



Research Insights

Meet the 2020 consumers driving change

Why brands must deliver
on omnipresence, agility,
and sustainability

In association with

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Talking points

Consumer shopping behavior has fundamentally changed

Rather than being a planned, discrete activity, shopping occurs whenever and wherever the mood strikes today's always-on consumers—and this is increasingly while they are doing something else. Seven in 10 consumers surveyed say they shop in these so-called “micro-moments,” and 35 percent do so at least weekly.

Sustainability has reached a tipping point

As consumers increasingly embrace social causes, they seek products and brands that align with their values. Nearly six in 10 consumers surveyed are willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact. Nearly eight in 10 respondents indicate sustainability is important for them. And for those who say it is very/extremely important, over 70 percent would pay a premium of 35 percent, on average, for brands that are sustainable and environmentally responsible.

Values are as important as value

Most consumers fall into one of two segments: Value-driven consumers, who are primarily concerned with getting their money's worth and select brands based on price and convenience; and Purpose-driven consumers, who select brands based on how well they align with their personal values and who are willing to “walk the talk” when it comes to sustainability, changing their behavior, and even paying more for brands that get it right.

Always-on consumers reshape retail

Throughout history, shopping has involved taking a trip, planned in advance, to a favorite store for which a consumer made time. Then, the ecommerce revolution upended that predictable relationship and activity. In lieu of going to a store, people increasingly purchased goods and services online and sight unseen. Yet, it's only recently, a decade or so since the advent of the smart-phone, that a fundamental change truly occurred.

Thanks to mobile technology and social media, consumers have been rewired as it pertains to shopping, and it may usher in one of the industry's biggest shifts in consumer behavior. Today's always-on consumers come highly informed with specific demands pertaining to price, ingredients, delivery options, production methods, and much more. And they shop whenever and wherever the mood strikes them, in so called “micro moments,” often while doing other tasks. In other words, consumers today shop anywhere, anytime, and increasingly, any way they want.

Further, consumers are now driven by “micro-needs” that reveal their desires for specific products or attributes that conform with what they consider important or valuable. Traditionally, the industry produced and carried offerings that varied only slightly from locale to locale, largely based on macro factors such as sales volume, climate, and competitive intensity, to name a few. It's now important to offer items based on specific qualities tailored to meet consumers' demands, such as products that are certified as organic, fresh, environmentally friendly, parabens-free, and the like. Over 70 percent of respondents say they are looking for specific attributes that are important to them when choosing a brand.



81%

of respondents worldwide belong to one of two shopper segments: Value-driven consumers (41%) who want good value and Purpose-driven consumers (40%) who seek products and services aligned with their values.



57%

of consumers are willing to change their purchasing habits to help reduce negative environmental impact.



71%

of those surveyed who indicated that traceability is very important are willing to pay a premium for brands that provide it.



71%

of consumers shop in “micro-moments” (shopping while doing something else). More than one in three say they do so at least weekly and up to multiple times daily.

Paradoxically, as consumer shopping continues to shift toward digital touchpoints, the store is more important than ever, even as its role morphs into something new. For shoppers who crave convenience and immediacy, stores have become critical nodes in the omnichannel supply and fulfillment ecosystem. For consumers who desire experiential and/or communal shopping, stores have become showcases for them to have hands-on engagement with products and brands.

These wide-ranging requirements have radically transformed the retail and brand landscape over the past five years. To better understand how consumer preferences and priorities keep changing, as well as the resulting impacts on brands, the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV), in association with the National Retail Federation, conducted a research study of 18,980 consumers in 28 countries (see Study methodology on page 14). We asked about shopping habits, drivers of brand and product choice, consumption patterns, and the willingness to change behavior based on a variety of personal values and beliefs.

Who are the 2020 consumers?

Four distinct consumer segments emerged from the analysis of our survey, each one representing different areas of focus (see Figure 1):

1. Value-driven consumers (41 percent of all consumers) want good value, convenience, and products/services to simplify life and are willing to pay for those benefits.

Value-driven consumers are primarily concerned with getting their money's worth and select brands based on price and convenience. And unlike the other customer segments, this group isn't inclined to switch habits to reduce negative environmental impact. The highest concentrations of Value-driven consumers are found in North America, Northern Europe, Japan, Korea, and China. Fifty percent of this group report middle- or below middle-income status.

2. Purpose-driven consumers (40 percent) seek products and brands that align with their lifestyle and those with health/wellness benefits.

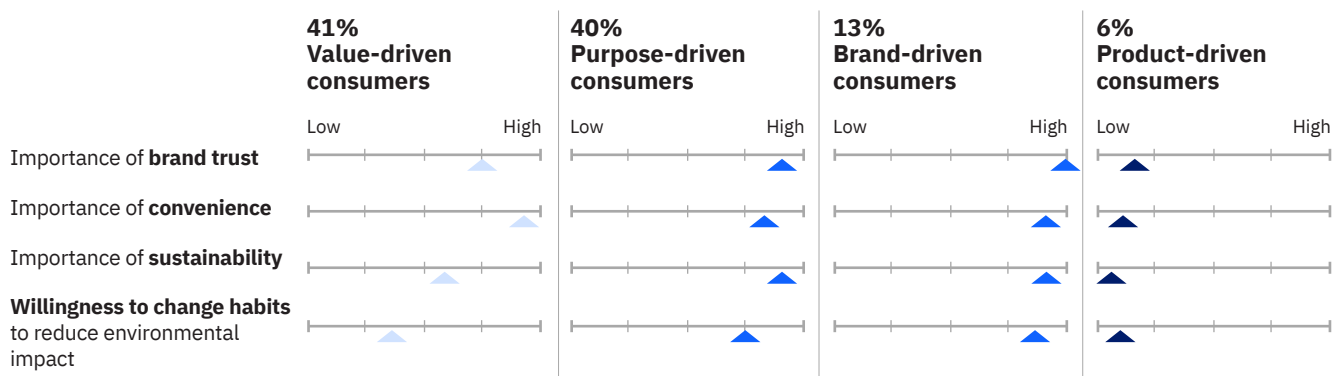
They are willing to pay a premium for products and services that align with their values and lifestyle. Purpose-driven consumers are also willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact and care about issues such as sustainability and recycling. Europe and parts of Southeast Asia and Latin America have the biggest representation of this group. Slightly over half (51 percent) of this group report middle or above middle income.

3. Brand-driven consumers (13 percent) trust brands, and brand is a major factor in their purchasing decisions.

Compared to other groups, they have the highest average income, and they shop and spend more. Brand-driven consumers want it all and are highly engaged in shopping. And, they are willing to pay a premium for assortments that fit their lifestyle. India, parts of the Middle East, and Latin America have the highest concentration of them. Overall, 37 percent of Brand-driven consumers say they have above middle income.

Figure 1

Most of the consumers we surveyed fell into two big groups: those who lead with their wallets and those who consume with their values in mind.



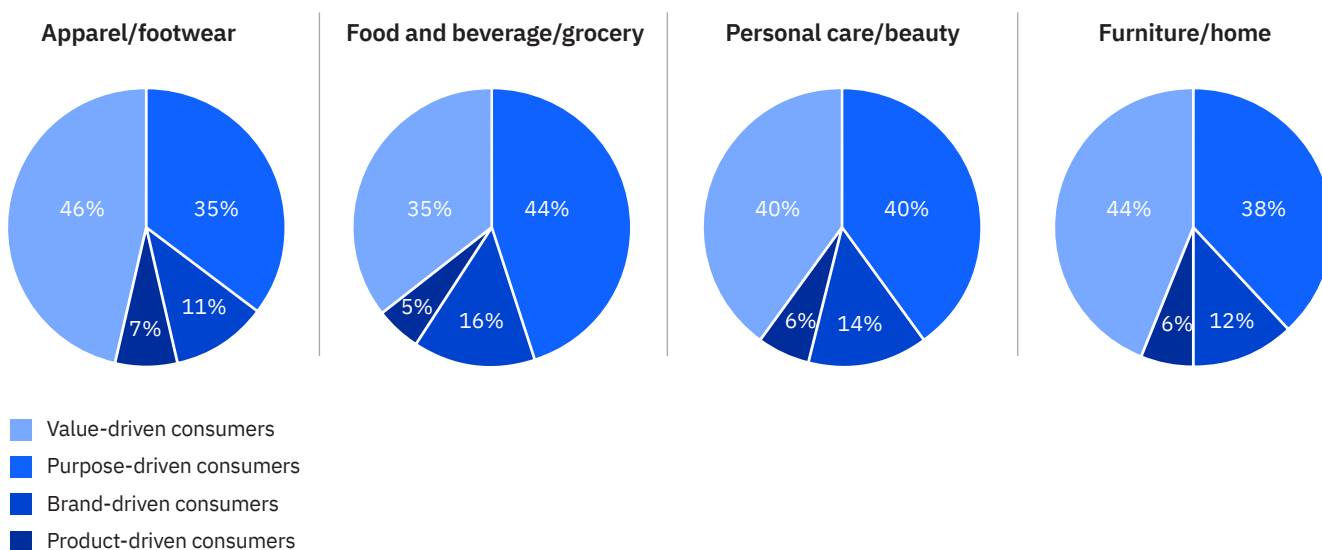
Source: IBM Institute for Business Value.

4. Product-driven consumers (6 percent) focus on product functionality. These consumers are less engaged in shopping overall and are not tied to any brand or product attribute. Rather, our findings lead us to conclude that the Product-driven consumer relies on research for nearly every new product purchase. However, it's not just about price; these consumers are willing to pay a premium for transparency that vouches for product authenticity. Just over half of them (51 percent) identify as earning below middle income.

As interesting as the consumer groupings are overall, it's also notable how the degree of importance changes when it comes to each product category. For example, when it comes to shopping for apparel, 46 percent of consumers are Value-driven. Conversely, when shopping for food, 44 percent of consumers are Purpose-driven, showing that they are more conscientious of what they put in their bodies than what they put on them (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Percentage of shoppers by product category.



Sustainability hits the tipping point

Retail and consumer products companies around the world have been increasing their focus on sustainability over the past five years. Since 2014, global sustainable and environmentally responsible investment is up 68 percent and now tops USD 30 trillion.¹ More and more, awareness of global environmental issues is changing the habits of consumers wherever they live. Already, substantial numbers of people have adopted a back-to-basics mindset, opting for products that are simple, are fresh, and contain fewer or no preservatives or processed elements.²

These attitudes are driving brand choice. Over 7 in 10 consumers say it's at least moderately important that brands offer "clean" products (78 percent), are sustainable and environmentally responsible (77 percent), support recycling (76 percent), or use natural ingredients (72 percent). See Figure 3.

Beliefs drive buying: Consumers shop "for good"

Nearly 6 in 10 consumers (57 percent) are willing to change their purchasing habits to help reduce negative impact to the environment, and among those who say sustainability is important for them, this jumps to 77 percent. Moreover, of those who say these traits are very important, over seven in 10 are willing to pay a premium for brands that support recycling, practice sustainability, and/or are environmentally responsible (see Figure 4).

Figure 3

Consumers are looking for brands that:

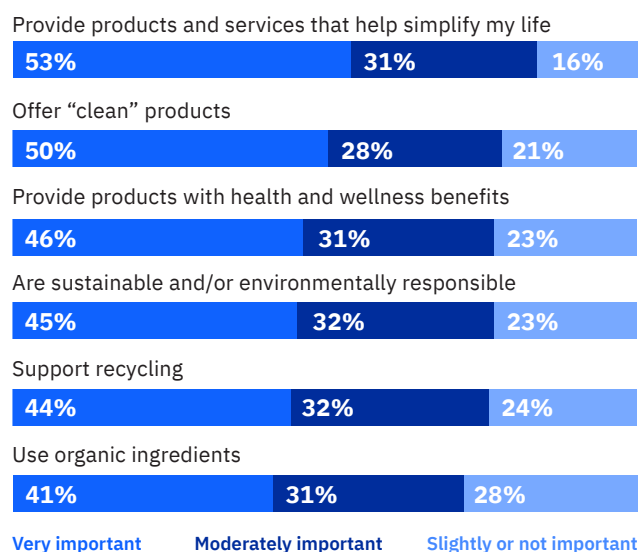
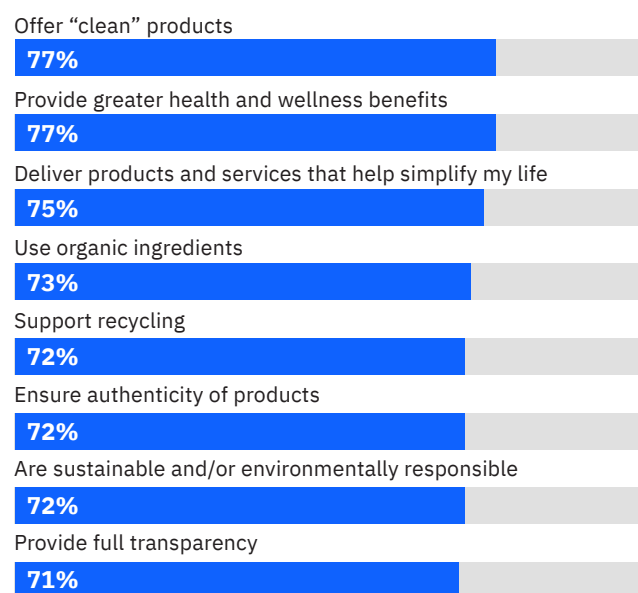


Figure 4

For attributes they say are very important to them, consumers are willing to pay a premium for brands that:



Sustainability priorities transcend age

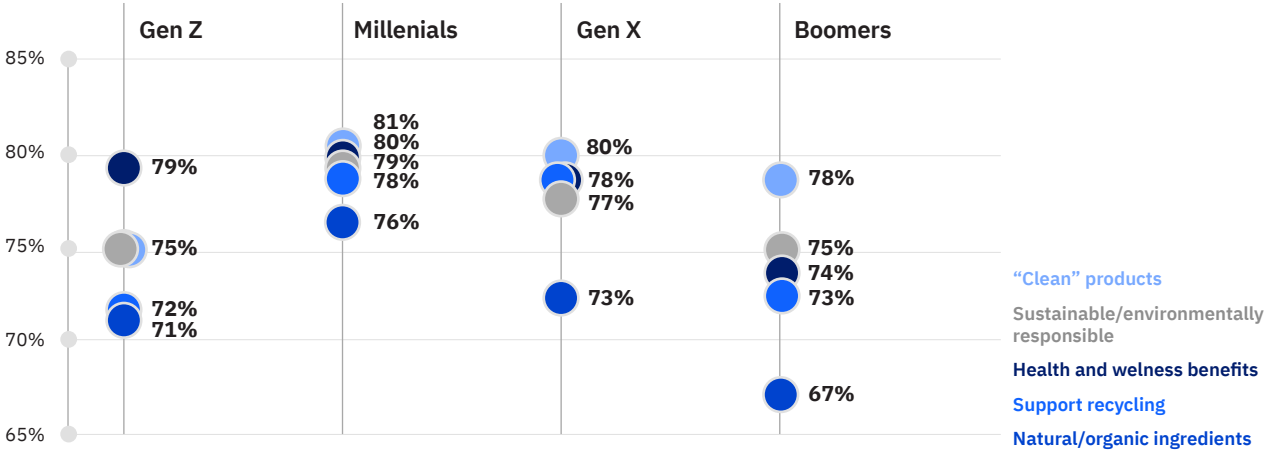
While Millennials may be leading the charge in sustainability awareness, every age group indicates that sustainability, environmental, and/or personal wellness attributes are significant considerations in selecting brands (see Figure 5). While Gen Z cites health and wellness as their top priority, clean products are most important for the other groups. Interestingly, natural/organic attributes are of lower importance across age groups.

Sustainability priorities based on location

Despite widespread importance of sustainability, there are notable differences in shopper priorities across regions and countries. To cater to requirements that vary by geography, companies need to truly understand what’s most important to consumers in each local market. This includes knowing the “sustainability sophistication” or degree to which sustainability is locally embedded and enforced in each market. For example, providing health and wellness benefits is relatively more important in Italy and Spain than in the Nordics. Meanwhile, those in China and India rate “clean” products as their top priority.

Figure 5

Each age group surveyed is very consistent in the relative importance of sustainability and health-related attributes of what they buy. (Percentage of respondents citing these attributes as Very/Extremely/Moderately important to them.)



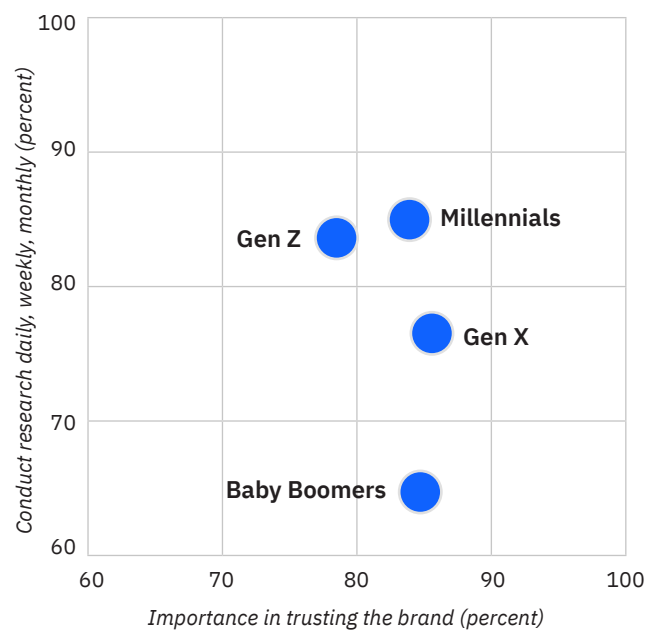
Trust but verify

With sustainability front and center, consumers do more than just check the list of ingredients on a label. They want details about sourcing, how products are made or processed, as well as how they are delivered. Of the consumers surveyed, 73 percent indicate that traceability of products is important to them. Of those who say this trait is very important, 71 percent would pay a premium for it. Shoppers also seek information on corporate sustainability policies. Many want assurances that brands support recycling, fund charitable causes, or take other actions demonstrating social responsibility.

When consumers choose a product with sustainability in mind, 84 percent say brand trust is important—in other words, consumers are using brands as a proxy for the attributes they seek. Strikingly, regardless of how much consumers trust a brand, they will still do extensive research before purchasing (see Figure 6). Even 75 percent of Brand-driven consumers say they conduct substantial amounts of research prior to making purchases. Therefore, trust and credibility need to be constantly reinforced.

Figure 6

Regardless of how much they trust a brand, consumers across all age groups will conduct extensive research prior to making their purchases.



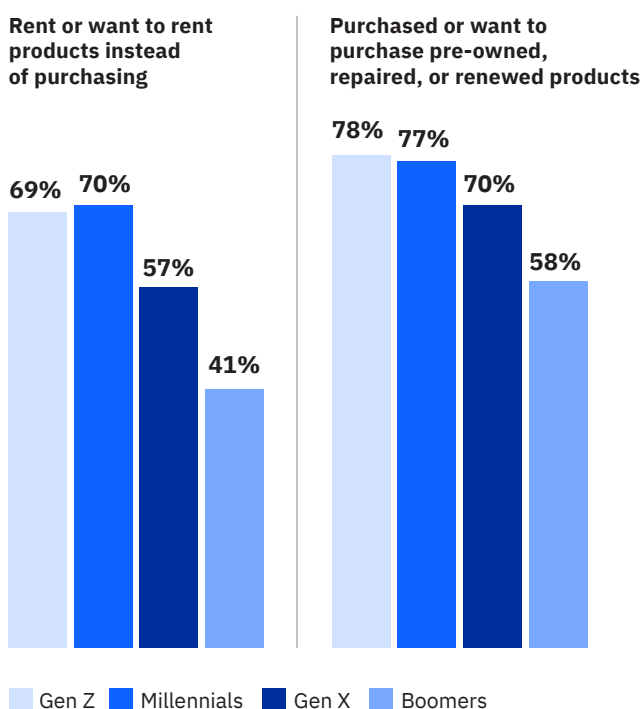
Eschew the new: Impacts from the circular economy

As part of consumers' increasing focus on sustainability, they are turning to new purchasing and consumption models that are disrupting many traditional brands and creating opportunities for new entrants. Consider the rise of the "circular economy," which offers alternative ways to attain products like renting them and buying pre-owned goods.

When it comes to purchasing pre-owned, repaired, or renewed products, 70 percent of respondents have tried or would like to try such practices, and 84 percent of those who have tried them plan to continue to do so. And nearly eight in 10 Gen Z and Millennials have purchased or want to purchase pre-owned products (see Figure 7). As for renting products, nearly 60 percent of those surveyed have tried it or would like to, and 77 percent of those who already do plan on doing it again.

Figure 7

The circular economy appeals to all age groups.



Brands respond to the sustainability mandate

As consumers continue to gravitate toward more sustainable products, brands are no longer being judged against a single lens of what their products can do for individual consumers. Their preferences about product attributes and company values greatly affect where they choose to shop, and this is true across both mature and emerging markets. In fact, 57 percent of respondents say they are willing to change buying habits to reduce environmental impact. And more consumers in emerging markets (62 percent) are willing to make such changes than those in mature markets (54 percent).

Large global consumer brands that ignore sustainability increase reputational and business risk. A Deutsche Bank report revealed that companies that experienced positive press regarding climate change saw share price outperformance of 26 percent per year over the MSCI World index.³ Conversely, the report also found a link between bad press and underperformance.

Given that sustainability has now become a key part of consumers' decision-making process, it's imperative that brands and retailers increase their focus and improve their ability to meet these preferences. This offers competitors of all sizes the opportunity to build trust, especially with Purpose-driven consumers.

Action guide

Sustainability hits its tipping point

“Sustainability” has become a catch-all term that can encompass anything from environmental conservation to factory conditions to employee relations, and much in between. Thus, for any company, it can seem daunting to incorporate sustainability into its strategy and operations. Yet, success requires it to be part of your short- and long-term strategic planning from start to finish. To do it right, companies need to:

1. Earn consumers’ confidence through transparency and traceability

- Consumers’ brand loyalty and purchasing decisions are highly contingent on detailed product information. Employ the latest technologies to provide transparency of production methods and traceability of source materials. Demonstrate your commitments to sustainability and environmental responsibility by offering details about operations, as well as how you manage your sustainability agenda.

2. Factor in consumers’ willingness to contribute to the cause

- If consumers are willing to pay a premium or change behavior to reduce environmental impact, then offer options that provide trade-offs between supply chain cost, service, and environmental impact. In the “last mile” delivery from fulfillment center to home, trade-offs can reduce variable logistics cost while enabling the consumer to participate in initiatives that reduce emission or otherwise help maintain a healthy planet.

3. Leverage sustainability as a driver for end-to-end operations

- The supply chain is a highly complex network of entities. Raw material suppliers, manufacturers, third-party logistics providers, and retailers all struggle to operate as one due to conflicting business goals and operating models. But under a purpose-driven objective, such as the sustainable sourcing of palm oil in personal care or the provenance of eggs and milk, end-to-end integration serves a greater goal and seemingly the network will abide. Examine capabilities and adjust investments to create new inter-company partnerships focused on environmental impact and social responsibility.

4. Align sustainability initiatives to your core competency

- Brands and retailers need to know which specific traits rank highly so they can factor that valuable information into product design and development. Consumer goods manufacturers are not only good at producing high quality finished goods, they are experts at reducing waste. For example, in the food and beverage industry, discarded food can be given a second life by partnering with farms and kitchens to turn work-in-process and semi-finished goods that would normally be discarded into nutrient-rich by-products such as animal feed, protein flour, or even beer.
- The circular economy is gaining momentum. Brands and retailers are actively looking to participate in this new economy in varied ways from recycling textiles, fabrics, and plastics. Others are forging new ways consumers shop. Look for ways your organization can harness the zeitgeist to find innovations to reduce waste and fulfill customers’ sustainability demands with new products and processes.

Shopping has changed, but fundamentals still matter

Consumers in 2020 are always online and have at their fingertips an unprecedented ability to access information about products and services. Thus, the pressure intensifies for brands and retailers to be ready not just to enable any-time shopping experiences, but also to do it flexibly. In addition to this unrelenting quest for ease and ever-available shopping experiences, brands need to keep delivering on the fundamentals—and doing that better than the competition. How consumers interact with nearly any type of business often comes down to habit and needs. The reason consumers shop where they do is still rooted in perennially important fundamentals, such as convenience and getting a fair deal.

To accomplish these things, brands and retailers have to understand which basic needs are still critical to shoppers and get better at accommodating their continually changing needs and desires.

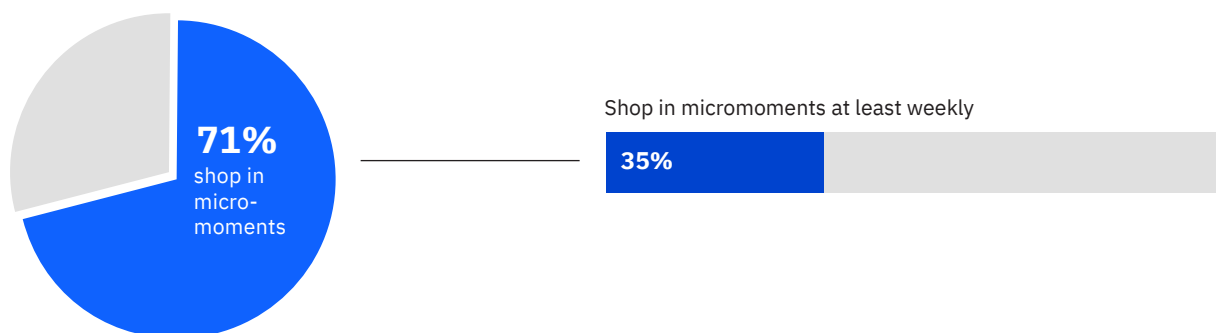
Micro-moments: Handling always-on consumers

Shopping moments now happen at different points in time for different reasons. So, it is especially important to understand the person and the context in which they are shopping. At various times, the same person can be shopping for a party, a gift, or a meal, for example—and doing so from the treadmill, at lunchtime, or in countless other settings. While a shopper may still be doing replenishment for food, it may be done individually for particular items as needed, rather than during a single, regular weekly trip.

While 71 percent of respondents told us they shop in micro-moments, there is a burgeoning subset, more than one in three, who do so at least weekly. In other words, they're shopping "in the background" while doing other tasks (see Figure 8). And nearly two-thirds of those who shop in micro moments require flexibility for their orders to be fulfilled. And so, in consumers' quest for availability and speed, both brands and retailers can differentiate themselves—and delight shoppers—by being able to offer accurate, informative contextualized content—anything relevant for that shopping "trip," from pricing to product details to inventory to order status— all available anywhere and any time.

Figure 8

Just over seven in 10 consumers surveyed say they shop in "micro-moments." Of those, 35% say they do it weekly or more often.



Micro-needs: Catering to the need for speed and ease with the latest technologies

Consumers are increasingly looking for products with specific attributes that align with their values, so offering the right assortment is a key differentiator. However, high on the list of consumers' desires is a convenient and easy shopping experience. Moreover, the top requirement of all surveyed groups is for brands and retailers to "simplify my life."

While 86 percent of respondents say stores must have an assortment that fits their lifestyles, 84 percent said it's important they can find what they need to get in and out of the store fast. It follows that respondents most desire the use of technologies that help find what they need easily and quickly.

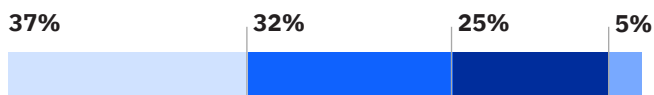
Awareness of new shopping technologies is generally above 90 percent across the board; as a result, consumers are keen on experimenting with the latest tools. Seventy-one percent of respondents are already using or want to try searching by visual means; close behind are 69 percent who use or want voice search options (see Figure 9).

However, none of the emerging search methods has really taken hold yet. In fact, only voice search is above 35 percent trial rates, and satisfaction is mixed. By 2021, Gartner predicts that early adopter brands that redesign their websites to support visual and voice search will increase digital commerce revenue by 30 percent, which could only bode well for brands, in terms of gaining new information to help them understand consumers better.⁴

Figure 9

Technologies that respondents have tried or would like to try.

Voice search



In-store digital display



Social shopping



Geo-location services



Visual search



Smart dressing room



In-store app navigation



Virtual reality



I have tried this I would like to try I am not interested I don't know what this is

Enabling a frictionless shopping experience

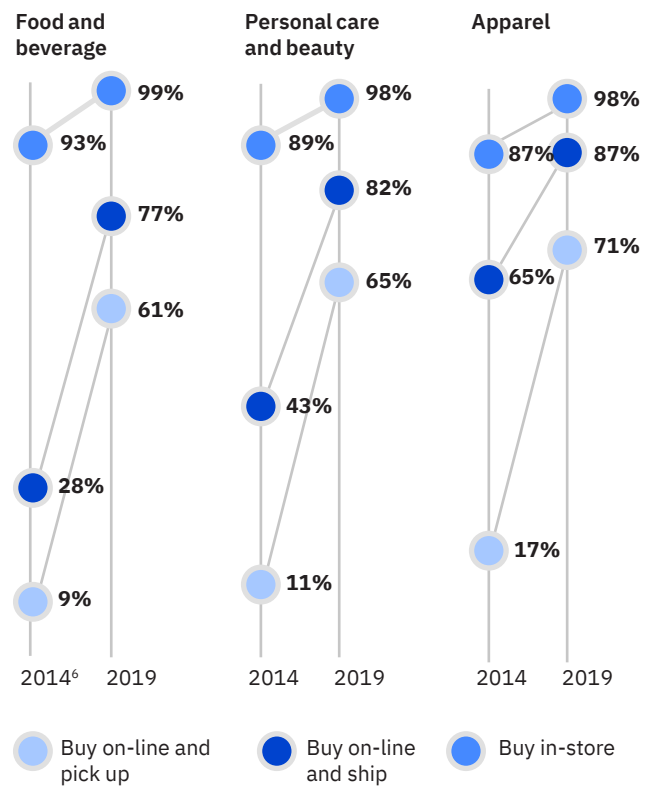
Even as shopping options increasingly involve specific requests and multiple channels, consumers around the world still want effortless and uncomplicated experiences. More than ever, consumers shop on an as-needed basis.

From buy online-ship to home, to BOPIS/Click-and-Collect (buy online, pick up in store, or pick up at curbside) to BAGA (buy anywhere, and get anywhere), demand is growing for all fulfillment methods (see Figure 10). As shoppers require speedy home delivery, stores have become a critical component in meeting this demand, which explains why BOPIS has grown over 4x over the past five years (see Figure 10).

Thus, having the right assortments is a differentiator for retailers and brands to attract consumers to both traditional and digital channels. What's more, 82 percent of shoppers say they purchase additional items when they come into the store to pick up an online purchase.⁵ Thus, it's in retailers' best interests to make the BOPIS experience as friction-free as possible. Even as there's been explosive growth in ecommerce over the past five years, the store remains a very important channel for shopping and purchasing.

Figure 10

Due to changes in shopping preferences over the past five years, consumers want more flexibility in how, where, and when they make purchases across product categories.



Action guide

Shopping has changed, but fundamentals still matter

1. Deliver value instead of disappointment by using technology for the right assortment

- Leverage external data to make better assortment decisions and more accurately forecast demand patterns—to have the right product available at the right place and the right time.
- The abundance of non-historical, non-linear external information such as weather, neighborhood composition, and local events can help brands and retailers make more relevant merchandising and assortment decisions.

2. Be omnipresent, and fulfill anywhere, anyway, and anytime

- As shopping continues to splinter, retailers must eliminate channel silos and become omnipresent wherever, whenever, and however consumers demand.
- Despite expectations around the omnichannel experience, ecommerce and supply chain often operate under two separate functions within an organization. Beyond just technology, brands require a tighter integration between the two functions to effectively address consumer expectations of buying and receiving goods anytime, anywhere, and anyway.
- Fulfillment is often challenged by inventory availability and logistics constraints, but complexity is compounded further with omnichannel distribution, be it distribution center (DC) to store, store to home, or DC to home. Through prescriptive analytics and machine learning, shipments can be optimized for delivery across all nodes. The ability to optimize fulfillment using multiple variables

(shipping cost, transit-time, margin impact, and weather, to name a few) can be the difference between a profitable and unprofitable business.

3. Expand the role of the store to reach its full potential

- As BOPIS/Click-and-Collect continues to grow, distribution capabilities at the store must evolve and scale accordingly. Borrowing a chapter from warehouse management, robotic automation is gradually making its way into stores. These micro-fulfillment centers not only operate at a hyperlocal level, they also address the growing demand for cross-channel orders with higher productivity.
- Explore how to use automation to handle repeatable tasks, such as counting inventory on store shelves, to free up time for store associates, improve the in-store experience, and provide services that help simplify consumers' lives.
- As the role of the store changes, so should the metrics by which stores are measured. Typically, store metrics are based on three primary things: sales, expense percentage, and four-wall profit. If the store's purpose is to be a physical component of the purchasing, fulfillment, and delivery cycle, then adapt store measurements to include any purchases its customers make, no matter how they are fulfilled.

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Methodology

To better understand how consumer preferences and priorities keep changing, as well as the resulting impacts on brands, the IBM Institute for Business Value, in association with the National Retail Federation, conducted a research study of 18,980 consumers in 28 countries. We asked about shopping habits, drivers of brand and product choice, consumption patterns, and the willingness to change behavior based on a variety of personal values and beliefs. We analyzed responses by age group, income, and market (growth versus mature).

Respondents by country

12%	US	3%	South Korea
11%	China	3%	Spain
8%	Japan	2%	Saudi Arabia
7%	Canada	2%	UAE
7%	UK	1%	Belgium
6%	India	1%	Denmark
5%	France	1%	Finland
5%	Germany	1%	Indonesia
3%	Australia	1%	Malaysia
3%	Brazil	1%	Norway
3%	Ireland	1%	Netherlands
3%	Italy	1%	Sweden
3%	Mexico	1%	Thailand
3%	Nigeria	<1%	Luxembourg

Related reports

Lee, Jim S., Gene Chao, and Jane Cheung. "Intelligent automation for consumer products and retail supply chains." IBM Institute for Business Value. <https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/ai-retail-supply-chain>

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Notes and sources

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