WEBER SHANDWICK

INLINE

COMMUNICATIONS

REPORT 2009

WELCOME TO INLINE

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING. WELCOME TO A TEMPLATE FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COMMUNICATIONS. WELCOME TO A KEY FOR UNLOCKING THE DIGITAL DOOR. WELCOME TO INLINE COMMUNICATIONS.

This report highlights the results of a pan-European study of adult consumers to obtain insight into the communication channels that influence consumer opinion and purchase habits.

We have used the results of this comprehensive research to validate our INLINE Communications approach. INLINE describes communications that are integrated across all channels: online, offline, experiential, word of mouth…

INLINE is not just a philosophy, but also a process. There is a methodology behind the insights provided in this report that allows Weber Shandwick to deliver measurable campaigns that provide concrete results.

To find out more, please contact us. We'd be delighted to come and provide you with some tailored insights – and to help you 'get INLINE'.

C. Byrne

Colin Byrne

AN INTRODUCTION TO INLINE COMMUNICATIONS

INLINE COMMUNICATIONS SEEKS – FOR THE FIRST TIME – TO PUT REAL DATA INTO THE HANDS OF COMMUNICATORS THAT ENABLES THEM TO DEPLOY THEIR COMMUNICATION RESOURCES IN THE MOST APPROPRIATE, EFFECTIVE AND COST-EFFICIENT WAY.

By understanding how consumers process product information – or more simply, how their purchase decisions are influenced – we can help PR and communications managers plan campaigns that reach their target audience in the places where they are influenced.

A great deal has been written about the decline in influence of the traditional media and yet more still about the rise in online search technology, and the mass adoption of self-publishing tools and interconnected networks of individuals that have helped contribute to the traditional media's demise. But to what extent is that true, and how does it affect the European consumer?

INLINE Communications is a simple concept: that your communications activity – and the stories you tell – should not be isolated within channels. Rather than create separate online and offline campaigns (and teams to manage them), brands should create campaigns that draw no distinction between the channels deployed. Consistent stories should be told across all the media that reach your target. What you do offline should also be visible (discoverable) online. In short, your communications should be INLINE.

Great theory, but what about the reality? We set out to prove that INLINE Communications was more than just a clever play on words. We wanted to demonstrate to brands that European consumers really do value traditional media channels. We wanted to establish the true influence of the new digital channels.

And we wanted to create a template for communications campaigns that ensured money and resources were maximised, with measureable results that truly influenced the target audience.

We created the INLINE Profile. To do this we asked a representative sample of 4,692 European consumers the following question:

When thinking about purchasing goods or services in general, how influential are these sources in helping you make your purchase decisions?

The results enable us to create a profile for the target audience that maps how – and where – they are influenced. This becomes the template for our communications activity, providing a framework for our teams to deliver against.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHEN IT COMES TO INFLUENCING PURCHASE DECISIONS, ONLINE ADVOCACY CARRIES THE MOST INFLUENCE OF ALL COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS.

Young European consumers are more influenced by the traditional media than their older counterparts.

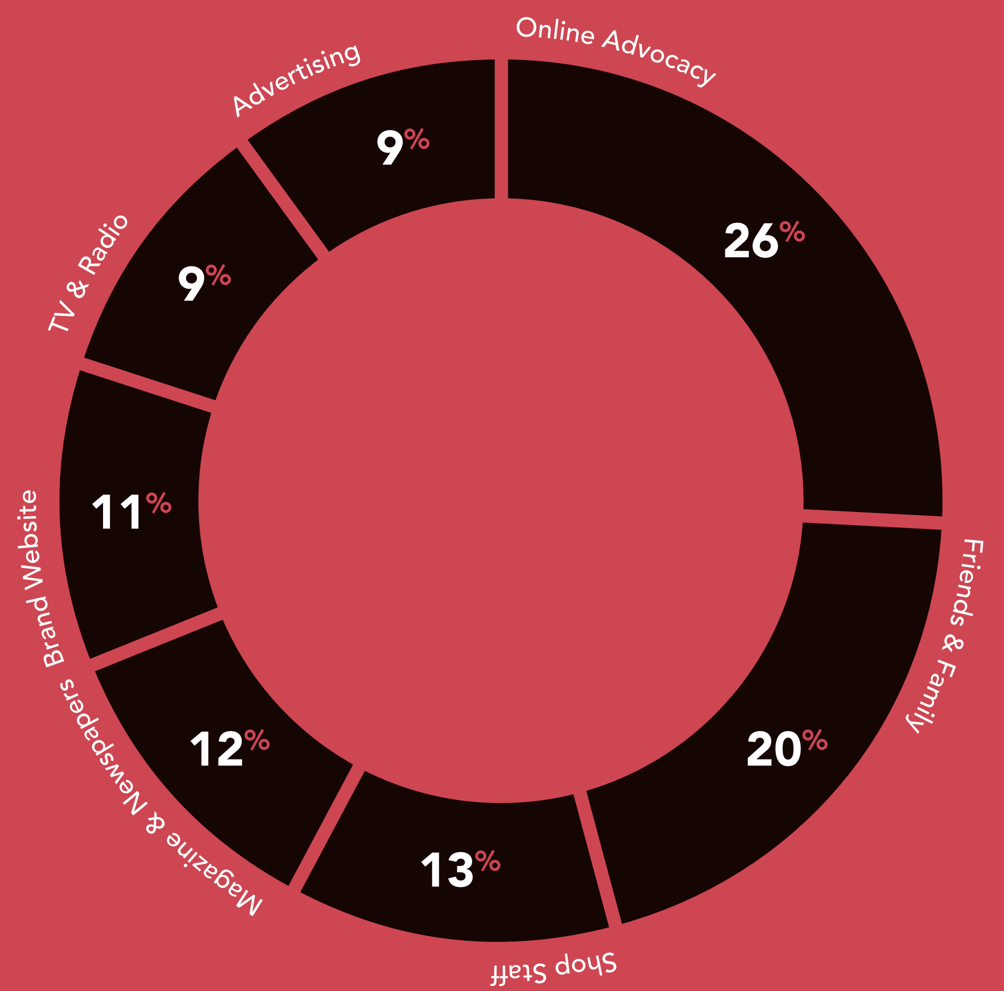
Over half of European consumers under the age of 35 expressed a desire to interact with brands via social networks.

Newspapers and magazines are more influential to French and UK consumers than those in other European markets.

Advertising is cited as having the least influence on Europeans' purchase decisions.

Many European consumers do not wholly accept what they read online until they have checked the facts in mainstream, traditional media.

INLINE Profiles are consistent across all European markets.



SOURCE 4,692 European consumers, 18+, July 2009

PAN-EUROPEAN RESULTS

THIS IS THE INLINE PROFILE FOR ALL EUROPEAN CONSUMERS.

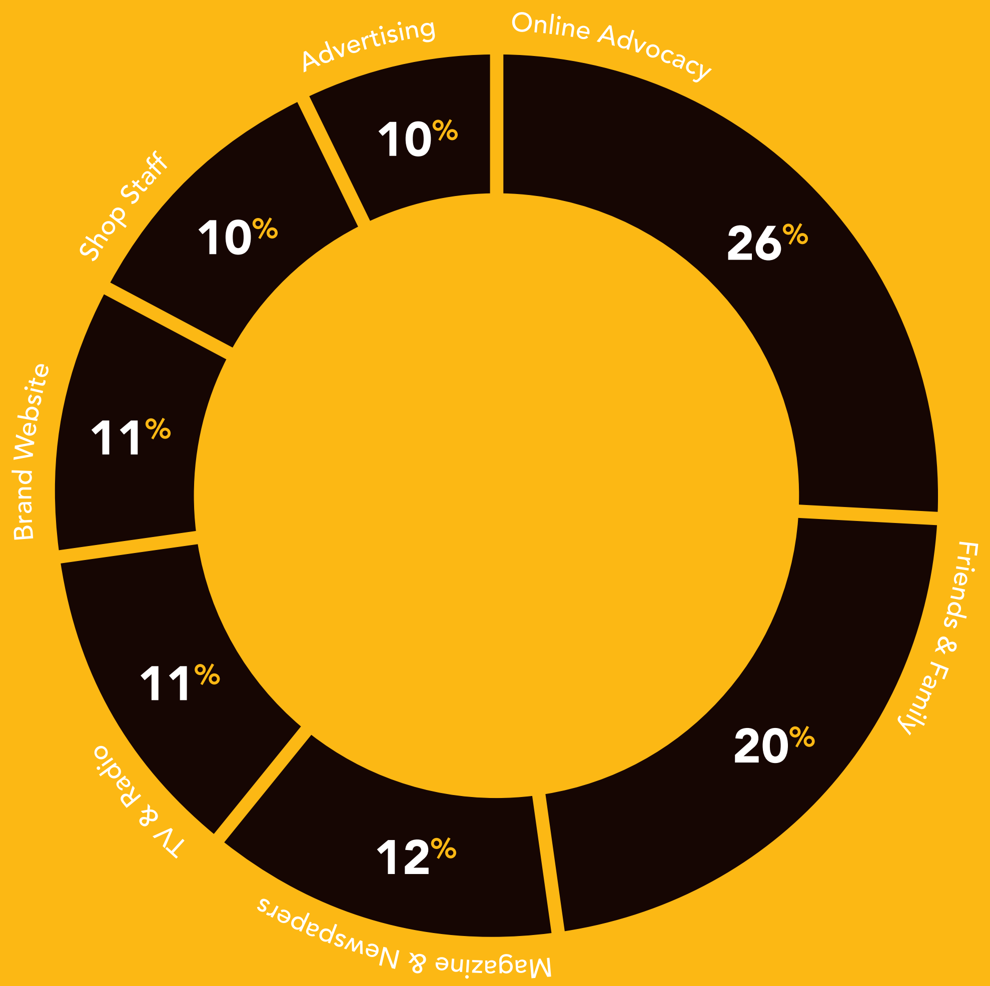
Online advocacy is now the most influential source of information for European consumers (26%). Online advocacy is defined as online user reviews and recommendations. This is remarkably consistent across Europe, with every market citing it as the most influential source of information. Similarly, every market agreed that the second most influential communications channel on their purchase decisions was their friends and family (20%).

From a pan-European perspective, the advice and recommendation of shop staff narrowly beats traditional print media into third place. This is where the regional market differences come into play, as shop staff are referenced by UK consumers as being one of the least influential sources of information. However, the traditional media is universally consistent in its level of influence across all markets.

Bringing up the rear – from a purchasing influence perspective at least – is advertising. While it is certainly a useful tool to build and maintain brand awareness, European consumers are all united in agreeing that advertising has the least influence on their purchase habits of all cited communications channels.

COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY

WEBER SHANDWICK INTERVIEWED 4,692 EUROPEAN CONSUMERS IN BELGIUM, FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, SPAIN AND THE UK. INTERESTINGLY, THE SURVEY RESULTS WERE REMARKABLY CONSISTENT ACROSS ALL MARKETS SURVEYED.



SOURCE 1,021 UK consumers aged 18+, July 2009

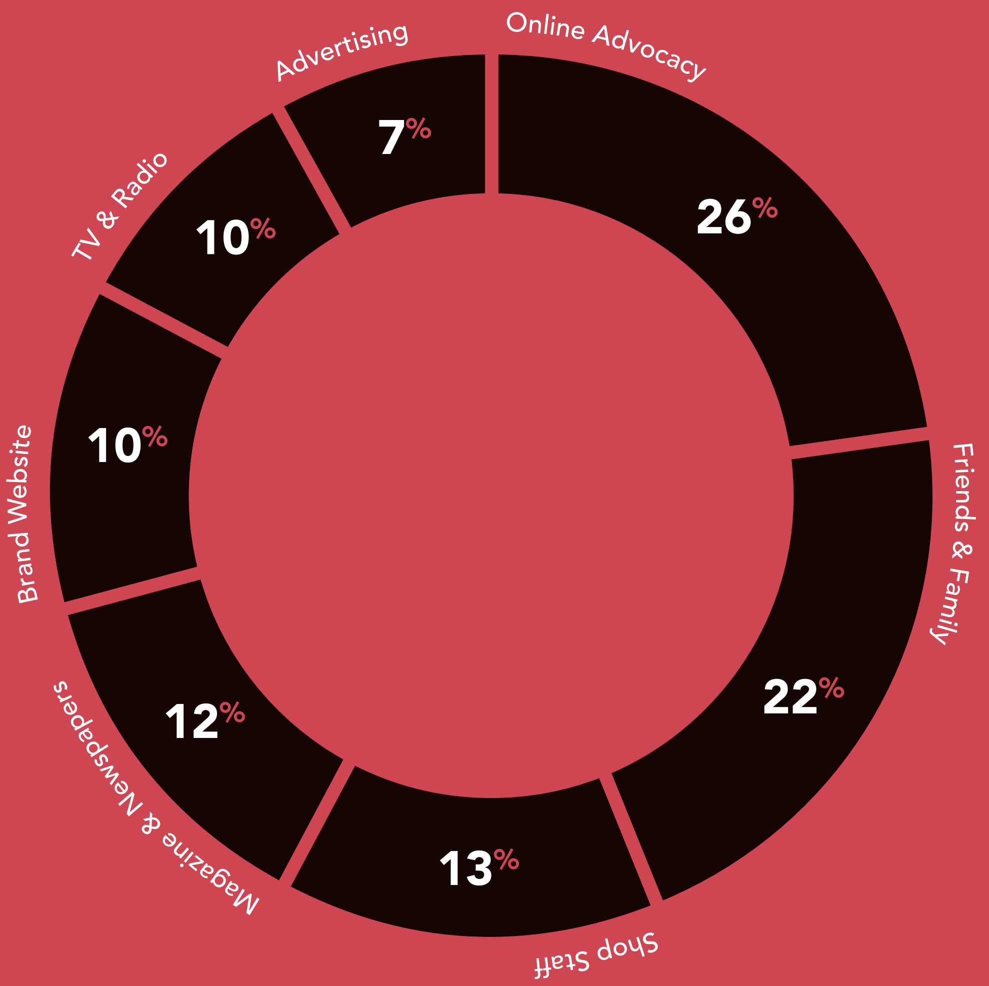
UNITED KINGDOM

THE MOST DIGITAL COUNTRY IN EUROPE?

Half of UK consumers under the age of 35 specify that they find traditional print media influential, compared to only 34% of over-35s. This flies in the face of informed wisdom – but of course makes sense when you consider the volumes of media (especially magazines) aimed at a younger audience.

Almost half (43%) of UK consumers often don't believe what they discover online until they've checked the facts in the mainstream, traditional media.

Although one in three (31%) of UK consumers state that they would be interested in interacting with their favourite brands via social networking sites, 24% were strongly opposed to the concept.



SOURCE 1,036 German consumers, aged 18+, July 2009

GERMANY

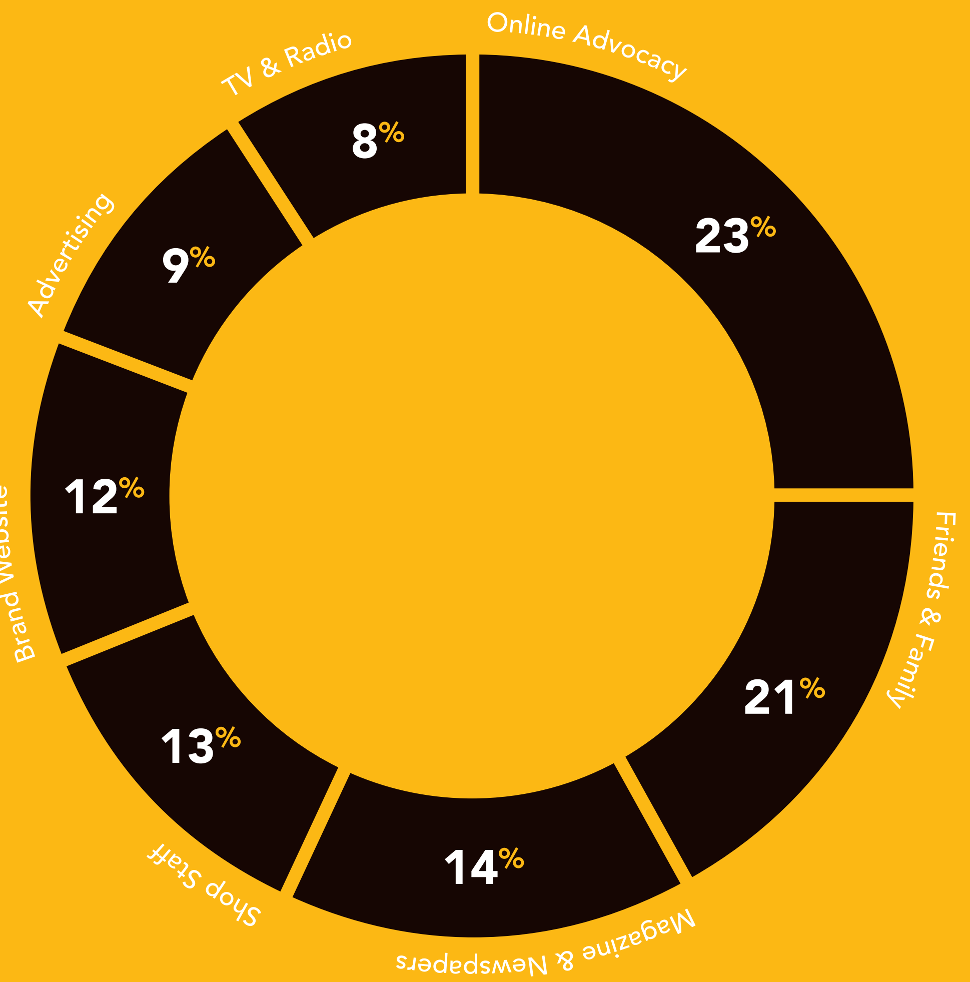
THE OVERNIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA SENSATION!

Two-thirds of German consumers under the age of 25 would be interested in interacting with their favourite brands through a social network. The same age-group is also more likely than those over 25 to check facts uncovered online in the traditional media before they believe them.

Shop staff are deemed more influential on purchase decisions to German consumers than newspapers and magazines.

Recommendations from friends and family are more important to German consumers than any other European market surveyed.

German consumers are least likely to be influenced by advertising.



SOURCE 1,008 French consumers, aged 18+, July 2009

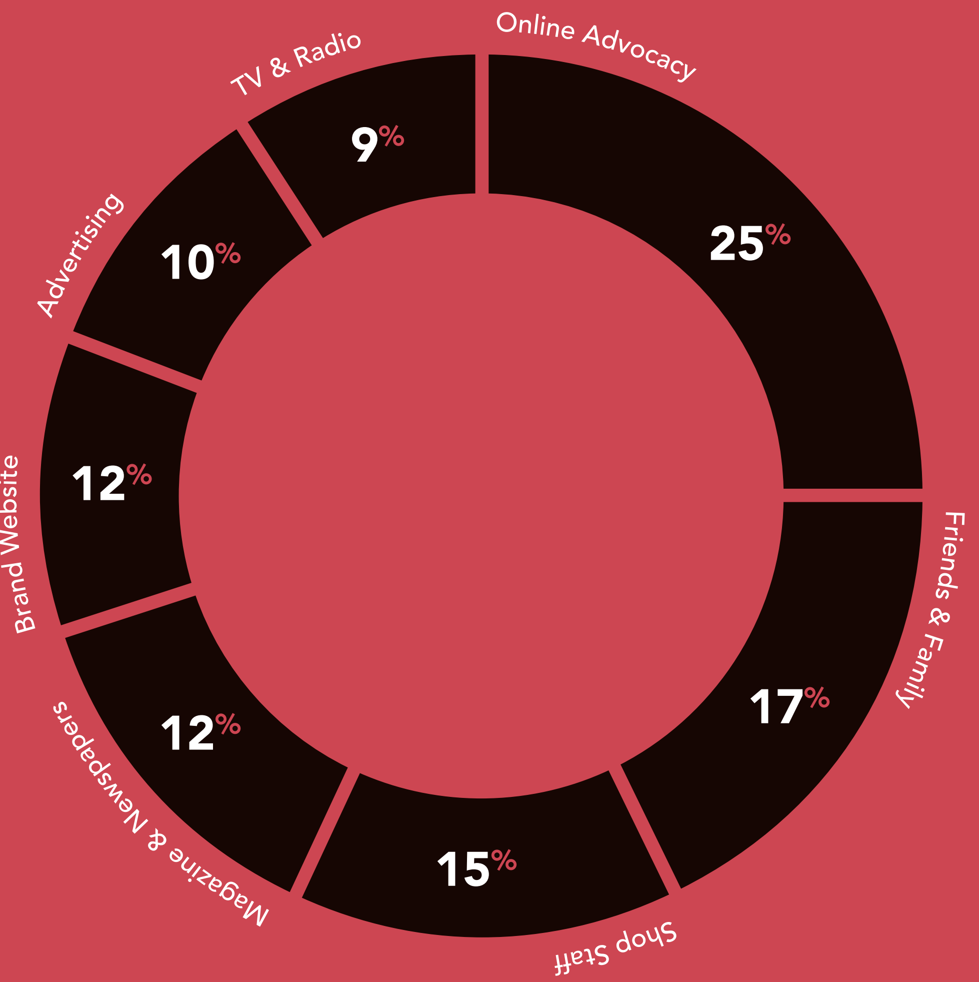
FRANCE

SOPHISTICATED MEDIA AND STRONG TRUST IN ONLINE.

French consumers place more emphasis on newspapers and magazines as an information source than any other European market. Conversely, although online advocacy is cited as being the most influential source of information, it is less influential proportionately than any other market.

French consumers under the age of 35 are twice as likely to be influenced by recommendations from friends and family as those over 35.

France has most faith in what it reads online, with only 36% of respondents claiming they would check online facts in the traditional media.



SOURCE 514 Spanish consumers, 18+, July 2009

SPAIN

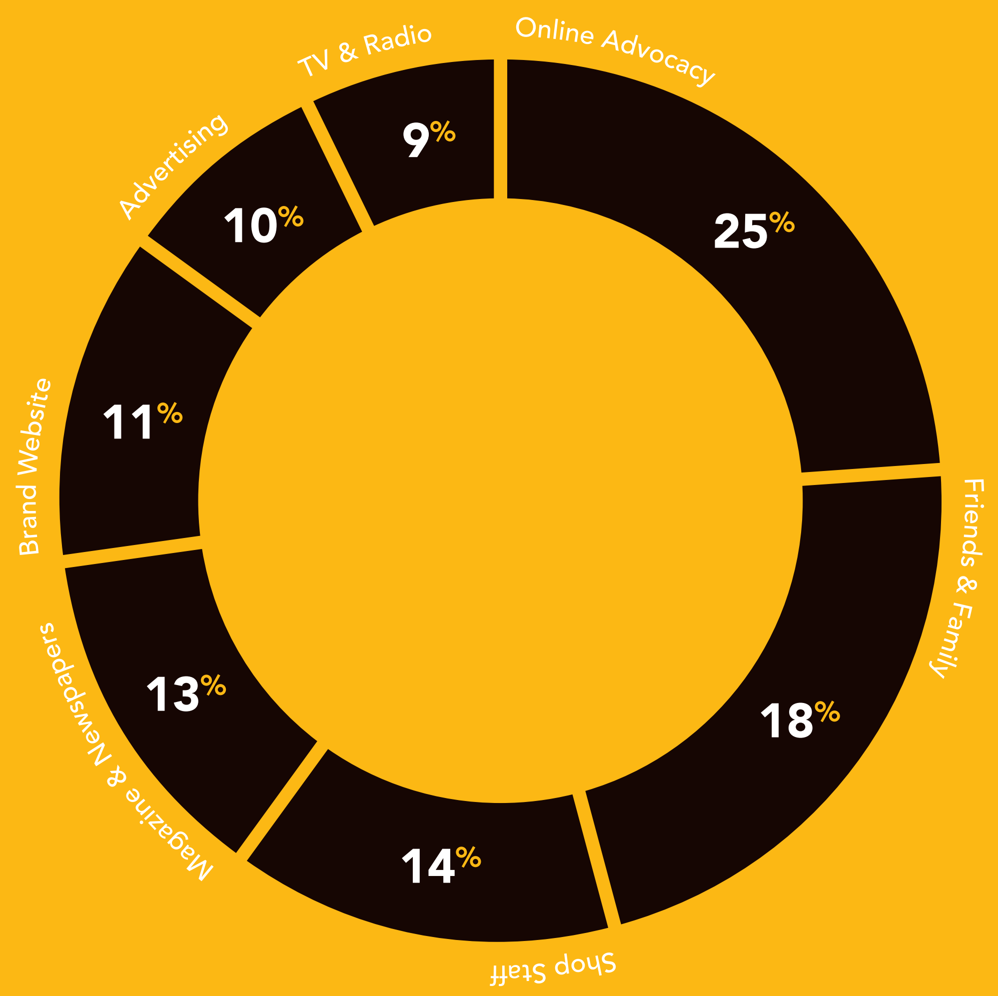
A NATION OF SHOP SEEKERS.

Shop staff have more influence over purchasing decisions in Spain than in any other market, wielding particular influence over female respondents (with 77% of Spanish women indicating that shop staff were influential).

Almost half (47%) of all Spanish respondents expressed a desire to interact with their favourite brands via a social network.

Recommendations from friends and family are less influential in Spain than all other European markets.

TV and radio have more influence in Spain than any other market surveyed.



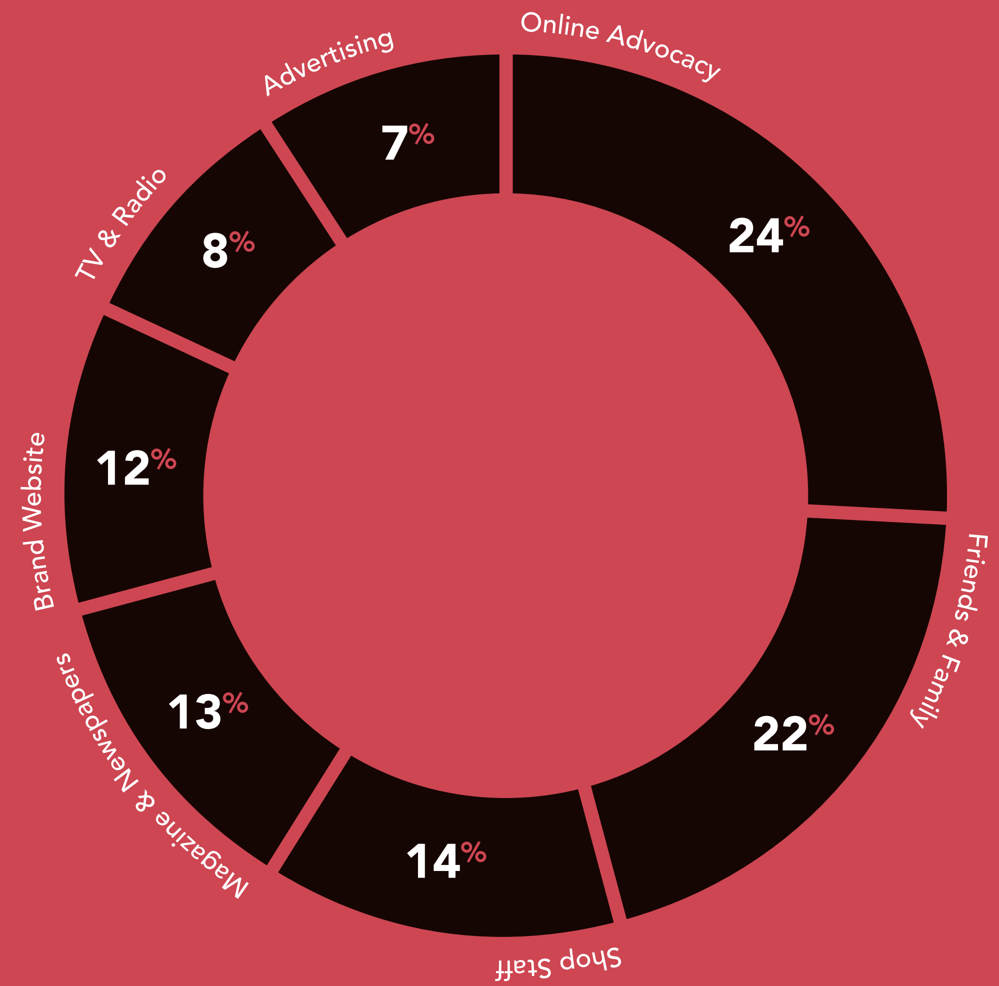
SOURCE 517 Italian consumers, 18+, July 2009

ITALY

THE MOST SOCIALLY NETWORKED CONSUMERS IN EUROPE?

Half of all Italians (50%) were interested in interacting with their favourite brands via a social network, the highest percentage of all countries surveyed. In addition, the number of Italian consumers who indicated they did not want to interact with brands via social networks was also the lowest in Europe (19%).

Italians are second only to UK consumers in not trusting what they read online until they have checked the facts with a mainstream media source (40% of Italian consumers agreeing with that statement).



SOURCE 530 Belgian consumers, 18+, July 2009

BELGIUM

THE MOST INDEPENDENT CONSUMERS IN EUROPE.

The levels of influence of all cited communications channels were comparatively lower in Belgium than those observed in other countries.

Belgian consumers were most opposed of all European consumers to interacting with their favourite brands through social networks, with 43% of respondents claiming they would not want to do so.

Young Belgians (under 25) are twice as likely to be influenced by online advocacy than older respondents.

CONCLUSION

OUR RESEARCH PROVES THAT THE CONCEPT OF INLINE COMMUNICATIONS IS A VERY TIMELY ONE. ONLINE ADVOCACY IS NOW OVERWHELMINGLY THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CHANNEL FOR CONSUMERS LOOKING TO BUY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.

It also demonstrates that there is much cross-fertilisation between channels, with consumers checking out facts and opinions in print, on the radio and TV as well as the Web. Therefore a truly consistent and complementary brand story must be told across channels both 'old' and 'new'. This is at the heart of INLINE Communications.

No longer can brand communicators just pay lip service to digital channels. The growth of digital media – social and otherwise – has driven consumers online to research and validate their purchasing decisions. The heady combination of simple search technology and the ease with which European consumers can publish their opinions online has created an enormous opportunity for marketers to identify and mobilise advocates for their brands.

But communicators must be mindful that they do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. The fact that a large proportion of European consumers turn to the established media to verify what they read online points to the continuing value of a robust media relations function. Analysis of advocacy networks teaches us that there are key influencers within each and every community, both on- and off-line. The trick is knowing who they are, how to reach them and how to then amplify their support for your brand. The good news is many of these are the 'traditional' influencers that PR professionals have been speaking to for years.

The opportunity INLINE presents brands is to tell a consistent story and to tell it in the places where they know their audience seeks information. Analysing these channels and knowing how to tell stories across each of them, how to integrate social media into a campaign in such a way that it complements your existing activity rather than duplicating or replacing it – that is the secret of INLINE Communications.

Weber Shandwick has developed a planning methodology – and a workforce – that enables it to help you deliver campaigns that are truly INLINE. We'd love to tell you more about it.

For more information, contact your local Weber Shandwick office or James Warren on **+44 20 7067 0503** or email **europeinline@webershandwick.com**