

Mention-Me.com

# *Report:* Customer Advocacy in 2020

# Introduction

In November 2019, we asked 2,000 UK consumers what makes them likely to recommend a brand. Their responses were fascinating.

Some were predictable; generous discounts and free delivery remain key drivers for brand recommendations. Others, like attitudes towards brands' ethical credentials, were less anticipated.

We've compiled this report\* based on extensive analysis of 2,000 responses to 10 questions, exploring everything from the traits of referrable brands to how recommendations are influenced by age and gender.

*\*In collaboration with One Poll*

As consumers become increasingly cynical of mainstream advertising, brand trust and credibility has never been so important. Mention Me is on a mission to put trust back into the heart of marketing and help businesses – from young challenger brands to established global enterprises – fuel long-term growth via their happy customers.

We hope our findings provide you with valuable insight into how you can achieve this for your business.

**ANDY COCKBURN**  
CEO & Co-Founder  
Mention Me



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# The Most Trusted Source of Brand Recommendations: Friends

51% of UK consumers trust their friends' or partner's brand recommendations more than any other source. Friends are trusted 5% more than partners, coming top for the third consecutive year.

But this trust works both ways; 41% of consumers are deterred from recommending brands that friends or family have advised to avoid.

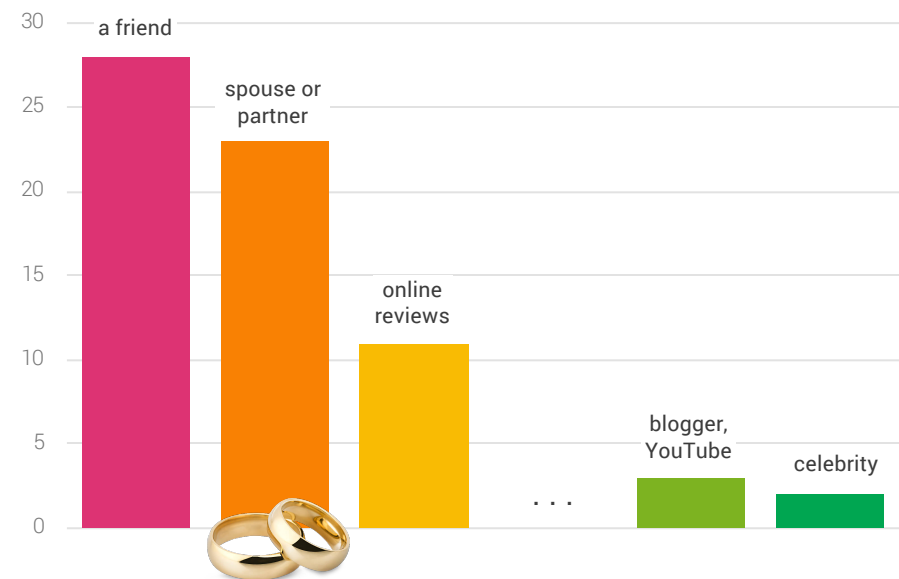
23% of respondents are likely to act on their partner's recommendation, higher than in previous years. This figure rises to 27% for men, who trust their partners more than women do (20%).

And, despite many brands continuing to plunge significant investment into celebrity and influencer marketing, our research found just 2 and 3% of consumers respectively trust these forms of marketing.

Furthermore, consumers are showing signs of losing trust in online reviews, with just 11% now considering them a highly trusted source of brand recommendations (compared to 21% in 2017).

Finally, in unsurprising news, just 1% of UK consumers trust a politician's brand recommendation.

Whose referral do you most trust?



# The Frequency of Brand Recommendations

37% of consumers have recommended at least one brand over the past month. This figure rises to 68% when looking at the past six months.

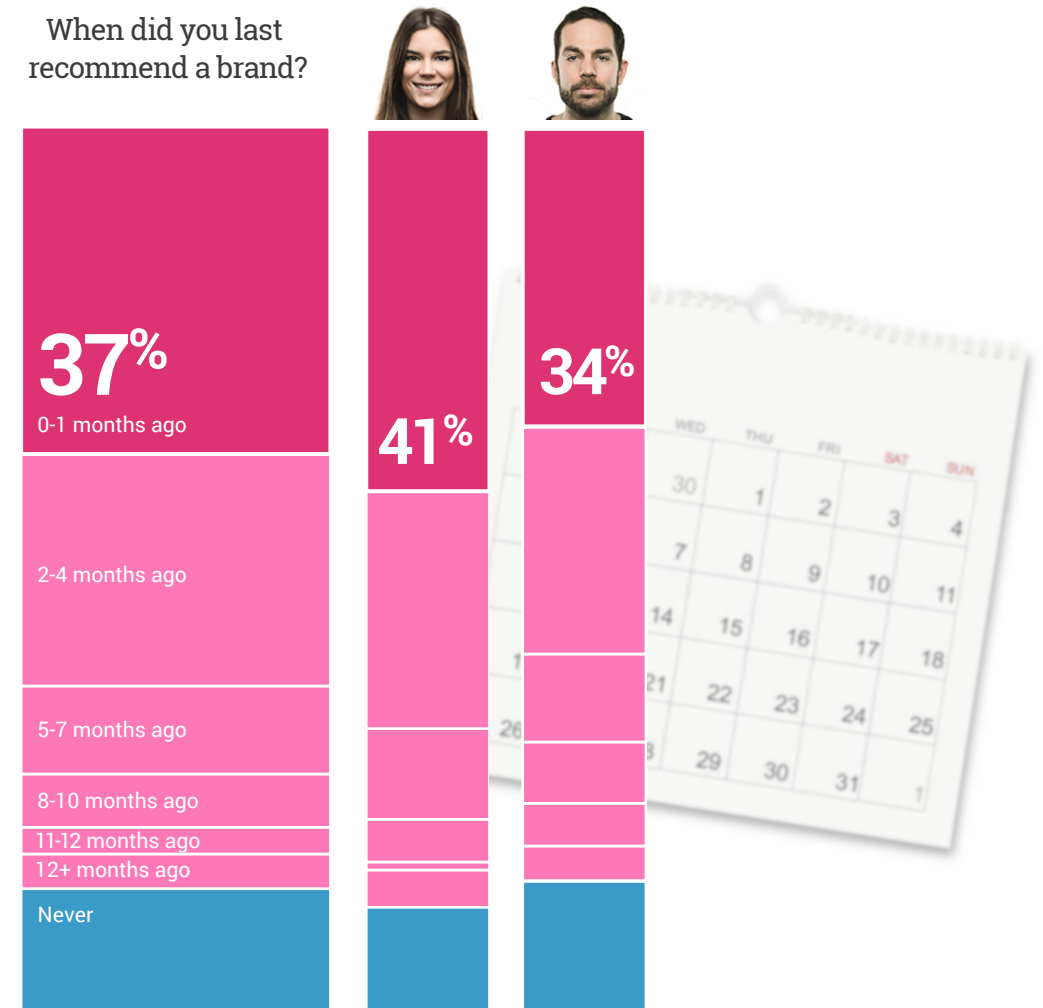
This readiness to recommend the brands getting it right presents a valuable opportunity for businesses.

By implementing a referral programme that actively incentivises and tracks recommendations, you can unlock significant growth, driving benefits like new customer acquisition and higher lifetime value.

Women are slightly more likely to have recommended a brand in the past month (41%), but there is also strong opportunity for male-focussed brands, with 34% of men having made a recommendation in the past month.

On average, 30% of brand recommendations take place offline; reiterating the importance of implementing a referral programme that tracks and optimises these everyday conversations to drive results.

When did you last recommend a brand?





# Traits of a Referrable Brand

The most frequently recommended brands share a number of key traits. The most important, as cited by 72% of survey respondents, is trust and credibility. The psychology behind referrals means consumers are reluctant to share brands that risk their reputations; a generous discount isn't worth seeming self-centred or as having poor taste.

Great customer service is the second most important trait (63%). This ties in closely to trust and credibility; customers are much more willing to recommend brands they know will provide a positive service to their friends.

In 2018, customer service came out top, followed by trust and credibility. This swap in positions highlights the increasing importance of brands building meaningful connections with customers – against a backdrop of fake news and overwhelming information, nothing trumps a trustworthy brand.

The third most important trait of a referrable brand is being better than the competition (51%), beating last year's offering good discounts (46%). This reiterates that consumers are not led solely by price and do their research first.



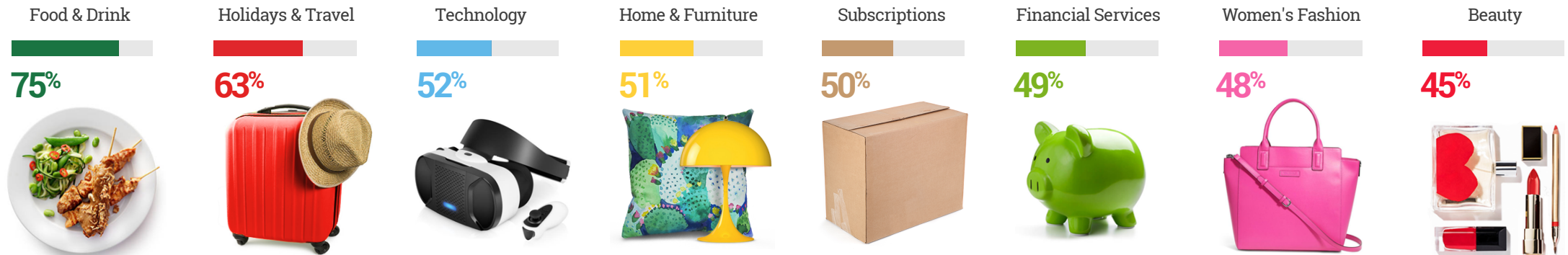
# The Brands & Sectors Most Likely to be Referred

Certain sectors are more likely to come up in conversation and therefore be recommended. But that's not to say that referral is off-limits for other sectors. Brands in the food and drink sector are most likely to be recommended (by 75% of consumers), followed by travel (63%) and technology (52%). These results are unsurprising; what we eat, where we holiday, and gadgets like mobile phones and smart watches naturally come up in conversation on a regular basis. However, brand recommendations are rising across every sector. Most notable is finance, with a 17% year-on-year increase. British consumers may feel uncomfortable declaring their salaries, but 49% are likely to tell others about the finance brands helping them to manage their money.

This year, our survey included questions around subscription businesses to reflect the rising prominence of brands based on this model, like gym memberships, mealbox delivery services and energy providers. 50% of respondents were likely to recommend subscription businesses.

The sectors least likely to be recommended are sports clothing and equipment, and childrenswear and toys. Nonetheless, one in three consumers (36%) are still likely to recommend brands in these sectors. Their lower scores are likely due to their appeal to specific demographics, in contrast to, for example, the food and drink sector.

The brands most likely to be recommend:



# Blockers to Brand Recommendations

For the first time, we asked consumers about the factors that deter them from recommending brands.

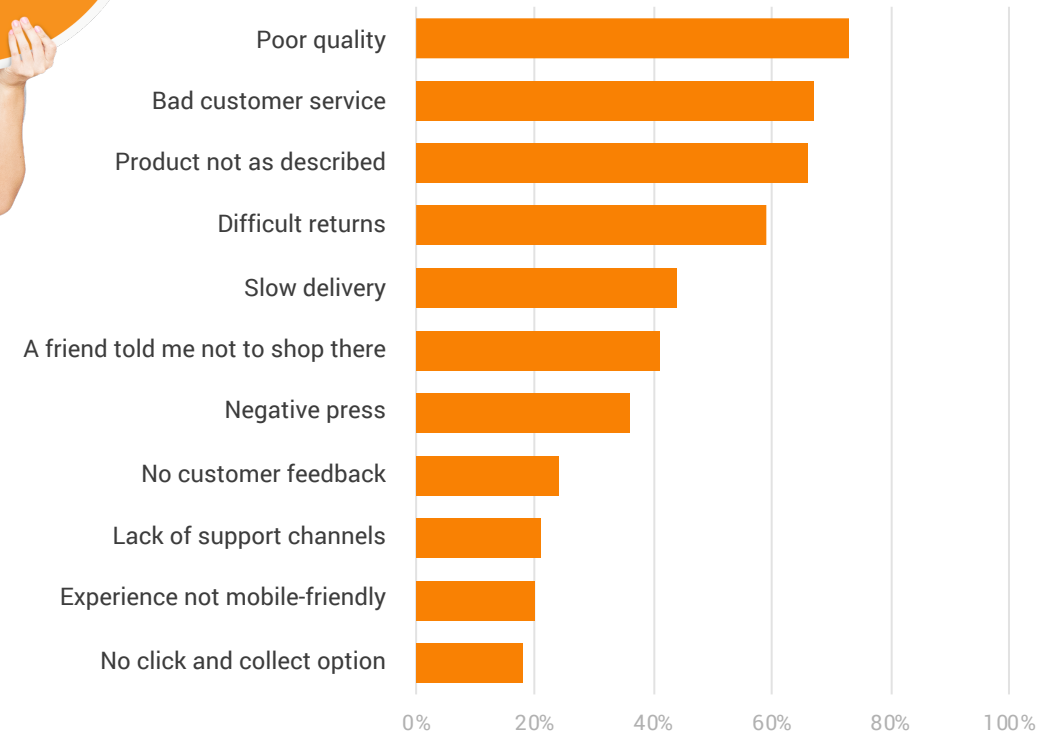
The top three responses were as expected: poor or ill-fitting products and bad customer service are key factors that make a brand very unlikely to be recommended.

But our question also led to other, more interesting responses. Delivery times are of key importance to consumers, reflecting our age of convenience where increasing numbers of retailers offer same-day delivery. This likely also contributes to Amazon's top spot as the brand most likely to be recommended (cited by 33% of respondents).

Consumers are also highly influenced by the opinions of others. 41% are unlikely to recommend a brand their friend or family member told them not to shop at; 36% are deterred by negative press coverage.



What would put you off recommending a brand?



# The Importance of Brand Ethics

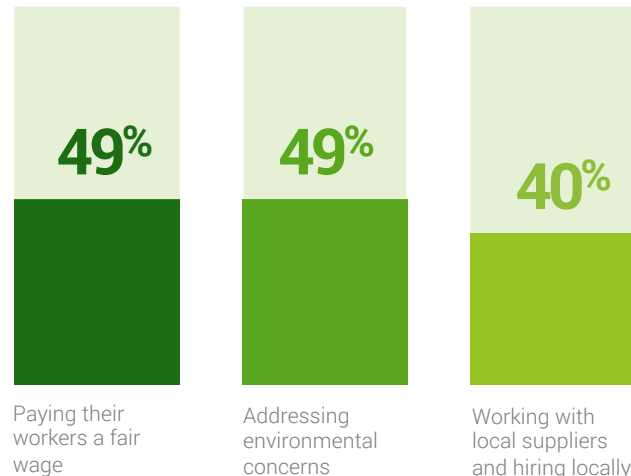
Last year, we reported on the rising importance of ethics. This year, our survey found the trend has become an even bigger consideration for consumers.

Brand attitudes and behaviour towards sustainability and social responsibility proved paramount for all respondents, especially women.

Generation Z is most likely to be influenced by a brand's environmental credentials, with 48% of 18 to 24 year olds considering them very important. This figure steadily decreases moving up the age groups, with 27% of those aged 55+ considering environmental credentials very important.

Nonetheless, 49% of 55+ year olds said they were more likely to refer brands committed to scrapping plastics and acting on other environmental concerns. These results highlight the mounting pressure for brands to exhibit environmentally-friendly behaviour, regardless of their target demographic.

Consumers are more likely to refer brands committed to:



# Encouraging Customers to Return

Many brands entice in new shoppers with generous first-time purchase incentives, only to lose them after their first – and only – purchase. Real value lies in transforming these one-off shoppers into loyal brand advocates.

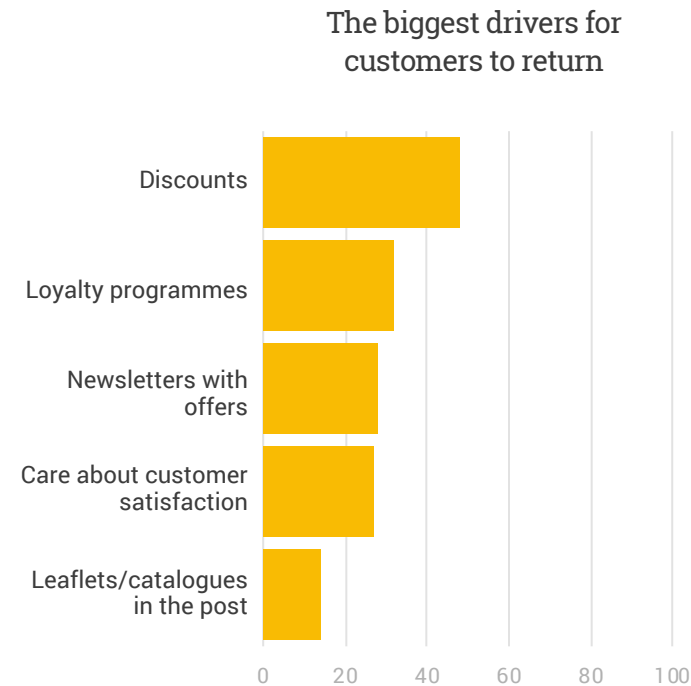
The majority (48%) of consumers cite discounts as the biggest incentive for returning to a brand. But, as our results show, there are other effective methods for encouraging customers to return.

32% of respondents said being enrolled into a points loyalty programme is the best thing a brand can offer to encourage them to shop again. This supports our extensive research into referral programmes as drivers of customer retention as well as acquisition – rewarding existing customers, not only new ones, is key to building brand loyalty.

The next most popular method was email newsletters with offers. Though the top three methods centre around offers, 27% of respondents said brands showing they care about their satisfaction is a key driver for returning. This emphasises the importance of providing appropriate channels for feedback and efficient customer service support.

Another interesting finding is the continued place for print in our digital world. 14% of respondents said they'd be likely to shop again with a brand after receiving materials in the post.

Lastly, just 10% of consumers want to be targeted with personalised online advertising based on their shopping habits, highlighting the challenge brands face to tailor content without overstepping boundaries.



# Conclusion

This year's report emphasises the increasing importance of brand transparency and trust.

In our era of fake news, paid-for promotions and endless advertising, consumers value businesses they can count on. This extends from providing reliable products to behaving ethically and creating personalised experiences.

Today's shoppers are savvy and have a wealth of information at their fingertips. Even a seemingly minor purchase, like a t-shirt or health food product, involves researching brands and finding the best offers.

While this competitive landscape may seem daunting, our results reveal the key ingredients for a successful brand are simple: fair prices, strong ethics, and an excellent product and service.

Add a strategically optimised referral programme into this mix, and your business has powerful potential for long-term growth. By tapping into everyday conversations, you can transform customers into loyal shoppers who buy often, spend more, and recommend your brand to others.

Mention Me's award-winning marketing technology platform provides the tools and expertise to help brands build communities of loyal customers who spend more, return often and recommend them to others.

Seamlessly integrable across platforms, Mention Me powers growth for 400+ brands worldwide and has delivered 1.5 million referrals totalling £500m revenue (and counting!).

Get in touch to discover how we can deliver results for your business.

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