



CONTENT STRATEGY FOR THE VISUAL CONSUMER:

**IT'S TIME FOR BRANDS AND RETAILERS TO PUT SOCIAL PHOTOS
AND VIDEOS TO WORK IN THE ONLINE SHOPPING JOURNEY**

A new study from Bazaarvoice

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THE RISE OF ONLINE SOCIAL SHOPPING AND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOUR BRAND

Social media's role in the way that consumers interact with each other, as well as the brands they love, is more important than ever before. Nothing demonstrates the increased importance of social media in our everyday lives more than the pure volume of photo and video content consumers are posting on it. In fact, **the average consumer devotes roughly two hours per day to social media**¹, and that time is increasingly spent viewing visual media (photos and videos). With over 250 billion photos on Facebook alone and **95 million new photos and videos posted to Instagram every day**², user-generated visuals flood our digital devices. But how do they impact our purchase decisions?

The new social consumer journey

We know that today many purchase journeys are influenced by social touchpoints. To understand this new, more social consumer journey better, we worked with a research partner to uncover how, when and where social intersects with shopping.

We wanted to know:

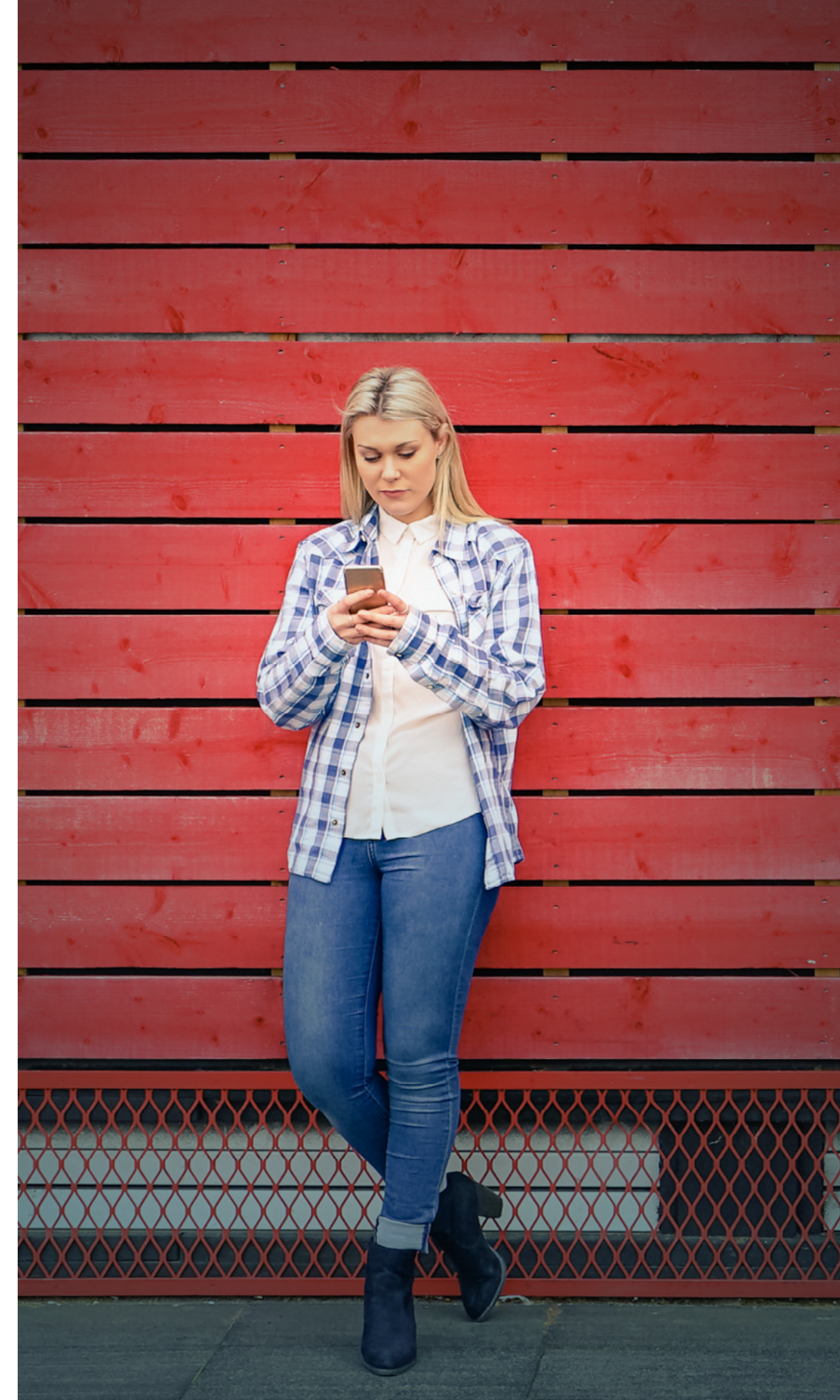
- How people use visual content like photos and videos to discover new products
- How visual consumer content stacks up against brand-generated content in shopper influence
- How visual content combines with other forms of consumer-generated content like ratings and reviews to advance shoppers through the journey
- What type of shopper is most likely to generate and use visual content when they shop

After surveying thousands of online shoppers about their behavior and decisions, we discovered four important insights and one big takeaway:

- Online shopping and buying are social experiences.
- Photos and videos trigger interest in products and spark spontaneous shopping.
- Visual CGC closes the trust gap.
- Visual CGC is becoming the new word of mouth.

The big takeaway: Putting visual social content at the center of the shopping experience drives consumer confidence.

It boils down to this: shoppers are creating and sharing more and more visual content related to their buying experiences, and they're paying more attention to each other's opinions than to what brands have to say. The most successful brands are those that are finding ways to take advantage of this consumer trend, and who are making social visual CGC work for them.



ONLINE SHOPPING AND BUYING ARE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

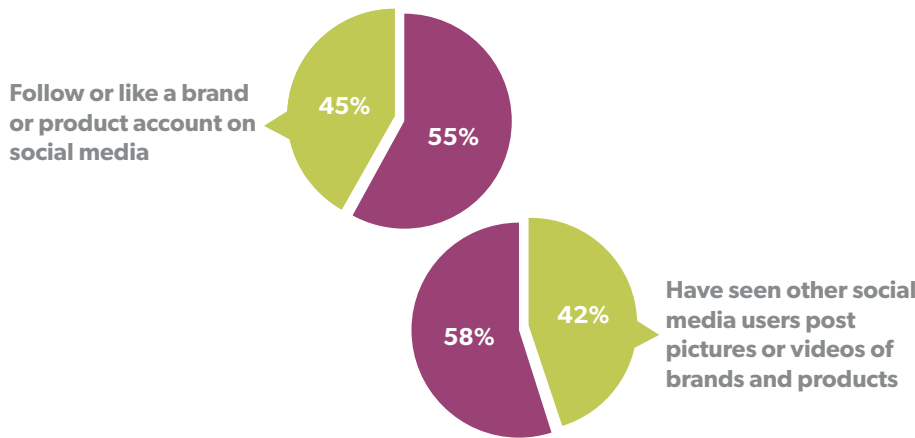


Online shopping and social are converging. Take a look at the online behavior of shoppers today. For many consumers, it has moved from a transaction activity to an *experience* – even recreation. Consumers’ purchase paths are converging with their social lives more and more.

Many consumers won’t even buy a toaster or a pair of socks these days without checking online reviews, asking Facebook friends what their experiences have been with brands they’re considering, or browsing Pinterest boards to discover the coolest and trendiest products on the market. And friends and family will almost compete with each other to provide the best recommendations about what products or services to buy.

Just how social has the online shopping experience become?

Increasingly, we are seeing products and brands becoming a significant part of the social experience. Almost half of all online shoppers (45%) follow or like a brand or product account on social media, and nearly the same proportion of shoppers (42%) say they’ve seen other social media users post pictures or videos of brands and products.



Social consumers actively look for inspiration

These social consumers are ranging far and wide across channels and influencers, actively looking for inspiration and opportunities to buy things. Their engagement with brand social content – posted both by other shoppers (38%) and by the brands themselves (34%) – is high. For example, a quarter of shoppers report actively searching for photos or videos of real people using a specific product or brand. And there is plenty of evidence that consumers are willing to directly question, praise and challenge brands on social media, often participating in extensive conversations, arguments, contests, reviews, photo sharing, and more.

Simply put, the social media landscape is riddled with brand exposure and shopping opportunities. Consumers have always influenced one another by broadcasting their impressions of products and brands, and at this point more than half of online shoppers say they have purchased a product they first heard about on social media.

CGC helps overcome barriers to online shopping




While our survey focused primarily on those who shop at least monthly, we did explore the reasons behind less frequent online shopping. For the most part, infrequent online shoppers tend to be those who simply prefer seeing products in person or dislike paying for shipping.

Visual CGC can be a powerful way to overcome the need to see a product in person. In fact, when we asked infrequent shoppers what would make them more likely to make online purchases, over one third cited reviews from real people and/or photos and videos from other shoppers.

Active social media users spend more online

One in three shoppers is spending \$200 or more a month. Active social media users tend to spend three times as much as everyone else (\$580 per month, vs. \$189), signaling a clear correlation between social and shopping.

Online shopping trends

-  **Most shoppers are in the market to buy something online.** Two out of three U.S. adults are currently in the market for a product they intend to buy online. Among millennials – those aged 18-34 – it jumps to three out of four³.
-  **Nearly half of consumers shop online at least weekly.** Consumers aren't just buying one thing and setting down their credit cards. Forty-five percent of consumers shop online at least a weekly frequency, with about 20% shopping multiple times per week.
-  **37% of infrequent shoppers say more reviews or photos from real people would make them more likely to buy online.**

57%
of consumers have
purchased a product
they heard about on
social media



PHOTOS TRIGGER INTEREST IN PRODUCTS AND SPARK SPONTANEOUS SHOPPING

Consumers shop recreationally and impulsively. One in three online shoppers admits to making impulse buys – purchasing something that catches one’s attention while looking for something else. Among millennials specifically, 49% say they shop impulsively.

Looking at recreational shopping, about one in four shoppers say they often shop for fun; again, this figure is significantly higher among millennials, with twice as many (45%) saying they use shopping as a pastime.

Impulse buying and recreational shopping represent a tremendous revenue opportunity for brands that are able to effectively capture shoppers’ attention while they are shopping for something else entirely. Impulse buying and recreational shopping are heavily dependent on moments of inspiration, like seeing that one thing you never knew you wanted, or even realized existed.

In other words, people shop spontaneously and for fun. Use visuals to grab their attention during those times.

Photos and videos posted on or pulled from social media are how many online shoppers say they first discover a product or brand. Just over half of online shoppers say a picture posted by a real person on social media is likely to catch their attention. Visual content posted by the brand or retailer grabs attention similarly well, *but there is a difference between catching attention and actually driving interest.*

What is the likelihood that visual content will catch shoppers' attention?



VISUAL CGC CLOSES THE TRUST GAP

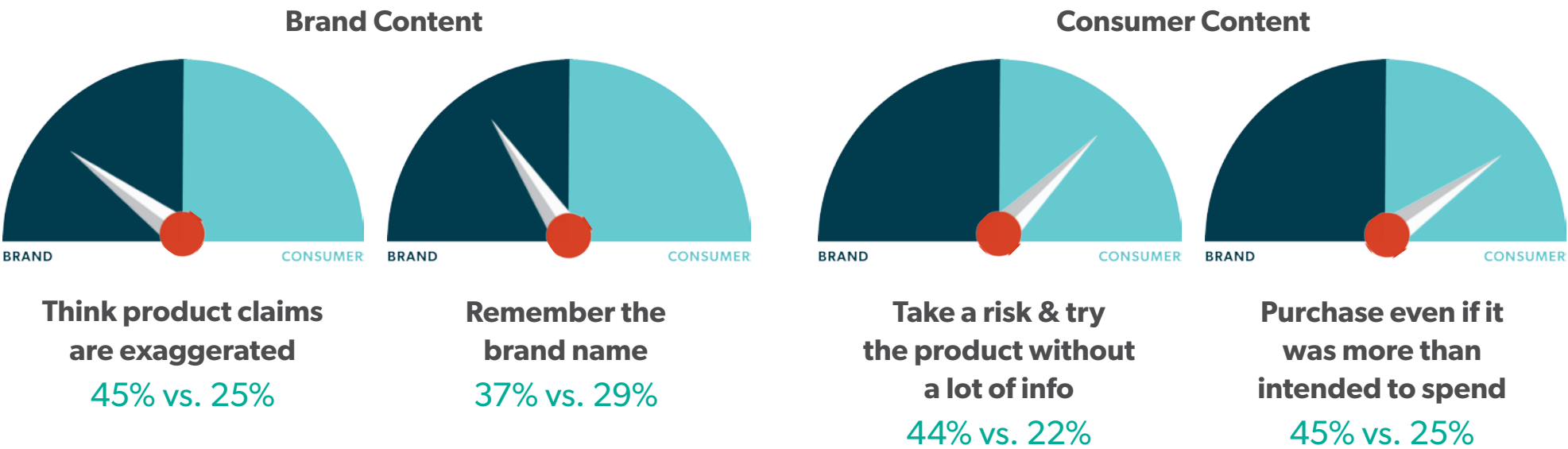
Photos and videos posted by brands, while more likely to drive brand recognition or awareness, suffer at the hands of consumer skepticism. Almost half (45%) of online shoppers agree that studio or stock images posted by brands or retailers are more likely than consumer pictures to make them think the product claims are exaggerated.

In contrast, consumer-generated pictures and videos are more likely to influence shoppers to take a risk and try new

products, or even make a purchase that may be outside their intended budget. Shoppers also tend to use visual CGC as a tie-breaker. In fact, when deciding between multiple brands, visual CGC is *almost always* the deciding factor. Consumers simply trust other consumers more. 56% of online shoppers say that pictures and videos from other shoppers give them the most accurate depiction of the experience they can expect from a brand.

So if something looks too slick or staged or perfect, shoppers assume it's too good to be true. For example, women's clothing pictured on professional models is a turnoff to many real-world women who have trouble envisioning what the clothes will look like on their own body types, versus impromptu CGC "outfit shots" posted by friends or independent third parties such as body-positive fashion bloggers.

CONSUMERS TRUST EACH OTHERS' VISUAL CONTENT MORE THAN BRANDED CONTENT



Visual CGC influences both everyday and major purchases

Whether they are making an everyday purchase or a major one that requires a lot of consideration, most consumers find user-generated pictures and videos to be helpful. In fact, another data point from our research shows that for both minor and major purchases, consumers are just as likely to look for videos/pictures taken by real people as they are to ask a friend or family member about the product.

VISUAL CGC IS BECOMING THE NEW WORD OF MOUTH

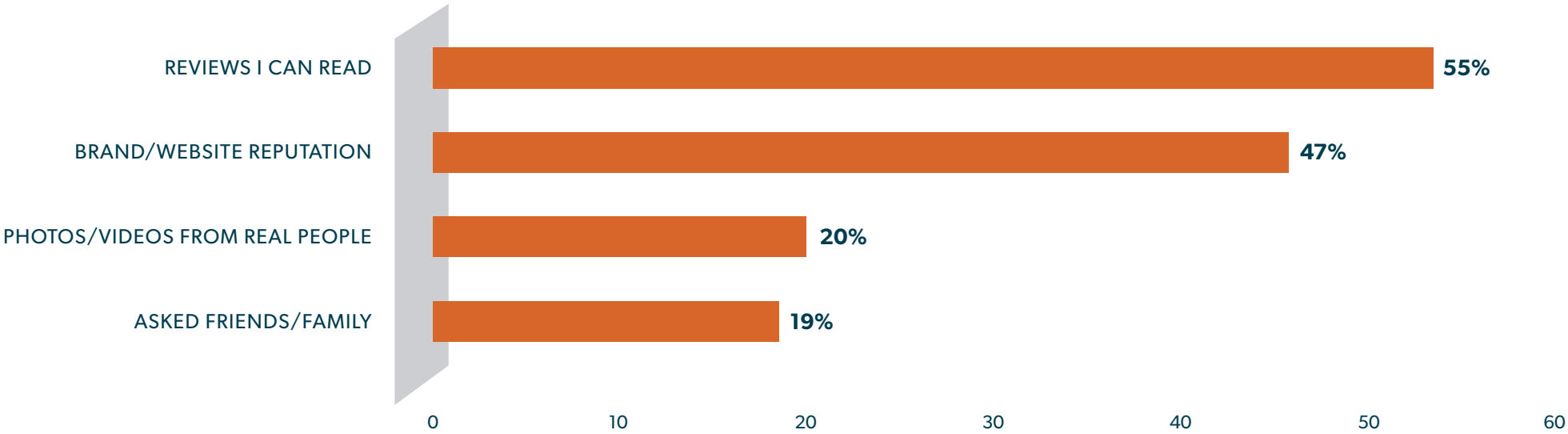
Brands and retailers are beginning to engage socially savvy shoppers to capitalize on their social and shopping behaviors. Injecting visual CGC into the consumer purchase path is still a fairly new tactic, but it's only a matter of time before this type of content becomes as much table stakes as ratings and reviews. Consumers are coming to expect it, and the brands and retailers who embrace this social, visual consumer content as the new word of mouth will come out on top.

Visual CGC is now *just as important* as offline word of mouth in driving consumer confidence. As social media and visual shopping continues to explode – and as the social shopper continues to spend more – visual content will surpass word of mouth.

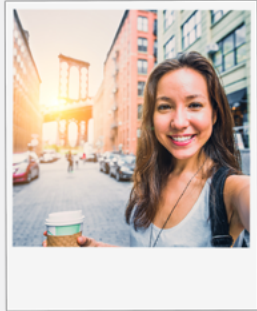


VISUAL CGC HAS NOW SURPASSED TRADITIONAL WORD OF MOUTH

What makes you confident in your purchases?



Consumers reward brands and retailers who provide visual CGC



65% trust a brand more if they link to social media posts from real customers.

66% are more likely to purchase a product if the website has social media posts with pictures/videos from real customers.

PUT VISUAL SOCIAL CONTENT AT THE CENTER OF SHOPPING TO DRIVE CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

There is a great deal of online shopping activity, and a lot of wallet to be shared. Brands are of course extremely interested in what factors are most likely to help consumers find their products and services in a crowded online marketplace and – even more importantly – click that “buy” button. Our study findings revealed that user-generated content is as powerful as ever in persuading consumers to make purchases – in fact it’s far more influential than brand-generated content – and visual CGC like photos and videos from “real people” are the most powerful persuaders of all.

Are you taking full advantage of consumer-generated visual content that pertains to your products and services? Embracing this trend provides tremendous opportunity to increase shoppers’ awareness of and loyalty to your brand, and in turn greatly boost sales and revenue. It’s still early enough to get out ahead of this trend and stand out in the marketplace by giving shoppers what they clearly want: wisely-curated CGC that enhances the shopping experience, helps consumers make confident decisions, and drives more conversions.

For more information, visit bazaarvoice.com/curations.



METHODOLOGY

Online survey

Audience: online shoppers age 18+

**Conducted in June 2017 by Maru Matchbox,
3rd party research provider**

Working with a third-party research provider to ensure impartiality of the data, we surveyed over 3,000 online shoppers age 18+ in the United States and Europe to gain insights into the role of consumer-generated content (CGC) in the purchase process, from initial discovery through the post-purchase experience.



ABOUT BAZAARVOICE

Bazaarvoice helps brands and retailers find and reach consumers, and win them with the content they trust. Each month in the Bazaarvoice Network, more than one-half billion consumers view and share authentic consumer-generated content (CGC), including ratings and reviews as well as curated visual content across 5,000 brand and retail websites. This visibility into shopper behavior allows Bazaarvoice to capture unique first-party data and insights that fuel our targeted advertising and personalization solutions.

Founded in 2005, Bazaarvoice is headquartered in Austin, Texas with offices across North America and Europe. For more information, visit www.bazaarvoice.com.

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