

Social media: The new search?

By  Danette Breitenbach

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While Google still rules, social media sites are quickly gaining prominence as key places for brand discovery - especially among younger generations, in particular Gen Z.



Source © Ian Robinson [Unsplash](#) Social media is becoming the key place for brand discovery

What people think of as a search engine is very different today, compared to even five years ago. It's becoming much more likely for a young person to type into TikTok "best place for lunch in San Francisco" or "best skincare for dry skin" and see a person's review, followed by checking the accuracy of the review in the comment section.

This is according to recently released [The global media landscape](#), GWI's report on the latest trends in global media.

The internet saturation point

The report found that despite consumers spending almost seven hours (six hours, 43 minutes) a day online using a mobile, PC, laptop, or tablet, these figures have actually hit a ceiling.

"This is the case even in internet growth markets like the Middle East & Africa and Latin America, where average daily time spent online has fallen by 20 minutes and 34 minutes respectively since 2021."

The report notes that this could impact different forms of media. “Though notable drops in time spent online illustrate a decrease in pace, reflecting the post-pandemic landscape and how people now have less time to spare; a combination of media fatigue, subscription churn, and the cost of living crisis play an equally important role in flattening the curve.”

Social media takes biggest audience share

Social media continues to take up the greatest share of audiences’ daily time in 2022, reaching 94% of consumers, ranking ahead of competition from all other forms of media. (In Latin America and the Middle East & Africa, consumers spend over three hours a day browsing through their feeds.)

While this is mostly driven by younger audiences (Gen Z/millennials average two hours 44 minutes on social media per day) Gen X/boomers now spend just shy of two hours there too – up 14 minutes since 2018, it is also down to many social platforms acting as a hub for all their users’ content needs, where formats like short-form video keep them scrolling and interacting for longer.

Uses of social media grows

In addition, new shopping options have appeared in the social media universe:

- Since 2015, the number of people using social media for product searches has risen by 43%. Today, people use Instagram to find product information just as much as they use it to find entertaining content.
- Since Q4 2020, there’s been a 7% increase in TikTok users who follow brand accounts, something that may prove fruitful thanks to further advertising opportunities like TikTok’s shopping ads. As users scroll, they see numerous ads that reflect their shopping preferences. You can even be watching a non-ad related video, and TikTok will pick out keywords for a user to be taken to different results.
- Among TikTok users, 46% of Gen Z and millennials make an impulse purchase online at least every two to three weeks, and this number is likely to increase as social media ads become increasingly more personalised.

Search on social media

The report has found that since 2015, the number of people searching for products on social media has risen by 43%, with ads on social are becoming more curated for the consumer and purchasing an item taking less time.

Finding brands or products for consumers has been through search engines and TV ads, but these two mediums have battled to be the most effective way for consumers to do this.

It is no surprise that the number of people using these two avenues for brand discovery has ticked downward.

“The number who discover via TV ads has fallen 16% since Q2 2018,” says the report.

“Our data tells us that Gen Zs, outside of China, use Instagram almost as often as Google, and millennials are on a similar path.

“On top of this, as the number who discover brands via search and TV ads drops, social media has remained relatively steady in comparison, managing to nab the top spot on the brand discovery leaderboard for Gen Z,” it explains.

TikTok: the new search?

Spearing heading this shift in finding information online is TikTok.

“The appeal of TikTok is real people recounting their real experiences, instead of a search engine offering up hundreds of links that may get you the answer you’re looking for,” explains the report.

It quotes a *New York Times* article, where Kalley Huang explains that while Google is still the most prominent search engine, “they’re taking notice of TikTok doing the things they can’t, like showing the atmosphere of a restaurant in a short clip or the real material of a clothing purchase”.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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