HOW AND WHY CUSTOMERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMPLAINTS IN RETAIL

Author: Imogen Wethered, CEO & Co-founder
Introduction

In 2017, Qudini conducted a survey with over 2,000 UK shoppers in order to ascertain the reasons why customers complain about the in-store experience and which channels they favour when voicing their complaints.

In our first whitepaper, we examined those factors that contribute to negative retail experiences, alongside insights as to why this data is important. It also looked at the areas where retail brands need to make improvements in order to maintain customer loyalty and build trust and advocacy.

In this second part, we take an in-depth look at the most popular channel used to complain about poor in-store experiences - social media. We also discuss what actions brands can take to ensure they’re being both responsive and engaged in the conversion online.

To quickly recap, in our first whitepaper, we revealed that in the event of a poor in-store experience, **88% of customers will complain in some way**, and one in five (21%) of us will post our negative experience on social media.

Long waiting times were the primary reason for customer complaints (51%), followed by rude and unhelpful staff, unavailable stock and unavailable staff.

Now, in this second part, we reveal that **almost all of us use Facebook to air our complaints (80%)**, although our survey discovered that men are 18% more likely than women to share their complaint online. Men are also more likely to use Twitter as a preferred complaints channel (40% male vs 33% female).

We then examined each generational age category to identify which groups are more likely to complain on social media.

However, it’s Millennials (25-34 years old) who report the highest number of complaints. They use Facebook to share negative retail experiences, while also posting blogs to LinkedIn in order to warn others of poor in-store practices.
For a generation that accounts for 21% of the whole UK population (13.8 million people. Source: Statista), the social habits of Millennials and improving their overall in-store experience should be a high priority for retailers.

Social media has a unique power to amplify customer grievances and influence behaviour through peer-to-peer recommendations. Without a monitoring and social response strategy in place to deal swiftly with customer complaints or enquiries, retail brands ignore these communication channels at their peril.

Imogen Wethered
Qudini, co-founder & CEO
In 2017, Qudini conducted a comprehensive survey with over 2,000 UK consumers to gauge their views on the state of brick and mortar retail, including the frequency and cause of poor in-store experiences and how customers are responding. Our findings formed the first of a two-part whitepaper entitled, 'How customers respond to poor in-store experiences.'

We were particularly interested in the fact that one in five of us respond to a negative retail experience by posting to social media. We wanted to know more about how customers are using social media as a complaints channel.

As a result, we decided to delve deeper into this behavioural thread by asking the same shoppers the following three additional questions:

**Q1**
When you’ve complained about a poor in-store experience on social media, which channels have you used?

(Turn to, ‘What online channels do people use to complain about poor in-store experiences?’, page 4 for insights)

**Q2**
When you have used social media in the past to complain about a bad experience in a store, what are the main reasons for sharing this?

(Turn to, ‘The sharing rationale’, page 7 for insights)

**Q3**
Did any of the retail brands you complained to via social media respond to your complaints, and did they resolve the query?

(Turn to ‘The reality of retail responses on social media’, page 9 for insights)

We then extracted further interesting insights by analysing these new findings according to gender, generation and geographical responses.
Customers use different Twitter channels regionally
with Scotland referencing Twitter more than any other demographic

- 21% of customers with a poor in-store experience will use social media to complain
- Facebook is the most commonly used social complaints channel, with 80% of respondents complaining on Facebook, largely for their friends and family to see
- Twitter is the second most used platform, with 37.5% of customers tweeting their complaints

**In summary, our UK findings show that:**

- **21%**
  - **21% of customers**
    - with a poor in-store experience will use social media to complain

- **34% of customers** expect a response to their complaint and are therefore using the channel as a means to communicate directly with the brand. Women (particularly Baby Boomers and Generation Z) are significantly more likely to use social media for this motive over men.

- **9% of customers** post their complaints to social media because they want the business to be damaged by their experience. Women and Baby Boomers are more likely to admit this as their primary motive.

Customers in the East and Northern Ireland are most expectant of a response from the business, and customers from Yorkshire, most intent on damaging the business. Customers in Scotland are more interested in just letting the business and other people know.
WHAT ONLINE CHANNELS DO PEOPLE USE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT POOR IN-STORE EXPERIENCES?

In the event of a poor customer experience, 88% of customers will complain in some way.

One in five of us (21%) will post our negative experiences to social media and men are 18% more likely than women to vent their frustrations with the retail experience online.

As many customers will use social media to complain, as those that do not complain at all.

**Where do we post?**

**Facebook** 79.6%

**Twitter** 37.5%

**Instagram** 25%

**Snapchat** 10.5%

**Linkedin** 9.2%
Online behaviour across channels

Where we post online can signal what kind of response we’re looking for after airing a complaint. Many companies monitor Facebook and Twitter for mentions of their brand but, according to social media metrics tool, Sprout Social, the average response rate from retail brands is just 16%.

We’re perhaps more likely to want a response if we tweet a complaint about a poor in-store experience, especially if we include the brand’s handle and add hashtags that we know will be monitored, such as #needhelp, #customerservice or #customerservicefail.

Twitter is the most effective social channel for amplification and 37.5% of us want our complaints to be heard by as many fellow consumers as possible.

However, the fact that almost 80% of us post complaints to Facebook suggests that in the main, we may just want to vent our frustrations to friends and family.

Peer-to-peer recommendations amongst interconnected social circles still have a significant ripple effect and impact on brand reputation however. According to Accenture, 76% of people trust the opinion of people they know well. This could have the biggest negative effect on the reputation of local stores in smaller towns, with tighter communities.

Complaints made as blog posts on LinkedIn are targeted at a professional user-base and are more likely to detail business failings rather than personal vents.

Our data also reveals that even image-based channels such as Instagram and Snapchat attract retail customer complaints (25% and 10.5% respectively).

One thing’s for certain then. In the event of a poor customer experience, a quarter of us will head online to air our complaint, with the intention of warning others or seeking brand resolution.

Therefore, brands need to be monitoring each and every social channel, in order to develop a more comprehensive customer service strategy.
WHO IS COMPLAINING ONLINE?

By Gender

Almost all of us use Facebook to air our complaints (80%), although our survey discovered that men are more likely than women to use Twitter (40% male vs 33% female).

Although around 70% of Snapchat users are female, (source: Snapchat Inc), only 6% of the women we spoke to have used it to voice a retail complaint, compared with 13% of the men we surveyed.

Women are more inclined than men to voice complaints on LinkedIn or Instagram as an alternative to Facebook. This correlates to the fact that 56% of the 17.2million UK people on Instagram are women, along with 51% of the 20 million+ UK people who use LinkedIn.

With men’s propensity to use Twitter, coupled with the fact that they’re 18% more likely than women to vent their frustrations with the in-store experience, retail brands are presented with a very clear customer service challenge.

By Age

Millennials (25-34 years old) and both older and younger Generation X (35-54 years old) use Facebook to share negative retail experiences, while Millennials are also more likely to post to Snapchat and LinkedIn in order to warn others of poor in-store practices.

With the most influential, cash-rich generation accounting for 21% of the whole UK population (13.8million people. Source: Statista), the social habits of Millennials and improving their overall in-store experience should be a high priority for retailers.

Generation Z (16-24 years old) are less likely to use social media as a complaints channel compared with other generations (with the exception of the over 55s). However, when they do post complaints about their in-store experiences, they vent on Twitter more than any other generation.
By Region

Scottish consumers love to tweet their retail complaints. Only people who live in the West Midlands come anywhere close to using Twitter as much to air grievances as those who shop in Scotland (57% vs 70%).

People who live in Northern Ireland exclusively use Facebook to voice retail complaints. While negative posts to LinkedIn are most likely to come from people who live in London.

This is most likely because LinkedIn is a professional’s social network and the UK capital still attracts a majority of young professionals from England’s provincial cities. The same could also be said of the Welsh capital city, Cardiff and the high proportion of Welsh people using LinkedIn to air their complaints appears to support this.

Customers from the East Midlands and Yorkshire are the most likely to use Snapchat, followed by those that shop in the North East of England.
SPOTLIGHT ON TWITTER

To support our expanded survey findings, Qudini further analysed 200 retail customer complaints on Twitter to discover what issues people were tweeting about.

By searching the phrase ‘Bad store experience’ and exploring the issues being discussed, we found the following:

- 14% of tweets mentioned long waiting times and queues in-store
- 23% of tweets mentioned rude or inefficient staff
- 13% of tweets complained about unavailable products or poor product quality
- 11% of tweets cited poor customer service or the lack of in-store help
- 10% of tweets objected to product price
- 29% of tweets made non-specific complaints about the in-store experience

Amplified complaints requires fast customer service response

In 2016, Research Now carried out a study, commissioned by Twitter, and found that 61% of UK users admitted that the public nature of Twitter affects what they tweet about brands.

With the ability to articulate viewpoints in a short, sharp and succinct way, Twitter is seen as the most appropriate environment to discuss customer service queries. And not only with brands, but also with other customers who may be experiencing similar issues. It’s an example of how Twitter has transformed the customer service experience from a 1:1 interaction to a 1:many.

Research Now’s study further states that users are most likely to use Twitter as a customer service channel for retail and travel. As many as 40% of those who had recently used the platform for customer service had done so for retail; 33% for travel and 28% for telecoms.

What people really want from a customer service interaction on Twitter is their problem solved.

Twitter is very good at making this happen. As many as 83% of those who used Twitter for customer service said their issue was addressed and fixed (source: Twitter Inc).

Twitter is about what’s happening now. That means when it comes to customer service, people expect brands to respond quickly.

The Research Now report found that 24% of users ranked speed as the most important attribute for customer service on Twitter, while a quarter agreed that it’s important.

How brands perform on Twitter impacts how users feel about them. Two thirds of users say their opinion of a brand would be improved if that brand responded to a Tweet (source: Twitter Inc).

For brands, the dividends of delivering great customer service on Twitter can be really valuable.

It drives and builds customer loyalty. The Research Now study found that 96% of users who turned to Twitter for customer service and had a friendly experience with a brand would buy from that brand again. Equally important, an impressive 83% of them would recommend that brand to others. (source: Twitter Inc)
THE SHARING RATIONALE

Why people share their in-store experiences on social media

• To vent because I'm frustrated and I want the business and other people to know: 43.4%
• To vent because I'm frustrated and I want the business to understand: 33.6%
• To complain to the business because I want them to respond: 33.6%
• To warn other people so that they don’t have the same experience: 30.9%
• To vent because I want other people to know: 30.3%
• I want the retail brand to be damaged by the experience I had: 9.2%
• I didn’t have a particular reason: 2.6%

A third of customers post to social media in the hope of receiving a response.

A third of customers post to social media in the hope of receiving a response. They see social media as a direct communication channel to the brand and prefer it to emailing complaints directly to customer service departments. Women, (in particular female Baby Boomers and Generation Z), are significantly more likely to use social media in this way.

Although the majority post to social media to warn others, only 9.2% actually want the brand to be damaged by their experience (Women and Baby Boomers are more likely to admit this as their primary motive). Regardless of this low intent however, there’s always a much higher risk that a brand’s reputation will suffer as a result of social amplification.
By Gender

Women’s motives for using social media are more geared towards eliciting a response from the retailer. They also have a higher intent to warn others so that they don’t have the same experience.

Men are more geared towards venting their frustrations about the in-store experience, as opposed to wanting any specific reaction from the retail brand.

Generation X (35-54 years old) are more inclined to vent their frustrations to their social networks without caring that the business knows. This is a generation with lower expectations of brand interactions when compared with Millennials and Generation Z.

When Generation Z (16-24 years old) post to social media, they want to alert other people so that they don’t have the same experience, plus they want the business to understand their complaints and offer a response. They don’t set out to damage the retail brand.

Baby Boomers (55+) display the most intent in their social media usage. They show a high propensity to warn others, elicit a response or even damage the retail brand in question. They are significantly less concerned with using social media just to let the business know.

Retailer rules of engagement

A third of survey respondents (33.6%) disclosed that their intent behind posting to social media was to extract a response from the retailer and/or to make the retailer aware that they had an issue.

This is important for brands to understand so that they’re proactively monitoring social channels, and have a social response strategy in place to deal swiftly with customer complaints or enquiries.

Our data further shows that 43.4% of customers want to share their experiences with other people, as much as they wish to share them with the retailer in question.

The ratio of complaints to compliments on Twitter is around 2:1 (source: Twitter) but brands need to be aware that both negative and positive in-store experiences may be shared virally across multiple channels and what the knock-on effect of this may be.
A quick response to offer help or compensation will, for the most part, reflect very well on a brand’s customer service abilities. And yet, 13% of our survey told us they’ve never received a response when complaining to a retailer via social channels.

According to Twitter, some 42% of its users expect a company to respond within one hour. That figure increases exponentially to 72% when they have complaints (source: Twitter inc).

Studies in America by NM Incite state that almost half of all U.S. social media users have tried some form of social media as a way to access customer service (source: State of Social Customer Service Report).

Some 71% of those who experience positive social care (i.e., a quick and effective brand response) are likely to recommend that brand to others.

However, a lack of response on social media is as much an issue in American as it is here in the UK.

The Northridge Group’s State of Customer Service Experience 2017, surveyed 1000 American shoppers and found that 25% received no response whatsoever when they’d contacted a retailer through social media. That’s up from 21% in 2016 and correlates with our UK survey result of 13% receiving no response.

Retailers on both sides of the Atlantic are risking brand reputation by failing to deliver a well-executed, customer-centric service model.

Some 81% of those consumers surveyed by The Northridge Group reported they’d likely stop giving their business to a retailer after a poor service experience.

### The reality of retail responses on social media

- 24% of customers say that their query was responded to all of the time.
- 13% say they never receive a response when complaining via social channels.
- Only 16% of shoppers state that their query is always resolved.
- 16% of shoppers also report that their query is never resolved using social media.
THE REALITY OF RETAIL RESPONSES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By Gender

• Men report higher instances than women of never receiving a response, but also report high instances of always receiving a response.
• Women report higher instances of receiving a response some of the time and most of the time.
• Women have their complaints resolved 39% more of the time than men.
• However, women are also less likely to be satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, with 11% more women than men stating that their queries are never resolved.

By Generation

• Older Generation X (45-54 years old) customers are the least satisfied with the level of brand response to their complaints.
• Generation Z (16-24 years old) and Millennials (23-34 years old) are the most satisfied with the level of brand response to their complaints.
• Baby Boomers (55+ years old) reported the least satisfaction with responses received and the outcome of their received responses as satisfactory resolutions.
• Millennials report the highest effectiveness of social media as a means to receive a satisfactory response. However, this needs to be considered in the context that this generation also complain the most about poor in-store experiences.
• It’s interesting to consider that Baby Boomers are the demographic to use social media the most in order to solicit a brand response, whereas Millennials are the least expectant of a response from retailers. So Baby Boomer expectations are underachieved, while Millennial expectations are greatly exceeded.
By Region

- Customers in the East, West Midlands, Scotland and London are the most satisfied with brands’ adeptness to respond to complaints.
- Customers in the North East and East Midlands are the least satisfied with how brands respond.
- East Midland shoppers are also the most dissatisfied with how responses resolved their queries.
- While customers in Wales, followed by East England, are the most satisfied with how responses resolved their queries.
WE’RE QUIDINI
AND WE’RE HERE TO HELP

We help retailers use a variety of methods to reduce customer complaints on social media and to better respond and manage customers when complaints are made.

Our enterprise Customer Experience Management solutions enable you to manage and connect with your customers across multiple journeys and channels, all within a single platform, using:

- Walk-in & Queue Management
- Multi-Channel Appointment Bookings
- Click & Collect Management
- Collection & Repair Management
- Request Assistance
- Workshop & Event Bookings

Let’s design your customer experience

If you’d like to discuss how enhanced in-store experiences could open up new possibilities for your business, get in touch at info@qudini.com

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR WHITEPAPER

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with our team who will be more than happy to help.

info@qudini.com