

SE Marketing
HD **Shoppers flock to social media but ignore 'boring' branded content**
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You've probably noticed this happening on your Facebook feed: friends asking for recommendations about everything from the most energy-efficient washing machine, to child-friendly accommodation in Vietnam, to best BYO restaurant in the city or whether the Samsung tablet is better than the new iPad. Social media has become yet another digital space we go to research our **purchases** before we commit (either to buying in store or online).

The use of social media as a shopping aid is not uncommon in the general population. However research Ipsos has conducted into highly engaged users of social media (we call them "social creatives") shows just how indispensable these forums are when it comes to purchasing decisions.

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Of course the use of specialist or fan forums of all kinds is par for the course. "Forums influence me when I'm buying stuff. Like when I'm [making the] decision to **buy** PS4 or Xbox One. There were huge arguments about it online and I went through and found out all these problems with Xbox One in terms of compatibility and sharing. It made the decision quite easy." Online reviews are also widely used. "I won't **buy** anything over \$200 without going to see reviews first." TripAdvisor continues to stand out as the best example of a review **site**, a must read for all prospective travellers. "Man 1: TripAdvisor is great. You can get any information on any hotels. Man 2: Booking.com hooks up to that which is really cool. The **site** is so smart, it predicted the city we were going to go to in Europe and offered **hotel** deals."

And yet this social-media-obsessed cohort has found other digital tools to help them shop beyond the obvious online reviews and shout-outs on Facebook. These include YouTube. "Man 1: You can go to YouTube to see like game play and testing. Woman 1: I go there and see people from **China** and Korea and they show you what parts come in the box and what they thought of it." And even Twitter. "When I was going to Bali I was looking at resorts and looked for hashtags of where people were staying. You get real reviews and pictures of food." When it comes to style, fashion, interiors and the like, Pinterest is being used as a kind of virtual shopping list, a personal look book to be referred to before and during shopping sprees. "I'm on Pinterest for style things. To save them, to reflect. The wishlist, what I want to **buy**. I used it a lot for my 21st birthday which was themed 50s. Got lots of inspiration."

While consumers, particularly these social creative types, are using social media in various forms to direct their purchasing decisions, branded content on social media is still derided. Not because consumers expect social media to be a **commercial** or brand-free zone; on the contrary, they expect any organisation public or private to have a social media presence. No, they just perceive branded content to be boring, uninspiring and not worth sharing. "The promoted stuff on social media ... boring." "Twitter ... you can have a promoted tweet. It's the first thing on top of your feed for that day. They are always not worth looking at. It's an ad ... and they never say anything funny or interesting." The fact that this content is **commercial** is not necessarily the issue. Social media platforms of all kinds are accepted and used as possible vehicles for selling and buying, for promoting brands, especially your own. The problem with sponsored content online is that it fails to be interesting, creative, shareable. "I would like to see companies rise to the challenge of more interesting stuff on Twitter and Facebook. ... Companies need to understand the platform they are on and understand the content that's already there." "If something is well done, I don't have a problem sharing it even if it is sponsored."

For retailers, online and offline, the use of social media platforms of all kinds as shopping aids by this social creative **group** hints at what the broader base of consumers will be embracing in the near future. Post-budget quantitative research has shown cost of living concerns are set to rise as we enter the "age of austerity" (83 per cent of respondents in an Ipsos poll released earlier this week believe that cost of living will increase because of the budget). A highly competitive retail market will get even tougher. A clever, creative and comprehensive digital and social media strategy could be one of your devices to attract the attention of the distracted and anxious Australian consumer.

For brands already in the digital sphere, the message is clear. Be interesting or be ignored.

CO onInfr : Facebook Inc

IN isocial : Social Media | iint : Internet/Online | imed : Media/Entertainment | itech : Technology

NS gsnet : Social Networking | gcat : Political/General News | glife : Living/Lifestyle | gweb : Web Participation

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