

MAKING YOUR BRAND PINTERESTING TO YOUTH

EXAMINING YOUTH USAGE AND ADOPTION RATES OF PINTEREST

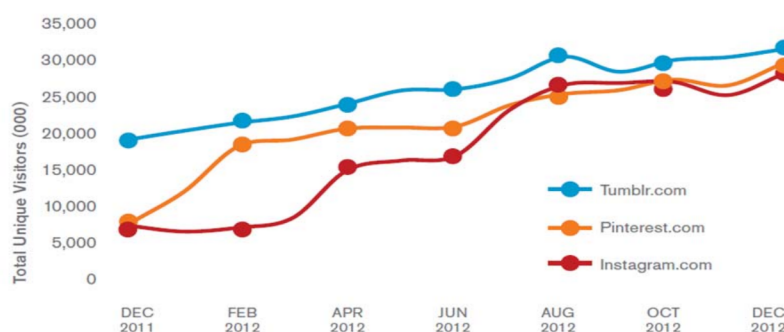
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INTRODUCTION

People are social beings and strive to communicate the most effective messages in the quickest way possible. The visual web allows us to do so and has emerged as a hot topic in digital marketing. In social media, blogging has evolved from short posts, to status updates, to 140 character tweets, and more recently, to image posts. Further, research suggests that we understand and react to images faster than text (Smith and Magee, 1980). Although the adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” has been around for quite some time, it is only recently that we have leveraged a medium capable of this accomplishment—the visual web.

This visual emphasis has led to the rapid rise of sites like Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest, each which gained over 10 million users in 2012 (see figure 1). By following consumers’ lead, many brands are finding success on these visual-based platforms. Among the three, Pinterest has induced the greatest excitement among marketers due to its explosive growth and success stories across many industries.

FIGURE 1, THE RISE OF THE VISUAL WEB



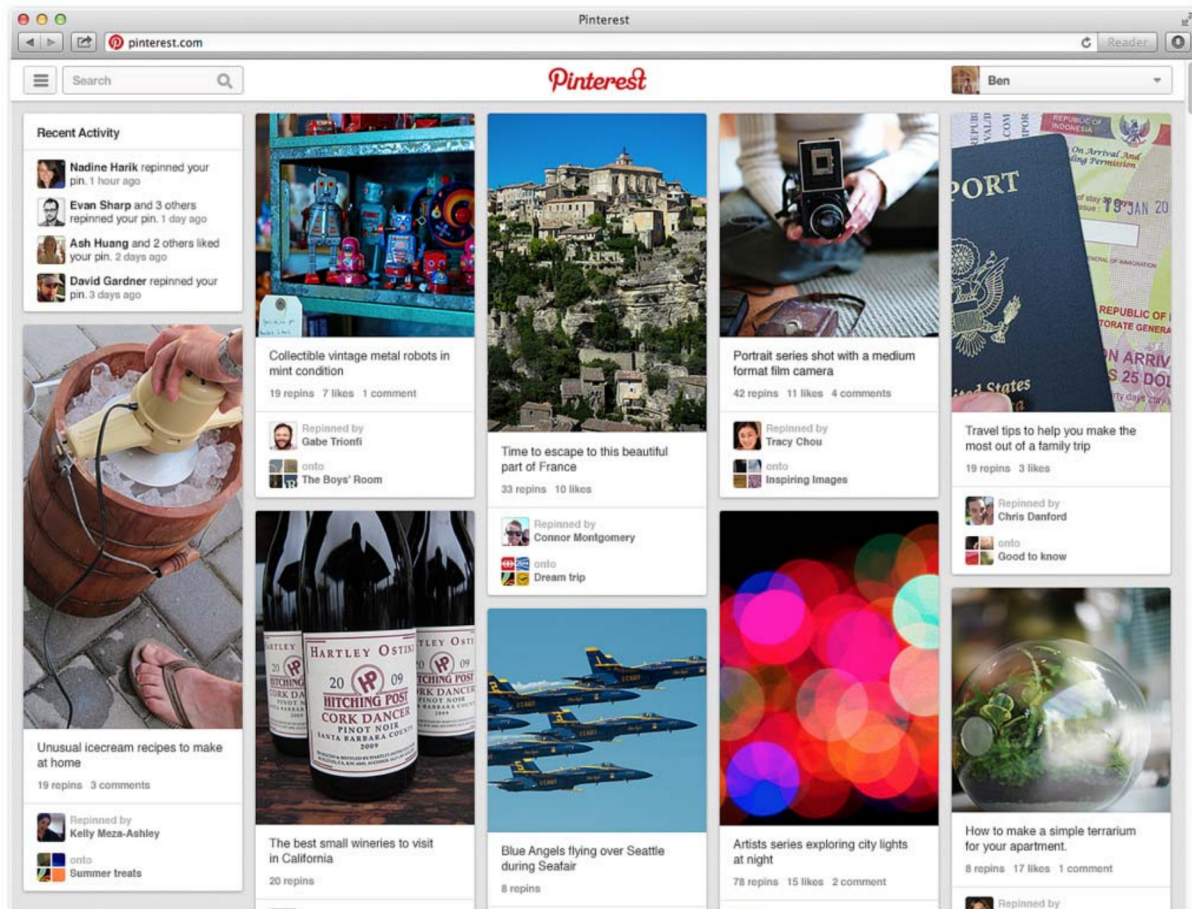
Source: comScore, 2013.

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Pinterest was founded in 2010 as a “tool for collecting and organizing things you love.” Users have the ability to create an account and post images known as ‘pins’ onto organized common-themed boards. Users share images either by repinning others’ pins—a concept known as curation, or by creating a new pin. Users can add a pin to their boards by uploading an image, capturing an image from the Internet via a ‘Pin It’ button, bookmark, or URL, or by viewing the category feeds and repinning another user’s pin. Since this content is a reflection of themselves, users take care in creating and curating boards that reflect their style, interests, and personality. Board topics include recipes, DIY (do-it-yourself) & crafts, home décor, photography, tattoos, workouts, and cars. See figure 2 for the Pinterest home feed, demonstrating the image-based feeds users navigate.

Pinterest has experienced tremendous growth since it first launched (see figure 3). As of February 2013, Pinterest had 48.7 million users (Reuters, 2013). Brands and marketers are interested in the visual web and particularly Pinterest for the same reasons that users have flocked to these sites. Research on other social media confirms that consumers are more likely to engage with visual content—images and videos—than text on social sites like Facebook and Twitter (Burrige, 2013). In fact, brands were so eager to take advantage of the large audience on Pinterest that they began to create accounts and pin before official Pinterest business accounts were offered in November 2012.

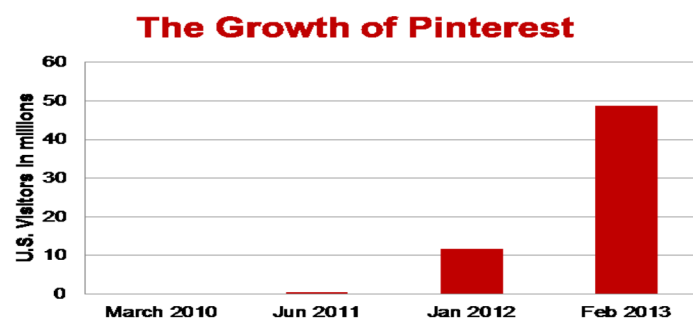
FIGURE 2, PINTEREST HOME FEED



Particularly in retail, there are many success stories that demonstrate that brands’ pins have led to increased website traffic and purchases compared to other social platforms. As early as April 2012, Convertro identified Pinterest as the top social media driver of website referral traffic to e-commerce sites in terms of revenue (Zwilling, 2012). Specifically (Bizrate Insights, 2012):

- 69% of online consumers who visit Pinterest find something they actually purchase or want to purchase
- 70% of users use Pinterest to get inspiration on what to buy
- 67% of users use Pinterest to keep track or collect things they like.

FIGURE 3, THE GROWTH OF PINTEREST



Source: inQbation, 2012; Reuters, 2013.

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In general, young adults and females are more likely to engage with social media sites; however, Pinterest is unique in that it has a very clear demographic—according to Pew, the typical user is a White female under the age of 50 with some college education. This differs from other social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, where usage is less dramatically skewed among demographic groups (Pew, 2013).

Pinterest is attractive to brands and marketers as it has great potential to raise brand awareness, drive referral traffic, and purchase revenue. Much of the current best practices are aimed at the typical Pinterest user (i.e., a White female under the age of 50 with some college education); however, in this paper, we examine Pinterest from a rather unique perspective—the U.S. youth market. First, we examine results from our two-part national study regarding young adults, ages 16 to 24, living in the United States and their social media usage. We focus on data specific to Pinterest; however, the scope of the survey, which included items about other social media usage habits, allows for comparisons to these other social media as well. The study results will frame a discussion that goes beyond the data to examine the implications of young adults’ usage behavior pertaining to marketing decisions. This discussion will incorporate lessons from industry best practices and case studies that are relevant to the young adult market in order to provide clear, actionable takeaways that can be applied to brand’s outreach and engagement efforts on Pinterest.

RESEARCH METHODS

Survey respondents were civilian, non-institutionalized young adults, ages 16 to 24, residing in the continental United States. The sampling frame was an address-based list of youth that has almost universal coverage of the target population (95% coverage of civilian, non-institutionalized, English-speaking young adults, ages 16 to 24, living in the 50 United States or Washington, D.C.).

Data was collected in a two-part survey effort conducted in 2012. The first was a paper-and-pencil survey that fielded over an approximately three month period in the spring of 2012 (n=3,743). The survey consisted of 58 items regarding usage, habits, and attitudes toward various social media. The data were weighted including post-stratification adjustments to control for census region, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education.

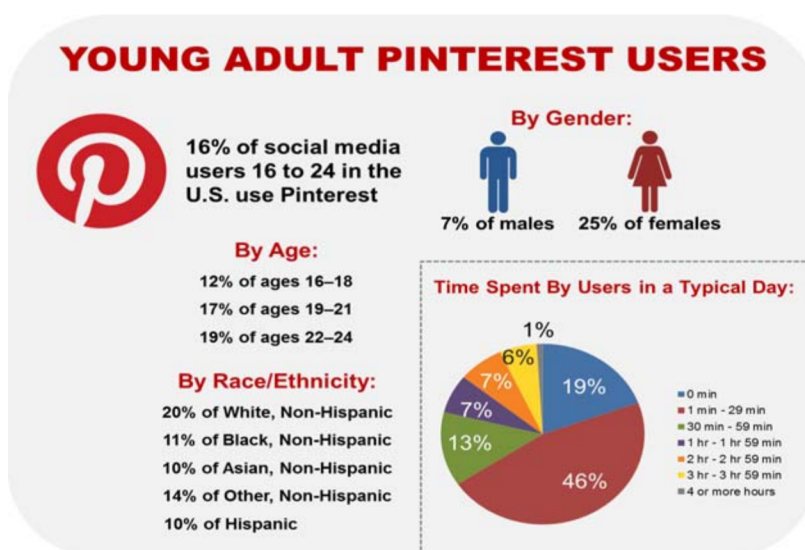
The second effort was a follow-up Web-based survey that fielded in the summer of 2012 to eligible responders of the initial paper survey who indicated social media use (n=1,686). The follow-up survey asked respondents about their behavior on specific sites that they had reported using in the first survey.

RESULTS

Who is using Pinterest?

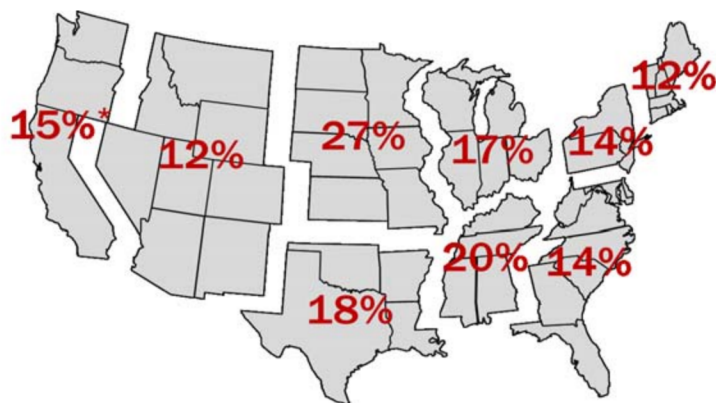
First we examined Pinterest usage by gender and age. Consistent with industry insights, we found that Pinterest has a dedicated following among the White female market. Our data revealed that 16% of American youth who use social media use Pinterest. Our young adult findings mimicked recent Pew data on adult social media users that demonstrate that the average Pinterest users are White females. Further, we found that usage increased as age group increased, indicating that Pinterest is more popular among older youth (see figure 4).

FIGURE 4, THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUNG ADULT PINTEREST USERS



Next we examined Pinterest usage by geographic region. Our data revealed wide variability across Census divisions. Interestingly, the West North Central division in the Midwest, which includes Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, revealed a significantly higher usage rate than all other Census divisions. (See figure 5.) This is consistent with data that shows Pinterest over-indexes on visits from users in the Midwest, Northwestern and Southeastern states (Experian, 2012).

FIGURE 5, PINTEREST USAGE RATE BY CENSUS DIVISION



*The Pacific Census Division also includes Alaska and Hawaii, which are not displayed.

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What are young adults doing on Pinterest and why?

As with all social media, Pinterest users have the option to consume content, share content, or some combination of the two activities. Our data revealed that the majority of young adults who use Pinterest —59%—are both consumers and creator/curators. Only 3% of respondents report being solely creator/curators, and 38% report solely consuming content. Next we examined what young adults view on Pinterest. We found that what young adults report viewing is consistent with the most popular categories on the site. As shown in table 1, young adults reported viewing lifestyle-related boards—DIY, clothing, recipes, home décor—the most. Further, young adults report not only following their friends, family members, and users with similar interests, they also report following brands, companies, and industry personalities.

TABLE 1, TOP PINTEREST BOARDS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Top Pinterest Boards Among Youth			
#1	DIY & Crafts	#6	Health & Fitness
#2	Women’s Fashion	#7	Humor
#3	Food & Drink	#8	Art
#4	Home Décor	#9	Hair & Beauty
#5	Weddings	#10	Quotes

Next we examined why young adults use Pinterest. As shown in figure 6, young adults largely report using Pinterest for entertainment (e.g., to have fun, see/hear something entertaining, laugh) and learning (e.g., to get better at doing something, find out more about someone/something). We further examined users who reported a moderate or high interaction with other pinner (i.e., other Pinterest users) to see how these “power users” utilize Pinterest.¹⁾ We found that while the power users performed all activities more than the non-power users, they were especially in sync with the learning and sharing aspects of Pinterest and reported doing activities, such as using Pinterest to get better at doing something, share ideas/information with peers to advance a topic, and teach others about something you have learned, more often than overall users.

FIGURE 6, TOP PINTEREST BOARDS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

#1	DIY & Crafts	#6	Health & Fitness
#2	Women’s Fashion	#7	Humor
#3	Food & Drink	#8	Art
#4	Home Décor	#9	Hair & Beauty
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Pinterest compared to other social media

A main goal of our study was to compare how young adults use various social media and determine if they use Pinterest in similar or different ways than other social media. Our data demonstrated some clear distinctions and much overlap. Figure 7 compares the top reasons young adults use Pinterest and other popular social media—YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, which are used by 93%, 92%, and 36% of young adult social media users, respectively. As shown, young adults use all these social media for similar reasons—to have fun, laugh, and to see/hear something entertaining. Interestingly, to “have fun” was the #1 reported reason for using Pinterest. While young adults reported using the other popular social media to have fun as well, they reported other reasons, such as to “see/hear something entertaining” as #1 for YouTube and Twitter, and to “find out more about something/someone” as #1 for Facebook. This suggests that marketers should be consistent with users’ objectives, and post “fun” things on Pinterest accordingly.

FIGURE 7, YOUNG ADULTS ON OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

PINTEREST COMPARED TO OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

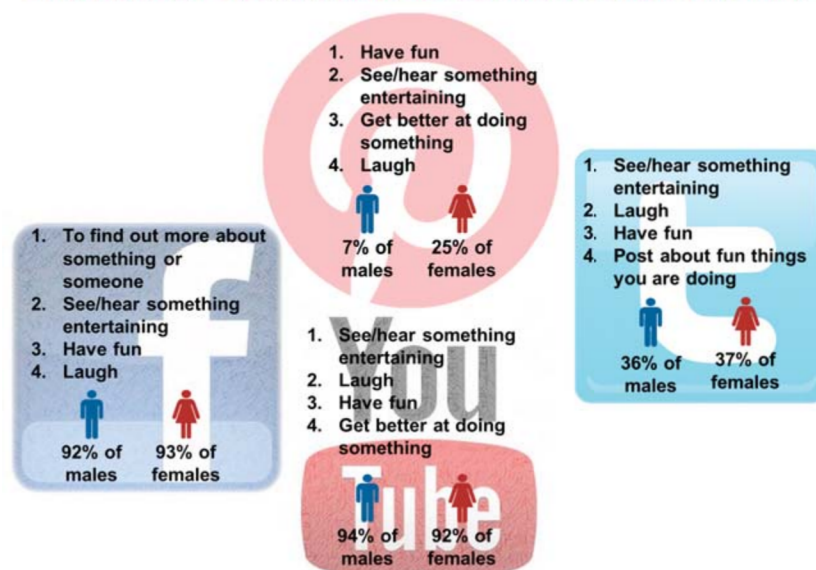
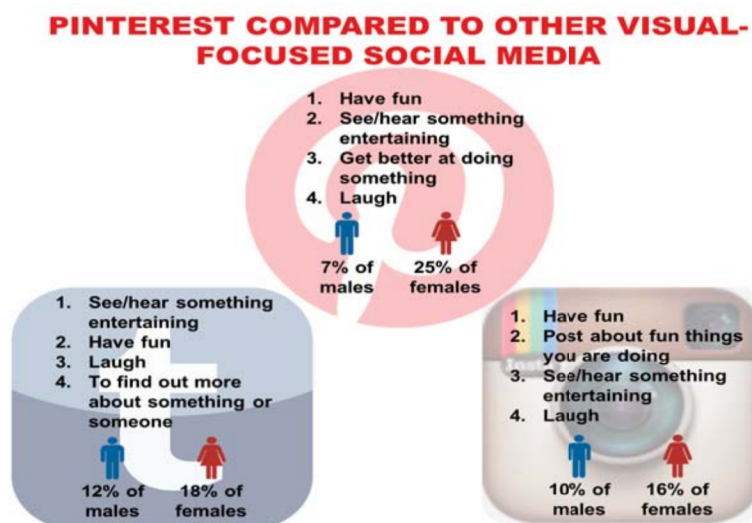


Figure 8 compares the top reasons young adults use Pinterest and other visual-focused social media— Tumblr and Instagram. As demonstrated, young adults use all three visual-focused social media for similar reasons, to have fun, and to laugh. As shown, compared to the other visual social media, young adults report only using Pinterest to get better as doing something. Thus, marketers should take advantage of this unique reason and post things to teach young adults how to do something or to get better at doing something.

FIGURE 8, YOUNG ADULTS ON VISUAL-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA



WHY SHOULD BRANDS USE PINTEREST TO ENGAGE YOUNG ADULTS?

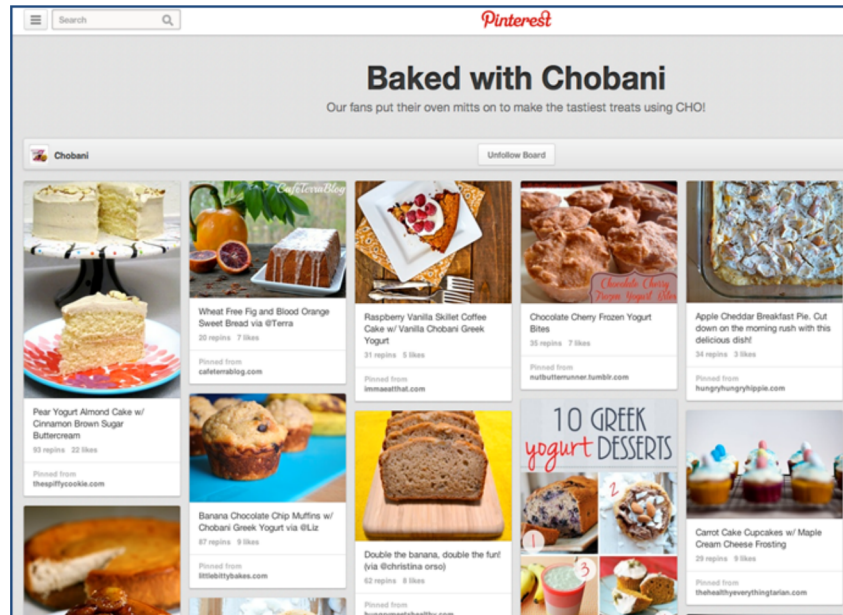
The young adult market is attractive—they are consumers with spending power and provide the opportunity for brands to establish relationships toward the start of their consumer lifetime. Further, in the case of digital outreach, young adults are early adopters who are eager to explore these new environments. Across social media overall, we found that young adults follow others for entertainment (e.g., for things they enjoy, are interested in), to stay informed (e.g., learn about events, updates on what they are doing), and show their support (i.e., they're a fan) (Krulikowski et al, 2013). Thus, young adults are using social media for many reasons, and while they may not be the majority demographic on Pinterest, they are an important one that should not be overlooked. Recent research found that global spending power of teens ages 12 to 19 was \$819 billion, of which U.S. teens accounted for \$117.8 billion (Sommer, 2012). As discussed, we found that 7% of U.S. young adult males and 26% of U.S. young adult females use Pinterest. While these numbers do not indicate that the majority of Internet users are actively pinning and visiting brands on Pinterest just yet, it signifies that brands have an opportunity to reach a very sought-after demographic for its high spending power.

While there is no direct connection to young adults' spending power and their use of Pinterest, we can infer why brands believe efforts spent on Pinterest is more influential and often times lucrative than efforts on other social media sites. One recent study showed that 88% of Pinterest users have purchased a product they pinned, and 49% of users have purchased five or more products they've pinned/repinned (Hello Society, 2013). Sephora, a beauty product retailer, reported that per-capita, Sephora's Pinterest followers spend 15 times more on their products than their Facebook followers do (Koetsier, 2013). Our research supports that young adults are more likely to use social media in their decision processes for retail purchases (e.g., what shoes to buy, what smartphone/cellphone to buy) and less important personal decisions (e.g., what to do in your free time as opposed to what school to attend) than solely product, company or other websites (Krulikowski et al, 2013).

The uniqueness of Pinterest

In addition to young adults using social media for decision making, they also report following brands' boards; thus they are open to engaging with brands on Pinterest. With 59% of users actively consuming and creating/curating pins and 38% consuming pins, almost all users are exposed to brands, whether through the brands' own pins or pins from other users. Unlike other social platforms that allow brands to push information to followers in a sales-focused matter, Pinterest allows users to interact with a brand as much or as little as they prefer. This allows brands the opportunity to tell a story, share helpful hints, suggestions and ideas with their followers, in a much more subtle tone. Branded pins may then be repinned or shared by consumers without any direct brand/consumer engagement upfront. For example, as shown in figure 9, Chobani Greek Yogurt utilizes a less sales-focused approach on its "Baked with Chobani" recipe board. Through their pins, Chobani can share a recipe that incorporates their Greek yogurt as a main ingredient, and yet their board appears to followers as a helpful recipe board that promotes a healthy lifestyle, rather than a direct sales pitch.

FIGURE 9, CASE STUDY: CHOBANI



Source: Pinterest, 2013.

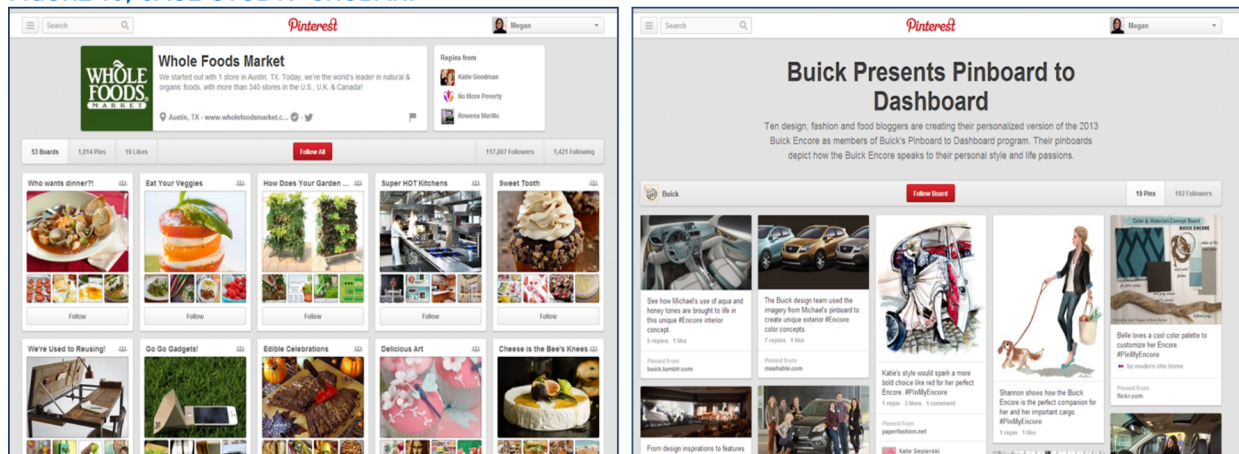
Source: Pinterest, 2013

What brands can benefit the most from Pinterest?

Choosing to pursue a specific social media site as a messaging platform is an investment for a brand; therefore, marketers want to ensure that the return on investment (ROI) is beneficial. Luckily, there are several brands that provide case studies in successful integrating Pinterest into their marketing strategy.

One such brand that is noted in the industry for using Pinterest effectively to reach niche audiences and drive traffic to their website is Whole Foods (Drell, 2012). As a leading organic grocer, Whole Foods has embraced Pinterest by creating boards that focus on the green lifestyle, recycling, holidays, healthy living and recipes, workouts, cool kitchens, food art, strength and workouts, favorite books, and more. (See figure 10.) They appeal to an incredibly diverse group of users through 53 boards ensuring that anyone familiar with their brand has something to follow. They even have a board to pin to and share ideas with other like-minded Whole Food pinners.

FIGURE 10, CASE STUDY: CHOBANI



Source: Pinterest, 2013.

Source: Pinterest, 2013

Even brands that may not seem like a natural fit for Pinterest, such as Buick, are able to successfully reach both male and female pinners (see figure 10). In March 2013, Buick introduced a competition to reinvent its brand identity and reach younger consumers by promoting its 'Pinterest to Dashboard' content (Reitsma, 2013). This contest combined their core business – cars – and what Pinterest is known for – style and design – by having top designers and bloggers create boards that would later be turned into dashboard/interior styles for their Encore luxury car. This not only showcased a revitalized and playful Buick, but it also enabled Buick to learn from younger generations and promote memorable interaction with potential future customers.

These examples are just a couple among countless brands that have successfully implemented Pinterest into their marketing strategy. As seen in both, focusing on the user, the users' creativity, and the users' engagement are key to the success of a board or visual post on Pinterest.

As shown previously in table 1, the most popular board topics for young adults were DIY & Craft, fashion, food and drink, home décor, weddings, health and fitness, humor, art, hair and beauty and quotes. A number of lifestyle and retail brands and organizations can play off of these top interests by pinning 'how-to' posts, recipes, inspirational quotes, workouts and fitness tips, and fashion suggestions that might apply to certain demographics, areas, or activity. These board topics provide brands with an opportunity to not only tell a story and showcase their products, but also engage and invite users to participate and share their view on the brand from their own unique perspective.

Most marketers and research teams are faced with the ever-important challenge of showing ROI. Early on, many brands found Pinterest led to success through pushing or referring users to visit their official website, but they were not able to see statistics of repins, pins, and most visited boards. In March 2013, Pinterest made this tracking possible for marketers and announced they would offer an analytics platform for account managers to track pins, repins, links, and comments for verified accounts. This new feature allows marketers to better understand their users' behavior, manage the interaction on their boards, and manage promotions and engagement.

CONCLUSION

Our research suggests that there is great potential for brands to engage with young adults on Pinterest. This opportunity is advantageous to brands as young adults are proven consumers with buying power, are actively consuming and creating/curating content, and are open to engaging with brands on Pinterest. Additionally, brands are able to establish and develop relationships with consumers at an earlier age, setting the stage for lifetime loyalty. Further research specific to young adults' purchase behavior in connection with Pinterest would be beneficial to fully explore the impact of marketing to young adults on Pinterest.

ENDNOTE

1. "Power Users" are Pinterest users who reported that they had moderate or high levels of interaction. These levels of interaction were defined by responses of 3, 4, or 5 to the question "How often do you interact with people through Pinterest when you use Pinterest?" Response options were on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was defined as "Never" and 5 was defined as "Always."

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