

RETAIL

Shopping habits, expectations evolve as consumers return to stores: Mood Media

October 23, 2022



Shoppers are returning to bricks-and-mortar stores with heightened expectations across all retail channels. Image credit: Galeries Lafayette

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

As consumers return to bricks-and-mortar stores in full force, they are coming back with evolved shopping habits and expectations.

Shoppers now increasingly see both online and offline as part of the same purchase journey not one versus the other, per a new report from **Mood Media**. Due to their growing comfort levels in the online space, they now expect similar levels of digital technology solutions as an integral part of the physical sales space.

"The results indicate that consumers expect the retail and hospitality venues they frequent to create emotional connections and elevated experiences," said Miya Knights, a retail-focused author and publisher who consulted on the research project.

"They are also looking for human interaction and sensory stimulation, where stores offer indisputable advantages," she said.

Mood Media's *Charting In-Store Trends* report aims to unearth how shoppers' attitudes towards physical sales environments are evolving. By doing so, it also highlights what store owners need to do going forward in response.

The influence of digital in-store is evident in the growing number of shoppers who are also looking for ways to take charge of their physical experience, per the study.

Mood Media carried out the study for two weeks in September among 12,261 consumers ages 18 and up in China, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States about their attitudes towards shopping in stores.

The respondents had visited at least one physical retail store or hospitality space within the last 12 months.

Per the survey results, shoppers want stores to empower them through digital self-guided shopping journeys that can also surprise and delight them.

That said, stores still have a fundamental role in consumers' shopping journeys.

But striking the right balance between interaction, experience and self-service, as well as instant gratification and sustainability, will ensure that stores remain indispensable in the future, Ms. Knight said.

Shop talk

Digital self-service and sustainability are climbing shopper agendas, ranking highly in their list of store expectations, according to Mood Media's report. So, it is critical to judge how customer expectations are shifting accordingly.

Repair services or recycling points emerged as having positive influences on a shopper's decision to visit a store.

Spaces that adopt sustainable practices or sell more sustainable products will have the most significant net positive effect on sales.

Beyond broad shifts, it is crucial to consider that more consumers ages 35-44 say they are visiting stores more often than two years ago compared to any other age group, the study found.

Those over 55 were the least likely to say they were visiting stores more often.

Friendly, knowledgeable staff are more valued in smaller stores than in larger ones.

Plus, branded music playlists and scents, for example, encourage shoppers to dwell longer in-store.

These 2022 findings provide crucial insight into how stores can win with consumers and play an important part in the overall shopping journey.

Indeed, they also serve as a timely reminder that what matters in-person experience and interaction does not change, just our means of accessing it, per the Mood Media report.

Gauging shopper expectations

More than one-third (38 percent) of consumers expect to shop in physical stores more often than two years ago, according to the report.

Globally, one-third (33 percent) said their visit frequency is the same as before, led by Germany (45 percent).

The effects of ongoing lockdowns are still being felt in China, while higher levels of ecommerce penetration track in line with countries polling either below average or less often, per the report.

While younger age groups tended to say they are visiting stores more often, the highest proportion was 62 percent of consumers ages 35-44 in the United States.

However, the same proportion (62 percent) of Chinese consumers ages 18-24 say they visit physical stores less often compared to two years ago, which tracks in line with the prolonged lockdowns across this country.

But common complaints persist, the study found.

For example, long queues emerged as one of the main reasons shoppers avoid or leave stores.

Spanish shoppers are most put off, cited by 63 percent, followed by those in the United Kingdom (58 percent) and France (56 percent).

Women (52 percent) were more sensitive than men (45 percent) to long queues.

Advantages of instant gratification

Almost half (45 percent) of consumers responding to the survey cite the convenience of getting their purchases instantly as the most important reason they choose to shop in a physical store rather than online, per the Mood Media report.

New product inspiration and shopping with friends and family ranked second and third, respectively.

But collecting, exchanging and returning unsuitable or unwanted products bought in-store or online was fourth.

This ranking highlights how the role of the store is evolving and how vital it is in facilitating one-stop convenience and digital convergence.

Respondents indicated that they are looking for a good layout and engaging digital screens in large flagship stores.

But friendly, knowledgeable staff are the only factor more important in smaller, local stores, reinforcing the role of expertise in conversion for smaller operators, per the study.

Human touch

Beyond store size and format, the survey underlines how central a role friendly, knowledgeable staff play in creating an enjoyable physical store atmosphere.

A good layout was next, closely followed by an uncluttered environment and fast checkout.

Creating stores with a pleasant atmosphere is most likely to drive repeat visits among 84 percent of those surveyed. This is much more likely to be the case in China, cited by 96 percent the top age group that would visit again were consumers ages 25-34 (87 percent).

Staff availability and layout contribute most to a pleasant in-store experience, according to the survey's findings. But a "nice scent" has the next most significant impact in health and beauty stores.

Consumers believe automotive stores and car dealerships should have digital screens, while quick-service restaurant (QSR) patrons most want free Wi-Fi.

The factors that shoppers consider create a pleasant store atmosphere have not changed much over the years, the survey found.

The top three are availability of friendly and knowledgeable staff in the store, a good layout and uncluttered look, and things to see, touch and smell.

However, the next highly ranked factors vary by sector, per the survey results.

Shoppers preferred interactive digital screens in automotive stores and car dealerships, pleasant music in department stores, the ability to try products or services before buying in fashion and apparel stores and a nice fragrance in the store when visiting health and beauty shops.

Also, fast food restaurants and coffeeshops should offer free Wi-Fi and pleasant light is preferred for specialty stores.

Expectations going forward

Sustainability and digital self-service are climbing shopper agendas when they choose to visit a physical store, the Mood Media report found.

Evolving consumer attitudes to, and understanding of, shopping impacts was most evident among women and millennials.

China and Spain lead on sustainability awareness.

Chinese consumers have the highest digital expectations, with 85 percent saying self-service technology, such as mobile checkout, augmented reality and virtual reality, are essential when choosing to visit a store.

Overall, incorporating branded music playlists and scents ranked third in terms of what shoppers want when they choose to visit a store (56 percent), followed by other digital technology use cases including interactive digital screens (55 percent), information on how to visit a store's presence in the metaverse (49 percent) and video walls (48 percent).

Impact of sustainability

The fact that two-thirds (66 percent) of shoppers rank sustainable practices and selling sustainable products as the highest of all factors when choosing which stores to visit is significant, per the Mood Media report.

The survey also discovered which sustainable factors have the most significant impact.

Where applicable, providing repair services or recycling points for used packaging or clothing are the top two sustainability initiatives that positively influence a shopper's decision to visit a physical store.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) put repair services on top. But, considering some countries now enforce measures requiring store owners to switch off illuminated window displays at night, consumers in China (68 percent), France (65 percent) and the U.S. (59 percent) rank this highest.

Four in five (80 percent) Chinese consumers are seeking information about the environmental qualities and characteristics of products or services for sale.

In the Netherlands, more than one-third (38 percent) favor keeping entrance doors closed to conserve energy used in a store.

The most significant impact of sustainability measures is that consumers feel more positive about their impact as a shopper on climate change (42 percent), the survey found.

Perhaps more importantly, as far as the bottom line is concerned, such sustainability initiatives would also

Perhaps more importantly, as far as the bottom line is concerned, such sustainability initiatives would also incentivize customers to buy something, cited by 37 percent globally.

More than half (59 percent) say sustainable practices or selling more sustainable products would make them more likely to buy, rising to two-thirds of those over 55. The top measures influencing them to purchase are packaging-free products, cited by two-thirds (35 percent) in the U.K. and more than half (56 percent) in Germany.

BY UNDERSTANDING how shopping expectations have shifted to accommodate the role of digital in-store for delivering convenience, alongside the ability to surprise and delight, it can be easy to overlook the importance of nurturing sensory experiences to extend the human touch, according to Mood Media's report.

These elements build the emotional connections consumers seek while elevating experiences through the use of digital technology in the sales spaces they frequent. Doing so may not only win with customers but also drive sales and foster frequency, per the report.

"Mood Media's latest study shows how vital it is to balance digital with physical in stores today," Ms. Knights said.

"Shoppers still expect a pleasant atmosphere, with good lighting, music and things to touch and see," she said.

"Knowledgeable staff and the ability to buy instantly or collect online orders cannot be understated, too.

"But the rising importance of digital technology for self-service, engagement and interaction, and the adoption of sustainable practices and products have a fast-growing role to play in shoppers' choice of store, buying intent and frequency."

MOST POPULAR

1. [Brands should incentivize consumers to go green](#)
2. [Retailers expanding pickup options, facing staff shortages this holiday season: report](#)
3. [Owning the customer experience in an Amazon-disrupted market](#)
4. [Shifts in retail sales of women's designer bags](#)
5. [Macy's trademark decision confirms importance of surveys](#)
6. [Year of the Rooster luxury items: Hit or miss with Chinese consumers?](#)
7. [How luxury is the millennial's unlikely weapon to fight social inequality](#)
8. [Luxury brands need to change their marketing strategy for India](#)
9. [Green is the new black: Backing the Fashion Pact](#)
10. [How resale, rental and flex payments can put luxury within reach – especially now](#)