

RETAIL

Pent-up demand, summer splurges driving consumer spending: Amex

July 16, 2021



Shoppers are buying clothing for events delayed by the pandemic. Image credit: American Express

By KATIE TAMOLA

After a year of lockdowns, restrictions and spending several days in the same clothes while working from home, consumers are ready to resume spending.

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Pent-up excitement, desire for new types of clothes and the temptation of a nice splurge purchase are all factors propelling consumers back to shopping, according to a new survey from the American Express Trendex. Respondents are purchasing certain items for different reasons, with 42 percent of respondents saying purchasing new clothes is one of the most important factors in returning to work or otherwise regular routines.

"We saw significant changes in shopping preferences as people spent more time at home," said Emily Chin, vice president and general manager of U.S. retail, merchant services at [American Express](#), New York. "Now, consumers are more excited than ever for in-person experiences.

"From going back to sporting events, restaurants and even indoor malls, people are ready to get back out there after spending so much time indoors," she said.

The Morning Consult poll was conducted June 2-14, 2021 with a national sample of 2,000 general population consumers with a household income of at least \$50,000, and a national sample of 500 small business decision makers. Results from the overall survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

What consumers are buying

Particularly as COVID-19 eases, consumers have a range of needs and preferences when it comes to shopping. Some consumers are shopping in preparation for a return to the office, some to reward themselves and some to make up for lost time.

About four in 10 adults said they are looking forward to spending money on outfits for events that were delayed due to the pandemic.



Half of millennials plan to invest in items they would not have purchased pre-pandemic. Image credit: Neiman Marcus

About a quarter, 27 percent, are ready to spend money on items they would not have previously purchased, such as high-end jewelry and watches. Specifically, 50 percent of millennials also noted they had plans to invest in items they would not have purchased pre-pandemic.

Twenty-nine percent of adults noted wanting to make an "all-out" purchase like a car, while this percentage jumps to 49 percent among millennial respondents.

Fifty-three percent of adults said they are looking to buy sporty clothes this summer, like athleisure or gym aesthetic, while this jumps to 70 percent for the millennial population.

Thirty-one percent of adults noted looking to buy streetwear this summer, reflecting a "hip-hop or skater aesthetic," with the percentage rising to 73 percent among Gen Z respondents surveyed.

Nearly eight in 10 adults are going a relaxed route for summer attire, looking to buy casual clothes like jeans and T-shirts. For work attire moving forward, 57 percent of respondents said they will focus on selecting clothes that are both comfortable and work-appropriate.

As consumers are actively trying to adapt and identify their post-pandemic sartorial for work and home, brands are experimenting with new ideas and concepts, even adding a spin to leisurewear.

For instance, this April, Italian menswear brand Ermenegildo Zegna unveiled a new fashion line hoping to launch a new wearable category of clothing, "Luxury Leisurewear."

The collection represents a shift in the way consumers approach style and sophistication, as the brand aimed to weave a new versatile wardrobe into its DNA. Zegna has reimagined the classics to reflect the cultural zeitgeist where consumers lounge, live and work all in one place and prioritize personal comfort ([see story](#)).

Resurgence of self-care

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a prolonged time of restriction and worry, leaving consumers around the world limited to where they could go and what they could do. Many consumers have had to take care of themselves in the comfort of their own homes, but as global conditions improve, people are looking forward to once again indulging in self-care.

About two-thirds of women reported planning to get a haircut in the next six months. Eighty percent of women are planning to get a manicure in the next six months, while 35 percent are planning to get a pedicure.



Several factors are propelling consumers back to shopping. Image courtesy of American Express

These numbers are indicative of the excitement to return to pampering.

Affluents are eager to return to in-person pampering, after COVID-19 restrictions forced consumers to adapt to at-home skincare routines and virtual wellness checks.

Spas and premium wellness centers took a massive hit when lockdowns began, but are beginning to reopen as governments lift non-essential restrictions. In combination with the freedom to safely visit these businesses, new values centered on self-care and mental wellbeing are pushing consumers to indulge in aesthetic services ([see story](#)).

Self-care is a concept that brands are becoming more cognizant of, differentiating their offerings so as to show consumers taking care of one's self is not a one-size-fits-all prescription, but can have several routes. One can certainly reward the self experiences, and can also do so with products.

In May, Italian beauty retail platform Mozzafiato celebrated spring by showcasing its men's fragrance collection which aims to transport consumers to the Mediterranean.

Based on the belief that scent has the ability to trigger a range of emotions that can elevate mood, evoke memories and build connections, Mozzafiato hoped to bring the benefits of Italian self-care to men's routines. The "For Him" collection includes cologne offerings, shower and shaving gels and various skin creams ([see story](#)).

Whether it's a new shirt, automobile, fragrance or trip to the spa, consumers are ready to shop again in conjunction with happier, safer times.

"It was surprising to see how the pandemic created a pent-up demand for spending across so many categories from beauty to fashion to lifestyle," Ms. Chin said. "Now that consumers are returning to their regular routines, our survey showed that about half of adults plan to go to local retail stores more frequently than they did prior to the pandemic, indicating a change in their shopping behavior."

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