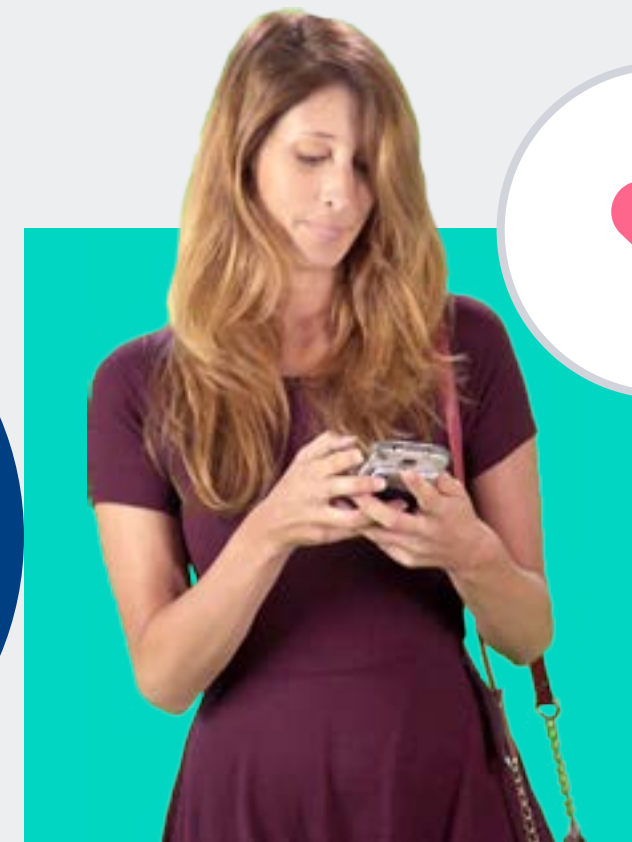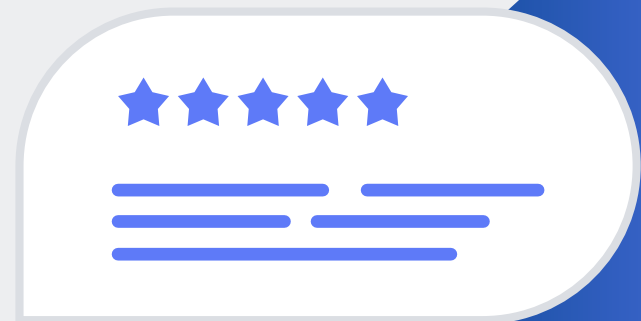# The authenticity movement: building consumer trust without fake reviews

Content strategies that grow and protect your brand

What's inside

Introduction

It takes more than a good product to stand out in today's market.

With more information, choices, and control than ever, consumers are choosing to buy from brands they deem to be authentic.

72% of shoppers choose products based on a brand's reputation.[1]

But what factors impact whether a brand is deemed authentic?

We surveyed over 10,000 shoppers across Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. to uncover:

- The factors that contribute to a brand's trustworthiness
- What kind of content shoppers trust most
- What makes shoppers suspect content is inauthentic
- The impact of losing trust on shoppers' likelihood to purchase
- What kind of standards—and consequences—should be in place to combat inauthentic content
- And much more

What we found is that shoppers trust content from other shoppers more than they trust brand content. But misusing content from your shoppers will certainly get you labeled as inauthentic.

To help you capitalize on the authenticity movement and protect your brand from backlash, here are some content best practices to guide your marketing strategy.

Crack down on fake reviews and inauthentic content

Authentic user-generated content helps to provide a positive customer experience and generate sales. Using data from our Bazaarvoice Network of over 12,000 brands and retailers, we found a **135% increase in conversion rate when shoppers engaged with content from their peers**—and a 164% increase in revenue per visitor.[2]
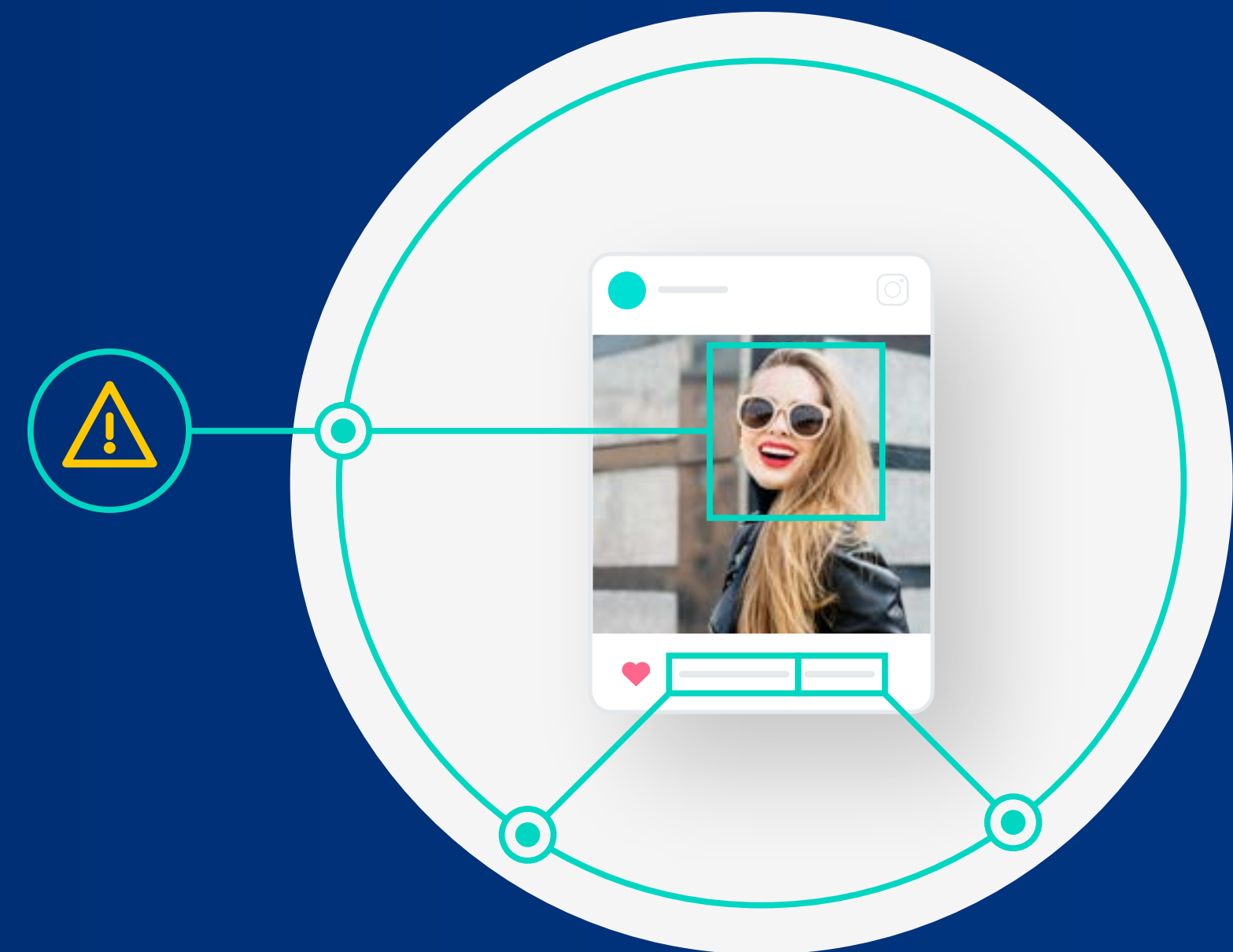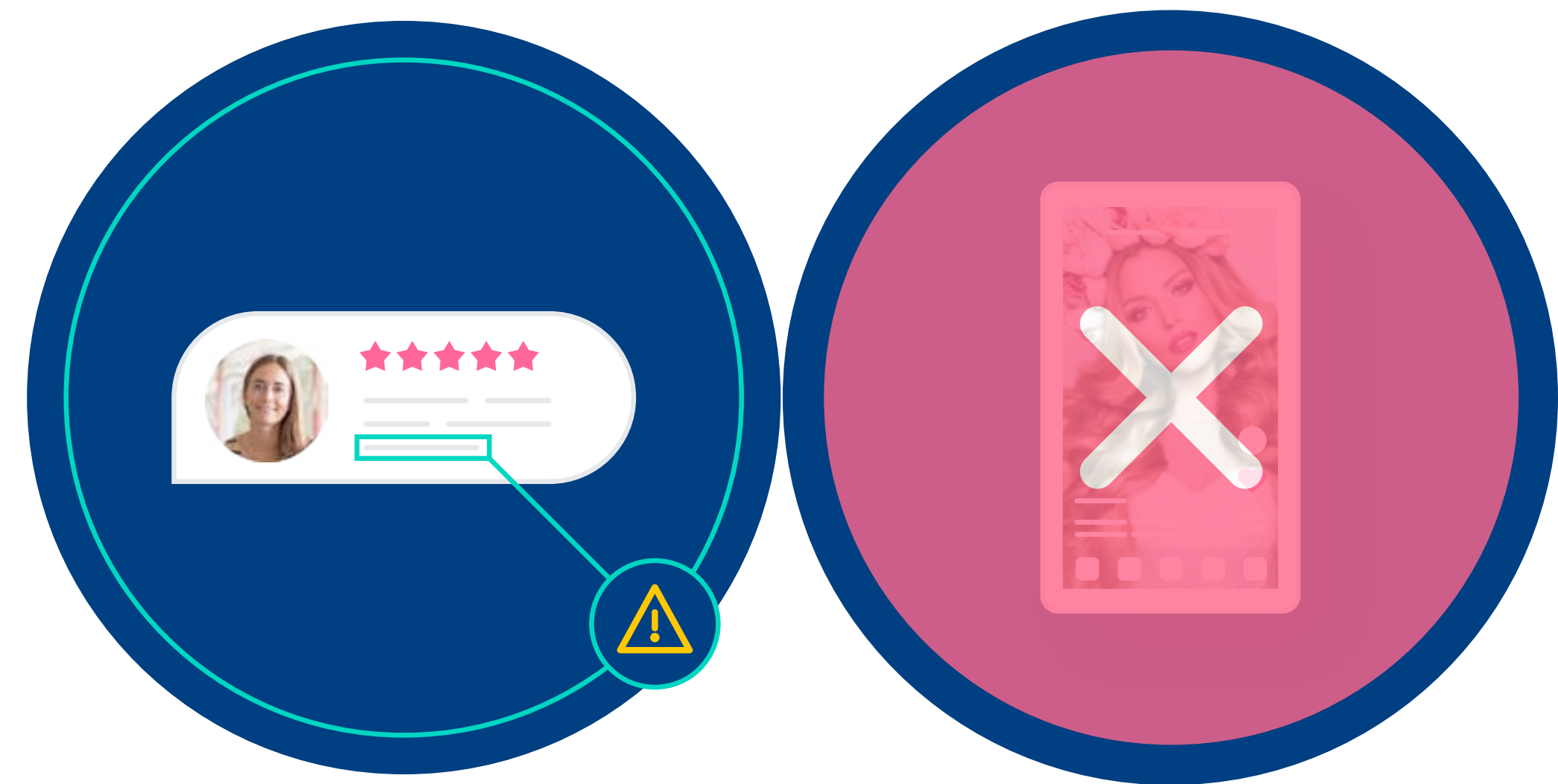
Nearly all shoppers (97%) say fake reviews make them lose trust in a brand.[1]

There's a lot of pressure on brands to generate positive ratings, reviews, and other content. But fake reviews and inauthentic content can seriously impact brand trust. What constitutes a fake or inauthentic review? There are a variety of ways to fudge product feedback:

- Reviews written by a real person that didn't actually purchase or experience the product
- Reviews that are edited or manipulated to make them more positive
- Reviews generated by a bot
- Incentivised reviews from employees or customers—that are not clearly disclosed

Just over half (52%) of shoppers say these fake or misleading reviews from the brand make them lose trust, and 45% report that fake reviews from customers have the same result.[1]

Why consumers lose trust in a brand[1]
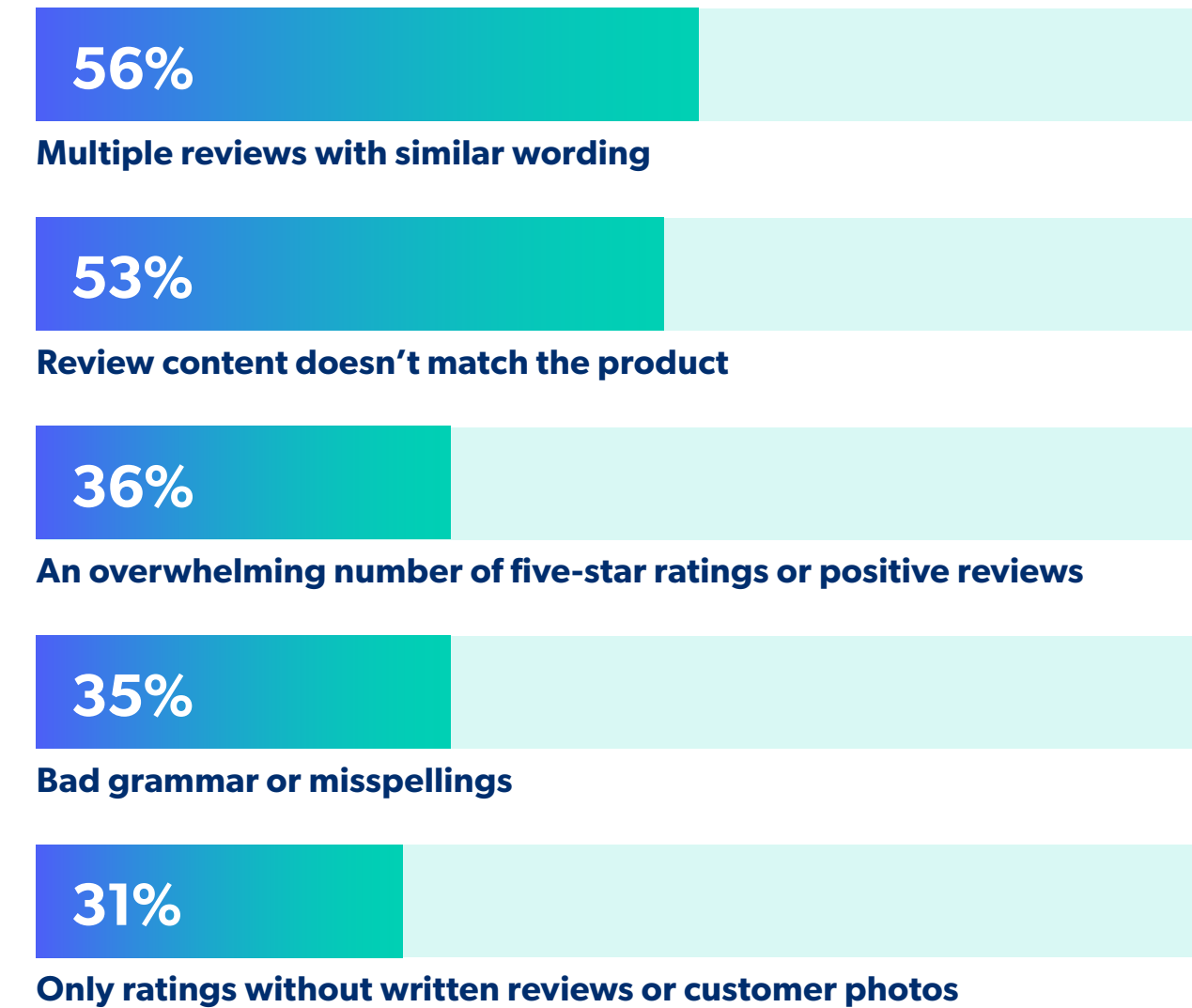
|	
65%	
Product is poor quality/damages easily	
56%	
Dishonest brand/product information	
52%	
Fake or fraudulent reviews from the brand	
51%	
Problem with customer service	
47%	
Breaches in data security or privacy protection	
45%	
Fake and fraudulent reviews from customers	
40%	
Brand is revealed to treat its staff and/or suppliers badly	
32%	
Brand is revealed to sell products that are not aligned with my values	

And consumers can tell when content is the real deal (or not). These savvy shoppers say there are a variety of clues that raise suspicion reviews may be fake:[1]

56%	
Multiple reviews with similar wording	
53%	
Review content doesn't match the product	
36%	
An overwhelming number of five-star ratings or positive reviews	
35%	
Bad grammar or misspellings	
31%	
Only ratings without written reviews or customer photos	

Not only do consumers know how to spot inauthentic content and inauthentic brand messaging, they will call it out, loudly. **Over three quarters (81%) of consumers said they would avoid using a brand again after losing trust in it.**[1] Almost half (48%) would leave a negative review, and 16% would post about the company on social media.[1]

To avoid embarrassment, bad press, and ultimately loss of brand trust, it's important to keep a critical eye on all of your content. If you need to generate authentic user-generated content in a hurry, consider a well-planned product sampling campaign (instead of something nefarious).
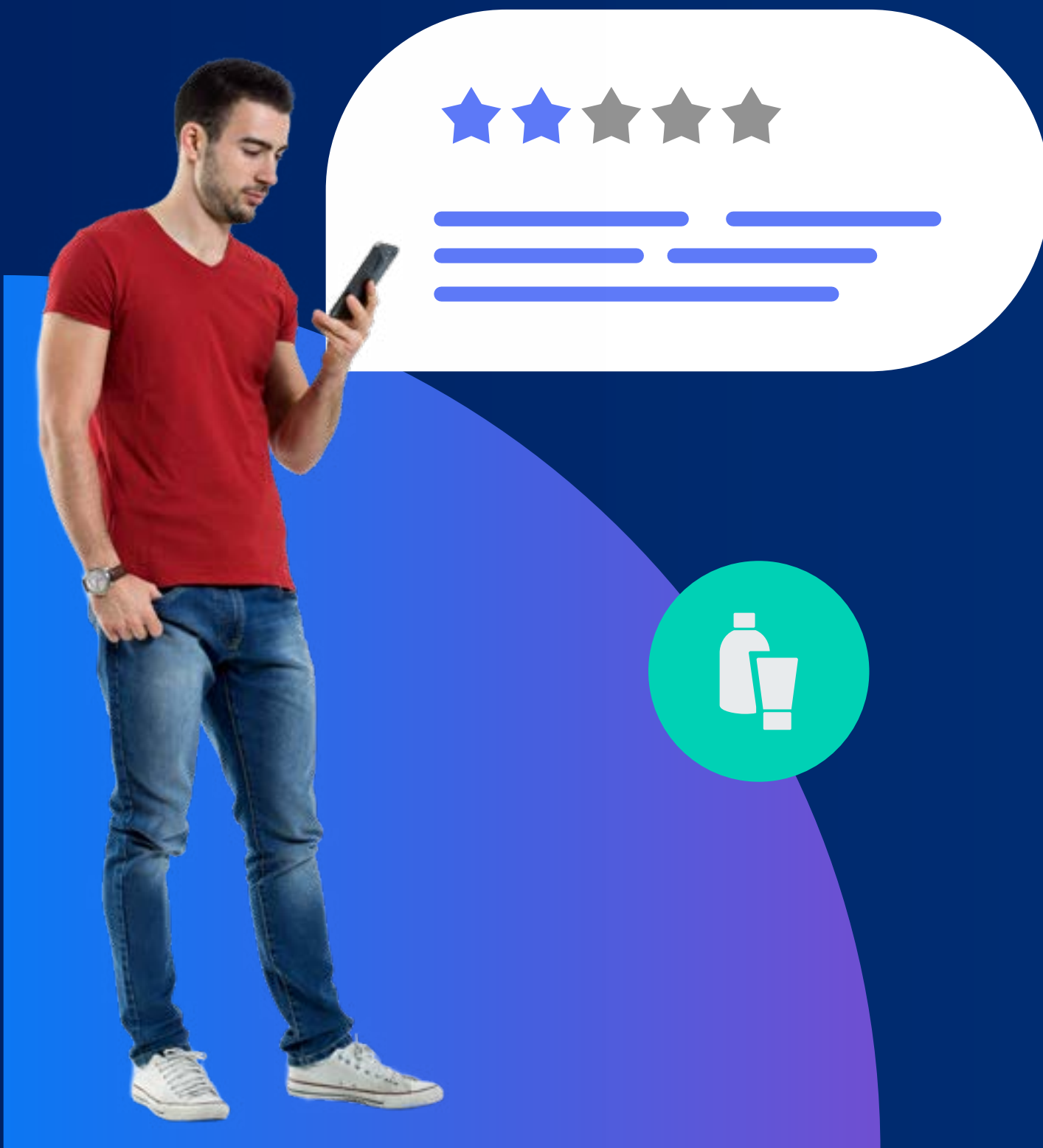
Embrace negative feedback (and use it to your advantage)

Almost 1 in 3 shoppers view a brand as trustworthy if online reviews are positive.[3] But consumers also expect to see some level of negative product feedback — and not having any negative reviews could actually devalue all the positive reviews.

Negative reviews matter

Our research revealed that 54% of people think negative reviews are as important as positive ones in their decision to purchase, and 31% think they're more important.[1] That's a total of 85% of consumers who think negative reviews matter — only 9% said they're less important than positive ones.

Shoppers that think negative reviews are more important than positive[1]

54%

They're less likely to be fraudulent

51%

They contain more detailed information on product pros and cons

28%

They increase the trust of their brand

36% of consumers say an overwhelming number of five-star ratings or positive reviews is a clue content may be fake.[1]

Use bad reviews for good

So, the negative reviews should stay, but they don't have to be a necessary evil. About a quarter of consumers say this negative content increases their trust in the brand — and you can build on this opportunity with how your brand responds to the negative feedback.

Responding to negative reviews gives us the chance to shift the way the customer feels toward us based on the way we handle their concerns. They might still share their negative experience about a product or service, but they also immediately follow with how they will always buy from us because of how well we handled the issue. We respond to reviews to get involved in a conversation with our customers.[4]

– Bonnie Berrio, Customer Service Specialist at Boots Retail

For example, you can treat negative content from consumers an an opportunity to publicly embrace your flaws (and apologize, when necessary). Buckley's cough medicine offers a perfect example. Customers say their product tastes bad. Instead of denying it or downplaying the concern, they very publicly admit that no, their product doesn't taste so great — but it works.

Quick service restaurant KFC offers another example of embracing a mistake. After a supply chain issue led to many of its locations running out of chicken, KFC made a brutally honest apology. The imagery showed one of the brand's famous chicken buckets — but the lettering had been updated to read "FCK" instead of "KFC". Copy underneath explains, "We're sorry" and goes on to thank consumers for bearing with them.

When most brands boast only about their positives, authentic honest communication that shares the positives as well as the flaws shows consumers that the brand is different from the others and that it cares for them. This difference in approach builds trust around the authenticity of the brand, and humanizes the brand more.
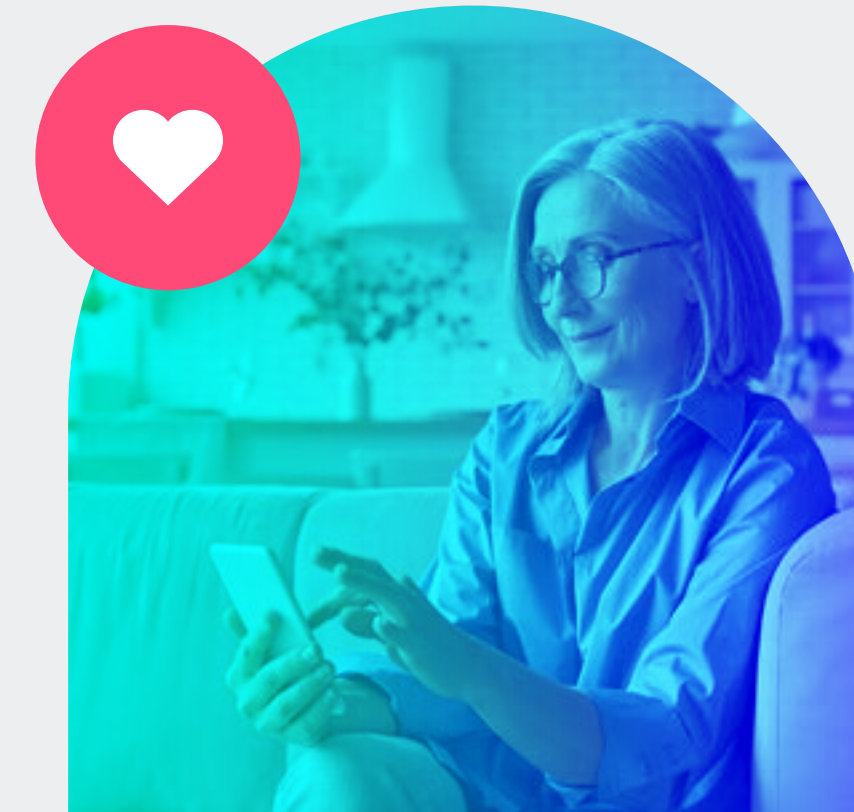
Make sure you're well-versed in local legislation

Fake and inauthentic content has become so pervasive, many shoppers want their legislators to crack down, too. Almost three quarters (70%) of consumers think the retail industry needs a new set of standards to combat fake reviews—only 4% disagreed.[1]

What kind of authenticity standards do shoppers want?[1]

59%
want only verified customers to be able to post reviews

49%
want daily oversight of customer content to weed out fake reviews

56%
want all products tried and tested among legitimate consumers before launch

40%
want websites to publish the review process or third party they use for reviews

Governments are cracking down on brands with fake content

The Federal Trade Commision (FTC) in the U.S. recently cracked down on Fashion Nova, fining them $4.2 million for suppressing negative reviews. The retailer blamed their technology vendor for a setting that auto-published four and five-star reviews, while holding lower star reviews for moderation before publishing.

In the European Union, the 2022 Better Enforcement and Modernisation Directive (the "Directive"), explicitly prohibits selling, buying, and submitting all forms of fake reviews, including 'likes' on social media. The Directive also prohibits brands from manipulating reviews and endorsements, "such as publishing only positive reviews and deleting the negative ones."

In addition, a new proposal is being discussed in the U.K. that would make it "clearly illegal" to pay someone to write or host fake reviews. If passed, this legislation would allow a competition watchdog to fine firms up to 10% of their global turnover for bad business practices.

The Competition Authority (France), Bundeskartellamt (Germany), and ACCC (Australia) are all creating similar consumer protection standards governing media like product reviews and other user-generated content—and consequences for breaking them.

The takeaway? Not only does inauthentic content hurt your brand's reputation—it can also hurt your wallet. Make sure you—and your vendors—are well versed in all local legislation governing your use of user-generated content.

27%
of consumers think brands with fake content should be fined up to 30% of revenue
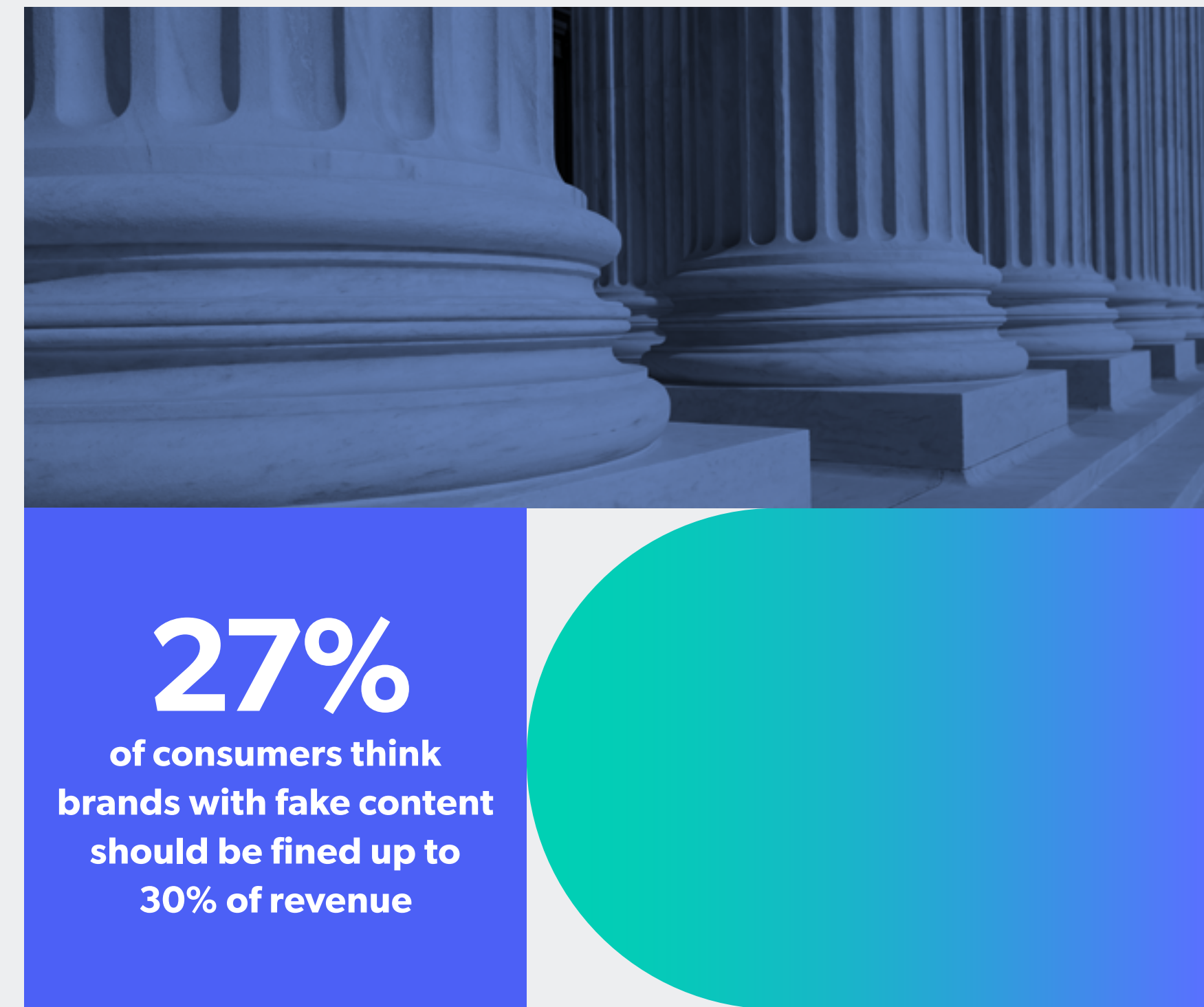
Be radically transparent

It should go without saying, but some brands need a reminder: authenticity comes from being totally transparent about your offerings. In fact, transparency is key for consumers to perceive brands as trustworthy and authentic.
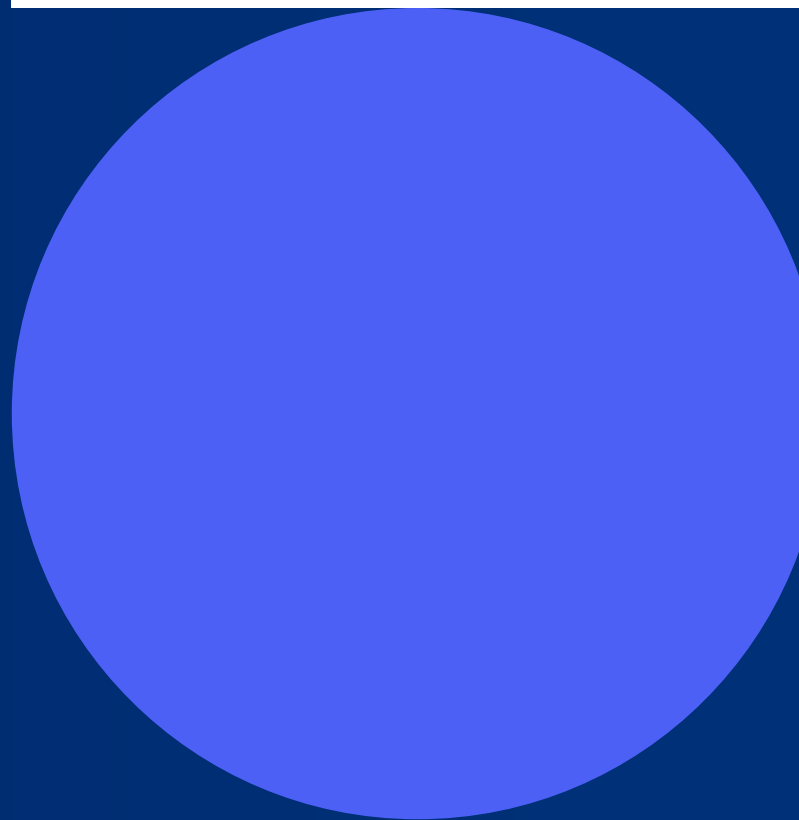
Consumers want to know everything about the brands and products they buy

Brands must be open and transparent about their products and prices — but that's not enough to come across as truly authentic. Your brand must also be open about:

- Product origin
- Ingredients
- After sale services
- Delivery timelines
- Sustainable practices
- Labor practices

Southwest Airlines offers a solid example of transparency with their 'transfarency' philosophy, which communicates to customers their commitment to eliminate hidden fees.

Ugly Drinks also embraces total transparency, taking on other soda brands by highlighting their ingredients — or lack thereof.
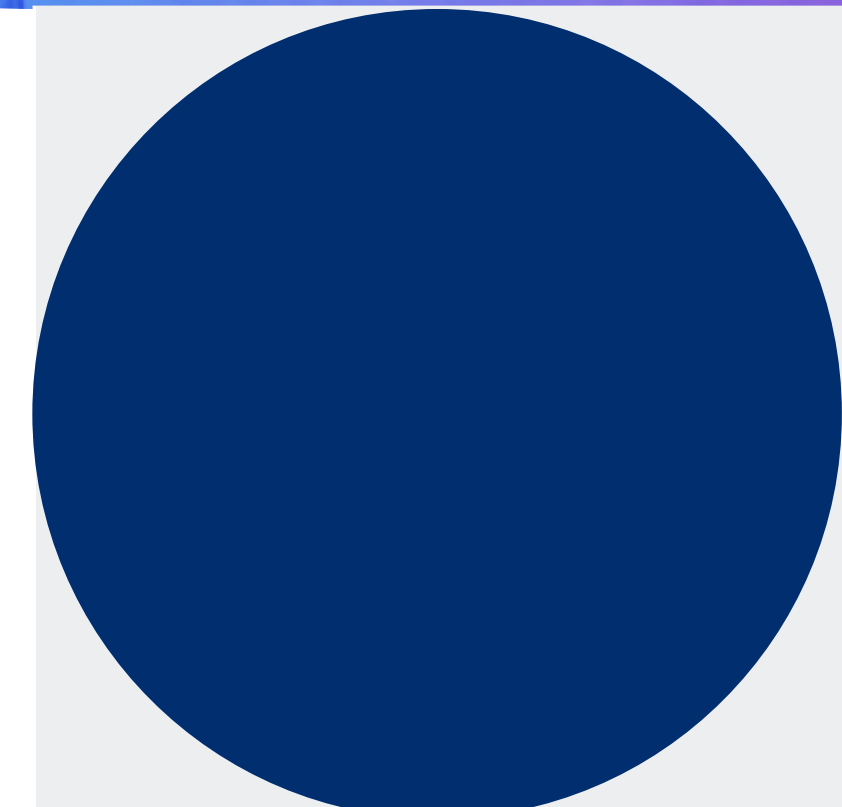
Transparency also plays an important role in user-generated content

In the spirit of openness, you must be open about how your content is curated. It's okay to sponsor content and showcase incentivized reviews, but you must be open and transparent about these arrangements.

Follow these best practices:

✓ Disclose any material connection with reviewers.

✓ Disclose any material benefit provided to reviewers.

✓ Make sure content disclosures are prominently displayed.

One way to prove your reviews are legit is to work with a vendor that provides a seal of authenticity, like the **Bazaarvoice Authentic Reviews Trust Mark.** We offer this mark to clients to be displayed as a symbol of their company's dedication to authentic consumer feedback. It signals to consumers that the review content they see is safeguarded—by a neutral third party—with sophisticated fraud detection technology and industry-leading best practices.

We have the Bazaarvoice authenticity Trust Mark displayed on each of our product display pages…Having Bazaarvoice as a trusted voice for us has made it easy to show that we take authenticity seriously.

– Consumer-Generated Content Manager, Retail[8]

Choose influencers wisely

Influencers can be a powerful source of trustworthy content or your brand, but not all influencers are created equal.

When you think of social media influencers, celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Beyoncé, and Cristiano Ronaldo may come to mind — and these mega influencers still have their place in driving brand awareness.

But many shoppers no longer want to be told how to view a brand and its products by listening to actors, reality TV stars, musicians, artists, athletes, etc. In fact, the celebrity influencer industry has a big trust problem, as only 9% of people trust recommendations from these accounts enough to inform a purchase decision.[9]

Shoppers trust content from **everyday influencers** (42%) and **subject matter experts** (35%) and rely on on these accounts to inform purchase decisions.[9]

But how do you find these nano and micro influencers and get them to generate trustworthy content for your brand?

One way to get more influencer content is by sending them samples of your products.

The best product sampling partners can connect you with millions of nano influencers and everyday people that enjoy testing out products. Make sure to choose a partner with sufficient data on each person, so you can hypertarget exactly the right people to try your products.

Remember: Any content you collect in return for a free product is incentivized and must be labeled as such—whether it's a review or social media post.

9%
of people trust celebrities' recommendations enough to inform a purchase

# How Rael found the right influencers to grow brand trust

Startup skincare brand Rael relied on everyday influencers when they entered the beauty space with a line of skincare products geared toward usage at different phases of a woman's cycle. The brand needed to build awareness, establish credibility, and drive trial of new products — and they knew they'd need outside assistance to make it happen.

Rael used Bazaarvoice Sampling to send products to select members of the Influenster community of 7 million consumers. Through two sampling campaigns, Bazaarvoice curated and sent a total of 2,000 custom boxes with Rael's skincare products to a hyper-targeted audience of ideal buyers.

The sampling campaigns resulted in 3,000 total reviews (300% more than the initial goal) and generated 9.8 million impressions from tens of thousands of social posts, shares, likes, and comments. It also armed Rael with a repository of powerful, authentic content to use across other marketing channels.

For a small startup, it's all about building trust with consumers because you're not relying on a big brand name that has long-term credibility.

– Sorah Park, CMO of Rael

bazaarvoice®
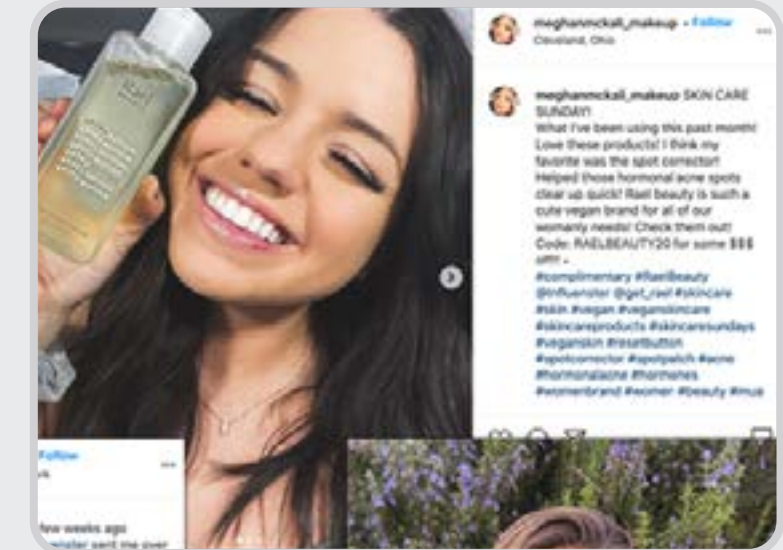
Rely on trustworthy content partners

It's ultra important that user-generated content is authentic—but if your brand is bringing in thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of reviews, how can you make sure they're all trustworthy?

Ensuring the authenticity of your content manually can be time consuming and cumbersome. The most efficient and effective approach is to work with a provider that takes reasonable measures to detect and prevent fake reviews.

As Fashion Nova found out the hard way (remember that $4.2M fine?), the right partner can make a world of difference when it comes to publishing authentic review content.

You'll want to choose a partner and platform that covers content authentication, moderation, and management tools across all marketing channels.

At Bazaarvoice, we provide the following capabilities to ensure the authenticity of your content:

- ☐ **Fraud detection technology** to identify the submission source of all reviews

- ☐ **Algorithms, alerting, and filtering capabilities** that allow moderation teams to identify, flag, and report suspicious content

- ☐ **Dedicated team of analysts** that monitors suspicious reviews to determine their authenticity

One Forrester study shows that our moderation filters take a significant lift off marketing teams' daily efforts, reducing time spent evaluating content by 75%.[8]

Bazaarvoice helped us to align moderation rules across business units with little effort because we wrote a moderation guideline that can be applied to the hundreds of thousands of [pieces of] content we collect each year.

— Business domain leader care, content and network, Retail[8]

75%
decrease in time spent evaluating content with Bazaarvoice
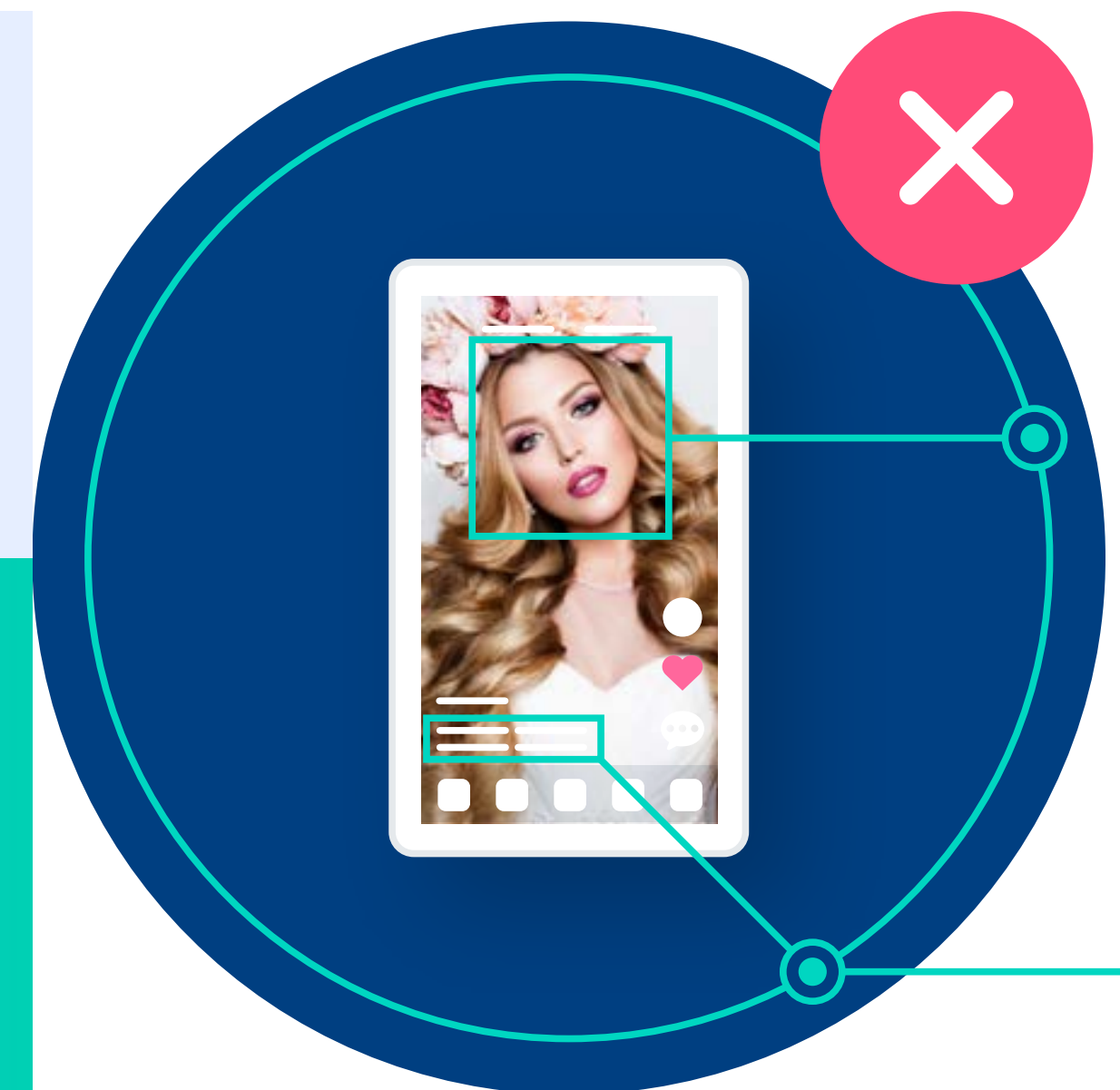
Key takeaways

In reality, you can boil most of these marketing lessons down to a single rule of thumb: be a good brand. If an action or approach to content seems a little sketchy, it probably is—and shoppers will notice.

More specifically, to endear customers to your brand, there are two key takeaways.

1. Invest more in curating and promoting your customer's voice

Shoppers trust their fellow shoppers more than they trust your brand content or paid ads. Let them do the selling for you by curating and promoting their content on your website and retailers' websites, social media, at retail locations, on product packaging, etc.

2. Use product sampling to scale authentic content collection

When you need to quickly generate authentic content from shoppers, like reviews or social media posts, a well-designed product sampling campaign can make it happen—at scale.

Ready to build brand authenticity with user-generated content?
Visit bazaarvoice.com
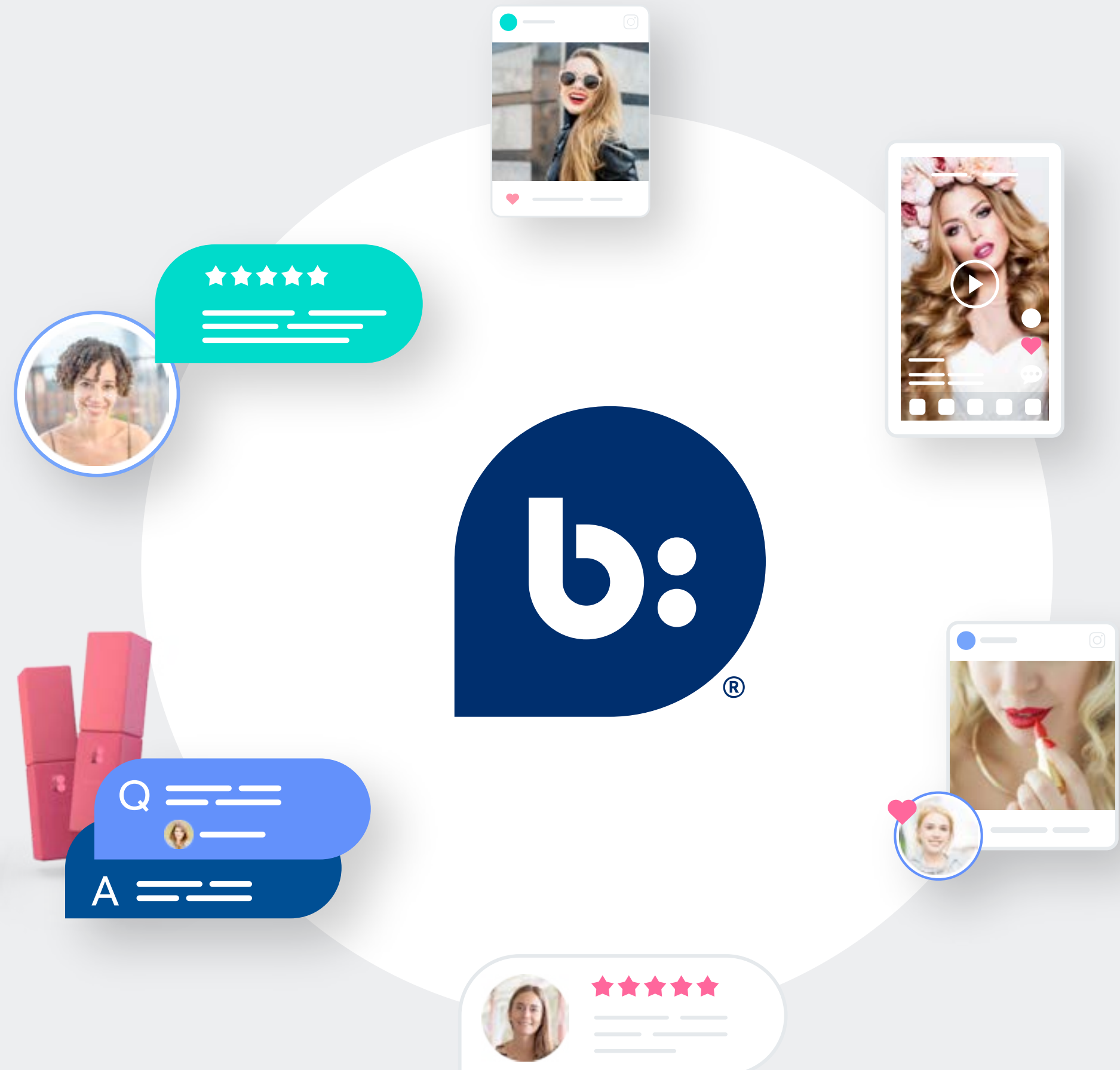
References

1. Bazaarvoice survey conducted by Savanta of 10,606 consumers in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S., 2022.

2. Bazaarvoice Network Data, 2022

3. Shopper Experience Index. Bazaarvoice. 2022.
   https://www.bazaarvoice.com/resources/shopper-experience-index-2022/

4. Protecting authenticity: Our 3 golden rules to combat fake reviews. Bazaarvoice. 2018.
   https://www.bazaarvoice.com/blog/authenticity-rules-combat-fake-reviews/

5. A fashion brand agrees to pay $4.2 million after F.T.C. says it suppressed negative reviews online. The New York Times. 2022.
   https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/business/fashion-nova-reviews.html

6. Directive (EU) 2019/2161 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Official Journal of the European Union. 2019.
   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/2161/oj

7. Fake reviews to be illegal under new rules. BBC. 2022.
   https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61154748

8. The Total Economic Impact™ of Bazaarvoice. Forrester. 2022.
   https://media.bazaarvoice.com/Forrester_TEI_Final.pdf

9. From the Kardashians to the girl next door. Bazaarvoice. 2022.
   https://www.bazaarvoice.com/resources/from-the-kardashians-to-the-girl-next-door/

10. Rael. Bazaarvoice. 2022.
    https://www.bazaarvoice.com/success-stories/rael/

bazaarvoice®

Thousands of the world's leading brands and retailers trust Bazaarvoice technology, services, and expertise to drive revenue, extend reach, gain actionable insights, and create loyal advocates. Bazaarvoice's extensive global retail, social, and search syndication network, product-passionate community, and enterprise-level technology provide the tools brands and retailers need to create smarter shopper experiences across the entire customer journey.

BAZAARVOICE.COM

Making shopping smarter.