

AMERICANS EMBRACED DIGITAL DURING COVID – BUT THEY’RE READY FOR IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS AGAIN

Parents and affluent Americans are some of the most demanding customers. Here’s how to satisfy them.

An Ipsos Point of View

By Stephanie Bannos-Ryback

GAME CHANGERS



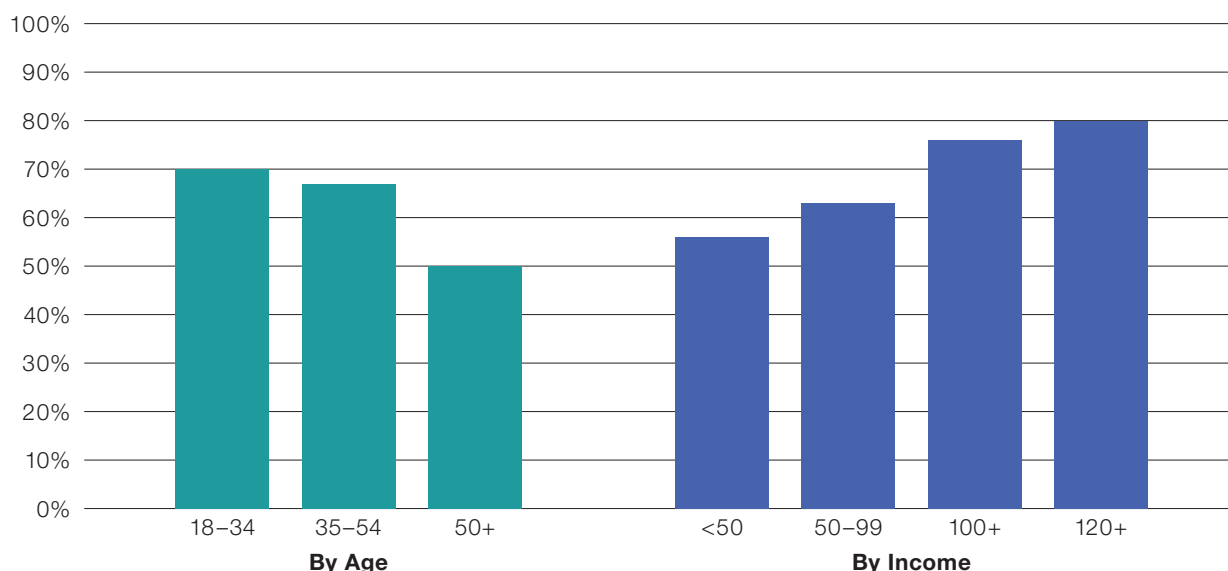
American shoppers altered their shopping habits and expectations in response to an unprecedented pandemic. Now, customers in 2022 expect consistency across engagement channels and fluidity in their path to purchase. As the COVID limbo eases and more Americans say it [is no longer a crisis](#), companies are learning just how much customers have shifted expectations when it comes to physical channels and human interactions.

A recent Ipsos Customer Experience (CX) Study confirmed that the offline-to-online and online-to-offline journeys must be fluid for all demographics—including Americans over the age of 55 who have now fully embraced digital. In particular, Ipsos finds heightened expectations when it comes to quality of service for in-person interactions. While consumers exhibited more empathy around negative experiences during the pandemic, that patience has shifted.

Journey Fluidity

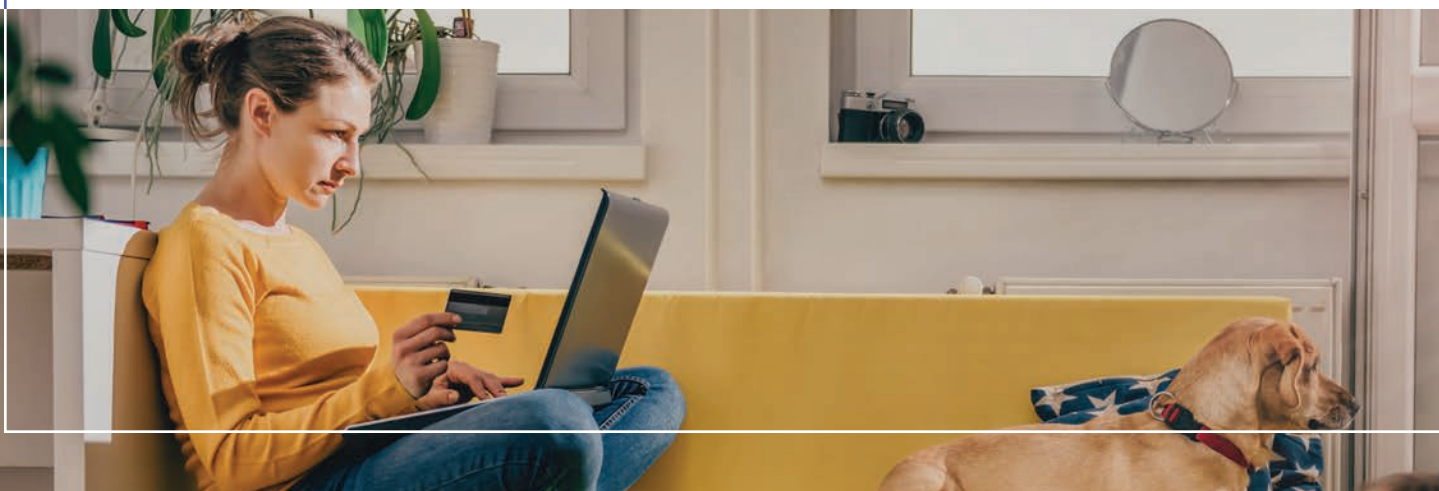
While the younger and more affluent lead the pack in expectations for a seamless customer experience when shopping from any device (smartphone, tablet, computer), at least half of all cohorts expect a digital experience that is intuitive and fully functional.

Who wants to be able to shop online across devices seamlessly?



Respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the statement, "I want to be able to shop online seamlessly across my devices."

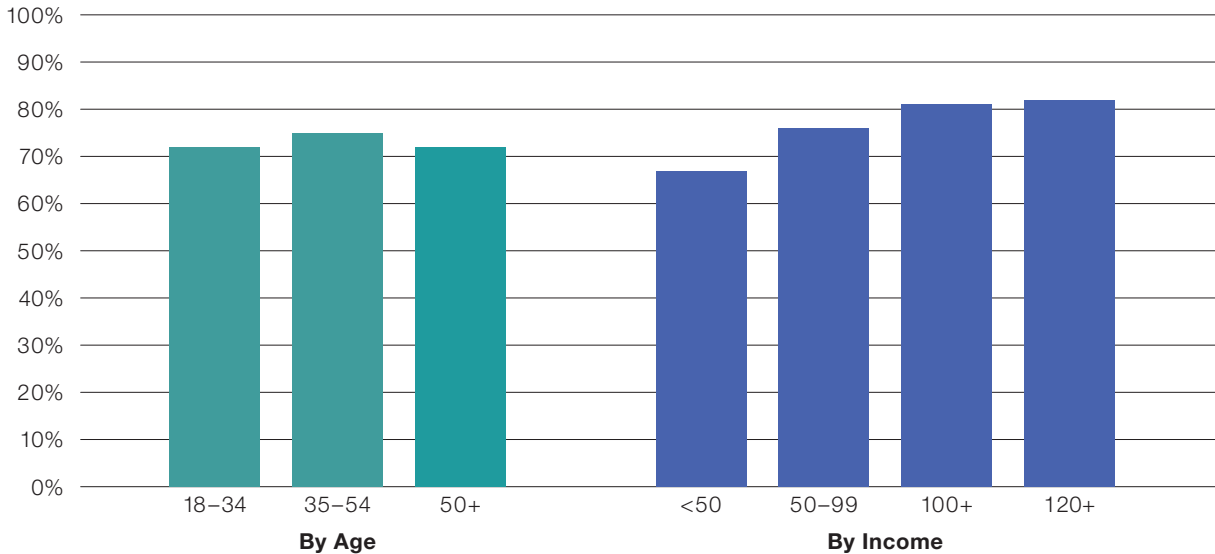
Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker



Busy parents exhibit the least patience for poor usability, with 73% of households with children expecting a seamless experience vs. 58% of those without.

This universal expectation goes beyond devices—it applies to transitions from digital to physical.

Who wants to be able to shop in person and online seamlessly?



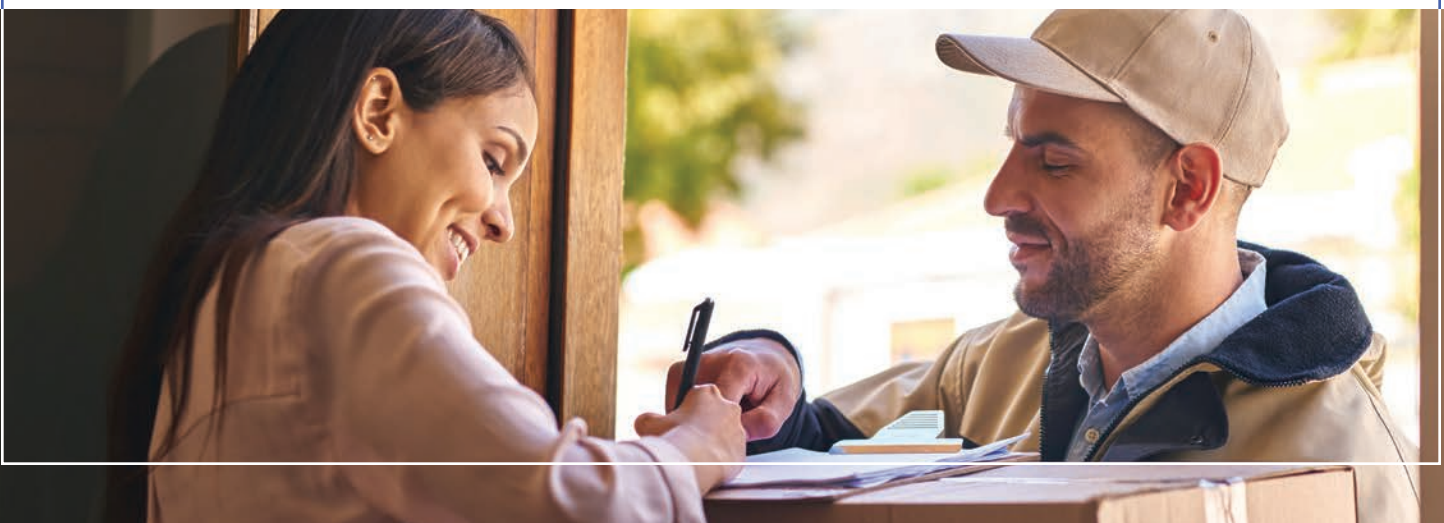
Respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the statement, "I want to be able to shop online and in person seamlessly."

Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker

Again, this is most prominent for parents: 83% vs. 69% for households without children. Expectations around online vs. in-store inventory visibility are highest among urban dwellers (55%) versus suburban (45%) and rural (41%).

Ipsos CX Guidance:

- Be certain to not sacrifice functionality when investing in differentiated digital experiences. At the end of the day, consumers of all demographics still value convenience and ease.
- The almighty head of household buyer is exceedingly expectant of convenience—to win them, you must make their lives easier.
- With affluence and propensity to spend come higher standards, so engaging and retaining these consumers is worth the investment.



Humans Still Hold the Power

When it comes to quality service levels and meeting consumer demands, employees are in the hot seat. Throughout the pandemic, we saw expectations loosen as consumers empathized with staffing shortages and frontline workers. It seems those days are over, as consumers now overwhelmingly agree that better, faster service will come from working with someone in person.

Older, affluent males in urban settings have the highest expectations of in-person experiences



Q: When talking to customer service or a sales representative in person, I expect better and faster service than other channels like phone, email, or online chat

Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker

Across all demographics, more than half of people prefer to speak with someone over the phone vs. email or chat. While reliance on digital has proliferated and the cross-channel customer journey has converged, humans are still at the center of customer expectations and therefore, the ultimate holders of customer experience delivery.

Ipsos CX Guidance:

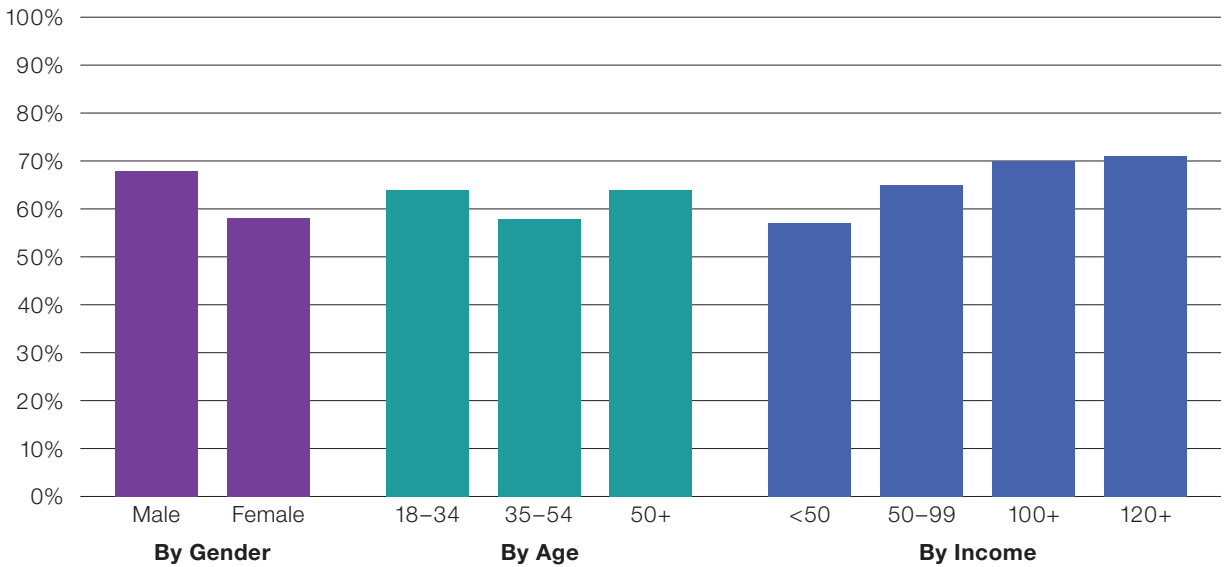
- Employee enablement and experience is at the heart of customer experience—when they are empowered, customers feel heard and brand trust has potential to grow.
- Measuring employee experience (EX) is critical to improving the brand's overall value delivery.
- While pushing service options to digital channels and automations is cost-effective, brands will pay the cost in lost customers if humans are not available in the moments they're needed.



If You Don't Make It, You'll Break It

With the significant investment brands are making in their customer experiences, brands must balance amazing experiences that garner few interactions vs. core experiences that touch many. When it comes to Return on Customer Experience Investments (ROCXI), investments that ensure neutral to positive interactions across touchpoints bring an intangible upside: avoiding the opportunity cost of poor experiences. After all, consumers will remember the bad more than they'll remember the good—and they'll probably let you know through negative ratings and reviews.

Who is most likely to remember a negative customer experience?



Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker



OUR STUDY ALSO ILLUMINATED A TREND FOR MIDWESTERNERS: 66% ARE MORE LIKELY TO REMEMBER A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE THAN A POSITIVE ONE, VERSUS 60% FOR NORTHEASTERS AND SOUTHERNERS AND 63% OF WESTERNERS. THE MIDWEST NICE ARE NOT TO BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF!

WHAT'S NEXT:

- When evaluating opportunities to improve the customer experience, it's imperative to estimate the impact with specific consideration for the reach of those enhancements.
- Brands must always monitor their customer journeys and touch-points for “hot spots” and have a system for quick identification and remediation.
- Closing the loop with customers who have expressed a negative experience—or those we can assume are dissatisfied through contextual and behavioral data—is a must. When a negative experience is remediated, it can become one of the most memorable experiences a customer has with the brand.

About the Author

Stephanie Bannos-Ryback
Executive Vice President, CX
stephanie.bannos@ipsos.com

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