The role of social media in shopping centres

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1. Executive summary

Key findings

The key finding of this report is that shopping centres are struggling with social media but say they are not.

The problem is that for the most part they are treating social media as a marketing channel, not 4a customer service channel. With a simple and limited focus on getting more 'likes' and 'followers' centres seem to be using new channels of communication to continue the age old problem of it costing more to acquire a customer than to retain one.

- 77% of the shopping centre managers who completed the survey described themselves as confident users of social media;
- 74% consider that social media is a central element of their marketing strategy;
- 63% say it is a central part of their customer service strategy;
- Despite this stated strategic importance, 60% have no written policy to manage social media output;
- About half of centres make no attempt to segment their customers who use social media;
- Only a quarter create different messages for different types of shopper;
- Barely 3 in 10 make any attempt to measure their efforts; and
- 80% of centres do not recruit staff with social media skills in mind, even when it is appropriate to the role.

A harsh critic would describe this as unfocussed, self-serving effort and might explain why consumers seem indifferent to companies trying to engage them in social channels.

Not only do consumers seem uninterested in what companies do and say in social networks, they have a low tolerance for brands that put out repetitive, sales-led messages on social media and will block or unfollow them very quickly. Unfortunately the vast majority (86%) of what centres are pushing out in social channels is sales and promotional content; either for themselves or their retailers.

Shopping centres risk squandering the huge opportunities presented by social media, by scattering generic marketing messages to consumers who are potentially indifferent.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of centre managers struggle to find cut and dried measures of success from their efforts, filling the void with meaningless metrics such as the number of Facebook fans they have and fear that senior managers will restrict resources in the future unless a clear picture of returns is provided. However, centre owners would be unwise to strangle efforts in social media before they reach maturity.

With mass media circulations and audiences dropping by the week, investment in traditional media is producing increasingly poor returns and the inexorable rise of the empowered consumer armed with a smartphone, demands that customer service embraces the social consumer or risk alienating them.

For the smaller centre, or the centre in secondary or tertiary retail locations, the opportunity is there to level the playing field. As social media have no cost as such, an effective idea need not be an expensive one, just one worth sharing.

The evidence of this report is that like a lot of businesses in a many of categories, shopping centres are still in the experimentation stage. They are discovering that social media is not like any other medium at their disposal.

That there is not a silver bullet of measurement for an activity that crosses advertising, PR, market research, community relations and customer service is not a reason to turn away from social media. It is more of an opportunity to ask, 'if social media is growing at a furious rate, what do we need to do to be more relevant to the customers who are using it?'

As one manager memorably said at a workshop…

"You might as well try and measure the returns I get on the benches on the mall. I do not know what they are worth to me, but I know I would never take them out."

The opportunities of social media. Its growth is explosive – some startling statistics

- Visits to social networks have now surpassed search engines as the most visited group of sites on the internet.
- The word Facebook is now the most searched for term on the internet.
- 40% of consumers using social networking sites plan to use Facebook for feedback from family or friends to help them make a decision about a product.
- In March this year, Twitter claimed to have 175 million users and that 95 million tweets are written each day, which is a 250% increase in 12 months.
- More than 30 billion pieces of content are shared each month on Facebook.
- Half of Facebook users log in everyday, which is a 40% increase in 12 months.
- Wikipedia now has over 17 million articles, with more than 91,000 active contributors.
- There are now more than 20 million LinkedIn members in the EU and the site has over 100 million members worldwide.
- Image hosting site Flickr contains more than 5 billion images and grew 25% in the last 12 months.
- 54% of the world's internet population visited Facebook in a month.

The challenges – Meet the social shopper

80% of the content on the internet is user generated, rather than created by organisations or publishers.

In practical terms, the internet is social media. It is essential to an understanding of how social media affects shopping centres to comprehend that unlike any other form of media, almost of all social media content is created and published by individuals rather than companies.

The social media landscape is being shaped and re-shaped by the convergence of major technological developments and changes in consumer behaviour. All of these forces are at work, shifting the ground under the feet of organisations. Some are adapting better than others.

The growth of the internet. The three key measures of internet growth are:

More people: the number of internet users has grown from 361 million at the end of 2000 to over 2 billion at the end of March 2011.

More time: British web users spend 65% more time online than three years ago. A quarter of that time is spent on social networks or blogs

More data: the volume of internet traffic will grow at 50% per annum over the next four years. The primary driver of this growth will be video.

Traditional media in decline - while internet growth has been dramatic so have the losses in traditional media. UK newspapers circulations have fallen by 25% between 2007-09, while combined circulation of all the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) magazines have declined 14% since 2000.

The empowered consumer - shoppers place greater emphasis on the opinion of strangers online. A study of over 25,000 internet users placed opinions of strangers at a higher level of trust when choosing a brand than news articles and equal with the brand's own website.

The mobile internet - the key internet trend is mobile. The number of mobile internet users will overtake desktop at the end of Q2 2014, with the crossing point at 1.6 billion users. (See Appendix 1.)

Smartphones - in the first three months of 2011 just under half of the all the 45 milion mobiles sold in Western Europe were smartphones. Google expects the number of searches from mobiles to exceed desktop searches in 2013, possibly sooner.

Social shopping - the potential of social shopping / daily deals sites is immense. The key player in social shopping, Groupon has grown to more than 5 million visits per week and investment in social shopping sites totaled $1.6 billion in the first half of 2011.

‘How To’ guidance for shopping centres

This best practice guide has been developed in the light of comments received during the survey of centre managers and the manager workshops.

In view of the wide variance in types of shopping centre and the level of experience and resource they have available to centres, a single guide cannot meet every need. Therefore this guide is aimed at smaller centres with limited resources and focuses on the two social media networks used by centres; namely Facebook and Twitter.

When engaging with social media, a centre should seek to answer the following points:

1. Why are we doing this?
2. Have we got the skills to do it?
3. What are the rules we will follow?
4. Who are we talking to?
5. Why will they want to respond?
6. What will we measure?

1. Consider why you are doing this

What is your principal purpose in creating and maintaining a social media presence? Bear in mind that maintaining a presence requires more resources than creating.

Time spent narrowing down your objectives and linking them to the centre’s specific business needs will pay dividends in efficient application of resources and enable you to better measure results. Typical objectives might be:

- to reduce customer service costs
- to obtain new customer data records
- to amplify other communication campaigns
- to improve relationships with key retail partners through collaboration
- to reduce market research costs by recruiting a fan base
- to build or repair relationships with local community groups
- to increase awareness amongst a specific group of shoppers

2. Consider the internal skills you require

The main cost in creating and managing your presence on social networks will be in two activities:

1) creating content that is well written and appropriate, and

2) responding in a timely way to comments and enquiries from users of social networks.

- Do the people doing the work have the right mix of skills? Do they have the appropriate level of authority to create content and publish it without going through layers of approval that it is rendered uselessly late or bland?
- Decide whether the response should be from an identifiable individual or as a corporate body.
- Remember that social media brings an expectation that companies will be quick to respond, be open and conversational so equip staff with the means to respond 24/7 e.g. smartphones.
- Involve your HR function in drawing up job specifications for current and future recruitment of staff likely to be involved in social media. This should be guided by your earlier decision on your overall objectives.

Consider the rules you will apply

The expectation is that social media is quick and conversational, which may conflict with a culture that values process and a conservative / cautious approach to public statements.

To reduce this gap, it is essential that you create a simple, watertight written social media policy for staff and contractors. The purpose of this policy is two-fold.

Firstly it lays out very clearly the rights and responsibilities of employees and contractors who may, in a personal capacity, make a comment on a social network about the centre which compromises the business in some way. This policy needs to acknowledge and align to the terms of their contract of employment or in the case of a contractor, their employer’s service agreement.

Secondly it guides employees whose job requires them to comment in an official capacity on matters such as tone of voice, dealing with critics or falsehood and escalating problems internally.

If you are going to ask an external agency to manage this you should agree with them:

- the frequency of updates and response times in each of the main social media channels
- agreements on working outside normal office hours, especially weekends when Facebook is at its busiest, and
- how often social channels are monitored for mentions of the centre.

3. Who are you talking to?

Social media monitoring

Assuming that you have decided what your primary objective is and you have prepared your internal resources and procedures, how do you begin?

The first stage is to listen to what is being said about your centre and centres with whom you compete to understand sentiment, and the kinds of topics that consumers discuss.

There are a number of tools available to do this. At the top end of the scale are professional, enterprise grade services. These are sophisticated analytical tools which are paid for on subscription.

There are also a number of free monitoring tools. These range from setting up Google Alerts for terms which relate to your business to relatively powerful yet still free tools will uncover mentions of a brand name or phrase on Twitter, Facebook and web forums.

4. Why will they want to respond?

Social strategy basics

Many companies are realising that embarking on a social media campaign has parallels with creating a website: you can build it but that does not mean they will come. There has to be a reason to respond.

The key commercial benefit of a successful social media strategy is that it encourages word of mouth, shared between people who trust each other's opinion and act on recommendations.

The research is clear that very few people (7%) connect with a brand on social networks because they truly identify with it so – repetitive or sales oriented will not be tolerated. The conclusion to draw from this is that messages and content that are self-serving have a very high likelihood of failure. It is not possible to say what will work for all shopping centres however, be as objective as possible when planning a campaign by asking the question:

Who would share this information and why?

A simple practical test of a campaign idea would be to ask "Would the local media cover this as a story?" Local newspapers rely on knowing what is on the mind of their community and knowing what will interest them is a good starting point.

5. Social media daily checklist

When composing day to day messages for Facebook and Twitter, there are certain things to do and avoid in acquiring a better reaction:

- post photographs and video, these kinds of postings get much higher click through rates
- post photos of people not things and have the people acting naturally, not posed
- be clear in your opinions about something. Sitting on the fence invites a neutral response
- do not be afraid to post occasional comments on subjects you know your consumers are discussing themselves – popular TV shows, a movie premiere, major sporting events, etc.
- avoid any subject you would not discuss with a stranger – politics, religion, sex and sexuality, criminality, etc.
- ask polarising questions to invite a response
- acknowledge responses, say thank you, deal with criticisms openly
- ask regular fans and followers what they are doing, show an interest
- spotlight colleagues that work on the mall who might be familiar faces
- go behind the scenes, show the things that consumers do not see everyday
- be authentic and honest in what you say
- once you have found the subjects that get a response, do not stray too far from them.

6. What will we measure?

A reliable, universal method for measuring return on investment in social media has yet to emerge in any business category.

Measuring the effect of individual actions in social networks is impossible. There are too many variables involved to be able to attribute outcomes and trying to apply meaning to metrics such as the number of fans or followers is all but perhaps futile. It further risks trying to apply what is essentially a marketing campaign metric to an activity which might be better described as customer care or community relations activity.

The best and most valuable way to measure the value of activity in social media is to create specific, measurable goals at the objective setting stage for example:

- a reduction in calls to customer services because a query had been answered via Facebook or Twitter
- an increase in the number of customers attending the Christmas lights switch-on
- an increase in charitable donations to local community groups made via the centre
- an improvement in scores on speed of response in customer satisfaction surveys
- an improvement in the amount of traditional media coverage by engaging with a wider range of journalists
- an increase in footfall at particular times of the week via offers promoted only via social media.

These will differ with each centre's needs depending on what commercial issues the centre faces. The critical decision is to focus on specific business goals rather than broad ambitions such as raising awareness.

2. Aims and methodology

Social media can take many different forms including: internet forums, blogs wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs picture sharing wall postings, e-mail, instant messaging, music sharing, and crowd sourcing to name a few. Examples of social media applications are Google Groups, Wikipedia Facebook, Last.fm, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn and Twitter.[1]

The research aimed to discover how shopping centres are using social media for commercial gain and to provide practical guidance to centre managers. In particular the study set out to discover what consumers look for from a shopping centre on a social network and study how centres are using these networks, and how they are resourcing and managing their activities, and what outcomes they are measuring.

The methodology comprised:

- desk research to review available literature
- an online survey of 504 adults who use social media
- an online survey of 84 centre managers
- two workshops (held in London and Manchester) each comprising approximately 10 centre managers to discuss their use of social media
- the input of a steering group comprising a variety of centre owners and managers, and
- a face to face interview with the Arndale Manchester to discuss the role of social media in recent rioting.

Primary research was conducted using online data collection. All interviews were conducted in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct.

Regarding the surveys, respondents sourced at random using a 3rd party consumer panel provided by CINT Ltd. The random data was weighted on gender to reflect social media usage demographics drawn from the Social Media Census 2011. The survey took around 10 minutes to complete and covered the following key topic areas:

- usage of social media
- social media and shopping centres
- social media and retailers, and
- future developments in social media.

For shopping centre managers, again interviews took around 10 minutes to complete and covered the following key topic areas:

- usage of social media
- aims of social media activity
- attitudes to social media
- management of social media activity and related policies
- usage of data derived from social media, and
- future development of social media activity.

[1] *Wikipedia.org: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media*

3. The opportunities and challenges of social – Meet the social shopper

The attractions of social media also contain its drawbacks.

It exists at an ever-moving meeting point of corporate functions which are rarely fully aligned: outbound communications, inbound customer queries, reputational risk and opportunity, and community relations.

Each one of those functions could be at the forefront of an organisation's social media efforts at any given point. However it is unlikely that any one will remain truly dominant over an extended period. This raises challenging questions about how centres allocate resources to social media and measure its impacts. How do you measure an activity that is influenced by and affects multiple aspects of a centre's activities? If there is a single unified way of measuring these separate functions, it is not apparent to the centre managers who have replied to the survey.

The evidence of the research strongly suggests that shopping centres treat social media as a marketing channel. All but 4% of the respondents to the survey fund activity in social media from their marketing budget.

This raises two obvious challenges:

1. If one corporate function is funding social media activity, does that fully reflect the centre's overall priorities and strategy and moreover, the shopper's priorities?

2. One department's measures of success may be wholly different to another's.

The comments recorded at both of the centre manager workshops reflect this and with it the natural frustrations of managers who wish to exert control over social media yet find doing so is like grasping at quicksilver.

The report 'Being Social' by media planning agency Mediaedge:CIA neatly summarise answers to the question of what commercial benefits can be derived from social media?

1. To understand consumer sentiment towards a brand to improve and increase dialogue with the target audience
2. to drive word of mouth and consumer advocacy
3. to quantify the effectiveness of brand communication
4. to improve customer service and support to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty
5. to build communities around brand events
6. to integrate a brand into existing communities, to launch or extend brand communication
7. to deal with or prevent PR crises
8. to gather consumer input to develop new products and services
9. to generate something very valuable: people who care about your brand

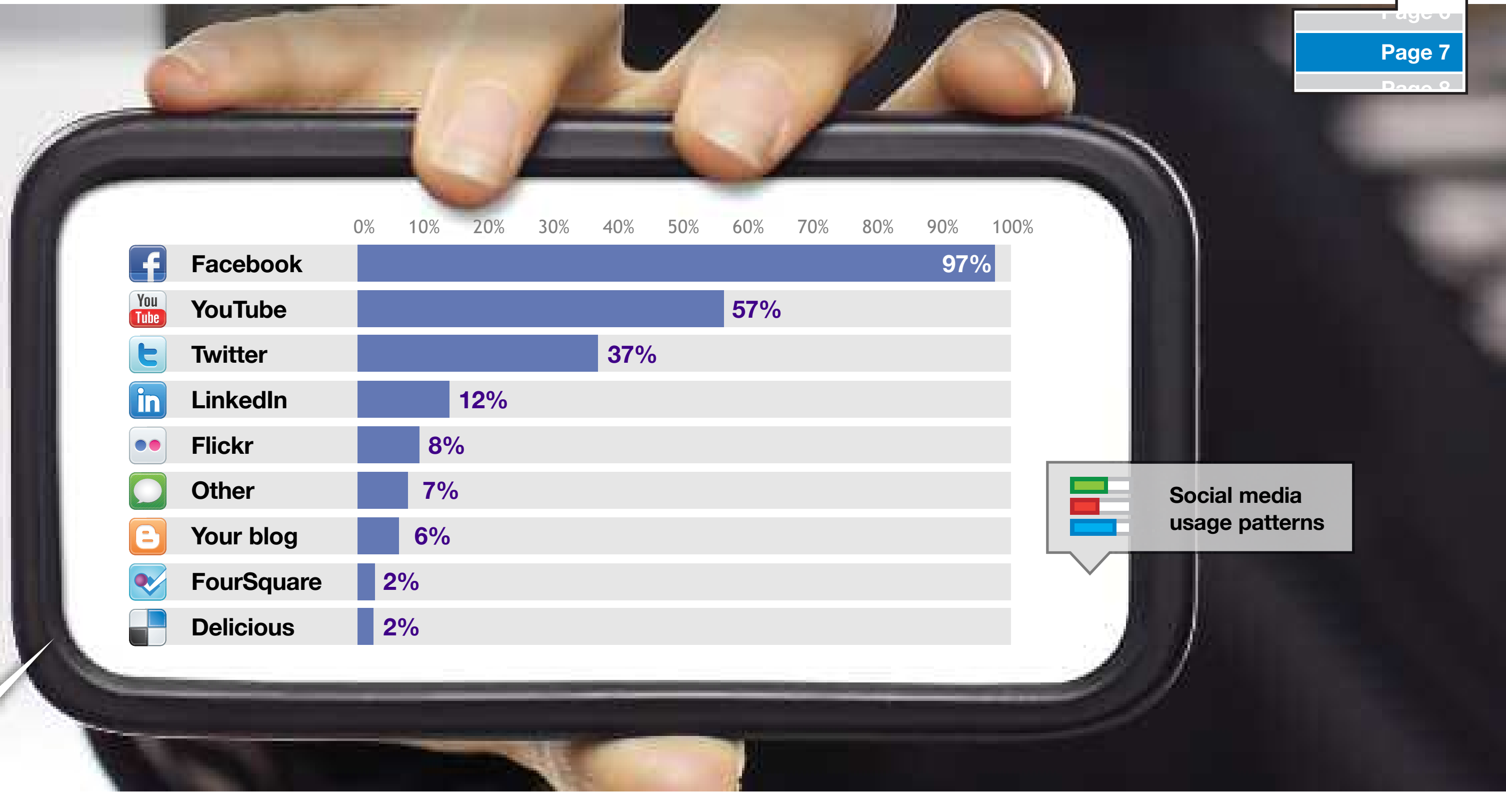
The same report contains a similarly useful list of common misunderstandings about social media:

1. Social media should not be treated like conventional media. Social networks - i.e. networks of people - are not mass media channels.
2. Social media are not a like-for-like replacement for traditional advertising. Nor are they cheap or a free alternative to a traditional mass media strategy.
3. Social media are not a free workforce, nor a free R&D or creative department.
4. Social media are not a miracle cure: using social media will not make bad products or services better on their own
5. Social media grew from the ground up - by the people for the people. You cannot run things from the top down.
6. Social media marketing is not a campaign, it is an ongoing commitment. Once you are out there you have to stay out there.

One of the key findings from the consumer research is the strong sense of indifference towards brands using social media to communicate and the very low threshold for consumers 'unfollowing' or 'unliking' brands they feel have become repetitive or too keen to sell 'at' a consumer. Once a consumer has decided to disconnect from a brand which has crossed a line, it is hard to imagine a consumer reversing their decision.

Source: Being Social – Mediaedge:CIA

4. Primary research findings for consumers



Research approach

An online survey was conducted amongst 504 UK consumers who were regular users of social media (self-defined). Respondents sourced at random using a 3rd party consumer panel provided by CINT Ltd. The random data was weighted on gender to reflect social media usage demographics drawn from the Social Media Census 2011.

Social media usage

Q. Which of the following social media do you use?

Facebook has the highest penetration of social media platforms currently available. 97% of the sample used Facebook compared with 57% using the next most popular platform, YouTube. Just over a third of consumers (37%) use Twitter, while other types of social media are much less popular.

Social media – frequency of use

Q. How often do you use the following social media?

80% of Facebook users update content at least daily and almost half (46%) view around four times a day or more often. Twitter is designed for micro blogging where the limited characters per message used by this platform encourages short yet frequent updates. However, 62% view Twitter at least daily. Half of YouTube users update on a daily basis, however there are significant differences in update frequency by gender. Almost two-thirds (65%) of males update YouTube every day or more often and this compares with just over a third (35%) of females.

See Fig.1.

Preferred social media platform

Q. Which social website is the one you use the most?

Although many people use more than one social media platform, when asked, 9 out of 10 people selected Facebook as the one they used most often.

There are gender differences in preferred social media platform. 91% of females use Facebook most often compared with 78% of males. Conversely, 11% of males use YouTube most often compared with only 3% of females.

YouTube is preferred as a social media platform relatively more frequently by younger consumers. 11% of those in the 16-24 year old group prefer YouTube. The other platforms mentioned have very low sample sizes making further sub-group analyses unreliable.

Only one person selected Flickr as their preferred platform. Nobody selected Delicious, Foursquare or a blog in response to this question.

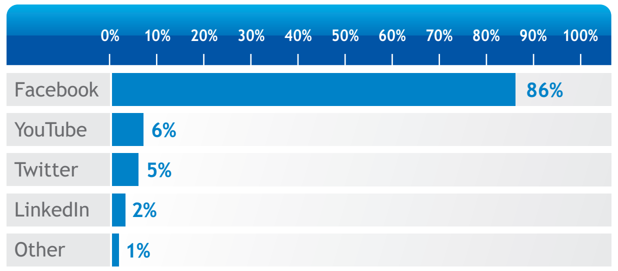


Fig.1.

	Hourly	Around 4 times a day	Daily	Every other day	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Less often
Facebook	18%	29%	34%	9%	7%	1%	1%	1%
Twitter	16%	17%	28%	15%	12%	5%	3%	4%
Flickr	8%	10%	13%	10%	23%	15%	8%	15%
YouTube	6%	9%	31%	17%	21%	8%	7%	2%
LinkedIn	2%	8%	26%	12%	18%	8%	16%	10%
FourSquare	25%	17%	8%	25%	8%	8%	0%	8%
Blog on your website	10%	17%	30%	3%	23%	7%	10%	0%
Delicious	22%	11%	22%	0%	0%	33%	11%	0%

Reasons for social media channel preference

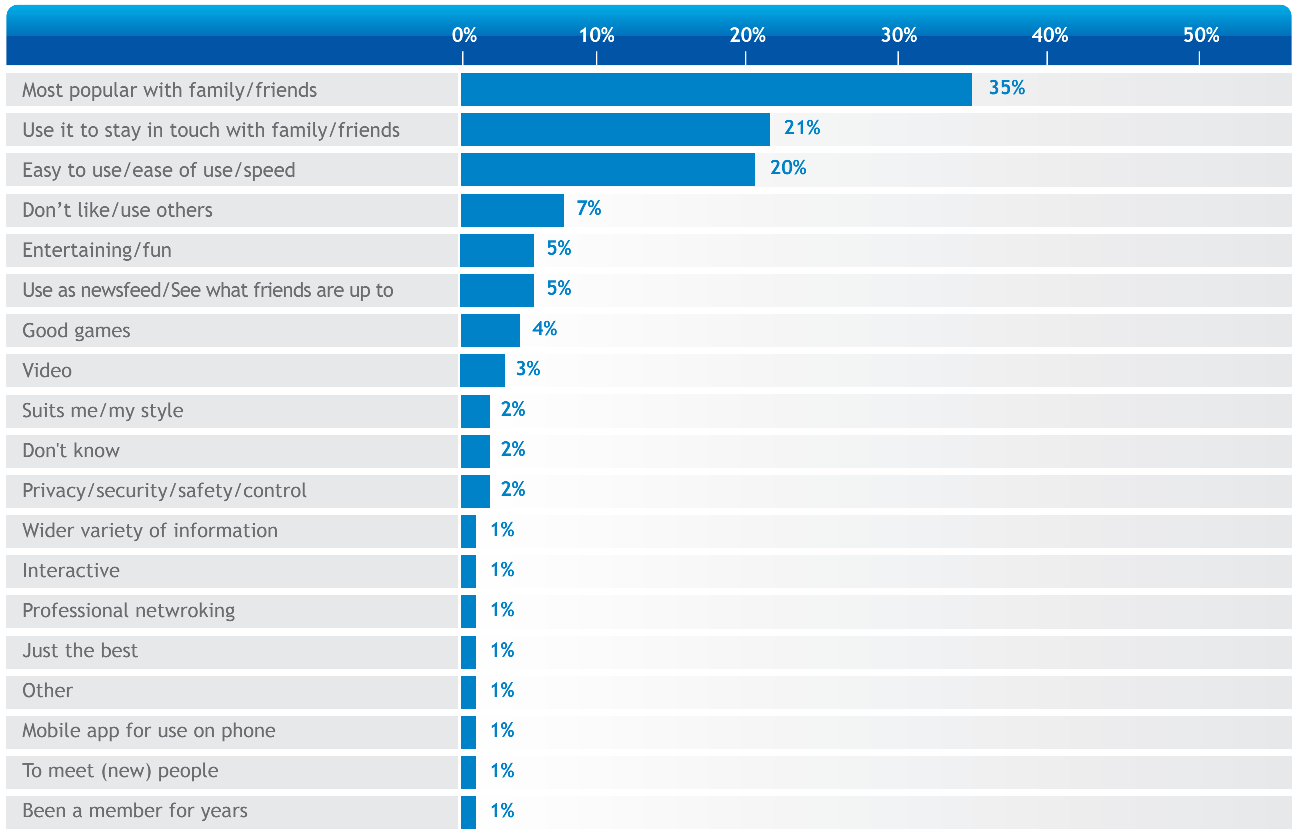
Facebook has achieved a critical mass with consumers so that it is chosen as a social media channel based upon popularity with the user's peer group. Twitter and YouTube have unique features that appeal, and prompt usage - namely speed for the former and a vast library of video content for the latter. Other social media platforms are viewed as niche, appealing to people with specific interests (e.g. photography and Flickr) yet lacking mainstream appeal.

Q. Why do you prefer this social website?

Reasons for social media channel preference varied by platform. For example, 62% of Facebook users say they prefer the channel because it is the most popular with family and friends, and is used as communication within these groups.

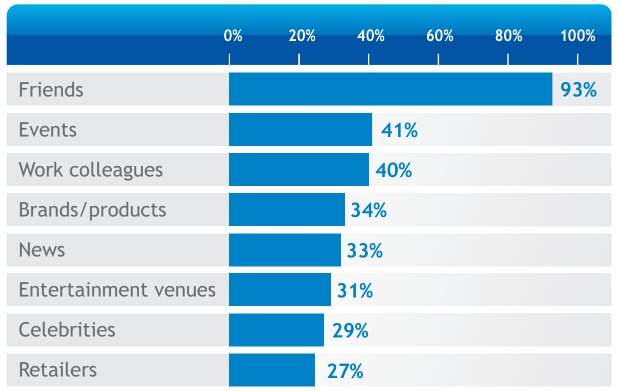
Twitter usage, however, is driven more by current events, with half of those using the media channel citing speed and ease of use as their main priority. Only 9% use Twitter to stay in contact with family and friends.

For YouTube, unsurprisingly, video content is the main factor driving usage - 52% of YouTube users prefer it due to its video content and 30% cite entertainment as the driving factor for their interest in the channel.



Subjects followed using social media

Q. Which of these do you follow on social websites? (Tick all that apply)

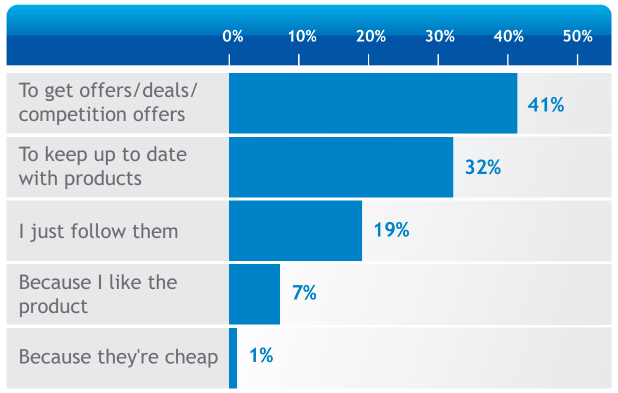


While there appears to be more interest in following particular brands, they may be more tailored to specific groups and niches.

`Friends' was the most important category with 93% of all consumers using social media to follow the activities of their friends. The 25-44 year old age group was most likely to follow friends with 96% giving this response.

Motivations for following brands using social media

Q. Why do you follow brands / products?



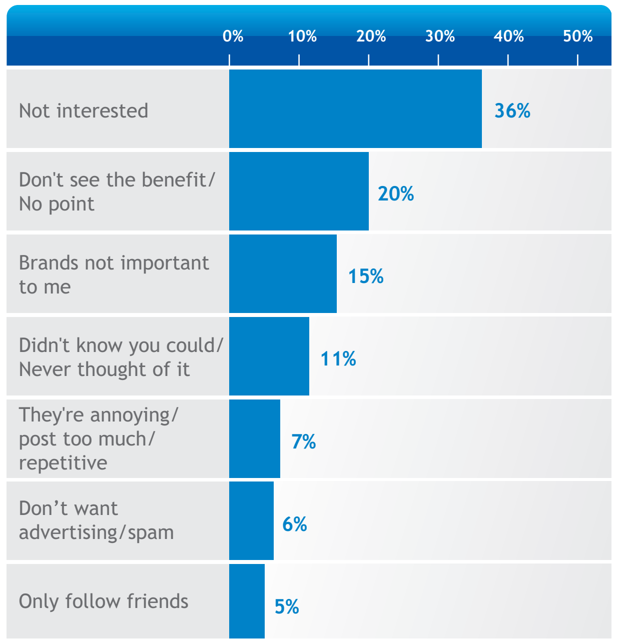
Only 7% of those people following a brand state that they do so because they have a positive affiliation and genuinely 'like' the product in question.

For those who follow, claim to follow brands (34% of the total). The motivations for doing so appear to be centred on promotions and special offers, combined with a desire to stay up to date with new product developments and launches.

There does, however, appear to be a fairly weak tie between consumers and brands, with almost a fifth of those following a brand unable to give a definitive reason.

Reasons why people do not follow brands using social media

Q. Why don't you follow brands / products?



Main factors are a lack of salient benefits or interesting and engaging content that might motivate them to follow. Less than one fifth of these consumers cited a specific reason for not following brands, namely, concerns over the quantity of content and spam.

This indicates that there is some potential for brands to tip neutral consumers into a more positive mindset. However, this will only be achieved through better quality content that speaks to consumers in a salient manner.

Unfollowing on social media

There is a considerable body of research into why consumers follow others using social media. However, there is rather less information on the levels of ceasing to follow and the motivations behind this `unfollowing'.

Q. Have you ever stopped following a social media user for any reason?

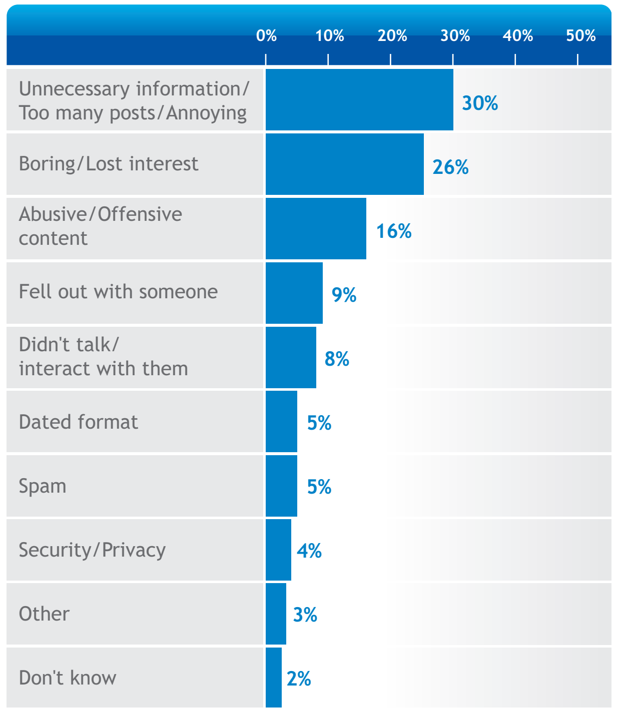
Approximately 25% of consumers said that they had stopped following a social media user in the past.

Younger users of social media are more likely to stop following than older people - around a third of those aged under 34 years old had stopped following another social media user compared with approximately a fifth in the older age group.

This age difference may indicate that all social networks both online and off-line, are more fluid amongst the younger age groups and therefore are prone to change. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the ties that bind social media users are not especially strong and followers should not be taken for granted.

Reasons why stopped following on social media

Q. Why did you stop following them?



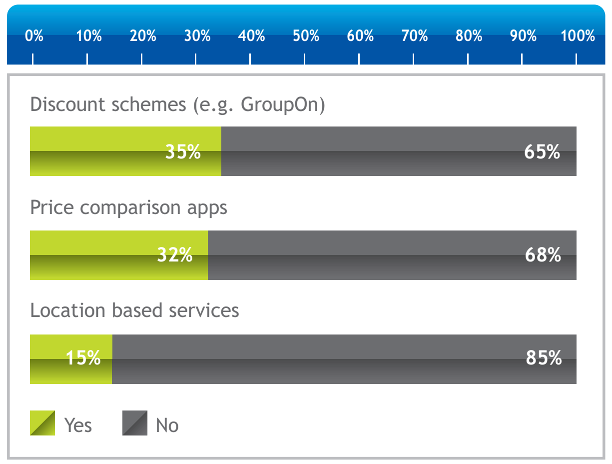
The reasons for stopping following another social media user show that there is a delicate balance between maintaining contact at an acceptable frequency while not communicating too often. Furthermore, content that is perceived as irrelevant and boring soon becomes irritating or annoying thereby precipitating unfollowing.

Usage of emerging social media platforms

Q. Have you ever used any location-based services such as Foursquare?

Q. Have you ever used any price comparison apps when shopping?

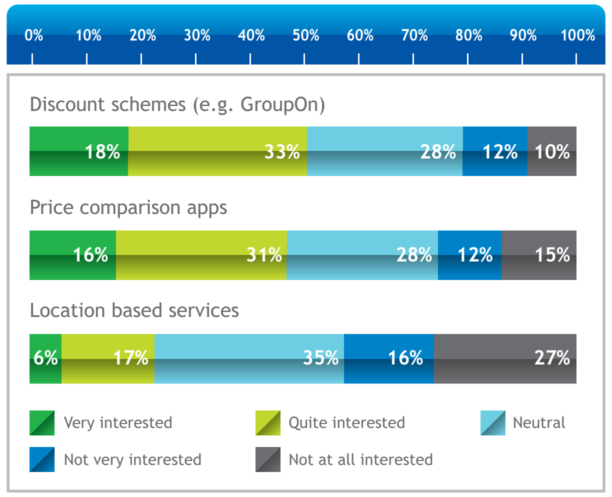
Q. Have you ever used group discount schemes such as Groupon?



The most popular emerging social media platforms are those based upon combined purchasing leading to discounted deals, such as Groupon and Living Social.

Levels of interest in adopting new social media platforms

Q. Please could you indicate how interested you would be in using…?



Levels of interest in using new technologies largely mirrors the patterns of actual usage with group shopping discount schemes generating the most interest followed by price comparison apps and location-based services. Women display more interest in group shopping schemes whereas men are more likely to use location-based services.

Shopping behaviour

The survey looked at general attitudes towards and usage of social media. The research also focussed on shopping behaviour and the role that social media plays for consumers.

Usage of the internet to aid shopping

Q. Have you ever used the internet to help you buy products from retailers (not from online retailers)?

71% of consumers have used the internet to help them make purchases.

Q. How have you used the internet to help you make purchases? (Please write in.)

Almost all consumers have conducted some product research prior to buying. Sharing is a central part of social shopping, yet this facet of the shopping experience has the lowest levels of participation. Consumers are slightly more likely to share their experiences with retailers and shopping centres than they are to share details of their purchases online.

General research ranged from merely establishing availability of products within a sector through to exploring product reviews and getting detailed specifications. Around half of the sample looked for price comparisons between retailers using web based data.

Just under half of respondents have used the internet to plan a shopping trip both in advance and to guide them to and between stores.

There are very few differences between genders on usage of the internet in a shopping complex. However, males were more likely to share details of their product purchases online compared with females (28% versus 23%). Also, propensity to share details purchases on social websites declines as age increases - 39% of the 16-24 year old age group have shared details of purchases compared with 14% in the 45-54 year age group.

Usage of social media as part of a shopping trip

Q. Have you ever used social websites as part of a shopping trip?

Overall, 12% had used social media as part of a shopping trip. The highest levels of social media usage as part of a shopping trip was amongst the 16-24 year old age group (18%).

More emphasis needs to be placed upon integrating social media into the shopping trip and in demonstrating how it can add value and enhance the overall experience.

Isolating the sub-group of people who stated that they have shared details of product purchases on social media, only 24% of this group had used social websites as part of a shopping trip.

This suggests that even those people that can be considered as more engaged with social media do not perceive it as a means of enhancing the shopping experience itself.

Social media and shopping centres

Ever followed a shopping centre

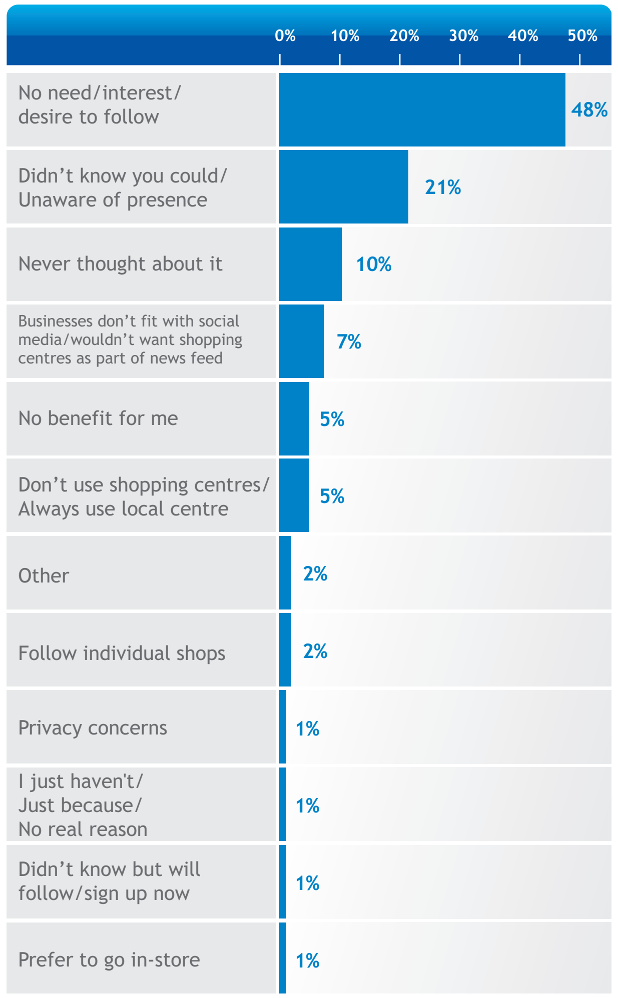
Q. Have you ever followed a shopping centre using social media?

12% of people have ever followed a shopping centre using social media.

There was a significant skew towards females among those people who have followed shopping centres (70% females versus 30% male). Also, those following shopping centres were predominantly younger consumers - 70% of shopping centre followers were aged under 34 years.

Reasons why do not follow shopping centres

Q. What would you say are the main reasons why you have not followed a shopping centre on social media? (Please write in.)



The main reasons why consumers do not follow centres is a lack of awareness combined with no salient or motivating reason to follow. Given this, there is a need to raise awareness not only of centres' social media presence but also to communicate specific benefits that will drive traffic to a centre's social media site.

We asked those people who have not followed a shopping centre in the past the reasons for this. 48% of this group could see no motivating reasons why they should follow centres. Male consumers were more likely to state a lack of interest or desire to follow compared with female consumers (57% of men versus 44% of women).

A further third had never followed due to a lack of awareness that centres have a social media presence. Overall, the picture is one of neutrality and a lack of engagement. Very few respondents (7%) feel that centres are not suited to social media.

Which shopping centres are followed?

Looking more closely at the actual centres followed using social media, people tend to follow their nearest centre and it is unusual for consumers to follow more than one centre. Some people mentioned retailer brands that they followed in response to the question asking them to specify the shopping centre that they have followed. Removing retailer brands leaves a sample base of 33 people (7% of the total sample).

The centres followed and the number of people following them is listed as follows:

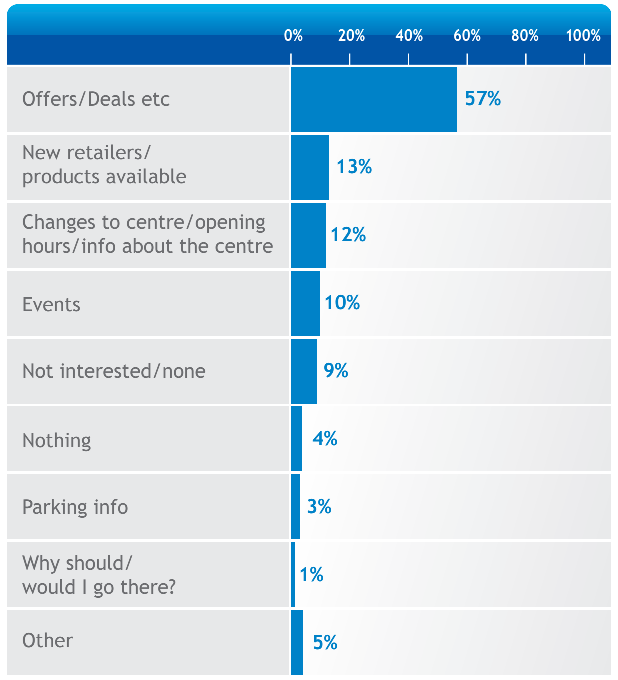
	33 no of respondents (multiple codes allowed)
Sheffield Meadowhall	4
The Trafford Centre	4
Liverpool One	3
Merry Hill	3
Gateshead Metrocentre	3
Westfield London	3
Don't know	3
Bluewater	2
Richmond Centre	2
Bullring	1
Brent Cross	1
Kingsgate	1
White Rose Centre	1
St Giles centre	1
Dalton Park	1
Four Seasons	1
The Mall	1

Base: All following a centre

Most important content / subject areas for shopping centre social media

Q. What would you say is the single most important thing a shopping centre should be communicating to you through its social media websites?

Over one in ten people cannot think of any content that would be appropriate for a centre to offer them. This underlines the need to provide a motivating reason for consumers to visit a centre's website rather than simply ignoring it or bypassing it in favour of a retailer or manufacturer site.

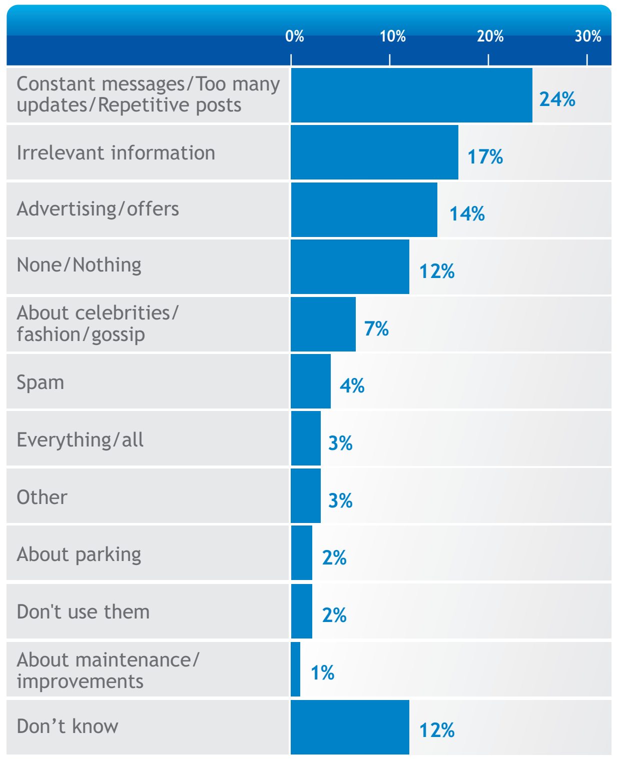


Consumers were asked, without prompting, what they felt would be the most important content or subject areas for shopping centres to feature in social media. It seems that consumers view centres social media content in a similar manner to that of retailers.

Given this, they expect centres to offer them incentives in the form of special offers or exclusive deals. Also, they expect information around the operation of centres including opening hours, location and navigation around the centre.

Shopping centre social media activity likely to prompt negative reaction

Q. Again thinking about shopping centres, could you tell me what you might find irritating or annoying in communications from them? (Please write in.)



Consumers are unclear and unfamiliar with potential social media offerings from shopping centres.

Consumers were asked, unprompted, to indicate what activity using social media they did not want to see from a centre. The responses were consistent across demographic groups.

A high volume of messages and too many updates were the most frequently mentioned dislikes. Irrelevant information was also likely to prompt a negative reaction (17%) along with advertising / spam (18%). However, just under a quarter (24%) stated that they did not know or could not name anything that might prompt a negative reaction.

Desired topic / subject areas for shopping centre social media

Respondents were prompted with a range of topic areas that might be included within centres' social media content. Consumers were asked to rank each content type according to its appeal and suitability for shopping centre social media - the ranking (most popular = 1) and the mean ranking score for each subject is listed as follows:

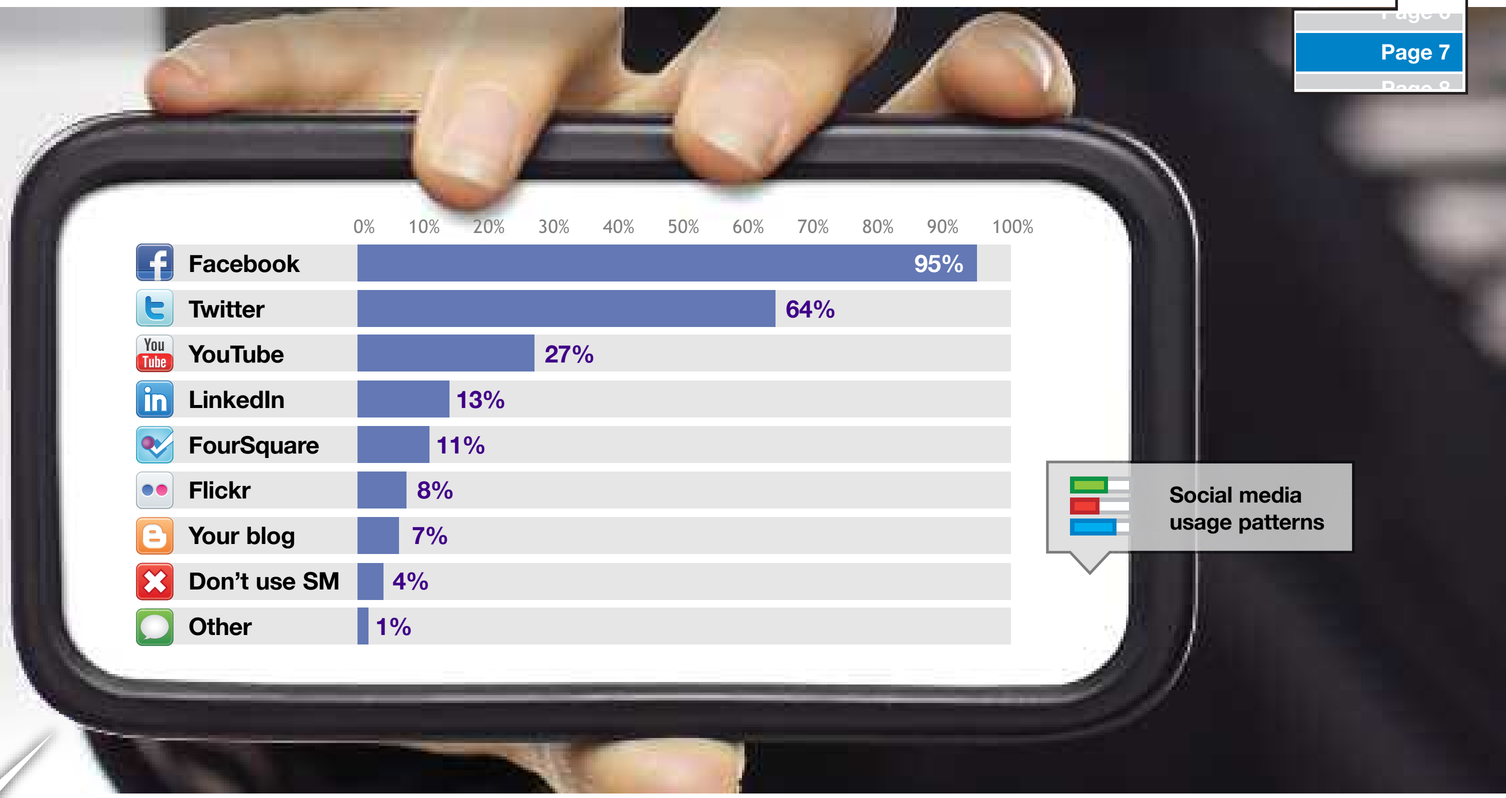
	Ranking	Mean Score*
Special offers/promotions	1	2.50
News about special events	2	3.21
News about new retailers in the centre	3	3.51
News about existing retailers in the centre	4	3.80
Car parking information	5	3.98
Items on music	6	3.98
Items on style/fashion	7	3.99
Entertainment News/celebrity gossip	8	4.07
News about developments to the centre (improvements/modernisation)	9	4.10
Traffic information	10	4.22

*lower mean score indicates higher ranking

The data suggest that some context would be useful to give an overall purpose and meaning to centres' social media presence i.e. are they intended to be a source of information on the centre itself, on retailers or even on the product sold by those retailers.

It is interesting to look at the mean scores in addition to the rank order given to each of the topic areas. There is not a broad spread of mean scores which would suggest that all of the topic areas might be suitable for inclusion as social media content for centres.

5. Primary research findings for shopping centre managers



Research approach

An online survey was conducted amongst shopping centre managers. Selected members were invited to participate by email and a link to the survey was posted on the BCSC website. A total of 84 BCSC members completed the survey. Centre managers were also invited to take part in two workshops to discuss their use of social media.

Social media usage

Social media channel used by centres

Q. Does your centre have an official presence on any of the following social media channels? (Please select all that apply.)

Usage of social media channels by centres mirrors the levels of usage amongst consumers. The exception to this is Twitter - almost two-thirds (64%) of shopping centres use Twitter however only a third (37%) of consumers.

Conversely only a quarter of shopping centres use YouTube compared with over half (57%) of consumers. The higher levels of consumer YouTube usage, suggest that shopping centres may want to review their YouTube presence and activity in order to identify any potential opportunities to deliver against social media strategy objectives.

'The most popular video on our YouTube channel is the construction of the centre 13 years ago!'

Social media channel used by centres

Q. Thinking about the value of different social media channels to your centre, please could you rank them in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 least important.

Rank	Mean Score
1 Facebook	1.36
2 Twitter	2.84
3 YouTube	4.26
4 Blog	4.41
5 Flickr	5.02
6 LinkedIn	5.26
7 Foursquare or other location service	5.32

The priority given to social media channels shows that Facebook is considered most important with a mean score of 1.36 (a score of one is the best possible score on this scale).

Twitter is ranked second and YouTube takes third place. However, looking at the mean scores for ranking there is some distance between the importance placed on Twitter and YouTube.

Findings from the consumer research indicates that YouTube is more important than Twitter and so shopping centres might consider revisiting the relative priority given to these two social media platforms.

Person responsible for updating social media

Q. Who has main responsibility for updating content?

	%
Marketing	32
Dedicated social media executive	12
Junior marketing executive	10
Press officer	6
Senior manager	6
Customer service executive	6
Other	12

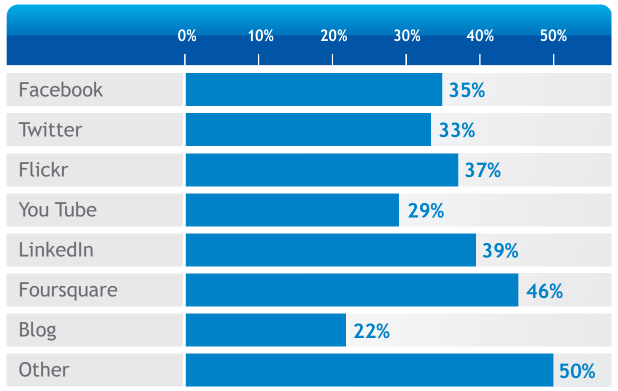
Managing social media is not a standalone role in centres at present and further priority may need to be given to the role if it is to develop in the future.

Some people with responsibility for content management are quite junior. The 'other' category includes people with job titles such as 'administrator', 'head of security', or 'secretary'. However, there are also mentions of 'centre manager' and 'senior management' in the `other' category.

'We respond Monday to Friday but Facebook is busiest at the weekend so I update in my free time. Saturday morning is when our page is busiest so I do it over breakfast and check in later.'

Proportion of centres requiring approval of updates by social media channel

Q. Does this person need to get new content approved before publishing on:



A minority of shopping centres require that content is approved prior to updating social media. This could be a cause for concern if junior staff are responsible for updates yet lack sufficient guidance or experience of company policy to inform judgement on social media content, potentially leading to inappropriate communications.

Proportion of centres with written guidelines for social media usage

Q. We have a written policy for staff on how to use social media

42% of the organisations surveyed have written guidelines in place on social media usage.

It is recommended that all centres have written policy and guidance on social media usage in the same way that they would have an acceptable usage policy for the internet. Given that the majority of social media updates do not require approval, it is expected to see some rigorous guidelines on acceptable usage of social media.

'We've had to put in measures to control people talking about work things relating to tenants'

Proportion of centres with guidelines on dealing with negative comments or complaints on social media

Q. We have written guidelines for staff on how to deal with negative complaints or comments on social media.

43% of centres have written guidelines for staff on how to deal with negative complaints or comments on social media. Clear written guidelines will not prevent negative comments however they will lead to a faster response to ameliorate any damage to reputation. All centres should have a policy in place with relevant staff fully briefed, before it is needed.

The speed with which negative comments can be propagated through social media requires swift action to minimise harmful effects. Some centres that do not have full guidelines on social media usage do have a procedure for complaints handling.

Most of those organisations that do have a written policy on social media also have guidelines for dealing with negative comments or complaints received through this channel.

'We had a customer complaint where the user demanded a response in public on Twitter. We stuck to our guns as we could not answer it in 140 characters and they went away.'

Proportion of centres with written guidelines on escalating problems that occur through social media channels

Q. We have written guidelines for staff on how to escalate problems that occur through social media channels.

37% have written guidelines on how to escalate problems that occur through social media channels. Escalation procedures should be revised and updated to include social media.

If junior executives are exercising their own discretion in dealing with problems that arise, it would appear prudent having well-defined guidance and procedure in place for the escalation of issues that may have a potentially major negative impact on the organisation. While junior executives may have valuable skills in social media it appears unfair and possibly unwise to place responsibility for dealing with issues that could have a major impact on corporate reputation and standing.

'You have to include contract staff in your social media policies.'

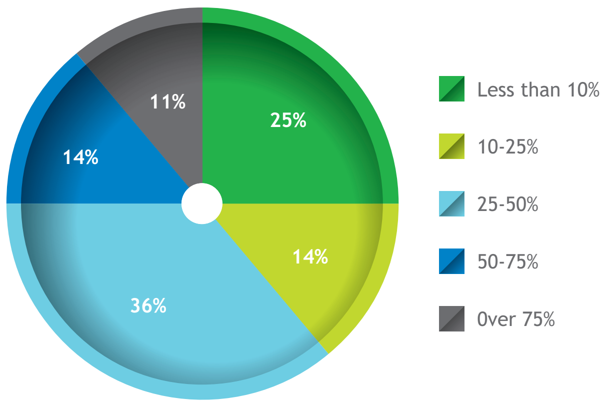
'Why not set up a Facebook page just for your retailers then you can speak to them all instantly and get round the problem of no emails for some of them?

Approaches to social media content generation

The research wanted to explore the approaches to content generation and particularly the relationship between the centre's own content versus redistribution of content from the centre's tenants.

Centres with a formal agreement on redistributing retail partners' social media content

Q. What proportion of your total social media output is re-distributing retailer's content (e.g. re-tweets)?



A quarter of centre's social media content is almost totally self-generated. At the other extreme, a quarter of centres state that the majority of their content is generated by third parties (retailers) and so their social media activity is primarily redistribution of this content.

On further analysis, looking at the proportion of redistributed content, there is not a clear pattern according to who has responsibility for social media management. Some people outsourcing to specialist agencies rely heavily upon third party generated content, yet some centres where a junior executive has responsibility are generating almost all of their content themselves.

Half of centres responding to the survey said that redistributed content accounted for between 10% and 50% of their social media output.

Quote: Customers expect high levels of detail about retailers' own items and stock levels in store. Do we answer at that level of detail or refer it? What is our role here?

Centres with a formal agreement on redistributing retail partners' social media content

Q. We have a formal agreement with our retail partners on distributing their own social media content through our own channels.

Only 13% of centres have a formal agreement with retail partners on redistributing their social media content. A formal agreement on content redistribution ensures that consumers receive timely information in a manner that enhances their shopping experience and avoids potential confusion and conflict.

Redistributing content in an ad hoc fashion is likely to lead to confusing communications with consumers receiving duplicate information which is a major source of irritation with social media for consumers.

Centres conducting analysis on customer data obtained through social media channels

Q. We analyse customer data that we receive through social media channels.

51% of the centres surveyed conduct any form of analysis on social media data.

A significant number of centres are missing out on the opportunity to gain an enhanced understanding of visitors to their social media sites and in turn, customers within their centres.

Monitoring of own centre mentions on social media channels

Q. We actively monitor mentions of our centre in social media channels.

65% of centres monitor social media for mentions of their own centre.

Reputation management (or indeed failure to manage reputation) in the social media sphere could become a serious problem for the 35% of centres that do not monitor channels for mentions.

Given the rapid spread out which news can travel on social media, it is good that the majority of centres are taking steps to monitor mentions.

Proportion of centres running social media campaigns targeting specific audiences

Q. We run separate campaigns for different audience groups e.g. by age / gender.

25% of centres target campaigns at separate audience groups.

The 75% of centres that do not target different audience groups are in danger of being unfollowed and should develop an audience segmented approach to social media as a priority. One of the main reasons why consumers stop following on social media, is irrelevant or uninteresting content.

Targeting specific groups using social media can be quite difficult. Certainly, Facebook has limited tools for communicating to sub-groups of a user's followers.

'I got a call from a journalist telling me the centre was being evacuated. He'd seen it on Twitter. Turned out it was an exercise that security hadn't told me about.'

Perceived main target audience for centres' social media

When questioned on the main target audience for their centre's social media activity a mixed response was received as follows:

Base	no. of respondents 84
Everyone	18
Females	16
ABC1	6
No specific group	6
Do not use social media to target consumers	5
Young people	5
18-35 year olds	4
18-45 year olds	4
18-65 year olds	4
Students	4
16-24 year olds	3
16-34 year olds	3
25-44 year olds	3
Under 25s	3
Don't know / Not sure	2
Families	2
Male	2
Under 30s	2
14-40 year olds	1
16-45 year olds	1
16-50 year olds	1
18-25 year olds	1
18-30 year olds	1
18-75 year olds	1
25+	1
25-34 year olds	1
25-54 year olds	1
All ages	1
Different audiences depending upon campaign	1
Early 20's	1
Fashionistas	1
Local community	1
People that are always on the go	1
People who like the page	1

It is difficult to create content that is relevant and salient for social media if there is not a specific audience in mind. Further, focusing on the existing customer base for a centre is a good starting point but this fails to acknowledge the potential of social media in expanding the types of people visiting the centre through targeting of specific demographic and behavioural types.

It is interesting that a large proportion of respondents either state that all consumers are their main target audience or that they simply do not know who the audience for social media is. In many cases where a target audience is mentioned, it is often defined in terms of the centre's existing customer base – those people that can be seen in the centre on a daily basis.

There is also some suggestion that the target audience for social media reflects the aspirations of centres rather than necessarily representing an achievable target. Attracting upmarket, stylish and fashion conscious consumers with high disposable incomes has obvious benefits for a centre, however this may not reflect the demographic present in the catchment area.

Quote: We targeted social media-based fan groups for our Christmas lights switch on. We have a capacity of 6,000 in our food court but ended up with 14,000 on the day and we were taken aback.

Monitoring of competitor centre mentions on social media channels

Q. We actively monitor mentions of competing retail centres in social media channels.

45% of centres monitor activity relating to competing retail centres on social media. Information derived by monitoring competitor mentions can be used to deliver new opportunities for business development and enhance customer care by capitalising upon unmet needs.

Monitoring mentions of the competition provides a useful source of information. This information does not only relate to competitor activities but also provides a snapshot consumer perceptions relating to competitor strengths and weaknesses.

Centres recruiting staff with social media skills for appropriate job roles

Q. We actively recruit people with social media skills for appropriate roles.

21% of centres recruit people with social media skills.

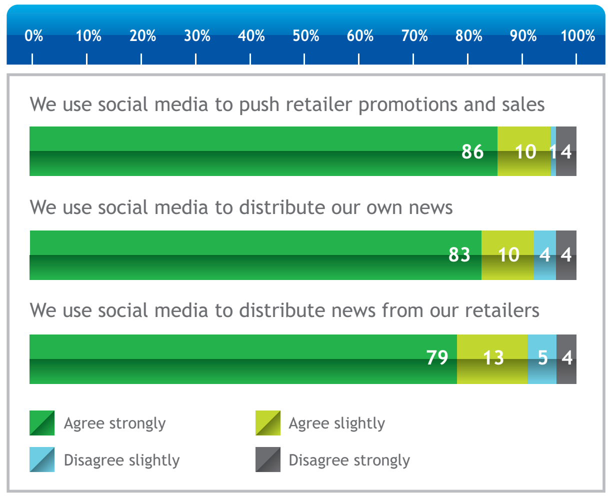
For many centres, management of social media is one element of a broader job function; typically marketing or centre management. In view of this, it is not surprising that 79% of centres do not recruit on the basis of social media skills.

Attitudes to social media usage

Main purpose of social media activity

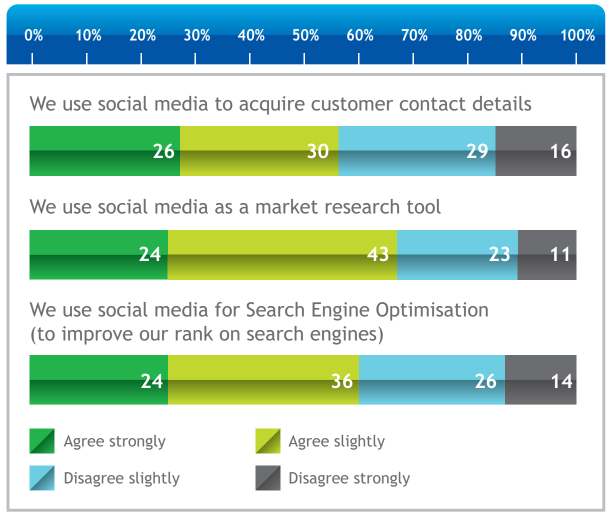
Respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements around attitudes to social media.

Q. Thinking about the purposes of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



Most centres use social media with the intention of increasing uptake of retailer promotions and to distribute news both about the centre and its retailers.

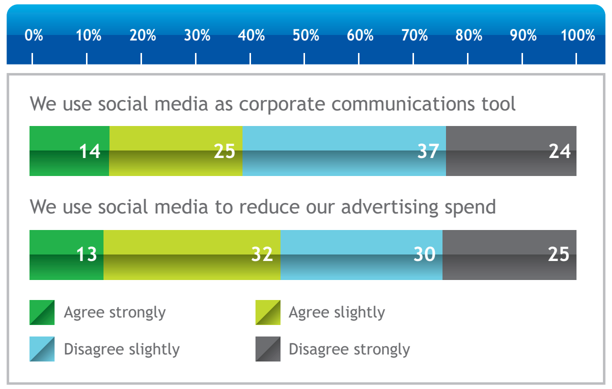
Q. Thinking about the purposes of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



51% of centres say that they conduct analysis on data obtained through social media. This analysis and processing of data includes contact detail acquisition and for market research purposes.

Most centres (60%) agree that social media serves a role to enhance the centre's ranking on search engines.

Q. Thinking about the purposes of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



Most centres appear to be using social media as an additional communications tool and are not, currently reducing reliance on traditional advertising media channels.

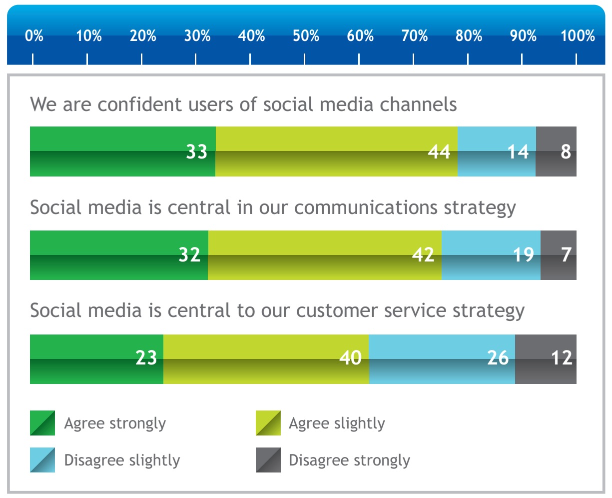
14% of centres 'agree strongly' that social media is used as a corporate communication tool. In contrast, approaching two-thirds (61%) actually disagree with the statement.

Social media is an effective channel for any brand to engage and interact with consumers. Social media interactions will be viewed as a communication from brand holders. The low levels of agreement with this statement suggests that there might be a need for greater alignment of social media with other communication routes including better integration of social media into an overall corporate communications strategy.

Over half of respondents (55%) disagree with the statement that social media has been used to reduce advertising spend.

Internal perceptions of social media

Q. Thinking about your efforts across all social media channels, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

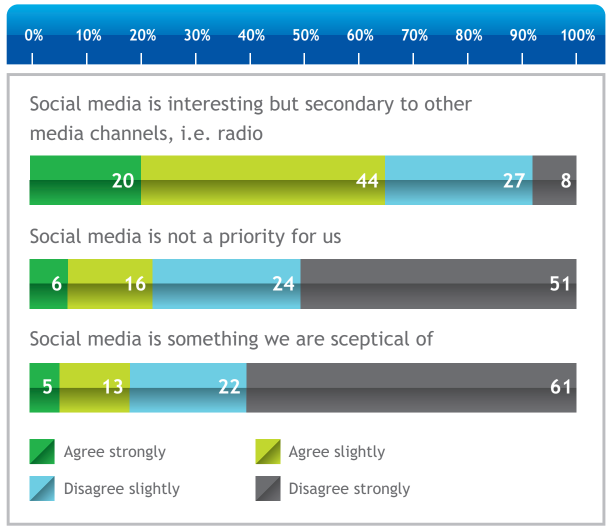


Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents said that they consider themselves confident users of social media.

74% agree that social media is central to their communications strategy. This finding is slightly at odds with the response that only 14% use social media as a corporate communications tool. However, the research found that almost 9 out of 10 centres fund their social media activity through marketing and communications budgets. Therefore, it is perceived importance to communications strategy may be driven, in part, by the source of funding.

63% of centres agree that social media is also a valuable part of their customer service strategy.

Q. Thinking about your efforts across all social media channels, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Social media seems to be placed in a secondary communications role – 64% of respondents agreed that the traditional / existing media channels are considered more important than social media.

Consequently, advertising spend has not been reduced through social media usage. Rather, it is being used as an additional channel and therefore we question whether it is receiving an adequate share of resources necessary to demonstrate or achieve its potential.

Nevertheless, centres are convinced that social media has a role to play and agree that it is a priority area for future usage and development.

Perhaps once centres have greater experience of using social media there will be more willingness to replace traditional media channels.

However, it is likely that replacing other advertising channels with social media may depend upon illustrating the relative return on investment (ROI) of social media compared with other communications media.

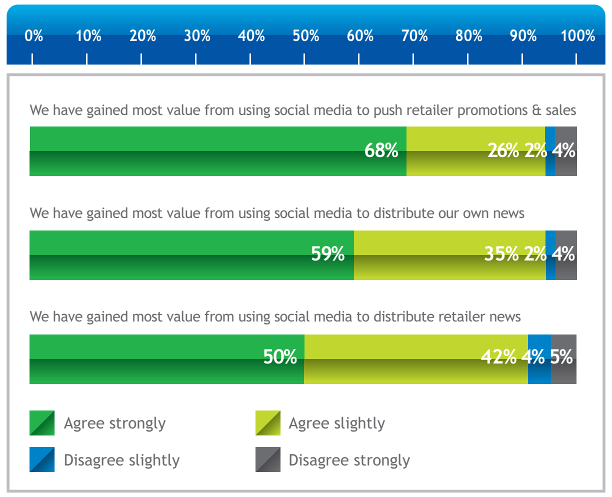
'It's too early to think about replacing ad spend with social media.'

Investment in social media

Sources of value from social media

Respondents were asked to consider how social media has delivered value to their organisation. Respondents were prompted with a number of different possible way social media could add value and were asked to what extent they agreed / disagreed with the statement.

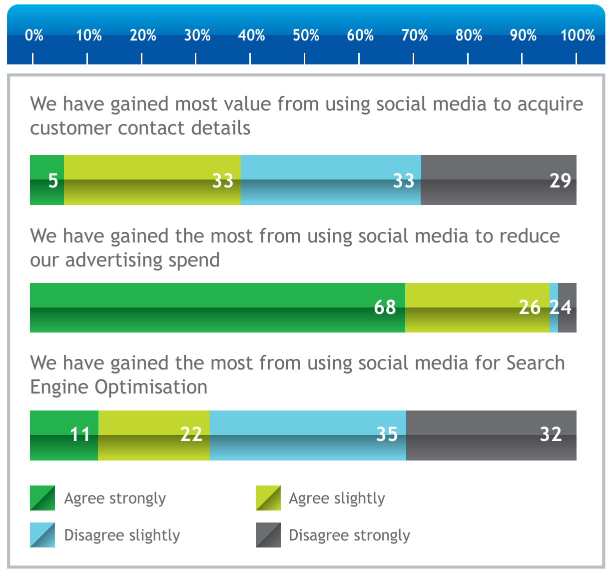
Q. Thinking about your experiences of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



Most centres believe that they derive maximum value from social media as a method of distributing news (both their own and retailers') as well as providing support for occupiers by pushing promotions and offers.

The remaining statements prompted much higher levels of disagreement.

Q. Thinking about your experiences of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



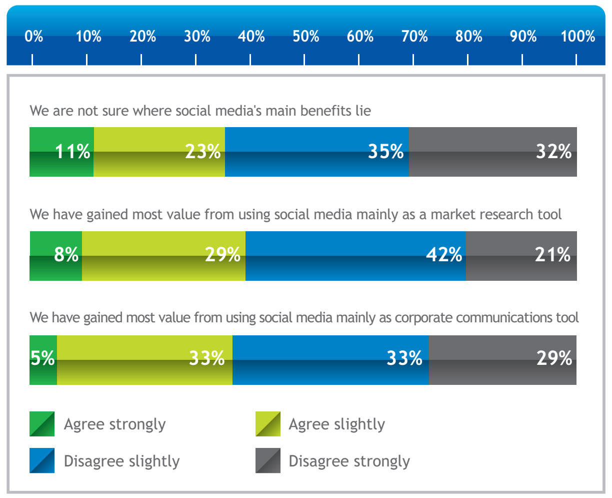
Centres are split over the value of social media in acquiring customer data. Approximately a quarter (26%) 'disagree strongly' that this usage has delivered value.

Social media has delivered benefits in search engine optimisation (SEO) for almost half of the sample (48%) although only 1 in 10 centres 'agree strongly' that the main value of social media for them lies in SEO.

The majority (56%) do not feel that social media's main benefit is the possibility to reduce advertising spend. Only a 10th of centres 'agree strongly' that social media has delivered value via a reduction in advertising spend. This suggests that any expenditure on social media is additional to existing advertising and communications activities.

'Everyone underestimated the time required to create fresh content.'

Q. Thinking about your experiences of using social media, please consider the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.



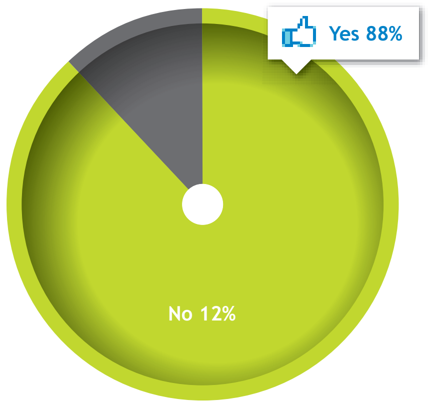
Two-thirds of centres (67%) feel that they are sure where social media's main benefits lie. However, looking at usage patterns, it could be argued that centres are taking a rather narrow view and are not using social media to its full potential.

Only 8% of centres 'agree strongly' that they are getting most value from social media as a market research tool; gaining greater understanding of customers.

There is approximately an even split between centres that have gained benefits from social media as a corporate communications tool. The mixed response to this question may well indicate a cautious approach to social media where it is considered appropriate for consumers yet not necessarily for corporate stakeholders.

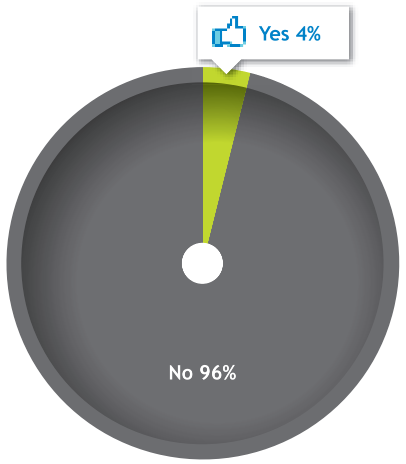
Budget used to fund social media – marketing and communications

Q. Our investment in social media comes from our marketing and communications budget.



Budget used to fund social media – customer services

Q. Our investment in social media comes from our customer services budget.



It is clear that funding for social media lies within the marketing communications budget - 88% of centres fund their social media activity from this budget. In contrast only 4% of centres invest in social media through their customer services budget.

While it is clear that the focus on promotional activity for social media is appropriate for a marketing function, it is questionable whether sufficient emphasis is being placed upon social media as a means of fulfilling a centre's role in the community. Furthermore, social media provides an excellent opportunity to address customer comments and complaints through an honest and open dialogue with customers.

The low levels of customer services budget funding for social media suggest that centres may benefit by reappraising its potential role and function. This may potentially shift some responsibility for management and budget holding, towards a shared position between marketing and customer services.

Quote: I've got a customer services manager and I say you've got to get your people on Twitter and Facebook. He says what's that got to do with me? He genuinely does not understand why they are vital to this.

Measuring ROI for social media campaigns

Q. We have a clear method for measuring the return on investment of social media campaigns.

29% of centres state that they have a clear method for measuring ROI of social media campaigns.

Measuring social media ROI is a contentious topic with many different proposed methodologies. There are various approaches that people have adopted to valuing social media which are under some degree of sceptical scrutiny and debate. Nevertheless, the fact that almost three-quarters of centres do not have any measurement in place indicates that increasing budgets for social media will be difficult for shopping centres until they can demonstrate the value delivered.

We had 14,000 check-ins on Facebook Places before we even knew what it was. I cannot understand how to measure conversion from likes to footfall.

When asked to specify the exact method used by centres that have a measurement in place, the following picture emerges:

Base	no. of respondents 24
Number of followers	10
Traffic (hits / impressions on website)	8
Number of `likes'	7
Interaction (number of comments on posts)	5
Sales	3
Uptake of promotions / competitions	3
Anecdotal customer comments / feedback	2
Retailer feedback	2
Sentiment measurement	2
Engagement metrics	1
Facebook analytics	1
Loyalty scheme membership	1

The most common measures relate to volume of followers / likes and the amount of traffic generated by posts. These measures can be considered as illustrating the penetration or reach of a centre's social media activity. However, it is questionable whether they actually demonstrate the value and ROI for social media, especially when consumers are forced to follow a particular site before they can view its content or where special offers and promotions are `bought' by consumers liking the site.

It appears that there is no single 'magic bullet' that centres are using for measuring ROI. A range of measures, both quantitative (e.g. traffic) and qualitative (e.g. the content of interactions) seem to offer the most reliable measures of success. A range of measures benchmarked over time, combined with 'hard' data on uptake of promotions, special offers and competitions should provide effective guidance on the success of social media initiatives.

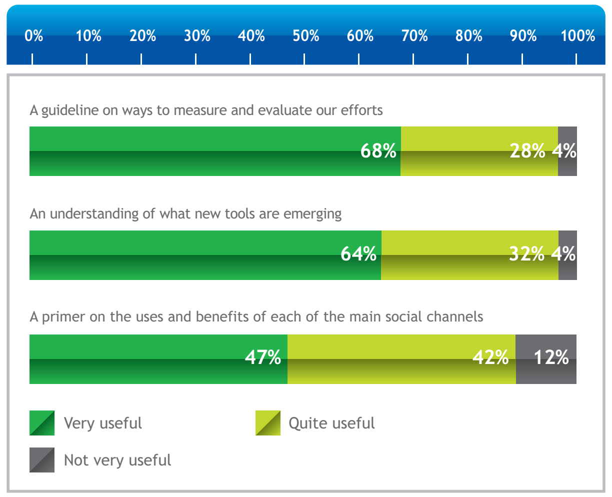
'Future development of shopping centre social media.'

6. Conclusions

Development needs in social media

The survey included a number of questions on centres' development needs with regard to social media including any resources that might prove useful.

Q. Thinking about your development needs in using social media, please rank the following items in terms of how useful you would find them.



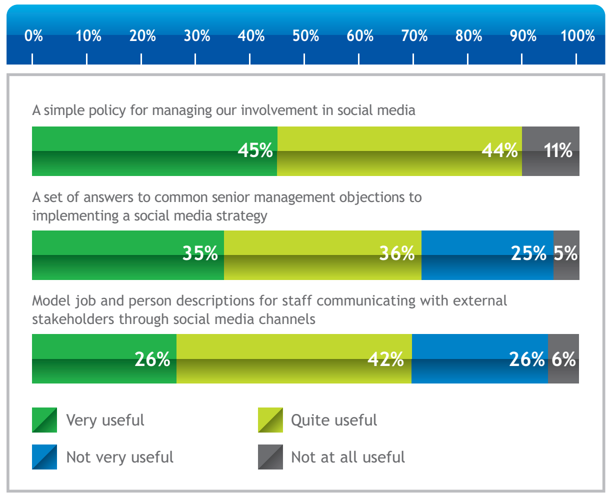
The greatest interest lies with two areas 1) ways to measure return on investment 2) more information on new developments and tools within social media; both attracting interest from over 90% of the sample.

There is also a desire for guidance on the most effective usage of different social media channels, indicating that centres now want to look towards developing a more segmented approach to social media whereby they select a particular platform for specific tasks and objectives.

'Social media is wrong for me. I just don't see what benefits it can bring to me or the shopping centre.'

This suggests that most people feel that they have a basic grasp of using social media and now want to develop their skills and enhance their centre's presence into a more effective communications channel.

Q. Thinking about your development needs in using social media, please rank the following items in terms of how useful you would find them.



89% of respondents feel that a simple guide to using social media would be useful. This potentially represents a desire for a simple `best practice' guide that helps to cut through the many different sources of information available on the subject.

There is relatively lower, yet significant levels of interest in helping centres make a business case for social media by providing ways to counter internal objections to social media implementation.

Model job descriptions for personnel dealing with social media is considered useful by the majority however, almost a third (32%) disagree and feel that these would not be useful to them. The relatively lower interest in this resource may reflect a lack of responsibility for personnel issues which may rest with the HR function.

This report contains evidence that the majority of centres need to re-examine their approach to social media to address many of its findings:

- the gap between what centres publish and what customers expect
- the absence of internal policies and governance that expose many to daily risk
- the lack of customer segmentation, and
- the underlying belief that social media is simply another marketing channel.

The fundamental questions underpinning a successful social media strategy is what is a shopping centre for and who does it serve?

If the principal purpose is to be a host organisation for its retail partners, facilitating their relationship with their customers then can centres expect to have the same kind of emotional bond? In this model, social media's value is to enhance the customer experience and sense of satisfaction, in other words a customer service, and not a marketing function.

If on the other hand, centres flourish by being part of the community, then are the consumers who walk onto the mall simply 'shoppers' who identify themselves by the labels on the bag? Or are they individuals who identify themselves more by their interests and roles in those communities? In this model, social media's value is to be relevant to the shopper by being relevant to community organisations and structures, in other words a CR or long term reputational function.

Commercial imperatives may make the above questions appear abstract. Nevertheless, they have gone unanswered for too long already and for the large majority of centres, resulting in wasted effort and resources.

'When we started our big measure was number of fans. A year and a half on, drilling down, you have no idea what the engagement is.'

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Case Studies

Experimenting with social media

During the desk research part of this study it proved challenging to identify a sound sample of shopping centres case studies using social media in innovative manner. The comments from centre managers in the online survey and the workshops suggest that they see themselves at the beginning of the journey of adopting and integrating social activity into their businesses.

The list of case studies in this section comprise:

- Westfield - 100 years of fashion YouTube
- The Rock, Bury
- Mall of America - Twitter car park promotion
- Manchester Arndale - Summer riots
- Topshop - Instagram Changing Rooms and Kinect Moscow
- Burberry - the Art of the Trench
- Levi - Friend Store
- Jimmy Choos - Trainer Hunt
- Diesel Madrid QR codes combined with Facebook

Further case studies can be found at: www.bcsc.or.uk

Westfield 100 Years of Fashion – YouTube

Westfield Stratford City wanted to reach a wider audience with a message regarding the opening of the scheme on September 13 2011. A key objective was to engage with customers and create a viral campaign to create talkability.

A video clip was produced to promote the opening of Westfield Stratford City focusing on the East End's hip fashion credentials - the 100 years of fashion concept was born. The opening message was purposefully subtle to ensure that the fashion message had priority and this was not seen as a form of advertising in the clearest sense. It was well seeded across several platforms with YouTube being the key one.

The film attracted over 3 million views on you tube - and over 1 million of these within the first 48 hours of being online delivering wide exposure in a cost effective and immediate viral way, allowing customers to feedback, review and engage with the brand.

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The Rock, Bury

Introduction and objectives

The Rock, a new retail and entertainment destination in Bury, Lancashire, was due to open on 16 July 2010. The scheme had suffered difficulties with original developer Thornfield going into administration. Hammerson were employed in an asset manager role and marketing and communications strategy was quickly rolled out to challenge the negative perceptions in the local community.

While traditional media and PR had gone some way in communicating The Rock offer, it was felt that the target demographic, a younger, more fashion conscious, tech savvy shopper were online and needed to be engaged and quickly.

Key objectives

- Use innovative Facebook, Twitter and Youtube promotions to directly engage the target audience within a 15 minute drive time of Bury
- Drive 5,000 fans to the Facebook page by the second phase
- Gather clean data for future marketing activity
- Drive footfall to The Rock over launch and key future events

Strategy, planning and research action

Facebook was identified as the key platform for social engagement and data capture, offering the best match against the target social demographic and drive time. Twitter was identified as the tool to be used to broadcast news about The Rock and YouTube for entertainment.

Implementation and impact:

- 2,500 fake meteor like rocks were scattered in streets, workplaces and schools within a 15 minute drive time of The Rock – featuring a unique code directing the collector to a Facebook application. Data captured by the initiative included name, address and date of birth.
- The finding of a rock, and its location, were published in the newsfeed of the finder to generate excitement.
- Within 24hours, 30% of the rocks had been redeemed and numbers were steadily rising.
- A tip off to the local press generated coverage in The Bury Times and Tower FM, traffic to the Facebook page increased as people asked where to find rocks.
- One sparkling rock could only be found by decoding clues revealed across YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. The rock featured a code for a diamond, hidden in a top secret location.

Rock Star

- A regional road show was identified as a way to quickly engage the local community, taking The Rock brand to them. A version of Nickelback's 'Rock Star' was filmed featuring local people.
- Targeting high traffic retail locations and community events within a 15 minute drive of The Rock, over 5,000 people were engaged with directly during the four day sessions.
- Branded 'Do You Rock?' cards with social URLs were handed out to people who participated and during the edit, dozens of messages appeared on Facebook asking when the video would be available for viewing.
- The final film was uploaded to Vimeo and hosted on the Facebook page and has received tags comments and hundreds of views.

My style ROCKS

- Over opening weekend, The Rock invited stylish visitors to have their photo taken for Facebook.
- Handing out promotional cards with the social media details on, the visitors were advised that if they tagged their photo before 12 noon the following day, they would be in with a chance of winning £50 to spend at The Rock.
- To tag a photo on Facebook, you must 'Like' The Rock – this simple action, reveals a vast amount of useable data.

Engaging the concerns of the community

- Although every conceivable step had been taken by the management team for the launch day to run smoothly, the social space offers people with concerns, less than perfect experiences and negative agendas to express themselves. The Rock engaged that audience answering every concern individually from 8am – 10pm Monday to Sunday.

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Mall of America – Twitter car park promotion

The Mall of America offered a special perk to Twitter followers – reserved parking on the busiest shopping day of the year in its Big Secret Parking Party.

On 18 December, the Mall of America closed its north surface parking lot, reserving 96 spaces for its Twitter followers. To secure one of the coveted spots, Twitter followers needed to register on Eventbrite. In addition to following @MallofAmerica, they presented an Eventbrite registration ticket to park.

The first batch of tickets was released 15 December and was followed by two batches on 16 December. All tickets were sold out.

There are a total of 12,550 parking spaces at the Mall of America. Representative Lisa Grimm said the mall sees an average of 100,000 to 140,000 shoppers on any given day.

"We want to reward loyal Twitter followers with something extremely coveted during the holiday shopping season – a close parking spot without the hassle of a time-consuming search," said Dave Haselman, EVP of operations at the Mall of America, in a prepared statement. "We hope this service will be an added value as well as increase our follower base."

Manchester Arndale case study: Summer rioting

When rioting broke out in London and then Birmingham in the first week of August, it seemed likely that copy-cat disturbances would spring-up elsewhere. Manchester Arndale, the UK's largest inner-city shopping centre, indeed became a target of the city centre disturbances on 09 August.

In both the reactive and proactive stages of dealing with these incidents, social media was used to communicate with the public in a positive manner. Manchester Arndale also became the originator of an immediate response campaign to instil confidence in the city in the aftermath of the riots.

By having a robust social media strategy and policy already in place, Manchester Arndale staff were able to respond quickly and consistently to customer enquiries. The shopping centre's formal crisis management plan had already been activated, with strong communication links between head office and what was happening on the ground in Manchester.

In conjunction with Manchester City Council and Marketing Manchester, Manchester Arndale instigated a positive recovery campaign within 12 hours of the rioting taking place. This campaign was called 'I love MCR' and it aimed to show that the people of Manchester are proud of their city and united against anti-social behaviour. The campaign centred on the iconic 'I Love MCR' brand which has become a symbol of the city's resilience.

The 'I Love MCR' campaign was quickly adopted by social media as a #ILoveMCR hashtag on countless tweets and many social media users placed the campaign logo on their identities on Twitter and Facebook. Subsequent analysis by Manchester Arndale of comments made on social media of the 'I Love MCR' campaign, recorded 8,938 comments with 96% of these being positive in tone, thus demonstrating how the campaign successfully galvanised public reaction. The offline campaign was taken up across the city, the Manchester Evening as media partner, with many retailers displaying an 'I love MCR' poster in shop windows and on major poster sites across the city.

Manchester Arndale has recently announced strong footfall and sales figures for the first half-year and also for the month of August, which in particular showed how successful the response to the rioting has been.

During the week of the Manchester riots, footfall decreased by about 10%, with the centre recording a reduction of about 40% in terms of customers and sales. However, the following three weeks, during which the 'I love MCR' campaign ran, there was a strong increase in footfall. The third week in particular recorded an increase of 12.6% in footfall year-on-year, hitting about 812,000 in terms of visitors passing through the shopping centre.

Sue Anderson-Brown, interim general manager at Manchester Arndale, said: "The record-breaking footfall figures in August demonstrate how successful the 'I love MCR' campaign has been for the city and is testament to the public support shown following the national disturbances."

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Topshop Instagram Changing Rooms

Topshop is treating its shoppers to something beyond air conditioning this summer: a complimentary styling and makeup session, followed by an Instagram photo shoot.

Photos will be taken with an iPad 2 against a backdrop. Participants will then be able to select one of several Instagram filters to stylize their images, which they can print out on postcards. Shoppers can also opt to upload their images directly to Topshop's gallery as well as their own Facebook profiles.

Topshop Kinect Screen Moscow

Topshop set up a virtual fitting room in its flagship Moscow store. The fitting room uses Microsoft Kinect and augmented reality to let shoppers try on clothes without going into a fitting room.

A built-in camera recognises a human body and superimposes a 3D model of a garment; users can switch clothes using simple gestures, powered by Kinect.

Like virtual fitting rooms on the web and in mobile apps, the 3D fitting is awkward at best, but it does give an idea of what clothes shopping might be like a decade from now.

Source: http://mashable.com/2011/05/10/topshop-augmented-reality-fitting-room/

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Burberry – the Art of the Trench

In 2009, the company launched Art of the Trench, a photo-sharing website dedicated to images, past and present, of people sporting the Burberry trench coat. Art of the Trench showcases images from professional fashion photographers, Magnum photographers and the public and includes contributions from celebrated fashion photo-blogger Scott Schuman, better known as The Sartorialist.

Visitors can submit their own images, as well as choose their favourite photos, comment on individual pictures and share them with others. The gallery also links out to the websites or Facebook pages of each contributor.

Impact: Between its launch in November 2009 and mid-2010 the site had already notched up more than 7 million visits. The social networking aspects of the site position Burberry firmly in the web 2.0 world. The use of digital media also helps to bring a younger audience to the brand, building a new generation of Burberry wearers and enthusiasts.

Levis Friends Store

After integrating their catalogue into Facebook and letting people 'Like', 'Share', and 'Comment' on products, Levi's saw an increase of over 2 million fans in 6 months. What Levi's aims to do is make shopping online more interactive while getting feedback and suggestions from your friends and family. In fact, over 60,000 products on Levi's page have already been Liked. Levi's points out that by getting feedback from customers in real-time, they are able to obtain more information than traditional market research can provide.

What is the relationship between clicking the Like button on a pair of jeans in the Friends Store and purchasing? Are people who Like a pair of jeans more likely to buy than other visitors to your online store?

We are allowing our best customers to share their favourite products with their friends. We believe if we are a loved a brand and we enable fun and interactive ways of shopping, sales will follow.

What about the friends of users who Liked a pair of Levi's? What kind of engagement have you seen from them?

We've already seen great reaction from our consumers to the Like button. As of right now, over 60,000 Levi's products have been Liked on www.Levi.com. We have also see an increase in the number of people who Like the Levi's brand on Facebook – up to 2 million in the past six months alone. We could not be more excited about how engaged our shoppers are with our brand.

What has the Friends Store taught you about your customers and their tastes? How does something like the Friends Store compare to doing traditional market research?

The integration of Facebook with our e-commerce site gives us real-time feedback about what products consumers are responding to, something traditional market research is not able to do. Though our integration with social media on Levi.com is still relatively new, we can absolutely imagine a world in which we'll make product decisions based on what styles are being liked on the site – and the feedback from users will impact future lines.

Source: http://smartblogs.com/socialmedia/2010/12/14/spotlight-on-social-commerce-how-levis-turns-shoppers-into-ambassadors/

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Jimmy Choo Trainer Hunt

A simple idea combining Foursquare, Twitter and Facebook in which the brand gave away a pair of special edition trainers worth approximately £350. The shoes randomly 'checked in' throughout the day at some key trendy locations around the city of London. If a person was lucky and quick enough to reach the location and find the Jimmy Choo bag, the trainers were theirs.

- 4,000 individuals participated in the Jimmy Choo trainer hunt on Foursquare, Twitter and Facebook in just under 3 weeks.
- The competition details were viewed on Facebook 285,000 times.
- The campaign was mentioned over 4,000 times on Twitter.
- 1 in 17 of all users of Foursquare in London were following the Jimmy Choo trainer hunt online.
- 250 different blogs covered the Jimmy Choo trainer hunt.
- The Jimmy Choo trainer hunt was covered by Reuters, The Evening Standard, PR Week, Marketing magazine, Vogue, The Irish Daily Mail and Brand Republic to name but a few press and magazine titles.
- The Jimmy Choo trainer hunt was the most clicked on story on PR Week's news site and the second most clicked on story on Marketing's news area during the week the story was published.
- Daily trainer sales in-store went up 33% after The Evening Standard covered The Jimmy Choo trainer hunt.
- Influential social media blog Mashable covered the Jimmy Choo trainer hunt because of the unique use of Foursquare and the fact that a luxury brand had engaged whole heartedly with social media.
- Positive mentions of the Jimmy Choo brand increased by almost 40% as a result of the campaign (measurements taken between 19th April & 6th May).

Source: Forrester/http://groundswelldiscussion.com/groundswell/awards2010

Diesel Madrid QR codes combined with Facebook

A trial in Madrid in which the customer browsing in store photographs a QR code which takes them to a Facebook page, which shows the product to their friends who can then comment on whether they think the clothes will suit.

At the time of writing the trial was less than a fortnight old with Diesel promising to roll it out internationally if successful. Parameters for success are undefined.

7. Appendices
List of workshop participants

We would like to thank the following who participated in two social media workshops, held in Manchester and London. Thank you also to the Trafford Centre for hosting the Manchester workshop.

Participants at London workshop

Carley Taylor-Neilson
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Maria Cooper
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The Glades, Bromley

Steven Connolly
Centre Manager
Festival Place, Guilford

Susan Button
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Tim Keeping
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Peacocks, Woking

Tom Nathan
London Centre Director
Brent Cross

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Kirkgate Shopping Centre, Bradford

Derek Miller
Centre Manager
The Grange and Pyramids

Howard Gibbons
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Middleton Shopping Centre, Lancashire

John Holt
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Grand Arcade, Wigan

Karen Cox
Business Manager
The Galleries, Wigan

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Church Square St Helens

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