

OPTIMISING THE ECOMMERCE EXPERIENCE

Five online shopping
barriers UX can solve

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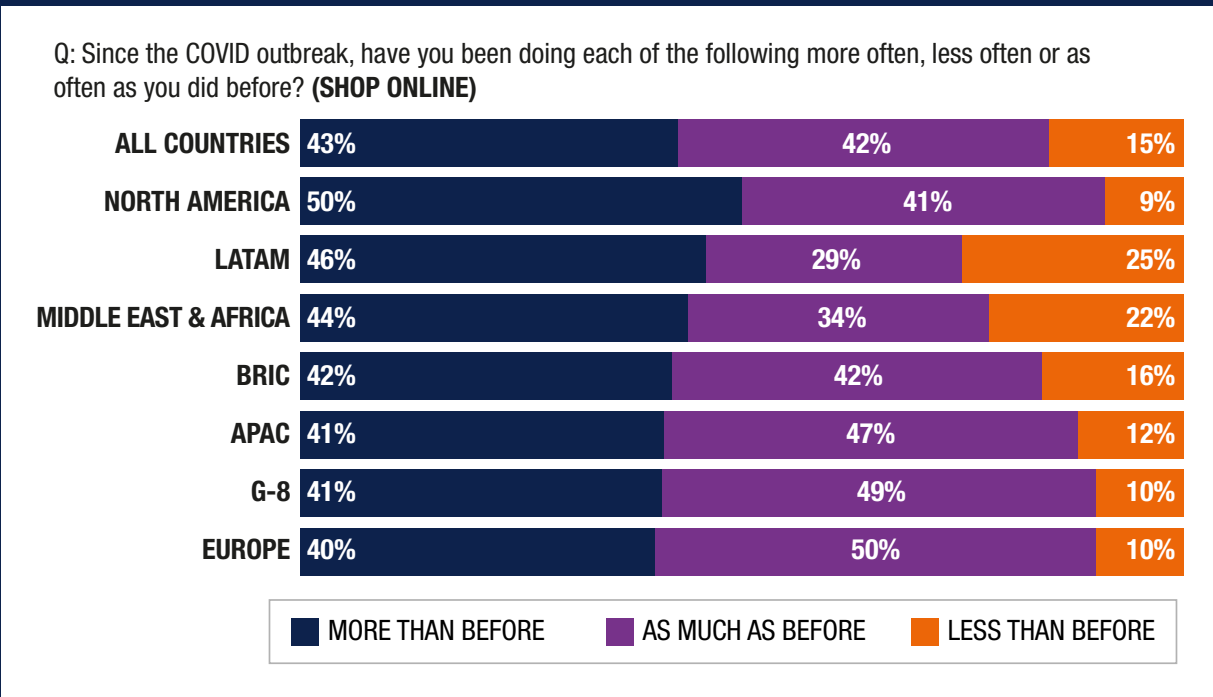
INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has seen massive acceleration worldwide since the pandemic began in 2020. Globally, 43% of shoppers say they are shopping more online¹, with the largest increases happening in North America and LATAM (see Figure 1). That behaviour is likely to continue as 55% of Americans said they expect to do more online shopping in 2021 than they did in 2020.²

With this increase in usage, friction has also risen worldwide (see Figure 2). Poorly designed sites and non-standard use of website functionality can lead to confusion and frustration for users (see Figure 3). Recent Ipsos research found that 51% of online shoppers in the UK have stopped using a website because it was too confusing.³

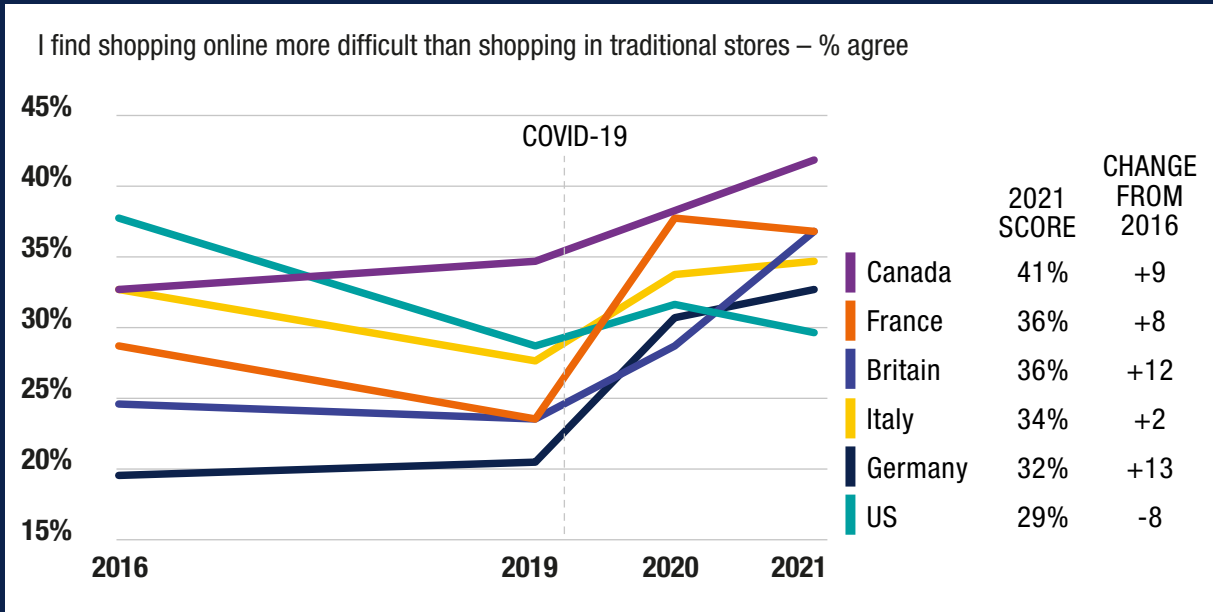


Figure 1: Online shopping during the pandemic






Source: Ipsos Global Advisor.
Base: 20,504 online adults aged 16–74 across 28 countries, 20 November-4 December 2020

Figure 2: Friction with eCommerce



Source: Ipsos Global Trends Series.
Base: 500-1,000 adults aged 16-75 (18-75 in US and CA) per market per year

Figure 3: Online shopping experience by sector

		TRIED	CANNOT FIGURE IT OUT	NOT SATISFIED	COMPLETELY SATISFIED
	GROCERIES	43%	11%	50%	40%
	RESTAURANTS	53%	7%	50%	43%
	DURABLE GOODS	24%	13%	51%	35%

Source: The Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker.
Base: 1,113 US adults, 15-16 September 2020

Consumers expect eCommerce experiences to be consistent across brands and marketplaces, with sites like Amazon, Mercado Libre (Brazil) and Taobao (China) setting the standard. Consumers are also anchored in their prior retail shopping behaviours, and deviations from their mental model can cause site switching and shopping basket abandonment. By focusing on the people who are likely to use your digital products or services, User Experience (UX) research can help you understand the existing mental model of consumers in order to design successful experiences.

UX research can also identify usability issues with functionality or content by testing prototypes, live sites and apps with users. UX research generates insights about the expectations, goals and needs of consumers, so eCommerce teams can design shopping experiences that are intuitive, satisfying and drive the behaviours your business wants.

The eCommerce landscape today has a level of complexity that goes beyond setting up a website to promote your brand. On and offline retailers, brand sites, marketplaces and direct-to-consumer (DTC) offers compete for attention and sales in an extremely crowded digital ecosystem. Social media is also increasingly introducing consumers to products and services and offering marketplaces for consumers to purchase items. Ipsos data shows that 80% of consumers say that store choice is driven by the website experience.⁴ In the UK, 45% of 16-24-year-olds say they have switched companies due to a poor online experience.³ To avoid losing momentum with eCommerce growth and to compete against the behemoths like Amazon, the usability of online shopping needs significant attention.

WHAT WE DID

Through more than 600 UX research sessions with major eCommerce retailers and brands worldwide, we identified five common shopping barriers online retailers should be aware of as they implement their shopping experiences.

By having consumers complete common and critical tasks on shopping sites and apps using think-aloud protocol, we have seen where experiences fail to deliver on consumer expectations. User-centered research and design, and a focus on usability, relevance and design appeal, can help solve these frequently occurring issues.

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FIVE ONLINE SHOPPING BARRIERS UX CAN SOLVE

1. SHOPPERS STRUGGLE TO FIND WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR

Just like shoppers in a department or grocery store need to be able to find what they came for, people shopping online need to understand where to click to get to the products or services they want. Rather than relying on search results from Google or Amazon, if you want people to shop directly with you, you need to make sure it is easy for them to quickly locate the products they want on your site.

It is crucial to make sure the search feature of your site works well. Sites like Taobao and JD in China return an overwhelming set of results, so having the ability to sort, rank and filter is extremely important to shoppers. The types of filters shoppers need vary depending on the products they are shopping for, so exploring those needs with users will help you craft a better experience for their product search. UX research can help you uncover how shoppers search for your products and the key criteria they want to be able to sort and filter by, to narrow down their options.

Shoppers also lose confidence in search when results do not align with the keywords they enter. A recent Ipsos study found that users prefer smart search that shows them closely related suggestions that have their keywords and common similar searches. It is also helpful to give visibility to how the search algorithm is filtering results as the user types, so they can see what options they are eliminating as they add words to their search.

The site organisation and product groupings also need to be intuitive for users. Too often, products are grouped based on internal business units or outdated ideas of how people shop, which may not reflect how shoppers think of products and how they use them. UX research helps you learn the words shoppers use to describe your products, the different categories of products they expect to find, and what products those categories include.

2. SHOPPERS HAVE TROUBLE DECIDING IF A PRODUCT IS RIGHT FOR THEM

While some consumers are getting more comfortable buying “sight unseen”, many still want better ways to understand whether a product is going to be a good fit. This doesn’t just relate to clothing, it is true for many categories including groceries, consumer electronics, home furnishings, and automobiles.

One way to help consumers decide if your product is right for them is to ensure there are lots of ways to view the product. This means including images from a variety of angles and with the product being used in context for size and scale, alongside functionality like zooming and rotating.

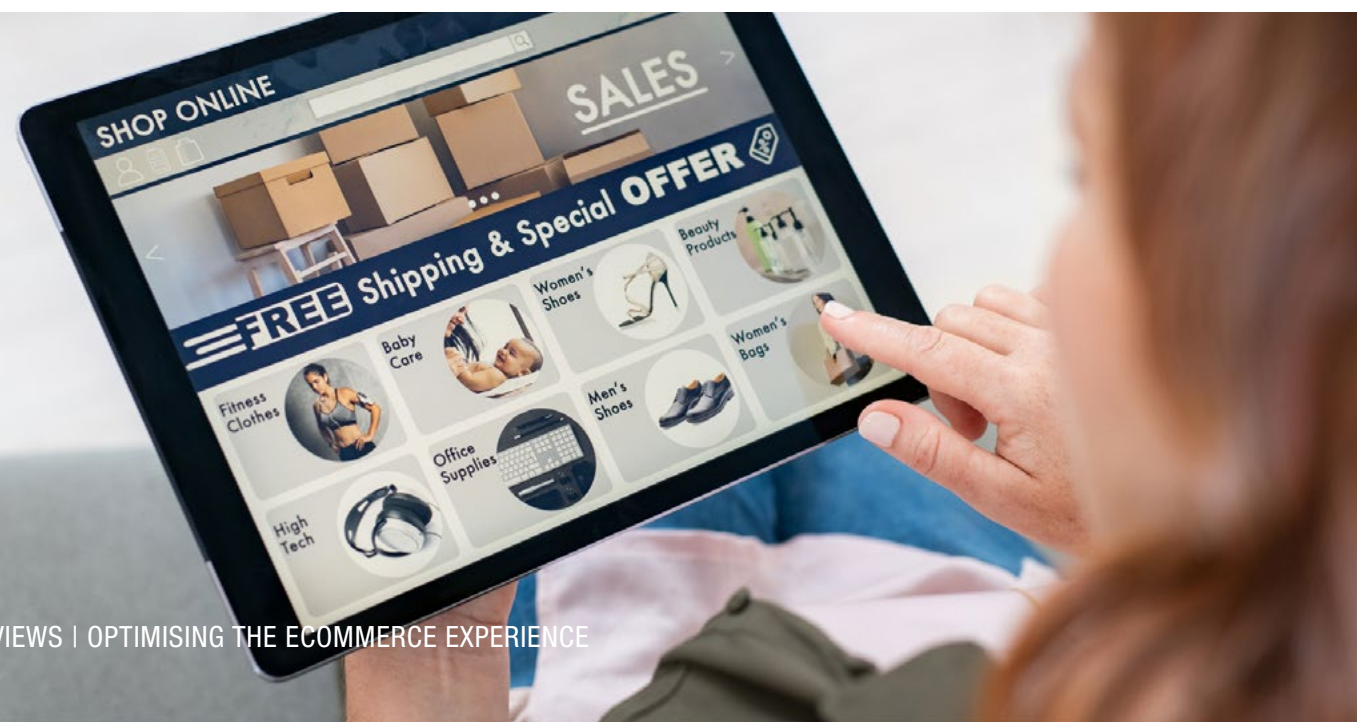
In the case of shopping for automobiles, recent studies Ipsos conducted in the UK show that whether they are a first-time buyer or a car expert, car shoppers need familiar language and visuals to learn more about the technical aspects of vehicles. Shoppers also need an immediate and factual impression of car models as soon as they land on a model’s webpage, to help them understand their options for their new car. If a site does not help shoppers see the features which are most important to their goals and needs, they may end up opening multiple browsers and bouncing between search results and product pages. This increases the risk that they go elsewhere during their search.

Videos are another great way to highlight styling details, sizing, or key product features and many consumers will search on YouTube and

other sites for videos if they cannot find them on your site. Once they navigate away from your site to a broader eCommerce search engine like Google, YouTube or Amazon, a shopper is likely to find competitor products while they are exploring your category. For example, confusing specs on consumer electronic brand sites often drive shoppers to Google and YouTube to better understand the features and performance of smartphones. Once the shopper has ventured into the wider search ecosystem, they will encounter an array of choices that could divert their attention to a competitor product. It is an opportunity lost!

In China, pictures posted by other buyers are considered more genuine than images provided by the site owner. Heavy reliance on reviews, in particular, negative comments, play a role in helping determine if the drawbacks of the product are acceptable or not. In Brazil, Reclame Aqui has cornered the market on consumer complaints about products purchased online. The businesses’ responses to those complaints are a strong influence in whether shoppers will trust a brand and buy from them online.

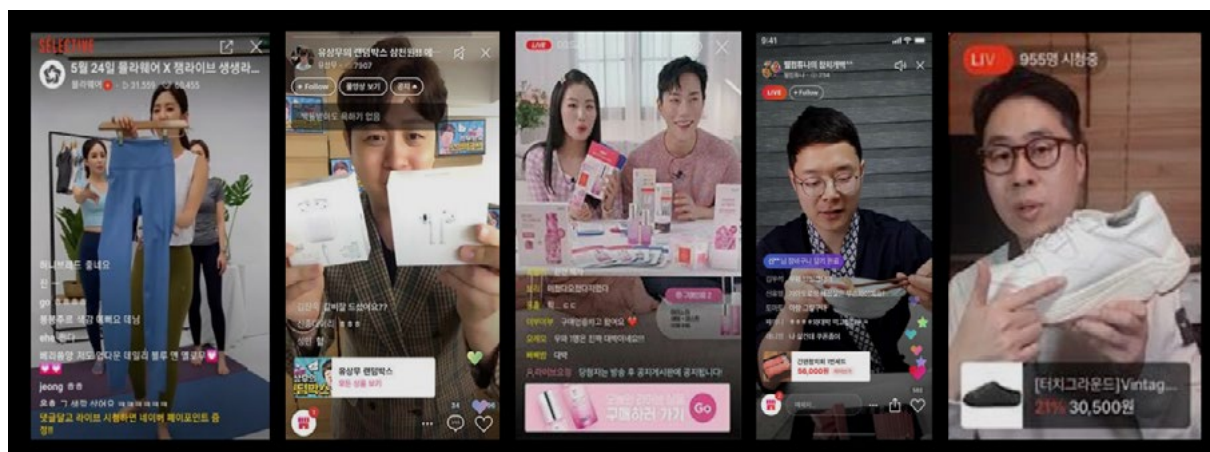
Shoppers still want to understand quality, size, texture and other features that are hard to convey online. Warby Parker solved the puzzle for eyeglasses in the US by letting shoppers order five sets of glasses to try on at home for five days and return them for free with an easy shipping process.



Other retailers have since followed suit. This provides peace of mind shopping for an essential product that people may otherwise hesitate to consider buying online. Another eyeglasses retailer, Eyeconic, offers virtual try-on to help shoppers see if a frame is right for them. This option allows you to see what you will look like in the new glasses without having to wait for shipping and reduces the environmental impact of shipping and returns.

Another new approach, live streaming eCommerce, has become a huge hit in China and South Korea⁵ (see Figure 4). In addition to helping shoppers view the product on live models or in the context of use, it also makes the experience more social by engaging online audiences during the events. Brand sites can leverage retail locations or their social media channels to host similar events in key markets.

Figure 4: Live streaming example



Source: Grip, South Korean-based live commerce app

3. SHOPPERS WANT TO COMPARE PRODUCTS AND PRICES

Online retail sites need to do more than just give shoppers a basket and checkout. The best ones serve as a tool for shoppers to learn about product options and pricing, as well as a way for brands to communicate affordability, value, and product selection. Recent research by Ipsos has shown that a key factor in building emotional connections with consumers is to help them feel in control.⁶ It is important to give them easy ways to compare different versions of products and understand price/value trade-offs. This is particularly true in the current atmosphere of uncertainty caused by Covid-19 when product availability is limited, and some of the usual options may be out of stock.

Some e-retailers provide simple tools where shoppers can select a few options and then compare similar features and technical specs. In some cases, brands even display a set of similar options together on their site to simplify the process. This allows the brand to highlight the features that differentiate their product grades and the available options while giving consumers control over their final choices.

The German watch brand Christ makes this process simple on their website by highlighting the “compare” functionality and explaining it clearly to encourage shoppers to try it out. Giving the shopper an opportunity to explore product features side-by-side instills confidence that they understand the trade-off between products and helps them continue along their purchase journey without interruption.

This is also true with service offerings including online services like meeting platforms, hiring tools and other professional services. LinkedIn provides quick access to a table that shows the four types of plans available based on the role and needs of the individual. Clicking into each option provides pricing and clear, bulleted lists of the features and benefits.

However, service providers with complex offers and retailers with a large and varied inventory can miss the mark when it comes to correctly identifying the criteria that people want to compare. In many of our recent UX research studies, Ipsos has found that product comparison tables often do not include the attributes shoppers want to use for comparison and so they seek out other sites to get the information they need.

Shoppers also go online to find deals. By making sales and discounts clear and easy to access, brands can attract and retain shoppers rather than lose them to random browsing. It is not just about discount offers or coupon codes for free shipping. Shoppers should be able to seek and find sales items, just like they would find the sale rack in their favourite store. A quick solution is to provide a clearly labelled section for sales items and the option to filter by discounts or sale. That level of transparency builds confidence in online shoppers that you are helping them save money without wasting their time.

4. SHOPPERS WANT DELIVERY AND PICK-UP OPTIONS WITH CLEAR COSTS

In many markets, fast and free delivery has become the norm, so shoppers watch closely for any shipping costs and factor them into pricing. They want to be able to easily weigh the trade-offs related to speed of delivery and price. This desire for transparency is another factor identified in the Forces of CX research⁶ as a way for brands to build emotional connections with consumers. Consumers do not like to be surprised by shipping costs, so you should let them know as soon as they arrive on your site if there are minimum order amounts required for free delivery.

This type of transparency can even motivate shoppers to buy more items if they see they are close to the threshold for free shipping. Presenting a few options of items that tip the scale at checkout if an order total is close to the free shipping threshold can be an effective way to help consumers and drive sales.

Delivery timing also needs to be clear and accurate. The sooner the consumer can understand the timing of their delivery, the

better. In Germany, where the quality and reliability of parcel delivery varies greatly between services, customers like to be able to choose between DHL, Hermes, DPD or UPS. The supermarket chain Rewe provides an array of shipping options and times on their website, and informs the customer how much is still needed before the minimum amount for a delivery is reached.

In addition, giving shoppers other options to receive their orders, like curbside pick-up, can be helpful. When people need something the same day, they may be willing to visit a nearby location to pick-up the item. In that case, a robust inventory system integrated with a store locator tool makes it easy for shoppers to find a way to get what they need, when they need it. Keep in mind, though, that shoppers are generally willing to pick-up because it is quicker than delivery. So if you cannot fulfill the pick-up requests quickly, let the customer know about potential delays before they are required to select how they receive items.

Consumers do not like to be surprised by shipping costs, so you should let them know as soon as they arrive on your site if there are minimum order amounts required for free delivery. ”

5. SHOPPERS WORRY ABOUT THE HASSLE FACTOR OF RETURNING ITEMS THEY BUY ONLINE

Ultimately, one of the best ways to ensure a great user experience for online shoppers is to always set expectations. The return process is a great opportunity to do this. Let shoppers know what your policies are for returns and refunds and you will give them more confidence about making an online purchase and build emotional connections through transparency. Many Ipsos UX studies have tested shopper confidence and show that buying “sight unseen” feels risky. Letting shoppers know that returns are allowed, and simple, lowers the barrier to online purchases.

Making returns easy also helps with customer satisfaction – as Amazon has shown with their policy of letting customers drop items off at shipping locations without even having to package them. This has built a sense of trust that makes people comfortable with trying out new products through Amazon because the risk is much lower that they will be stuck with a product they do not like, cannot use or could even find cheaper elsewhere. In China, JD also make returns easy by letting customers return the product without any conditions within seven days, even if the product has been unpacked. They will arrange for a courier to contact you and pick up the return at whatever location you designate.



IN SUMMARY

As eCommerce grows, so do consumer expectations and the resulting frustrations when online retailers do not meet them. **Below is a summary of the five barriers to satisfying online shopping experiences – and how UX research can help:**

1. SHOPPERS STRUGGLE TO FIND WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR

Leverage UX research to ensure shoppers can easily find what they came for and uncover how they shop for your products. Incorporate sort, rank and filter features, smart search, and intuitive naming and grouping of products, or risk losing your shoppers to sites that do this well.

2. SHOPPERS HAVE TROUBLE DECIDING IF A PRODUCT IS RIGHT FOR THEM

Feeling confident about a purchase is important across many retail categories from groceries, consumer electronics, home furnishings to automobiles. Videos are important here and without them consumers will search on YouTube and other sites. Pictures posted by other shoppers and reviews are seen as trustworthy and can also help increase confidence. Once consumers navigate away from your site to a broader eCommerce search, such as Google, YouTube or Amazon, the risk of losing that sale increases.

3. SHOPPERS WANT TO COMPARE PRODUCTS AND PRICES

Online retailers can use a side-by-side comparison tool to give consumers an easy way to compare different versions of products and understand price/value trade-offs. Leverage UX research to understand which attributes are important to shoppers so they do not navigate away from your site in search of what you have not told them.

4. SHOPPERS WANT DELIVERY AND PICK-UP OPTIONS WITH CLEAR COSTS

In many markets, fast and free delivery has become the norm, so shoppers watch closely for any shipping costs and factor them into purchasing decisions. Transparency is important here. Shoppers do not like to be surprised by shipping costs, so let people know as soon as they arrive on your site if there is a minimum order amount for free delivery.

5. SHOPPERS WORRY ABOUT THE HASSLE FACTOR OF RETURNING ITEMS THEY BUY ONLINE

Let shoppers know what your policies are for returns and refunds and they will have more confidence about buying from you. Knowing that returns are allowed, and are easy, can lower the barrier to “sight unseen” purchases.

Addressing these barriers requires a deep understanding of how consumers shop for your products, what leads them to feel confident about purchasing decisions, which attributes are important to them and, ultimately, what their expectations are so online retailers can meet (or exceed) them.

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KEY QUESTIONS FOR ECOMMERCE OPTIMISATION

- What is the best way to organise your site for shoppers and how is that similar or different from the in-store experience?
- What tools and content do shoppers need to understand if a product is right for them based on the key attributes of your category?
- Can you help people understand if the products they want are in stock at their nearest store?
- What do shoppers need to know about your return policy and their options?
- What are the implications of cultural differences and preferences in local markets that should be considered in the design?

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5. **Ipsos Flair South Korea 2021**
<https://www.ipsos.com/en/flair-south-korea-2021-leading-way>
6. **The Forces of Customer Experience – The science of strong relationships in challenging times**
<https://www.ipsos.com/en/forces-customer-experience>

FURTHER READING

- **The Retail Rollercoaster – Riding the ups and downs of today’s omnichannel shopper landscape**
<https://www.ipsos.com/en/retail-rollercoaster>

FURTHER VIEWING

- **Ipsos KEYS webinar recording, “E-Commerce Acceleration”**
<https://www.ipsos.com/en/keys-e-commerce-acceleration-omnichannel-strategies-evolving-consumer-webinar-recording>
- **Ipsos on-demand webinar recording, “Does your Online Shopping Experience Deliver?”**
<https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/knowledge/customer-experience/Does-your-online-shopping-experience-deliver-recording>

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