

bazaarvoice:

# Shopper Experience Index

**Exploring how shoppers connect with brands and retailers through user-generated content.**

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# Preface

Today, shoppers **forge their own path.**

Consumers actively navigate among brands and retailers — online and in-store, across devices, and through a variety of channels — and rely on authentic interactions with companies and other shoppers to help inform their decisions along the way.

To shed light on the most dynamic developments in the shopping landscape over the past year, the Shopper Experience Index draws on three critical perspectives: consumers, clients, and our analysis of rich shopper behavior data across the Bazaarvoice Network.

We surveyed more than 2,000 consumers in the US, UK, France, and Germany about their online shopping habits and preferences. We also asked 500 of our clients around the world for their insights and prioritized strategies for meeting new consumer expectations. Finally, we gathered data from the shopping behaviors of more than a billion monthly shoppers across the 6,000+ brand and retail sites in our network.

The result: A detailed view of the ways consumers connect with brands and retailers today — and what leading marketers are doing to succeed now and over the coming year.

**2,000**  
**consumers surveyed**

**500**  
**brands and  
retailers polled**

**1.1 billion**  
**monthly shoppers  
on our network**



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE BAZAARVOICE NETWORK

In 2018, shoppers submitted:

**66.8M**

**reviews**

**2.2M**

**photos**

**6.3M**

**questions**

bazaarvoice:

**Today, nearly  
1.5B reviews are  
displayed across  
the Bazaarvoice  
Network, reaching  
more than 1.1B  
shoppers via  
5.8B page views  
every month.**

# The key takeaways

**User-generated content fuels the shopping journey,** even with the increased presence of chatbots, voice assistants, social media, and other digital innovations. Ratings and reviews are fundamental to the shopping experience today.

**Shoppers crave interaction before a transaction,** expecting brands and retailers to put them first — and show it — no matter where they shop.

**When brands and retailers collaborate, everyone wins,** making partnerships key to supporting a seamless, multichannel shopping journey.

**A great mobile experience is an opportunity to stand out,** as mobile shopping experiences struggle to keep pace with the increasingly crucial role they play in the shopping journey.

**Getting personal with shoppers can deliver a big payoff,** and emerging technologies and new data-sharing regulations may help bridge the gap with consumer expectations.

**Looking ahead, the best brands and retailers will continue to break down boundaries to build interactive, human shopping experiences** that enable shoppers to make confident purchase decisions across every device, platform, and channel.

User-generated  
content **fuels** the  
shopping journey.

**Shopper interaction rates with reviews and photos from consumers across the Bazaarvoice Network:**

**39%**

**North America**

**41%**

**Europe**

**33%**

**Asia**

As the shopper journey extends in new and more directions, one fundamental remains the same: we are hard-wired to seek word-of-mouth. Simply put, shoppers want to know what other people think — and brands and retailers win when they make it easy for them to find out. Access to word-of-mouth content is consistently rewarded with return visits, online and in-store sales, and, above all, loyalty.

Shoppers' reliance on ratings and reviews — and the value brands and retailers derived from it — grew steadily in 2018. Shoppers around the world submitted 66.8 million reviews across the Bazaarvoice Network, up 9% from 2017.

Online reviews are second only to recommendations from friends and family when it comes to influencing shoppers,<sup>1</sup> so it's no wonder companies' adoption of ratings and reviews continues to rise. In fact, 64% of shoppers we surveyed consider ratings and reviews, consumer-submitted questions and answers, and consumer photos important — a 14% increase from 2017.

But it's not just shoppers who benefit from user-generated content (UGC). Its value to brands and retailers is also clear. The conversion lift among shoppers engaging with user-generated content on best-in-class sites (top 25% of all Bazaarvoice clients) jumped to 137%, and the revenue per visitor (RPV) rose to 157% — numbers that continue to increase each year.

**137%**  
**conversion lift**

**157%**  
**revenue per visitor lift**

among shoppers engaging with  
user-generated content on best-in-class sites

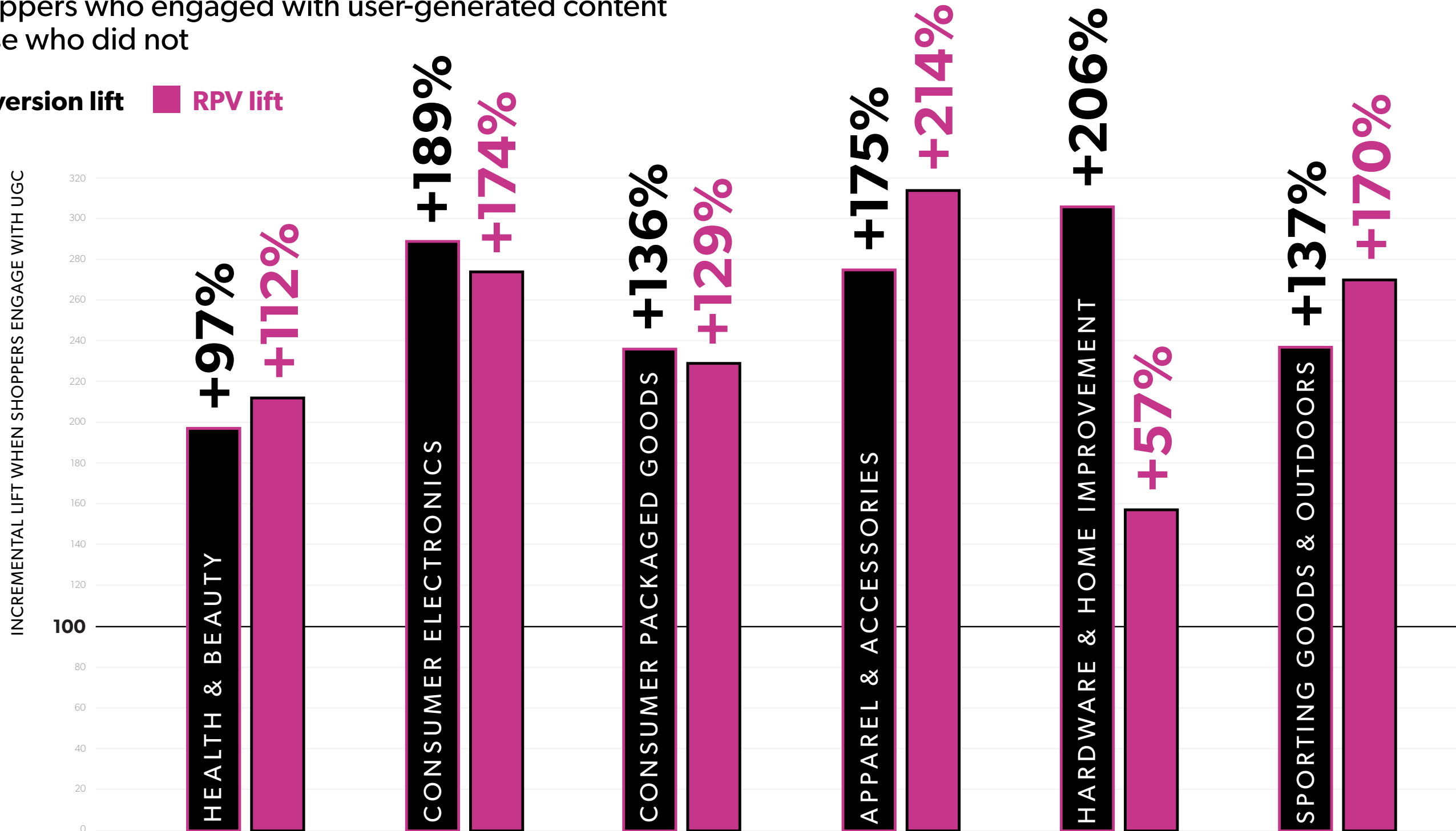


BRANDS

# Conversion and RPV lift by industry among Bazaarvoice best-in-class brand clients

For shoppers who engaged with user-generated content vs. those who did not

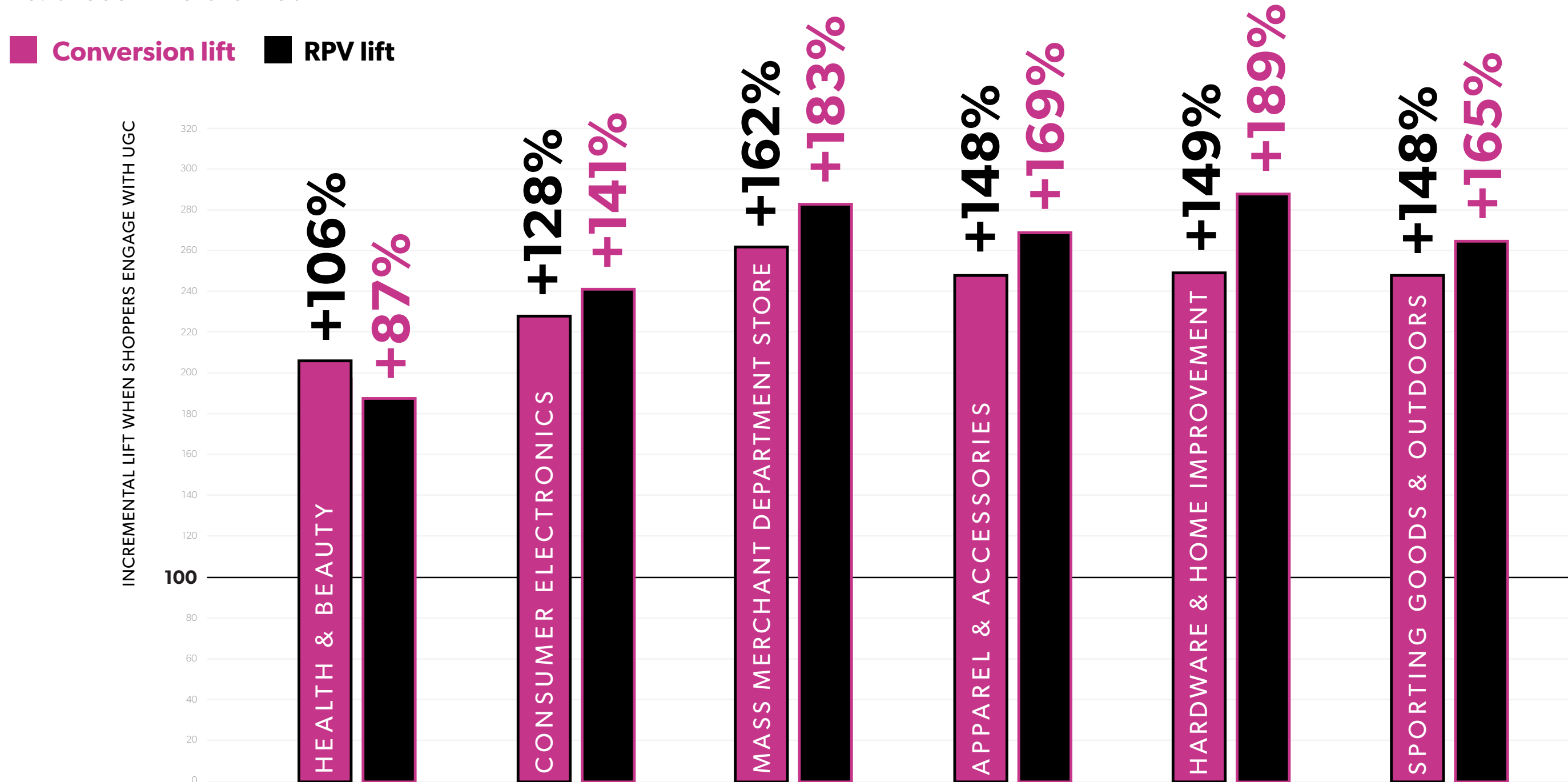
■ Conversion lift ■ RPV lift



RETAILERS

# Conversion and RPV lift by industry among Bazaarvoice best-in-class retail clients

For shoppers who engaged with user-generated content vs. those who did not

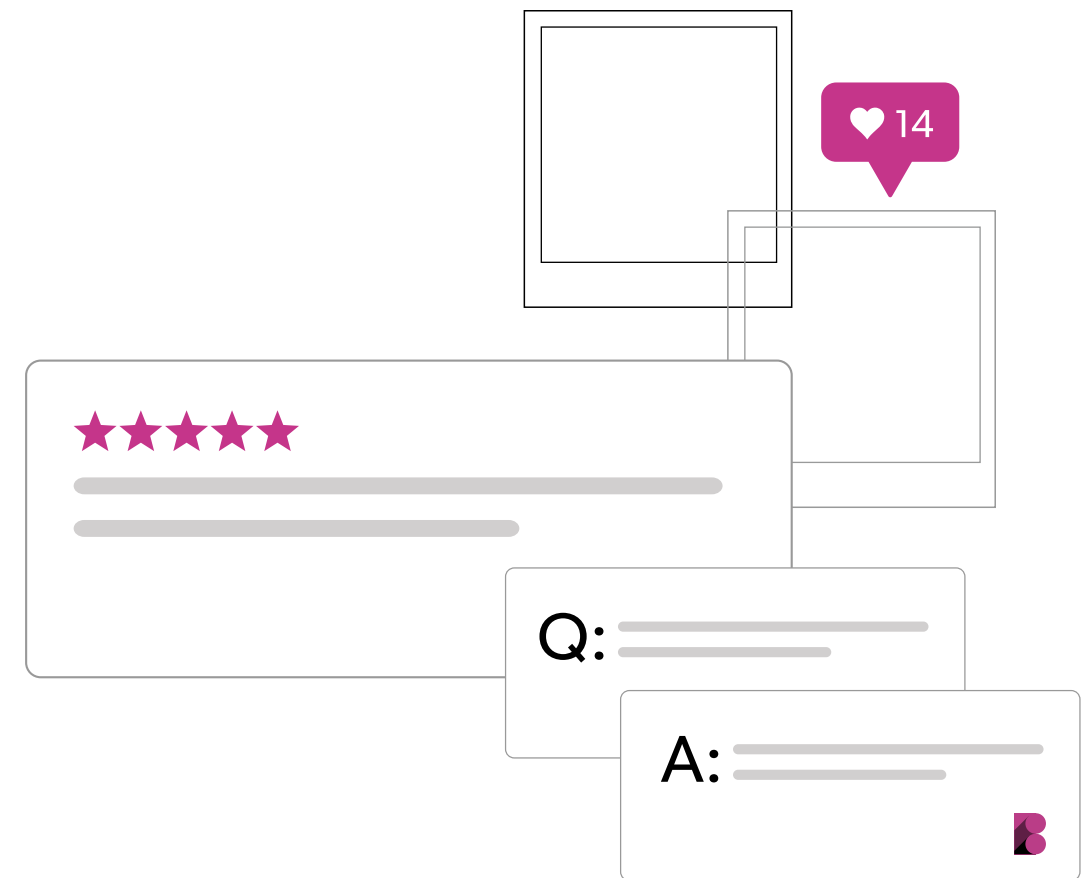


Just the presence of user-generated content can drive shoppers to purchase — even if they don't engage directly with it. Product pages with at least one review experienced a 354% increase in conversion rate and a 446% lift in RPV compared to product pages with no reviews, whether or not visitors engaged with the review content. Likewise, product pages with Q&A experienced a 447% higher conversion rate compared to product pages with no Q&A, regardless of shopper engagement.

The presence of user-generated content can increase search performance too, making products with even one review easier for shoppers to find. When a single review can drive more consideration and help turn consideration into conversion, the value of UGC becomes abundantly clear.

And brands and retailers are noticing. In our client survey, 86% of respondents say consumer reviews drive online sales, and 53% see its positive influence on in-store sales — a 62% increase from 2017.

What's more, 63% of brands and retailers rely on ratings and reviews to boost SEO performance, and more than half count on UGC to boost brand loyalty. So it's no surprise that 98% of brands and retailers plan to either keep the same tactics or increase the amount of effort they put toward consumer content in 2019.

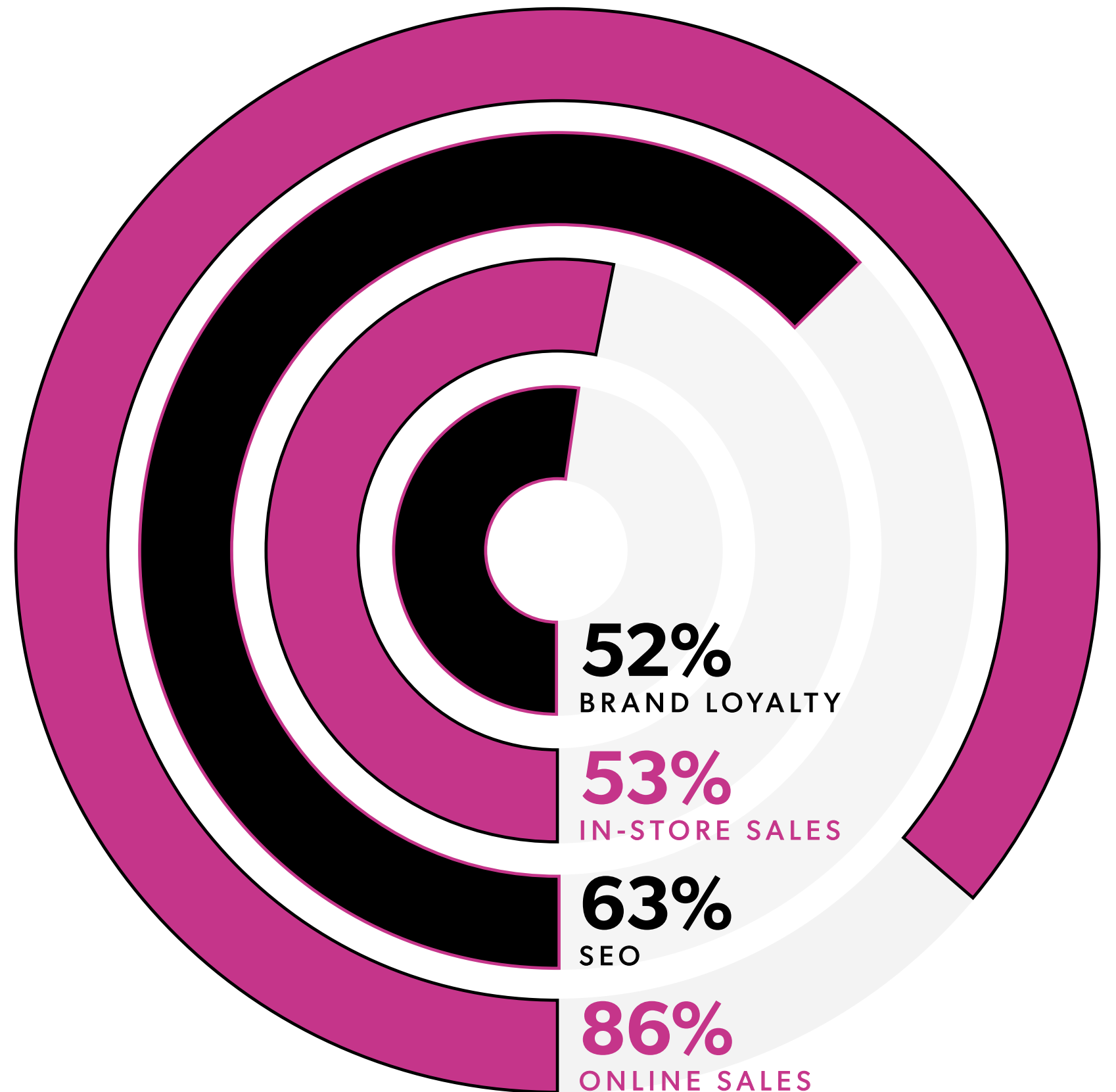


**Product pages with at least one review experienced a 354% increase in conversion**

compared to product pages with no reviews, whether or not visitors engaged with the review content

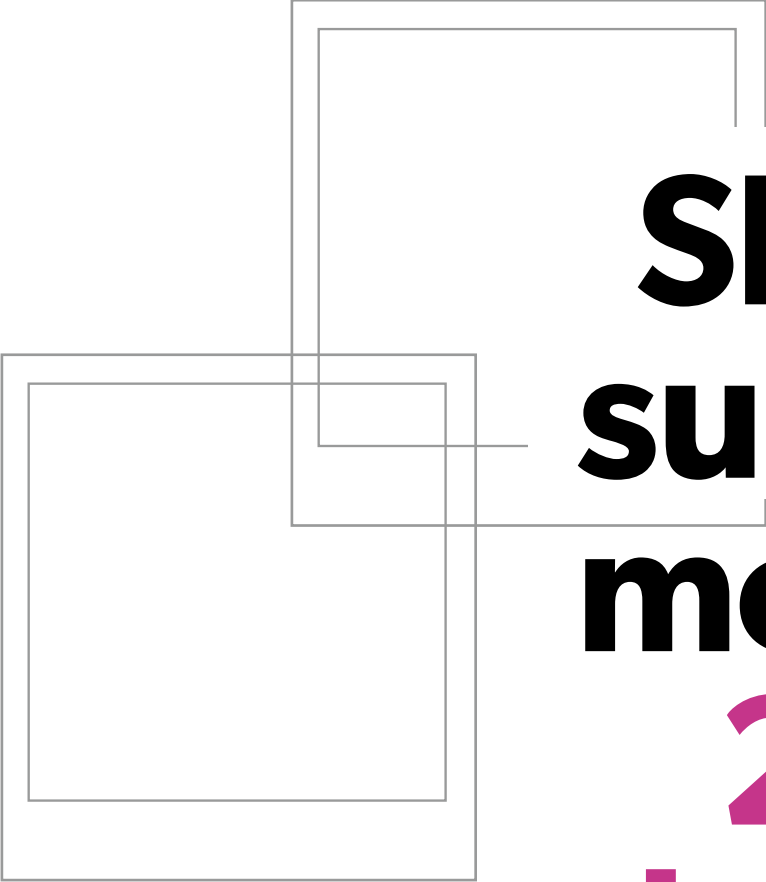
# What **key** value drivers are ratings and reviews expected to impact?

Percentage of brands and retailers selecting each value driver



The concept of a review has extended beyond text. Today, photos and videos are increasingly expected in ratings and reviews and can have an outsized influence on purchase. Visual user-generated content has also become increasingly important in enriching the shopping experience beyond written reviews and Q&A. Shoppers in the Bazaarvoice Network submitted more than 2 million photos last year — a 25% boost over 2017 — and 1 in 3 consumers reported that photos of products from other shoppers are important or very important in their decision to buy.

Brands and retailers report that visual content creates a more engaging shopping experience, increases discoverability, deepens brand trust, and increases conversion. In 2018, 38% of Bazaarvoice clients reported featuring visual content from social media on product pages (up from 35% in 2017), and 43% say they plan to in the near future.



**Shoppers  
submitted  
more than  
2 million  
photos last  
year, a  
25% boost  
over 2017.**

# Percentage of brands and retailers that agree featuring visual user-generated content in the shopping experience does the following:



## Year-over-year increase in visual content submitted with reviews, by industry:

<b>184%</b>	GROCERY
<b>160%</b>	HEALTH & BEAUTY
<b>115%</b>	CONSUMER PACKAGED GOODS
<b>66%</b>	MASS MERCHANT DEPARTMENT STORE
<b>51%</b>	APPAREL & ACCESSORIES
<b>48%</b>	HARDWARE & HOME IMPROVEMENT
<b>33%</b>	CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

With such a strong trajectory of user-generated content submissions — and the steadily increasing value they bring to shoppers, brands, and retailers alike — it's clear that word-of-mouth content is not only here to stay, but also expected to continue driving growth.

## PHILIPS

*“At Philips, we have gotten closer to the consumer by using user-generated content. We see an increased conversion whenever it is implemented in the consumer journey. We have a 180% buy-button increase and an organic search increase, and we get a lot of customer insights from our product reviews.”*

**Valerie Goncalves**

GLOBAL LEAD, RATINGS & REVIEWS AND UGC

**Shoppers** **crave**  
**interaction**  
**before a**  
**transaction.**



Consumers are wary of shopping experiences that feel one-sided. They don't just want to make informed decisions; they also want to trust the brands and retailers they choose. **They want shopping to feel more like a human interaction, not just a transaction.**

Shoppers reward the brands and retailers that put customers first: those that listen to their questions and concerns and respond to them personally. They're used to interacting with each other through ratings and reviews, Q&A, and social content, and they expect brands and retailers to participate in the conversation, too.

One of the best ways to encourage meaningful conversations is to empower shoppers to ask product questions and answer them directly and publicly. Getting quick, accurate answers to their questions, especially from brands and retailers, promotes trust, boosts confidence, and drives sales.

Even seeing helpful Q&A exchanges between a brand or retailer and other shoppers signals that customers' voices are heard and respected, which can translate to real value. In 2018, best-in-class Bazaarvoice clients saw a 114% lift in conversion and a 120% lift in revenue per visitor or higher when shoppers engaged with Q&A.

**When shoppers engage with Q&A on best-in-class sites, there is a 114% conversion lift and a 120% RPV lift.**

Though brands and retailers in the Bazaarvoice Network recognize the value of connecting directly with their shoppers, not all have allocated resources to do so effectively. Among those who reported that Q&A wasn't critical or major, 54% stated that they don't have the staff for it, and 27% said they plan to make it a priority in the future.

Still, Q&A continues to gain traction as an important venue for connecting with shoppers, and brands and retailers who invest the time and resources know it pays to engage. Of those brands who maintain Q&A on their product pages, 74% reported that they see significant value in it or consider it critical to the success of their business.

With those numbers trending upward year after year, more businesses are likely to shift more customer support resources to engage in active dialogue on product pages — just as they have on social media in recent years.

Social media continues to grow in importance as well, both as a platform for brands to interact directly with shoppers and as a venue for extending the online shopping journey. Now 1 in 5 consumers say it's important or very important to be able to discover products and purchase directly from social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest — a 17% increase over last year.

Brands and retailers are taking a proactive approach to this increasing appetite for a truly multichannel online shopping experience: nearly half of Bazaarvoice clients said that integrating social media and online shopping experiences will be a top priority or increased area of focus over the next 12-18 months.

As the siloes of traditional customer service continue to crumble, blurring into truly interactive shopping journeys, the investment in product page Q&A and shoppable social media is likely to become even more integral for brands and retailers to stand out in a crowded online shopping landscape.



*“Unanswered questions can keep shoppers from buying your products, and, even worse, cause consumers to distrust your brand. We prioritize facilitating and responding to customer questions to provide information at a critical point in the shopping journey and reduce traffic to our support team. Any time we can engage in a conversation with our customers, it’s an opportunity to provide a standout customer experience and build brand loyalty.”*

**Eugenia Lin**

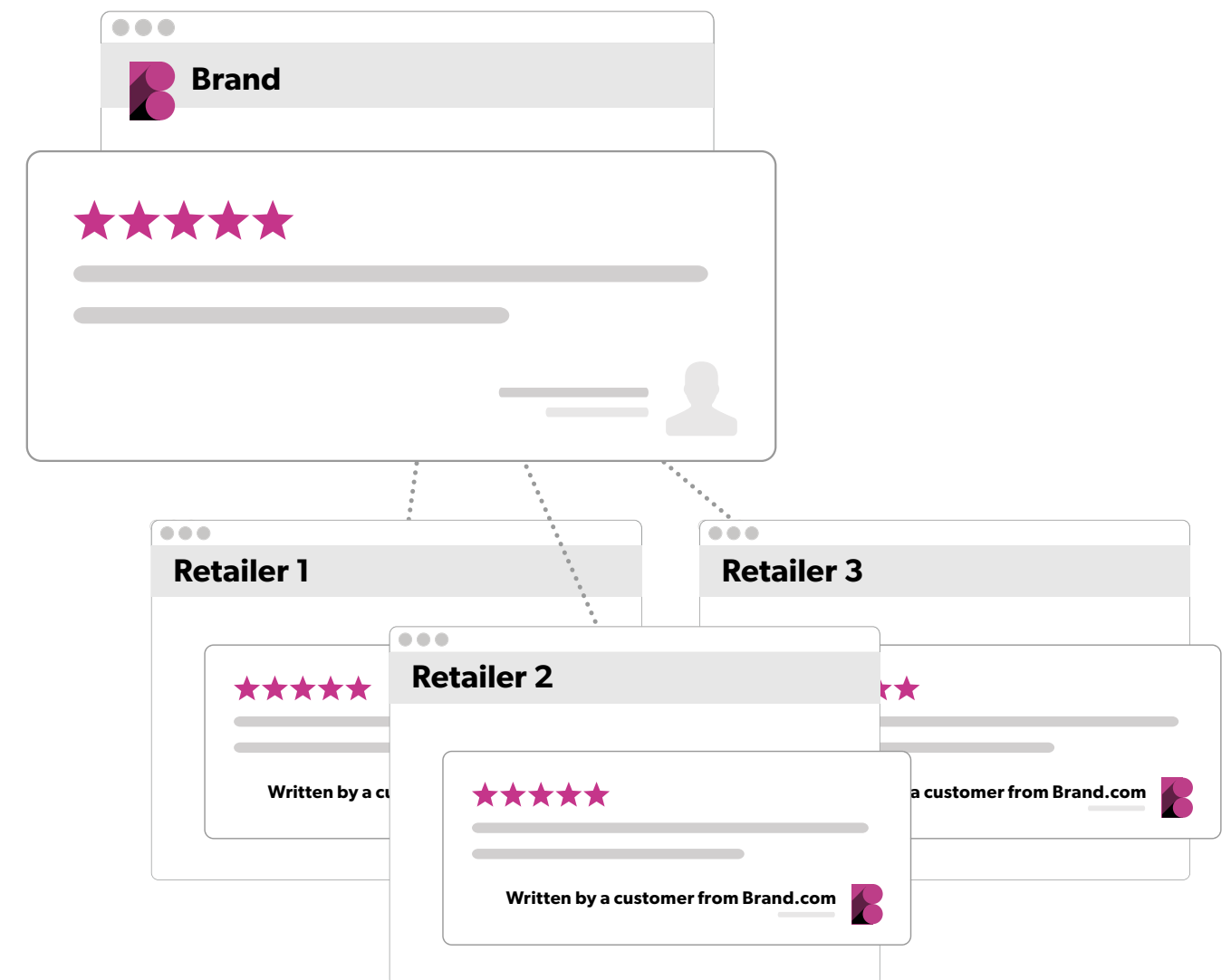
CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT, PROJECT MANAGER

**When brands  
and retailers  
collaborate,  
everyone wins.**

**In the competitive, ever-changing world of shopping, brands and retailers must differentiate their businesses against competitors and stand out in the minds of consumers. Bazaarvoice has seen ongoing evolution in the partnerships between brands and the retailers that sell their products, bringing new approaches to driving shopper trust and loyalty.**

Whether front and center, like Target and Nordstrom showcasing brands Lilly Pulitzer and Allbirds online and in-store, or with behind-the-scenes information sharing, a successful brand-retailer relationship is critical to survival. Most importantly, it helps both brands and retailers deliver a better shopping experience to customers.

User-generated content is one incredibly powerful way for brands and retailers to work together to better serve shoppers. While brands may collect UGC on their own, when they share this content to different retail channels, its value multiplies. Syndication of ratings and reviews to retailers helps brands ensure their content is available wherever consumers are shopping and helps retailers deliver an exceptional shopping experience by having plenty of content on all of their products.



In the Bazaarvoice Network, when brands syndicate reviews to retailers, the median increase in product pages with reviews on retail sites is 37%, resulting in a median of 83% more reviews per product than those without syndication. Driving reviews to retail sites not only helps brands to expand their reach and stand out in the digital aisle, it's also the most effective way for retailers to amass more content and compel more shoppers to buy. Half of Bazaarvoice retailers source 65% or more of their reviews directly from brands.

The potential in strong partnership between brands and retailers extends into Q&A. Viewed as the authority on their products, brands tend to get more questions than retailers — and they're answering them more often (67% of the time, compared to 23% of the time on retail sites). By working together to create a solid, collaborative Q&A program, brands and retailers can collectively reap the rewards: greater trust, stronger loyalty, increased engagement, and, ultimately, more conversions.

What does all this mean for the consumer? A more seamless, multichannel shopping experience that matches their shopping preferences — and gives them the information they need to make a confident decision — no matter where they choose to buy. And when brands and retailers join forces, they also reap the rewards, creating the next evolution of a frictionless shopping journey that drives sales across the full spectrum of channels.

**L'ORÉAL®**

*“It’s crucial to share and receive content as much as possible with channel partners, as users visit both brand and retailer sites when researching a product. It removes their feeling of needing to hunt for varied opinions and that what they are seeing is the true opinion.”*

**Amanda Green**

DIRECTOR OF ECOMMERCE

**A great mobile  
experience is  
an opportunity  
to stand out.**

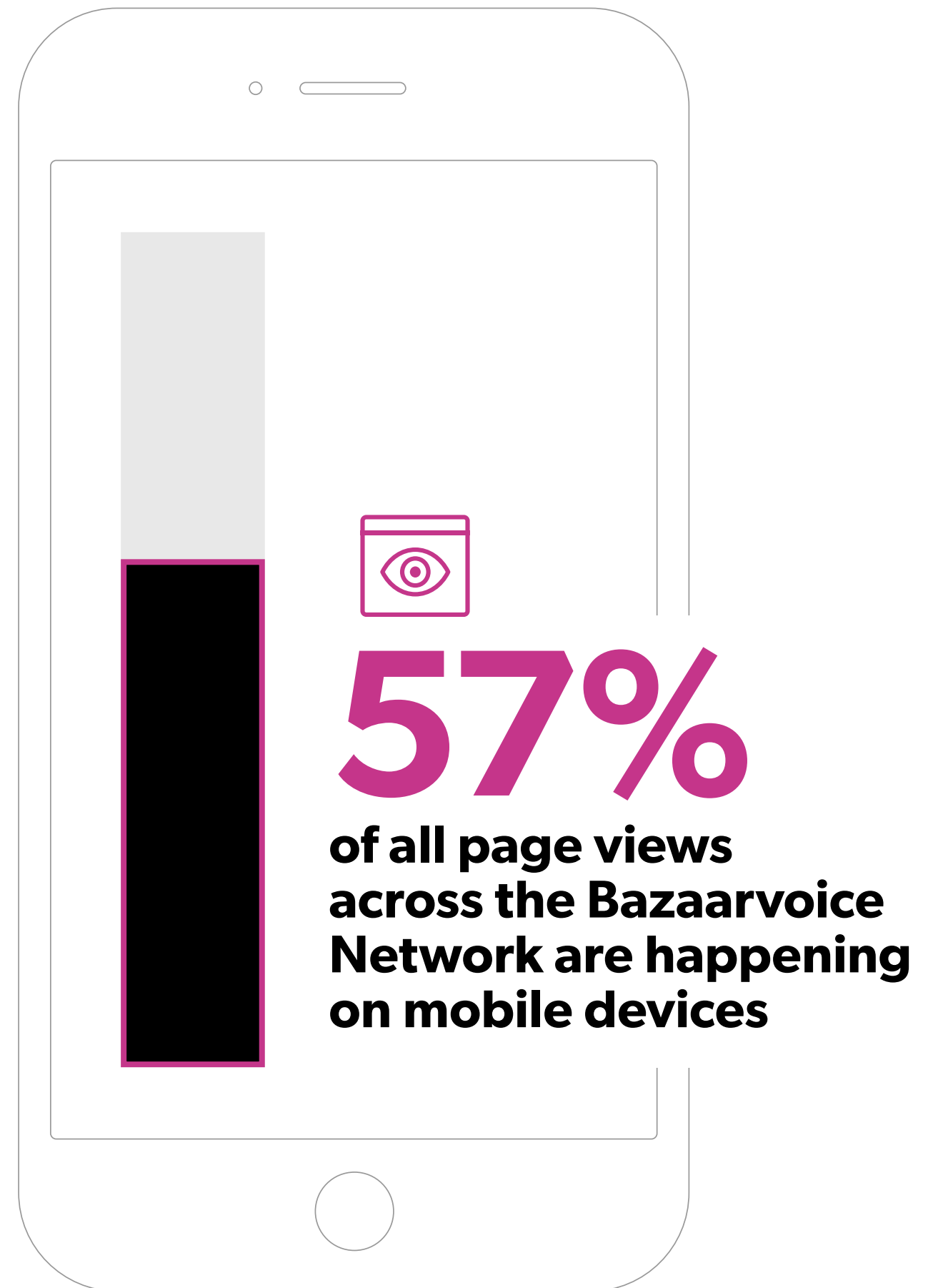
**It comes as no surprise that mobile traffic continues to increase: at 57%, well over half of all page views across the Bazaarvoice Network happen on mobile devices, continuing a years-long upward trend.**

Mobile frequently plays a role early in the shopping journey — especially during the research phase — but brands and retailers still have a long way to go to create mobile experiences that drive purchases.

Even as mobile traffic soars, mobile interactions with user-generated content aren't keeping up. The overall interaction rate with UGC is 116% higher on desktop than on mobile sites — which means potential conversions are slipping through the cracks, especially considering the conversion lift for mobile visitors who do engage with UGC is slightly higher (at 136%) than it is for desktop visitors.

This could be due in part to the lagging quality of mobile shopping experiences, especially in the key final moments of a transaction — consumers cited poor checkout experiences and mobile functionality, like speed, as factors.<sup>2</sup> With 68% of consumers considering an easy-to-use mobile experience important or very important, there's a valuable opportunity to improve not just mobile functionality but also how content is displayed.

And brands and retailers are acutely aware of the potential return on investment — 94% of clients across the Bazaarvoice Network say they realize that an optimized mobile experience is becoming more important to shoppers — but in a world of constrained resources, only two-thirds plan to make it an increased focus in the year ahead.



**Getting personal  
with shoppers  
can deliver  
a big payoff.**



**Brands and retailers are keen to make shopping feel personal, but they have a long way to go to meet consumer expectations. Personalizing offers and recommendations to individual shoppers is a priority for 70% of clients in the coming year, while only 1 in 3 shoppers say that personalized offers are actually important to them. Why the disconnect?**

Because missing the mark with attempts to get personal can actually push consumers away. In fact, less than 20% of shoppers say the product recommendations they see are relevant, and 38% say they won't return to an online retailer that recommends products that don't make sense for them.

It isn't that consumers don't want tailored marketing — 44% of US consumers say they get frustrated when retailers “fail to provide relevant personalized experiences”<sup>3</sup> — it's that many of them have never experienced it done well.

As marketing becomes more data-driven, the focus of forward-thinking brands and retailers has broadened to encompass not just who customers are — demographics, interests, and other identity-based information used to power more traditional marketing approaches — but also how they behave in the shopping journey. Developing a single view of the customer, bringing together intent signals across devices, platforms, and channels, is foundational to delivering experiences that feel relevant and human. But it's a challenge that few companies have cracked.

Marketing leaders agree that getting data-driven marketing right is difficult. In a recent survey of marketing influencers, 63% of respondents said that data-driven personalization is hard to execute.<sup>4</sup>

What's more, consumers have lingering concerns about data privacy, with the subject of data collection under intense scrutiny in 2018.

But this renewed focus on data privacy could also represent an opportunity: now that consumers are more educated about how their data is collected and used, brands and retailers can meaningfully differentiate themselves by showing a commitment to transparency, security, and integrity in their data practices.

When consumers understand how their data is collected, stored, and used to deliver more valuable experiences, they are more likely to engage and remain loyal to brands and retailers. And when brands and retailers combine a commitment to privacy rigor with a purposeful approach to data-driven marketing, they can deliver shopping experiences that resonate across the journey.



**of US consumers say they get frustrated when retailers “fail to provide relevant personalized experiences”**

Looking ahead:

**Breaking boundaries  
to build interactive,  
human shopping  
experiences.**

The future of shopping sees brands and retailers **working in concert** to deliver shopping experiences that enable shoppers to find the information they need, have authentic interactions with brands and retailers, and make confident purchase decisions across every device, platform, and channel.

**Retailers will emphasize a more “human” shopping experience**, differentiating themselves not by becoming all things to all people, but by offering an experience that feels “just right” to their target shoppers. The best approaches will combine data-driven marketing, deep understanding of the customer, and user experience to humanize online shopping.

**The ratings and reviews and Q&A experiences will become the platform of choice** for shopper interaction with brands. More brands and retailers will adopt tools to enable shoppers to seek feedback and information about products — and get a customer-centric response. Brands and retailers will prioritize these interactions in the same way they’ve prioritized interactions on social channels, despite the rise of chatbots and voice technology.

**Brands and retailers will double down on efforts to meet shoppers where they are.** There will be increased focus on improving the mobile shopping experience, providing shoppable social media, and pushing user-generated content across more retailer channels.

**Visual content will become increasingly fundamental to the reviews experience**, in contrast to influencer marketing, which consumers have come to see as inauthentic. Consumer photos enhance text in helping shoppers evaluate products, especially in certain categories. Expect photos to become critical in Apparel, Food & Beverage, Home Furnishings, Health & Beauty, and Pets.

**Trust will be the new currency** for building brand loyalty in an omnichannel shopping landscape. The brands and retailers who respond to customer questions and feedback, engage authentically with consumers, and communicate clearly about data practices will stand out from the crowd for increasingly educated and empowered consumers.

**Brands and retailers that connect in meaningful, authentic ways, both with shoppers and with each other, will gain an edge in 2019 and beyond.**

Looking ahead to enhanced capabilities like successful data-driven marketing, while maintaining focus on creating connected, human shopping experiences, will help brands and retailers build strong momentum into the coming years.

Those who win will put the customer first: listening to them, interacting with them, and ensuring they can access the content they find most helpful, wherever they are and however they prefer to shop. Seamless shopping experiences will only become more valued, and brands and retailers will use user-generated content — ratings and reviews, Q&A, and visual content — as the connective tissue to help bring that vision to life.

# Explaining the report

This report draws on data from 1.1 billion monthly shoppers in the Bazaarvoice Network of retailers, brands, and other sites. This includes 5.8 billion monthly page views and over 66 million pieces of user-generated content submitted in 2018. The dataset spans more than 6,000 client sites and content in dozens of languages. Except where otherwise specified, the data presented throughout this report illustrates best-in-class (top 25%) performance benchmarks among Bazaarvoice clients.

The timeframe for these benchmarks is the calendar year 2018. When relevant, we have included a 2017 benchmark for comparison purposes.

To complement this study, Bazaarvoice conducted a self-administered online survey of its clients in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia. Overall, more than 500 clients were surveyed about their current use of user-generated content, how they are prioritizing future e-commerce and marketing investments, and what they anticipate will matter to consumers in the coming year.

Bazaarvoice also conducted a self-administered online survey of 2,000 consumers across the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Germany. All respondents were 18 years or older and self-reported shopping online at least once a year. Respondents reported on their shopping preferences, behaviors, and the role user-generated content played in their shopping behaviors.

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# About Bazaarvoice

Bazaarvoice connects brands and retailers to consumers, so that every shopping experience feels personal. From search and discovery to purchase and advocacy, Bazaarvoice's solutions reach in-market shoppers, personalize their experiences, and give them the confidence to buy. Each month in the Bazaarvoice Network, more than one billion consumers view and share authentic content including reviews, questions and answers, and social photos across 6,000 brand and retail websites. Across the network, Bazaarvoice captures billions of shopper signals monthly — data that powers high-efficiency digital advertising and personalization with unmatched relevance.

Founded in 2005, Bazaarvoice is headquartered in Austin, Texas, with offices in North America, Europe, and Australia. For more information, visit [www.bazaarvoice.com](http://www.bazaarvoice.com).

