



THE TRUTH *-about-* SOCIAL

McCANN
TRUTH CENTRAL

THE TRUTH ABOUT SOCIAL: 12 Truths About Social For 2012

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INTRODUCTION

McCann Truth Central spent the last year talking to key audiences across the world and one incontrovertible and irreversible trend we observed is the increasing importance of all things social—social networks, social experiences, social proof and social businesses.

Our findings are aggregated from three Truth Studies covering 19 countries, 30+ focus groups, and 12,000+ online interviews.



12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

I. The nature of what's private or public has fundamentally changed

The monumental rise of social networking has caused a huge shift in the nature of what people believe they should keep private versus what they should share. As one US respondent commented, "People tweet their pregnancy, labor and delivery, and I mean that's something that people years ago would never think about." Indeed, 75% globally agree that "people share far too much information online these days" (although this is predominantly a comment about OTHER PEOPLE...we did not come across a single individual in our groups who felt that they personally were oversharing!).

Increasingly, a refusal to participate in social networking is seen as a refusal to participate in civic life. Driven by technology's dominance, the types and quantity of personal information we're expected to share socially is growing.

II. There's no shame in being a stalker

With so much information being shared, new norms about searching and sharing are also emerging. Nowadays, 4 in 10 admit to looking at the online photographs of people they hardly know, and 1 in 4 have read a partner's or friend's text messages. But these behaviors are increasingly seen as commonplace. Said one Australian, "I've stalked people on Facebook, everybody does."

Indeed, the failure to Google a prospective partner or employee is now seen as a serious oversight. Little wonder that in markets like India a virtuous online presence is key to protecting future marriage prospects.

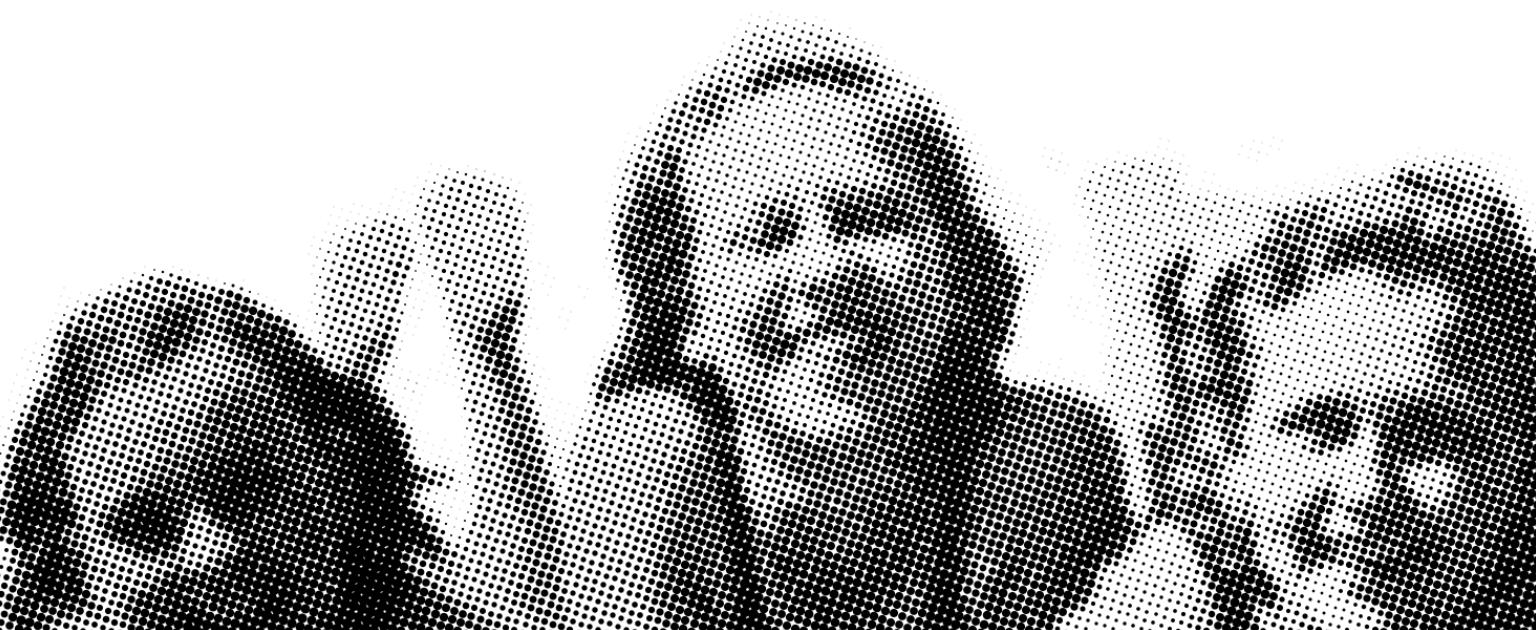
12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

III. We're all spending more time monitoring (and managing) our online brand

With so many searching for information about one another, it has become much more important to manage your online identity. 35% in India say they are Googling themselves more than once a month in their quest to manage their online presence. Globally, many individuals and brands are juggling multiple identities online. Often people talked about using separate identities for work and play, or a "virtuous" and "popular" self. For brands, this raises the very important question: Which version of your customers are you interacting with online?

IV. We have growing and complex ecosystems of friends

The definition of friendship for young people is being stretched, segmented and reinvented... Once upon a time, teenagers had a small group of friends (typically 4-7 people), and these were often people met through school. Within this group young people could express their individuality, but it was vital that they belonged to the group. However, nowadays things are more complex. Using social media, a typical teenager is likely to manage and maintain multiple, intersecting groups of friends. In this sense, 'connecting' to a broader network of friends has replaced the singular need to 'belong' to a tight-knit group of friends.



12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

V. We still know what makes a real friend

In these new, online spaces for people to be social, a lot of fake friends have cropped up along the way. Whether called “disposable friends” as they are known in Singapore or “obligation friends” as in Australia, this is a global phenomenon. Yet our data indicates that the values that make a friend a real friend are quite clear.

Young people worldwide said they value friends who are truthful and genuine. This truthfulness allows a friend to transcend the distinction between online and real life sociability. It's also a great model for brands: To use social media wisely, don't be afraid to show the true people and humanity that sits behind your brand.

VI. The need to broadcast is constant

The term “Experience Economy” was first coined in a 1998 Harvard Business Review article by James Gilmore and Joseph Pine. The theory goes that in economies of mass affluence, people become more and more interested in paying to do things, rather than paying to own things. Our research indicates that our economy is moving into a new phase (the social economy) whereby people seek to define themselves not only by what they own or what they do but primarily by their ability to connect, to share and to broadcast.

And for youth, it seems the need to broadcast is constant. “I might be doing anything in life, but it doesn't matter if no one talks about it,” observed a youth in India. Using technology as a platform for telling their life stories, consumers feel a need to recast that story with themselves as the protagonist. Even a short subway journey can cause tremendous disconnection anxiety as the non-specific fear of missing out takes hold.

12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

VII. We all have our audience

The role for brands, consequently, is to create unique experiences for that protagonist, giving them a reason to post about it. Smart brands know that it's not just about the brand's audience...it's their audience's audience. Brands can win by helping their audience to look cool or fun in front of their friends and followers.

VIII. Everyone is telling their own story

With the introduction of Facebook Timeline people are set to become even more focused on their own journey. As experiences are automatically archived, people will spend longer reflecting on their story so far, curating their archive and in many ways...contemplating their own identity. As one insightful British teenager remarked, "We'll be better parents than our parents because it will be easier for us to remember what it was like to be a teenager."



12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

IX. Brands should be part of this story

Brands should always be mindful where they fit into the social journey for their target consumers. How can your brand be a part of a consumer's life from the anticipation of a branded experience, to the afterglow one week later, to the reminiscence two years later?

As brands offer more events and experiences to consumers, recognize that there is a lifecycle within the consumer timeline: anticipation, experience, aftermath, afterglow and reminiscence. Each stage will be reflected through social media...how can a brand be present at each stage?

X. Social Proof is an increasingly powerful force in marketing

Globally, over 90% of 16-30 year olds agree with the statement "if a company or brand impresses me in some way, I will make a point of telling my friends about it." Meanwhile, data from our Truth About Beauty study showed us that female consumers rated online product reviews as a) the most truthful source available to them and b) the source most likely to prompt purchase. Social Proof is the human instinct to want to do things that other people do.

Plenty of research suggests that consumers who were referred to brands by other influential consumers or bloggers are more likely to go on to make purchases. Since word of mouth and online product reviews are still some of the most trusted and influential factors in buying decisions, it's important for brands to actively cultivate love communities of their fans and defenders.

12 TRUTHS ABOUT SOCIAL FOR 2012:

XI. If you seek advocacy, make it worth their while

Looking at consumers globally, we were able to identify five groups of consumers based on their attitudes towards privacy and sharing data with and about brands and businesses. The largest group, the Savvy Shoppers, understands the sharing equation. This group, 37% of the global population (also 37% of the US population), is willing to engage with and socialize with brands and businesses, but want to receive something tangible in return.



XII. When it comes to socializing with brands, customers want value

Globally, 86% of consumers understand that there are major benefits associated with sharing data with businesses online. For the majority (65%) one of the top two benefits of sharing data and socializing with brands is better access to discounts and promotions (a very "Savvy Shopper" mentality). 49% also found it beneficial that companies can show them goods and services that are personalized to meet their individual requirements. Being a social business is ultimately about encouraging an open relationship with customers where they trust the brand enough to share their personal information and understand how the exchange is beneficial to them, particularly as global concerns around privacy continue to grow.

CONCLUSION

The era of social marketing is here, and it's important to learn about how people are engaging socially in everything that they do. With every new tool, and in every success and gaffe, new ideas about how (and how not) to engage with consumers become apparent. Looking across our 2011 Truth Studies, McCann Truth Central has uncovered some of these new ideas. It's crucial for brands to recognize that consumers

want to entertain their own audience, and that love communities can be nurtured through social media. We may be in a brave new world of sharing, but it's more important than ever for brands to support this sharing in a safe and responsible way as privacy concerns grow amongst consumers.



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