compact size. Sturdy enough to let my son play with it.

# Looking beyond the platform

Every single one of our 8,000+ respondents said they use at least one social media platform. So, while it's clear that the power of visual UGC on retail websites will only grow, how can it aid brands on social media?

Coming across a product by chance while browsing social media echoes that familiar experience of discovering an item while browsing in a physical store. For some years, social media has increasingly played a role in product discovery due to the rising significance of influencers and the upskilling of brands' own social media outreach.

Over the last year, this discovery tactic has been complemented by the growing prevalence of social commerce, where shoppers can discover new products and buy directly through platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This means social commerce can complete the journey from finding, to wanting, to buying in just a click or two.

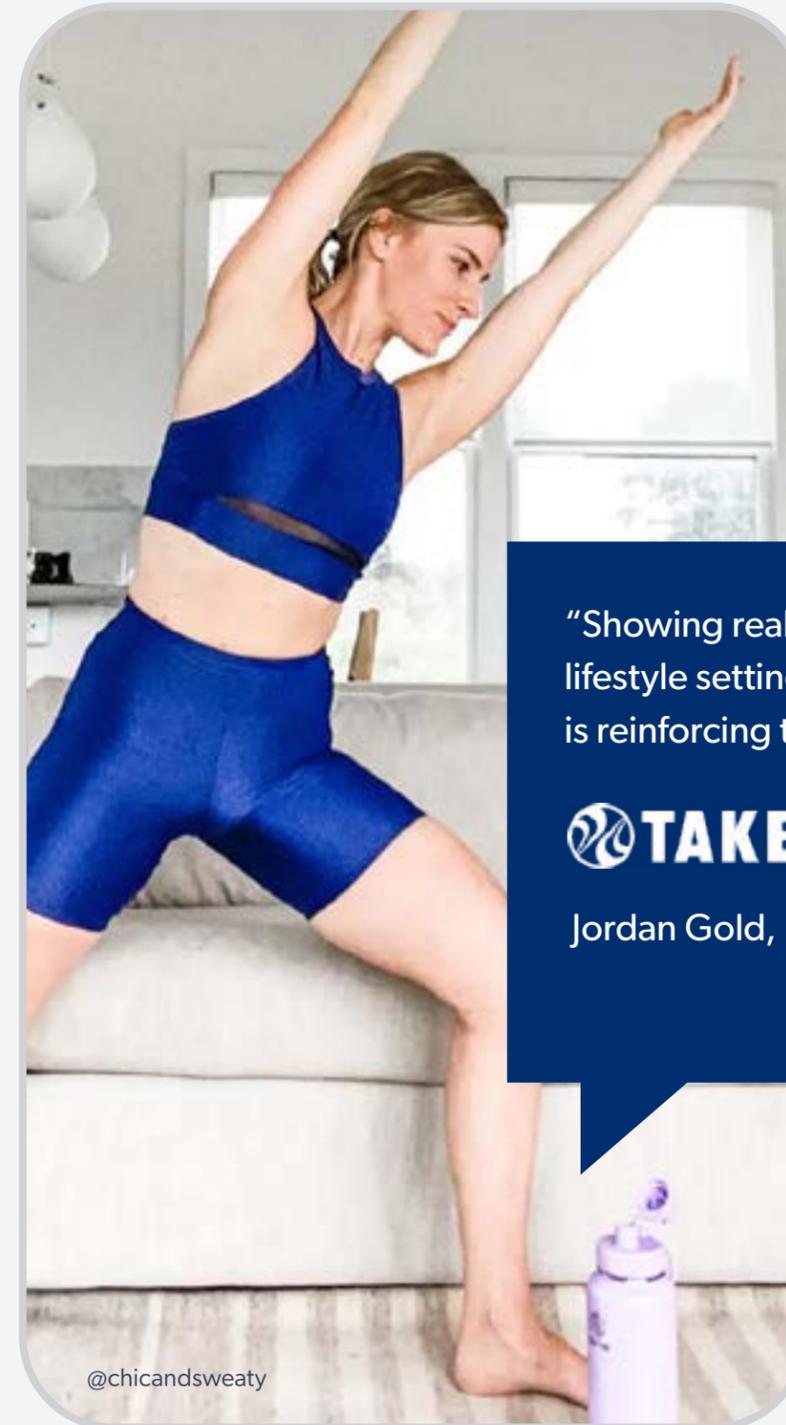


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The importance of social media in the retail landscape is clear, as 50% of people surveyed agree that social media plays an active role in influencing what they choose to buy. When asked what social media content has the biggest effect on buying choices, shoppable images and videos were identified as the most influential. The question, then, is not whether to pursue a social media strategy, but how to ensure that that strategy delivers content that really resonates with the target audience.

#### Social content with most influence on buying decisions

19%	Shoppable images and videos
15%	Video advertising
13%	Posts from brands I follow

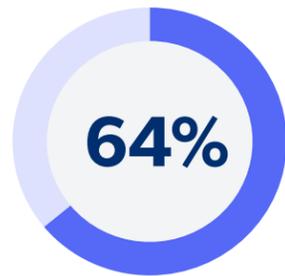


“Showing real people using our products in a lifestyle setting gives us powerful social proof and is reinforcing the real-world value of the products.”



Jordan Gold, Director of E-commerce



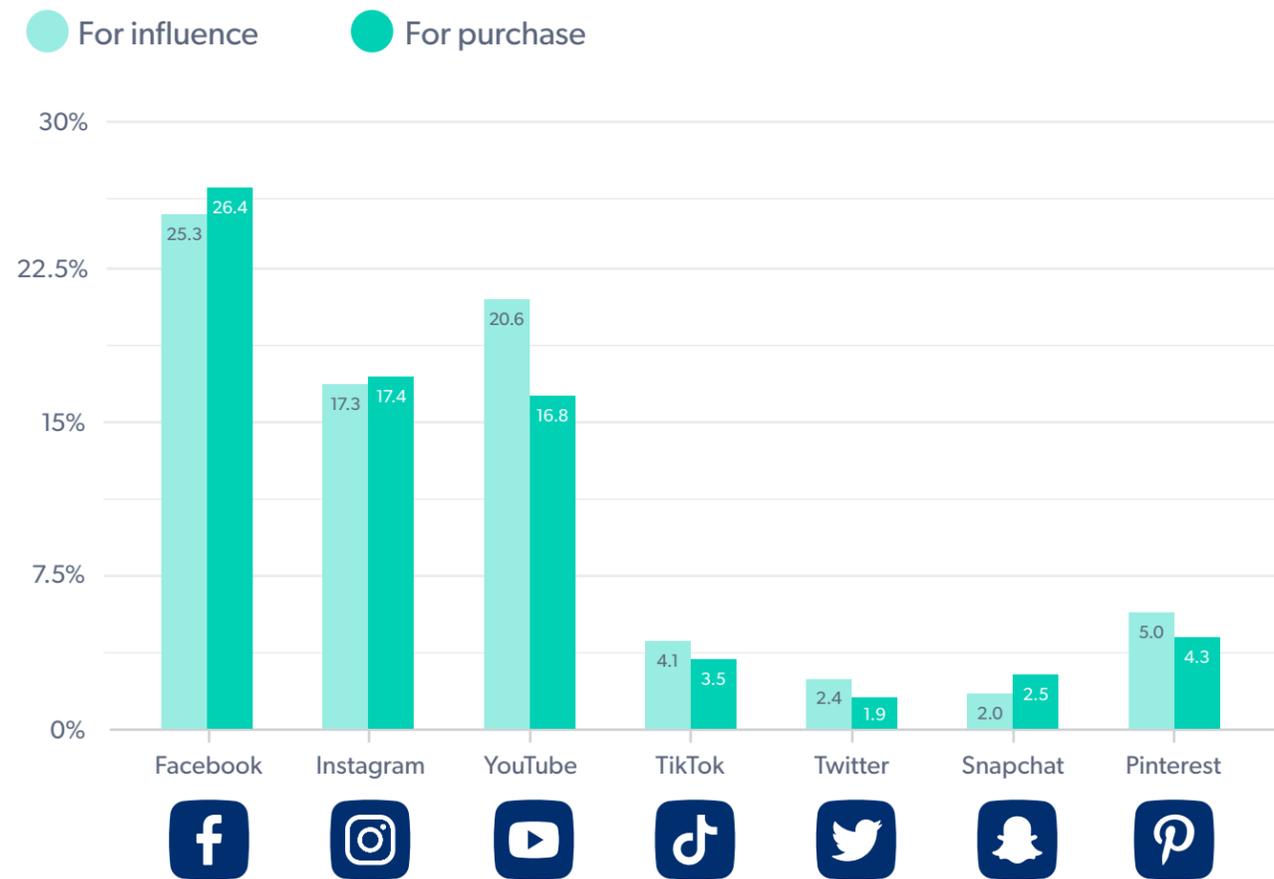


Shoppers who prefer brand social posts using real customer photos over professional product shots.

Visual UGC has clear benefits. 64% of our respondents reported that they prefer it when brands use real customer photos in their posts rather than professional product shots. While 74% of people prefer visual UGC on retail websites, recency and frequency become even more important for social media usage. Of our respondents, 60% told us that they want to see new visual UGC on a brand's social media presence at least once a week, compared to 55% for websites.

Younger shoppers demonstrate an even stronger preference for visual UGC on social media. Amongst 18-34 year-olds, two-thirds say that social media actively influences their purchasing, while 72% say they prefer it when brands use visual UGC for social media outreach. We see a similar trend in terms of where people are finding inspiration and buying products. Across all respondents, Facebook is the most popular destination for purchasing influence (25%) and the most likely social platform for them to purchase a product on (26%). Amongst 18-34 year-olds, however, Instagram is the most popular destination, with 31% using it as their main source of inspiration and 27% saying it's the most likely place for them to buy.

### Influence of visual UGC, by platform



# PARACHUTE

Parachute, a home and hardware essentials provider, found visual UGC on social media could play a huge role in driving sales, from product discovery to purchase completion. The brand optimized its advertising campaigns to boost conversions.

Parachute realized that fans were posting fresh, visual lifestyle imagery on social media and tagging Parachute products. The business used Bazaarvoice's technology to incorporate customer-tagged Parachute-related lifestyle imagery in its advertising campaigns, demonstrating how its products could be used in everyday life. The tactic was successful: UGC-based retargeting ads generated a 35% higher click-through rate and a 60% lower cost-per-click.

Bringing visual UGC to the table doesn't just match consumer preferences; by making those products feel real, believable, and trustworthy, it also increases buying likelihood. In traditional online retail, discovering new products doesn't happen to the same extent that it does in-store. The search bar gives people a direct route to what they already think they want. Social media fills that gap.

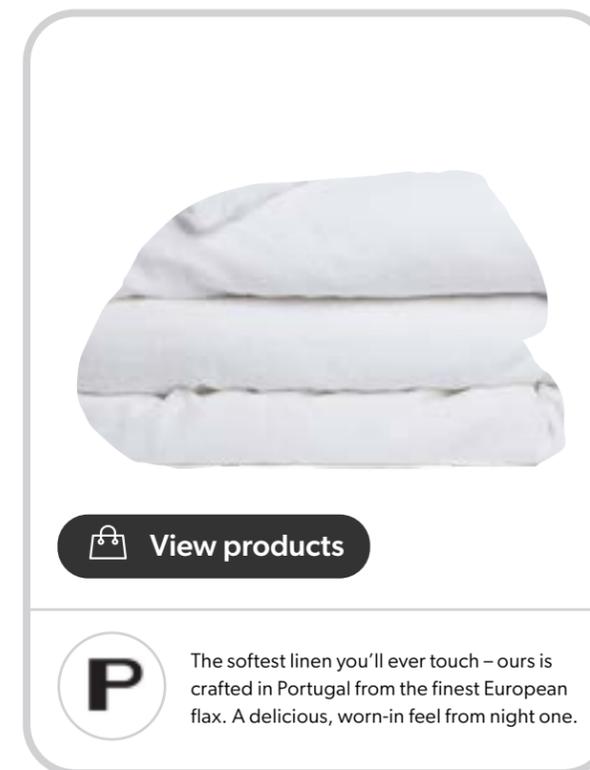
## Parachute leverages UGC in ads to increase conversions

**+35%**

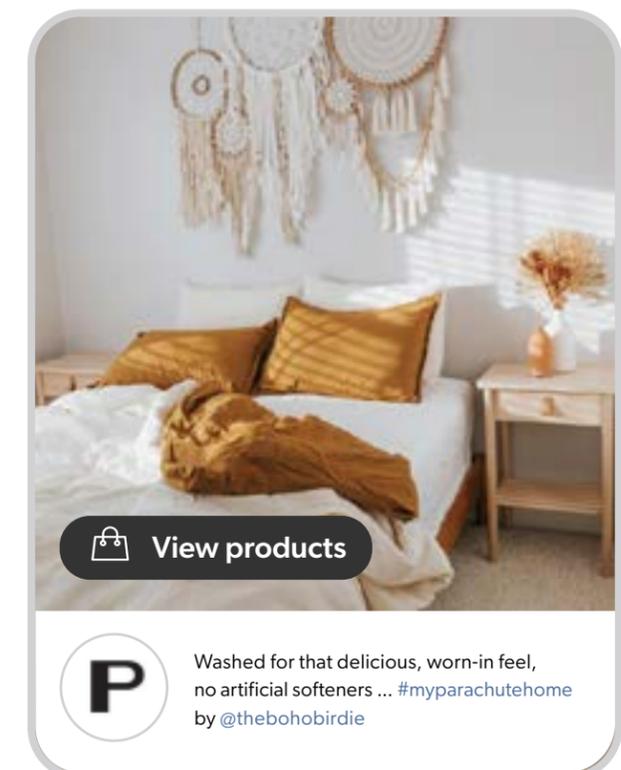
Increase in click-through rate

**-60%**

Decrease in cost-per-click



Before: Ad with brand photography



After: Ad with UGC

# Deliver compelling content

We all know that reviews, both written and photo-based, are a purchase driver, improving shopper conversion rates. Yet, not all reviews are considered equal, according to our respondents. The quality of available reviews was highlighted by 45% of people as the main thing they're looking for on a shopping platform to decide on the extent to which reviews should influence their purchase. Specifically, the length, detail, and grammar of reviews have a big impact.

Product price, service, and delivery information were identified by 34% of respondents as being necessary for a "quality review." How long ago reviews were posted also has a significant impact on its trustworthiness. A third of our respondents said they would want to see content posted within the last week to consider it relevant to their decision-making process, while more than two-thirds would like it to have been shared within the last month.

## What about a review inspires shoppers to purchase?

Almost half of shoppers say it's the quality of a review that matters most.



## What makes a "quality review?"

Reviews which have a biggest impact include details on the:



**Product price**



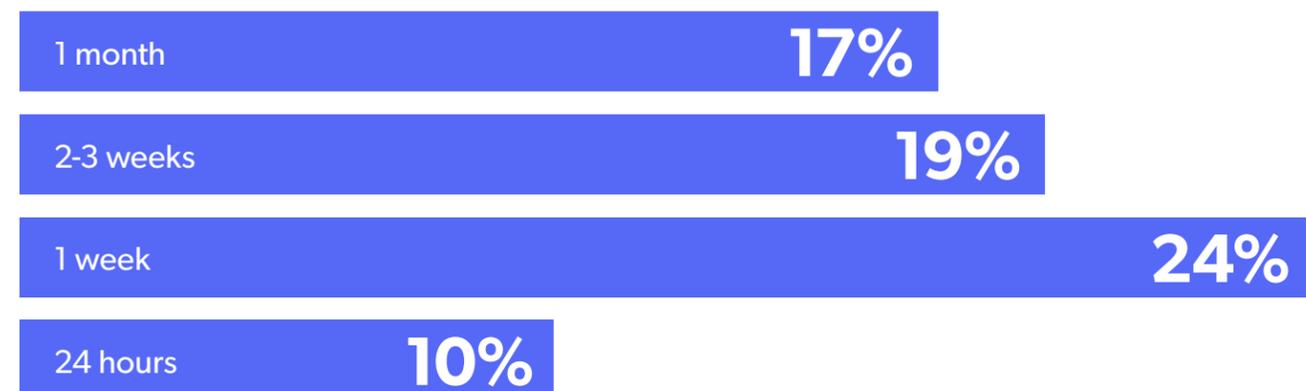
**Service**



**Delivery information**

## Preferred recency of UGC

Review recency also impacts trustworthiness. Shoppers want to see content posted within the past:



Of course, businesses do not have direct control over how many users submit reviews, the quality of those reviews, or how frequently reviews are posted – though all of these factors can be influenced by a good user experience for UGC.

Photos and videos are an important way to maximize the persuasiveness of user reviews where the product is too new to have a high volume of feedback or too rarely-purchased to have very recent feedback. The qualities visual UGC provides – making reviews more trustworthy, showing features not obvious in other information, seeing the product in action – can fill a vital potential gap in the trust-generation process with shoppers.

### How visual UGC fills the trust gap

Visual UGC generates trust with shoppers by providing deeper information for products which:

- **Lack recent reviews**
  - New in-market
  - Infrequently purchased
- **Have features not otherwise obvious**
- **Show the item in action**

It's also important to note that 30% of shoppers are most likely to trust a mix of positive and negative reviews, compared to just 18% for positive reviews alone. Again, it is the honesty and credibility of visual UGC, which makes it valuable over and above product descriptions and professional photos.

### Negative reviews are not all bad

Shoppers trust a mix of negative and positive reviews over positive reviews alone:

A mix of positive and negative

30%

Positive only

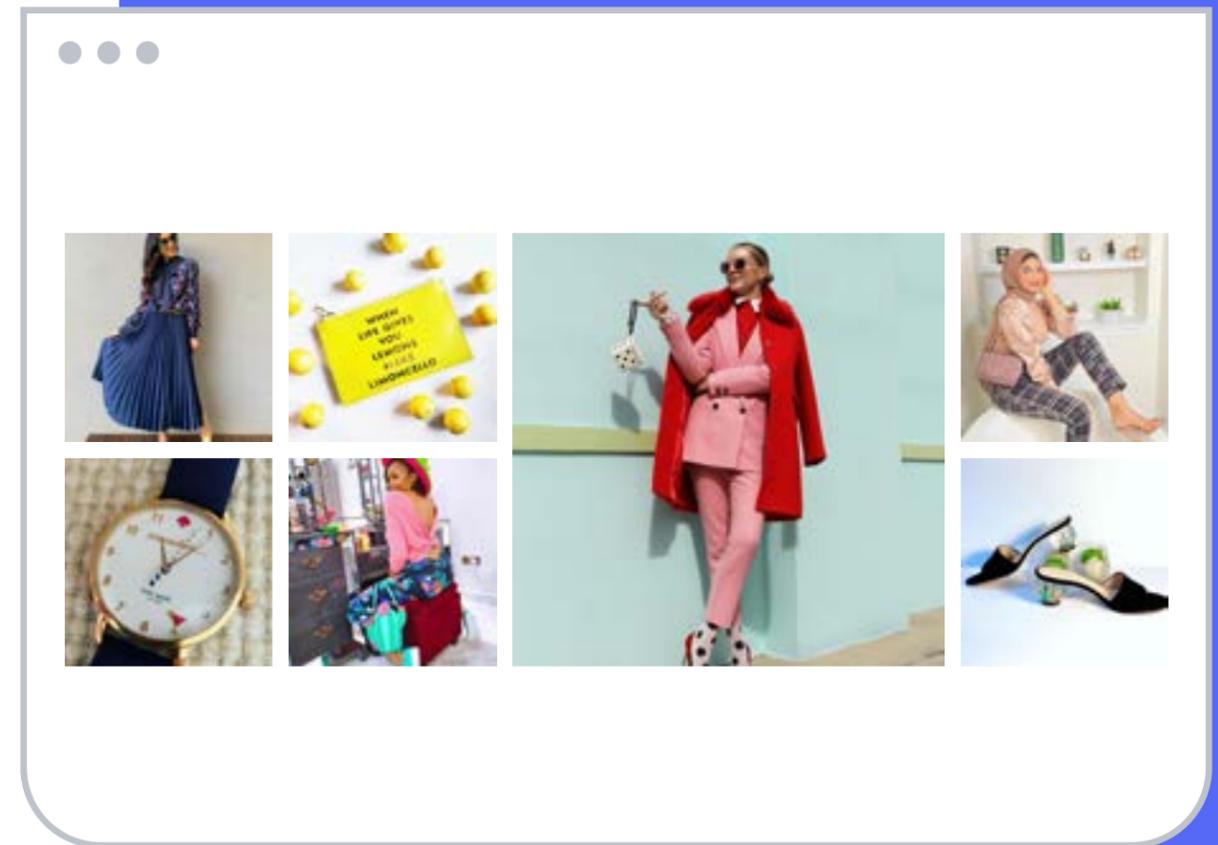
18%

The data supports the argument that the brands who create a defined UGC strategy, asking and incentivizing customers to post media that is rich, authentic, recent, accurate, and detailed will have a competitive advantage. In doing so, they will turn an often static and distant experience for users into a highly compelling, personal, and dynamic experience. This creates an experience similar to walking through a physical store, which will ultimately build trust in the brand.



# Transforming the shopping experience to drive more revenue

The pivot to digital has accelerated the online opportunity for retailers. Helping to facilitate the rise of social e-commerce, consumers are using social as a tool for discovery and authenticity to a greater extent, and seeing media-rich UGC as a trusted and inspirational source that will help purchase decision making. Marketers can use visual UGC to help their customers better understand products online and motivate them to buy. Over time, the use of media-rich, social UGC will help brands to convert more purchases, drive trust and importantly, revenue from increased sales.



# Recommendations

To transform the shopping experience, brands must:

- 1 Understand the demographics of their audience**  
They can see which generation is most likely to use media-rich UGC and for which types of product categories. As the data shows, while visual and social UGC helps inspire all audiences, it can be most effective when considerately applied.
- 2 Consider visual content formats**  
Media-rich content formats such as video can leave a lasting impression and have a larger impact, especially for social audiences.
- 3 Create a plan to leverage social conversations which tag your brand across multiple channels**  
Visual social content can be a key purchase driver for brands and it should not live on social media channels alone. Many brands can share reviews, images, and videos on their websites to help increase conversion.
- 4 Encourage users to continue to share their product reviews**  
As the data showed, relevancy and recency of UGC can affect how impactful it is as a purchase driver. By using social media campaigns, email marketing and product sampling tactics to incentivize well-networked users to share their opinions on the brand, the brand can extend reach across multiple channels.
- 5 Analyze social data**  
How customers engage with visual and social content will help a brand gather valuable insight which can be used to iteratively form a visual and social UGC plan and, ultimately, ensure maximum sales. Take KidKraft for example; they added a new color choice for one of their playhouses after they realized people were painting the item a different color post-purchase, which resulted in the significant sales success of the new version.

Visual, social content is becoming the foundation of consumer purchase decision making. To ensure that brands build shopper confidence and ultimately, convert more sales, working with partners to create a media-rich UGC strategy will be key. Incorporating this into the wider marketing and social media mix will give any brand a competitive advantage and transform the consumer online shopping experience.

## Connect with customers and drive revenue smarter and faster.

[Learn more](#)

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## About Bazaarvoice

Thousands of the world's leading brands and retailers trust Bazaarvoice technology, services, and expertise to drive revenue, extend reach, gain actionable insights, and create loyal advocates. Bazaarvoice's extensive global retail, social, and search syndication network, product-passionate community, and enterprise-level technology provide the tools brands and retailers need to create smarter shopper experiences across the entire customer journey.

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