

According to a study by PEOPLE FROM COSSETTE, social media is replacing email:

Americans are more social online but young Canadians are just as likely to share their opinion about brands.

Montréal, December 8th, 2009 — A large study by People from Cossette on social media reveals that social networks are progressing across the country. In Canada, Facebook is the most popular social network with a subscription rate of 66% among Internet users, a rate that is above the American average of 51%. But even in the US, Facebook ranks first before My Space at 36%.

Users generally access social networks from home, in 60% of cases; work access reaches 25% among 25-34 year-old; and 16% of 18-24 year-olds log on using a mobile phone. Moreover, 18-24 year-olds don't think twice about accessing social networks from work, spending no less than 16% of their Internet time at work on them. It is no surprise then to find that 75% of young people claim to visit Facebook on average 16 times a week or, if one prefers, more than twice a day.

Motivations

Generally speaking, Internet users are sharing more and more information online: 35% of Canadian users prefer email to share information that is important to them, compared with 36% in the United States and 31% in the United Kingdom. Canadians, and especially Quebecers, are more likely to choose face to face contacts (26%) whereas Americans still like the telephone (30%).

The study by People from Cossette indicates that 13% of Internet users visit social media to CONTRIBUTE, which is to say, write a review or share opinion about a product or service; 28% to SHARE links or recommend interesting content; 30% to REACT to the links that others have found interesting; and 63% to LOOK at photos and videos that others have uploaded.

Leisure, emotions and cultural products

Topics of discussion in the social media vary a lot according to gender and age. However, certain clear trends are distinguishable: more men discuss their pastimes and activities, while women communicate their emotions and young people talk about their outings. University graduates are those most likely to discuss current events and cultural products. In fact, it's in Quebec that cultural products are discussed online more than anywhere else in the country.

Of the remaining subjects, it is information about a product, service, brand or company that most interests Internet users (77%). Three of ten Canadian Internet users will share this information with other users afterwards, compared to 41% of Americans. The great pay-off of social media lies here, in the fact that people can influence those around them.

FIVE MAJOR OBSERVATIONS

1. Social media could soon replace email as a means of sharing information.

More than three quarters of the online population uses e-mail to share information they deem important. But the trend favours social media, as one third of Internet users are already publishing this information directly online, compared to 20% last fall only (2008). Furthermore, Gen Y (those aged 18 to 24) prefers social networks (26%) over e-mail (15%) to share information that is significant. Today, one must be at least 35 years old to belong to a group that still prefers using e-mail. Also worthy of mention is that messaging is the most popular feature in Facebook. Half of the members use Facebook to stay in touch with friends and 14% use it to communicate with family.

2. Facebook is poised to become the next Google.

This social network has the most daily connections of all the networks with 26% of Internet users: YouTube 4%, Myspace 4% and Twitter 3%. Furthermore, two thirds of all social media activity takes place on Facebook. In Canada, that figure is an astonishing 79%.

Generally, more Canadians connect to a social network each week (61%) than Americans (56%). They're likely to do so more frequently at sixteen times per week on average compared to twelve for Canadians.

But social media behaviour is a lot more than frequenting social networks. For example, almost 6 Internet users out of 10 answer simple polling questions. Half consider the opinions expressed online, 4 out of 10 follow links posted by others and 3 out of 10 read blogs or personal home pages, reacting to what they see or read the majority of the time. In this study, People from Cossette measured more than twenty such habits that are slowly forging social media behaviour in members of our society.

3. Citizens are increasingly turning to social media for news and to obtain information about products.

This is a significant and important trend. In the case of current affairs, 55% of Internet users consult citizen-journalists when it comes to informing themselves, compared to 56% who refer to professional journalists. Americans are more cynical of traditional news outlets which may be driving a good part of their social media behaviour. Canadians on the other hand are the most likely to trust and even defend their news organizations when asked about the credibility of citizen media.

In regards to information about products online, the study finds we've already reached the tipping. In fact, two thirds of Internet users consider the opinions left by other consumers, which is more than those who consider the information produced by the companies themselves, or any other source of information on the web for that matter.

4. Consumers discuss "brands" online.

In the past week, for example, the data revealed that 77% of Internet users engaged online with information about a brand, a service or a product. One third shared this information with other users. The trend is most pronounced in the United States, then in Canada, and then in the United Kingdom.

It should be noted that "Gen Y" is more likely to publish their opinion of businesses or products, which reinforces the notion that they use brands to serve their social status, both online and offline. This trend was found in 48% of cases in both Canada and the United States, indicating there is no "sharing" gap between the two countries when it comes to young adults.

5. Those who share information on brands online are curious and sensitive to advertising.

This is explained by the fact that 51% of them like being informed about new products and 55% believe that people they know expect good advice from them about these products. So, this group of users digs deeper in the blogosphere than other Internet users, looking for pertinent information. They also spend a lot of time online and access the Internet more frequently outside their home. Moreover, they believe that advertising is as useful as information provided by other Internet users.

This study by People from Cossette was carried out by its marketing research division, Impact Research. It was conducted among Internet users aged 18 and over through an online questionnaire from June 26 to July 17. The sample size in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom was 3,227 respondents with a margin of error of + or - 1.7%, 19 times out of 20.

The sample for Canada was 1,225 respondents with weighting according to the respondents' gender, age and geographic region, according to Statistics Canada's 2006 census data. The margin of error is + or - 2.8%, 19 times out of 20.

Go to http://www.cossette.com/www/news_socialmediastudy2009.php for more details.

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