

Do Reviews Still Matter? Study Looks At Changing Consumer Behavior via @sejournal, @MattGSouthern

BrightLocal has released a new report analyzing 15 years of consumer review behavior data. The findings reveal shifts in how people research and buy from local businesses.

Here's more about the study and what it means for marketers.

Historical Trends

The report tracks the popularity of online reviews. It notes a rise in local business research from 2015 to 2016, which coincided with smartphone ownership reaching 77% among U.S. adults.

This trend peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when 59% of consumers said they researched local businesses nearly daily.

After that, the number of consumers researching local businesses steadily decreased.

Traditional Review Metrics Less Important

Consumers now place less importance on traditional review metrics:

- Fewer consumers expect perfect five-star ratings.
- People care less about how recent reviews are compared to 2018–2020.

- Star ratings still matter, but more customers see them as “vanity metrics” instead of accurate indicators of business quality.

The report notes:

“This reinforces the point that consumers are more understanding of the challenges to maintain high ratings, and that it’s not a realistic indicator of true quality as a standalone factor.”

Consumers Willing To Write Reviews

Consumers may care less about reviews when deciding what to buy but are still willing to write them.

In the last five years, almost three-quarters of adults in the US have written an online review.

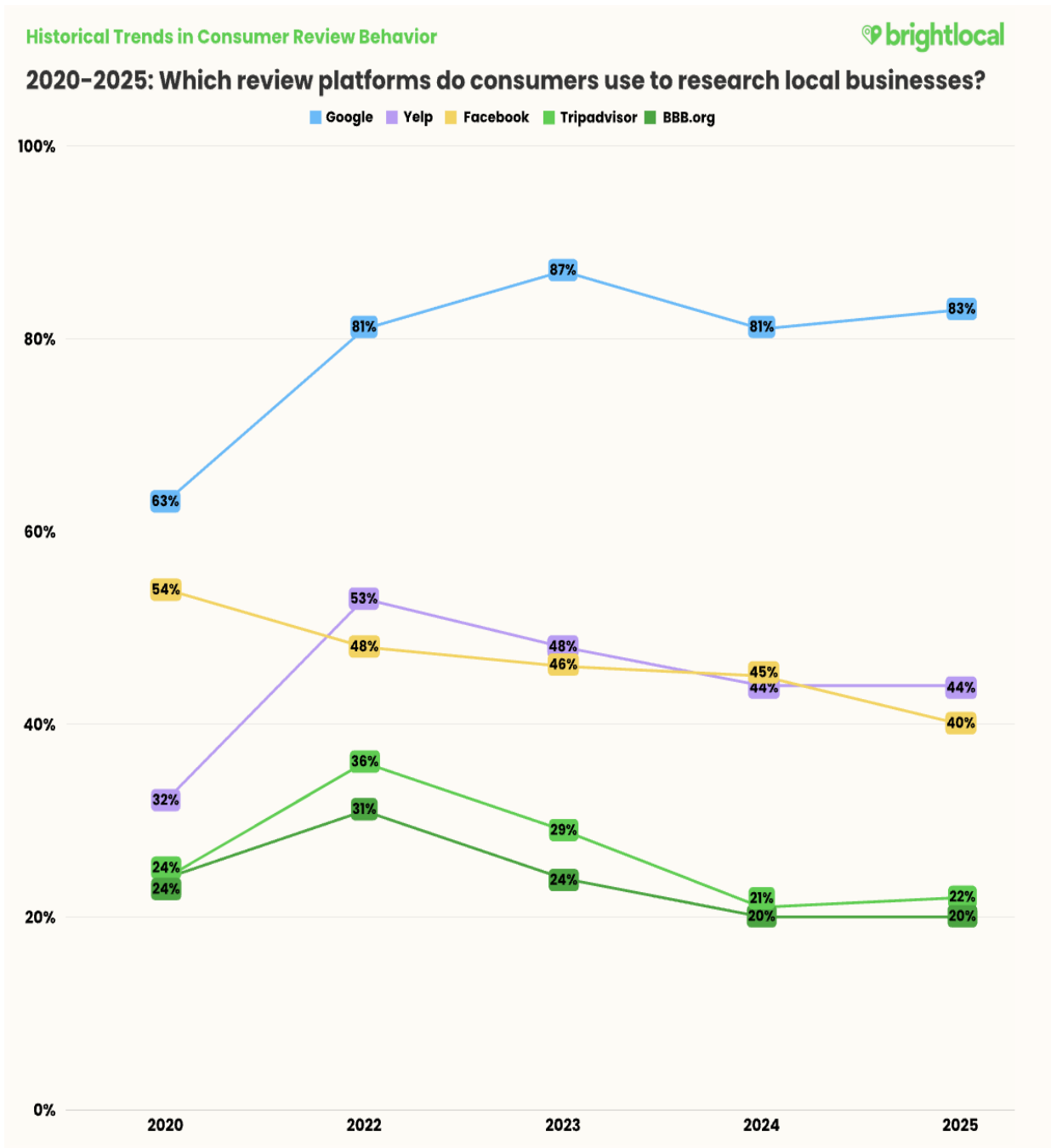
Additionally, data indicates that consumers are more willing to write reviews, even if they didn’t do so in the past year.

The report states:

“For business owners, what this shows is that, despite the challenges of maintaining a consistent stream of new reviews, consumers are overwhelmingly willing to write one. It’s all about giving them a strong reason to do so (AKA a memorable experience) and catching them at the right time.”

Related Webinar:

Platform Preferences



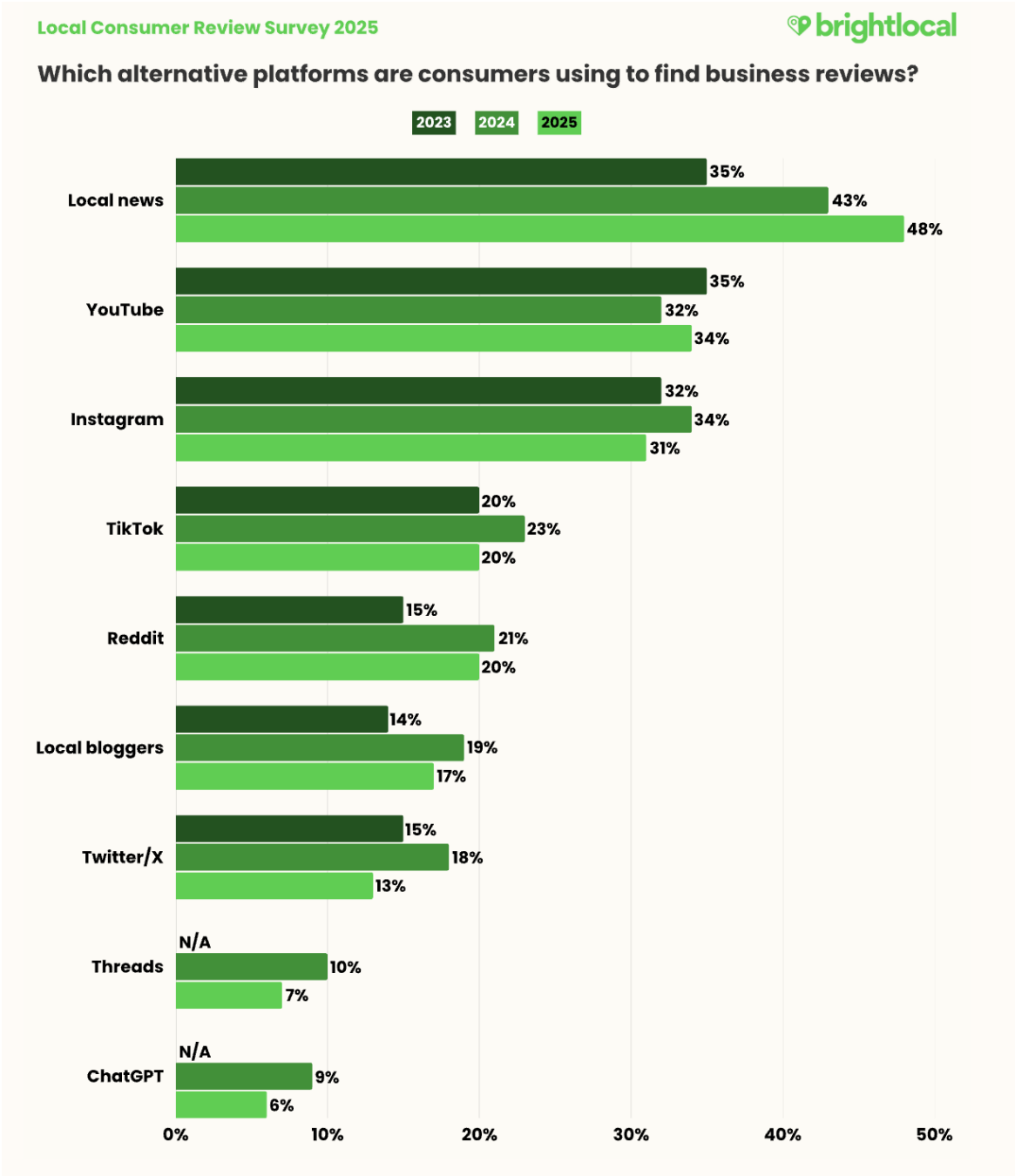
Screenshot from: brightlocal.com/research/consumer-reviews-historical-trends/, March 2025.

Google continues to lead as the preferred review platform, but the research shows movements among other platforms:

- Facebook has dropped in both usage and trust from 2020 to 2025.
- Yelp remains stable as a trusted review source.
- Platforms like YouTube, local news outlets, and social media are more influential in helping consumers make decisions.

The report suggests that the distinction between “traditional” and “alternative” review platforms is less relevant, posing the question:

“What does a consumer care about the definition of a review platform, really?”



Screenshots from: brightlocal.com/research/consumer-reviews-historical-trends/, March 2025.

I’m sharing a personal anecdote here: I tend to do much of my local business research on YouTube and TikTok.

I'm traveling out of town this month, and I used a combination of both platforms to decide which hotel to book, the exact room type I wanted to book, and the restaurants I wanted to eat at while I'm there.

As the report notes, I felt the experiences shared on YouTube and TikTok were a more authentic representation of what I'd experience as a consumer. Although they don't have standardized review systems, videos offer all the information needed to make an informed decision.

What This Means For Marketers

While recency and star ratings matter for local visibility, they no longer tell the whole story for customers.

BrightLocal's study offers these takeaways for marketers:

1. Be visible on various platforms, not just review sites.
2. Respond to customer feedback instead of just aiming for high ratings.
3. Use your business identity, like a Google Business Profile, to connect with socially conscious consumers.
4. Adapt to the changing ideas of "review platforms."
5. Ask for reviews. Customers are willing to write them, so don't hesitate to ask.

See the full report.

Featured Image: ImageFlow/Shutterstock

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/do-reviews-still-matter-study-looks-at-changing-consumer-behavior/541077/>