

RETAIL

Consumers still value in-store shopping for impulse buys

April 29, 2021



Smartphones are the top choice for browsing online. Image credit: Unsplash

By KATIE TAMOLA

Consumers are allured by the convenience, ease and greater product choice offered by online shopping, according to new research from [Bazaarvoice](#).

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More consumers are showing a preference for online shopping, with 61 percent of global consumers more likely to browse for new products online compared to in-store, while 64 percent and 54 percent of consumers find online shopping easier and more enjoyable, respectively. While the research shows that the majority of consumers enjoy browsing new products online, many consumers still prefer the physical experience of shopping and are more likely to make spontaneous spur-of-the-moment purchases in-store.

"I think that online browsing and buying will continue to beat out in-store, likely indefinitely," said Suzin Wold, senior vice president of marketing at [Bazaarvoice](#), Austin. "However, I also think that in-store shopping will never completely go away.

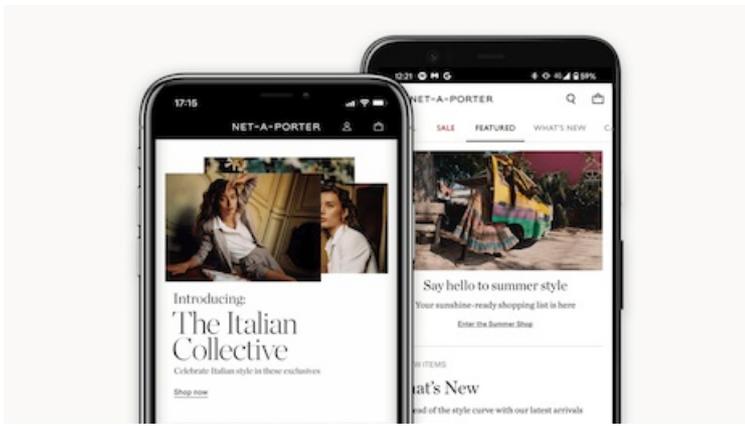
"Brands and retailers need to always utilize a good mix of both the online and in-store experience to ensure that customers can find, buy, and receive whatever they need whenever they need it," she said.

Bazaarvoice worked with market researcher Savanta to survey more than 9,000 consumers across the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada and Australia.

Different strokes for different folks

While online shopping is vastly appealing, many find certain aspects of in-person shopping preferable, as some consumers still want to physically feel and see an item before committing to purchase.

The physical experience is the most popular reason some shoppers elect to browse in-store compared to online, which highlights a need for brands and retailers to build greater online trust and confidence with user-generated content (UGC).



Retailersites can offer better user experiences for shoppers than Amazon or Google, even on a smartphone. Image credit: Net-A-Porter

When it comes to the most appealing aspects of online shopping, 59 percent cite convenience, 46 percent give credit to the ease of the process and 39 percent state the greater product choice is what makes the mode preferable.

Smartphones are the top choice for browsing online for almost half of consumers at 41 percent, followed by 28 percent of consumers using laptops and 21 percent using desktop computers. With online shopping offering immediate access, consumers spend more time browsing for products virtually compared to in-store, with 53 percent of consumers spending more than 15 minutes browsing in a single online session.

In-store shopping is still desired, as 68 percent of U.S. consumers are buying products in-store at least once a week, compared to 42 percent of consumers making weekly online purchases.

Sixty-nine percent of U.S. consumers are likely to buy a spur-of-the-moment item while shopping in-store compared to 52 percent being likely to engage in the same kind of purchase online. Whether it is online or in-person, consumers are still likely to spend the same amount on an impulse purchase, with the majority stating they will spend a maximum of \$20.

Although many consumers associate written reviews with online shopping, there are myriad ways for brands to utilize UGC both in-store and virtually.

"Displaying UGC in the forms of reviews and written testimonials around the store will help inspire purchase," Ms. Wold said. "Displaying photos and videos of other past customers with the product will help immensely as well 55 percent of people said they look up photos and videos from other shoppers when they've discovered a new product.

"And we know that shoppers often look up reviews online while they are in the aisle searching for a product, seeing this visual content of other consumers just like them allows the shopper to envision themselves using or wearing the product and may make them consider purchasing something they may not have otherwise," she said.

Brand and retailer websites have a certain advantage over platforms like Amazon and Google, as they are not only able to customize and make landing pages relevant, but also ensure that an ecommerce experience replicates the in-store buying experience. Brands' images on a website are more likely to lead to the discovery and purchase of new products for 39 percent of consumers, compared to 30 percent of consumers using internet searches on sites like Google.

Consumers are increasingly putting a great deal of importance on ratings and reviews. Forty-seven percent of consumers list product reviews as the top thing they want to see from a brand's website experience, and ratings and reviews are one of the most important factors influencing consumer's product discovery process at 47 percent, after 67 percent of consumers ranking price the most important factor.

LOUIS VUITTON



Consumers are more likely to make a spur-of-the-moment purchase in-stores. Image credit: Luxury Society, Louis Vuitton

The fluctuating availability of products during the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected brand loyalty, as 48 percent of respondents state they would make an impulse purchase online from a brand that they did not know, compared to 29 percent of consumers who would not. Impulse purchases from an unknown brand in-store are even higher with, given the appeal of a physical experience, 58 percent of consumers willing to spontaneously splurge.

Ratings and reviews have become more pertinent to brand success, with more than three-quarters of American consumers using ratings and reviews as a key resource in deciding whether to trust a brand.

UGC appeal

Through their online and in-store presence, brands should continue to look for ways to produce user-generated content, as consumers value the confidence and transparency UGC offers.

Returns can eat into retailers' bottom lines, but providing enough context and information through features such as UGC can help consumers anticipate what to expect ([see story](#)).

In 2017, beauty marketer Lancme leveraged user-generated content to drive sales conversions in a more personal and realistic approach to marketing, which gleaned significant results. Lancme was able to derive a 4 percent conversion lift after launching a user-generated campaign for its portable compact, Miracle Cushion ([see story](#)).

Whether a brand has already utilized UGC or is considering how to adapt, experts claim it is a multifaceted entity that can lead to success.

"UGC is priceless, and brands need to utilize it in any way that they can," Ms. Wold said. "From product pages, to social media, to email marketing, and print advertising, UGC is an asset that can be used pretty much anywhere products are promoted and sold.

"The simplest way to generate reviews are to ask for them," she said. "For instance, once a customer purchases from you, be sure to send them a follow up email a week or so later, also known as a post-interaction email, asking them to review your product after using it."

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