

Empowered Consumer (The) - UK - September 2010

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What is this report about?

In theory, today's consumers have more choices and more power than ever before. They can research products and services thoroughly before making a purchase decision, for example, by using price comparison sites and online reviews from other users. After purchasing they can then use online communities to spread the word about products and services, good and bad. Consumer power, through social networking campaigns, has even been used to 'resurrect' defunct products.

But what do consumers really think about all the choices and information available to them? Does it make them feel genuinely empowered, or does it feel more like a liability? How does this vary by personality and lifestyle group? And what can companies do to harness and benefit from consumer power?

What have we found out?

- The ability to research products thoroughly has given consumers a great deal of power. Today, three quarters of consumers do a lot of research when making major purchases, weighing up all considerations before buying.
- A key downside of consumer empowerment is confusion. Three in ten consumers find it confusing to search online for the best deals and special offers, whilst 12.9 million admit that they sometimes get bogged down in research.
- When it comes to face-to-face advice, consumers place greater value on advice from people they know. 46% of consumers take advice from friends/family members before making a major purchase, whereas only a third seek advice from sales advisers/professionals.
- User reviews are an important tool for the empowered consumer but trust is a key issue. Some 13.2 million consumers do not always trust reviews on third party websites such as TripAdvisor and Amazon. For companies' own websites this figure is even high at 20.3 million.
- Online research is by no means just a tool for the young. In fact, when it comes to certain purchases it is older consumers who are more likely to do their research online. For example, 70% of over-35s who have bought domestic appliances in the last six months carried out online research, compared to 60% of under-35s.
- Spreading the word is a powerful phenomenon amongst consumers: 30.8 million consumers let friends and family know if they have enjoyed a product or service, whilst 29.6 million do the same for negative experiences. 37% consumers have posted comments or reviews online, increasing to 47% amongst under 35s.

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