The Psychology of Sharing: What Is This Study About?

A first-of-its-kind inquiry into the motivations behind why we share.

Understanding the motivational forces behind the act of sharing will help marketers get their content shared.
Why do consumers share content online?

- What motivates consumers to share content?
- Are there distinct personalities with different motivations?
- How can understanding why people share help advertisers?
Overview

1. Methodology
2. Motivations for Sharing
3. Online Sharing Personas
4. Key Guidelines for Getting Shared
5. Consumer Categories
We worked with Latitude Research to conduct a three-phase study to understand why people share content online.
PHASE

1

Ethnographies

- In-person interviews in New York, Chicago and San Francisco
Methodology

PHASE

2

Immersion/Deprivation

● One-week sharing panel
Methodology

PHASE 3

Quantitative Survey
- Survey of 2,500 medium/heavy online sharers
- Conducted segmentation to identify main types of sharers
SHARING CONTENT IS NOT NEW
In the past, people shared at lunch with their girlfriends when they saw someone with something cool. We still share things when it’s relevant... we just share more and online.

- Ethnography participant, female
Sharing is not new, it's human nature
What's changed?

We now live in the Information Age

- We share MORE content
- From MORE sources
- With MORE people
- MORE often
- MORE quickly
I have a hard time imagining how much more to-the-minute information can become. With twitter, instant FB updates, e-mail updates, what would have been considered fast even five years ago is obsolete.

- Deprivation participant, female
Creating and recreating
From Broadcasters to Sharecasters
Combining
Receiving
Redistributing
Mashing up
Creating and recreating
Sharing acts as “information management”

73% say they process information more deeply, thoroughly and thoughtfully when they share it.

85% say reading other people’s responses helps them understand and process information and events.

“Sharing information helps me do my job. I remember products and information sources better when I share them and am more likely to use them.”

- Deprivation participant, male
MOTIVATIONS FOR SHARING
To bring valuable and entertaining content to others

94% carefully consider how the information they share will be useful to the recipient

49% say sharing allows them to inform others of products they care about and potentially change opinions or encourage action

“I share to enrich the lives of those around me.”
- Immersion participant, female
I try to share only information that will reinforce the image I’d like to present: thoughtful, reasoned, kind, interested and passionate about certain things.

- Deprivation participant, male
To grow and nourish our relationships

I miss the companionship and conversations on Facebook. I feel like I’m probably missing out on some things without the connection.

- Deprivation participant, male

78% share information online because it lets them stay connected to people they may not otherwise stay in touch with.

73% share information because it helps them connect with others who share their interests.
Self-fulfillment

69% share information because it allows them to feel more involved in the world.

“I enjoy getting comments that I sent great information and that my friends will forward it to their friends because it’s so helpful. It makes me feel valuable.”

- Ethnography participant, female
To get the word out about causes or brands

I forwarded an article about Proposition B to Everyone in my union. I wanted them to learn about the issue and rally against it.

- Ethnography participant, male

84% share because it is a way to support causes or issues they care about.
Sharing is all about relationships

1. To bring valuable and entertaining content to others
2. To define ourselves to others
3. To grow and nourish our relationships
4. Self-fulfillment
5. To get the word out about causes or brands
6 PERSONAS OF SHARERS
Six personas of online sharers

1. Altruists
2. Careerists
3. Hipsters
4. Boomerangs
5. Connectors
6. Selectives

Segments are defined by:
- Emotional motivations
- Desired presentation of self
- Role of sharing in life
- Value of being first to share
I sent a couple of articles on nutrition and wellness to a friend with health issues. She e-mailed me to thank me; she appreciated that I had been thinking about her.

- Ethnography participant, female
HELPFUL RELIABLE E-MAIL THOUGHTFUL CONNECTED

ALTRUISTS
I share [things related to] business interests and exchange ideas on how to improve our company’s offerings to our customers.

- Immersion participant, male
LINKEDIN  VALUABLE  INTELLIGENT  NETWORK

CAREERISTS
Sharing is actually part of who I am.
- Deprivation participant, male
When I post controversial things, it makes me look engaged and provocative, and I want to be perceived that way. If I don’t get a response then I know I’ve missed my mark.

- Ethnography participant, male
BOOMERANGS
REACTION  VALIDATION  EMPOWERED  TWITTER  FACEBOOK
Connectors

“

I got a deal to the bar at the Gansevoort Hotel e-mailed to me. I forwarded it to a bunch of friends and we turned it into a girls night out.

- Ethnography participant, female

“
CONNECTORS
CREATIVE  RELAXED  THOUGHTFUL  MAKING PLANS  E-MAIL  FACEBOOK
I only share things with someone specific if I think they will enjoy it. If they aren’t relevant to the material, there is no point in sharing it with them.

- Immersion participant, male
SELECTIVES
KEY GUIDELINES FOR GETTING CONTENT SHARED
Appeal to consumers’ motivation to connect with each other — not just with your brand
Trust is the cost of entry for getting shared
Key factors to influence sharing

Keep it simple…
and it will get
shared… and it
won't get muddled
Key factors to influence sharing

Appeal to their sense of humor
Embrace a sense of urgency
Getting your content shared is just the beginning.
E-mail is still #1
CATEGOR Y SEGMENTATION

- Travel
- Retail & Fashion
- Technology
- Finance
- Entertainment
For more information on this study and how it impacts your brand, please contact Brian Brett: brian.brett@nytimes.com.