

RETAIL

## Shopping in-store feels good again: report

June 29, 2021



Four in five consumers feel comfortable going to physical stores. Image credit: Neiman Marcus

By NORA HOWE

Global consumer confidence is starting to rise as the world adapts to the post-pandemic "new normal" and shoppers are ready to get back into physical stores.

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Following its [2020 Shopper Sentiment](#) survey, media solutions company Mood Media found that 80 percent of consumers now feel "somewhat" or "very comfortable" visiting physical stores, up 9 points from 2020. Three in five consumers surveyed for the [June 2021 Global Mood Survey](#) expect their shopping habits to be back to pre-pandemic levels by or before the end of this year, while 21 percent report their shopping habits have already returned to such levels.

"Consumers worldwide tell us they love the sensorial and tactile nature of physical retail the ability to touch, smell, taste, see, hear and try products in-person," said Scott Moore, global chief marketing officer at [Mood Media](#), Austin, Texas. "Additionally, they've missed the instant gratification and the joy of discovery that comes with physical retail.

"These are all aspects of shopping that should fit beautifully within the world of luxury, as many luxury brands already have a rich history of engaging and immersing their consumers into a holistic brand experience," he said. "However, because shoppers have spent the last 15 months romanticizing those experiences, their expectations and desires for even more elevated in-store experiences are extremely high.

The research was conducted by [Censuswide](#), with survey responses collected between May 28 and June 1, 2021 from 8,012 individuals in the United Kingdom, United States, France and China. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the [Market Research Society](#) which is based on the [ESOMAR](#) principles.

Returning to physical

More than half of respondents, 54 percent, said shopping in-store feels good again, with one in three of them declaring it feels "really good."

Consumers in the United States are the most comfortable with in-store shopping as of mid-2021, at 86 percent, up from 68 percent in September 2020.



*More than half of respondents now report having a positive in-store experience. Image credit: National Retail Federation*

In the U.K., where in 2020 consumers were the most cautious about returning to the physical retail space, consumer confidence has since jumped from 62 percent to 76 percent.

Only 5 percent globally cited not feeling comfortable at all about returning to stores, while 16 percent report feeling not very comfortable doing so.

Globally, most consumers, 84 percent, say there is no significant difference in the amount of money they are currently spending compared to before the pandemic.

However, after over 15 months of global uncertainty, the data also indicates that consumer spending overall is on the rise. The percentage of respondents reporting an uptick in their spending compared to before the pandemic has increased from 23 percent in September 2020 to 29 percent in June 2021.

The percentage of consumers reporting they are spending less has also gone down, from 38 percent in 2020 to 25 percent in June, while those citing spending the same as before the pandemic has increased from 40 percent to 46 percent.

The social aspect of shopping with friends and significant others is the second-most missed experience associated with physical shopping, with 35 percent of respondents citing this reason.

Almost a third of global consumers, 32 percent, declare having missed the leisurely side of shopping in stores. Chinese consumers have missed this aspect more at 40 percent, with 16-24 year-olds having missed it the most globally at 34 percent.

The ability to feel, touch and try products continues to rank as the number one reason to buy in-store versus online, with 59 percent of respondents agreeing, followed by the instant gratification of taking purchases home and browsing and discovering new things.



*Shopping malls were ranked as the top spot missed by Chinese and U.S. respondents, 61 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Image credit: The Mall*

Revealing what global shoppers have missed most about the physical shopping experience during lockdown, largely pointing to benefits that do not exist when shopping online, 45 percent said it was the experience of "touching and trying on" items on the spot that they missed most when stores were closed.

Phygital retail

Consumers have also enjoyed the merging of physical and digital, with a third, 33 percent, of them citing plans to

continue using click-and-collect or BOPIS (buy online, pickup in-store) services beyond the pandemic, with U.S. consumers above the global average at 38 percent.

Accelerated by the pandemic, luxury retailers have had to adapt to the rising demand for online shopping services. U.S. retail company Neiman Marcus Group is expanding its digital investments with its acquisition of Stylyze, Inc., a cloud-based software platform.

The acquisition of Stylyze, which helps deliver enterprise solutions to home and fashion retail verticals, will assist Neiman Marcus in building a differentiated luxury experience. This is the first of several digital investments and growth moves planned for the retail group ([see story](#)).

In October 2020, department store Saks Fifth Avenue launched a new website, marking the first comprehensive website redesign from the retailer in the last five years. Using Salesforce Commerce Cloud, saks.com now emphasizes fashion, convenience and personalization while ensuring flexibility for future enhancements.

The site allows customers to add items directly to their carts or "Wish List" from a variety of products, while product pages now feature a stylized "Complete the Look" section with the ability to add items directly to cart. Additional filtering options, such as buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS), same-day delivery, preorder and currently available are also offered to provide a more convenient shopping experience ([see story](#)).

"The pandemic placed pressure on stores to innovate at a faster pace, leading to an accelerated phygital' evolution which merges the physical and digital shopping experience," Mr. Moore said. "Consumers have told us they want click-and-collect and buy online, pickup in-store options to continue well beyond the pandemic."

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