



# Are Customer Behaviors Changing in Light of COVID-19?





# 2020 was a year of reckoning for retail.

In 2020, the impact of COVID-19 forced retailers to rapid decision-making and advancement like never before. In a year described as 'The Great Acceleration' slow to move sectors like grocery saw digital adoption jump **53% in a year**. Target reported a 700% lift in curbside pickup in **Q3**. With such upheaval, the critical question remains, have consumer behaviors changed for good?

From February – March 2021 TruRating polled over 100,000 using our point-of-sale feedback technology to investigate just that. The data presented in this report was collected from customers across a varied set of retailers, using both our in-store and digital surveying platforms.

The six questions we asked, suggest that while consumer behaviour has certainly been impacted by the pandemic climate, that the long-tail impact of this may be less severe than once expected.

In the light of an increasingly accelerated vaccine program, do retailers need to start preparing for 'The Great Return'?

## The Method

TruRating questions are delivered via in-store point of sale terminals and online via a simple widget that is triggered on the confirmation page of a merchant's eCommerce websites.

As a result, our questions are designed to offer simple one-touch responses to multiple choice surveys, that enable high volume response rates with minimal friction for the end user.

The design of the system allows us to link answers to transactional and location data – providing a unique view of anonymised customer sentiment that can be divided in many ways.

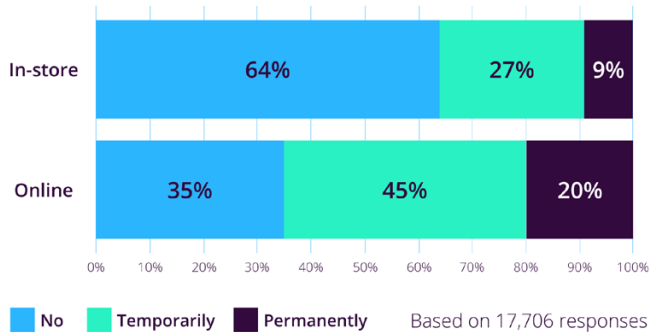
## The Questions

1. *Have you generally started shopping online more due to COVID?*
2. *Have you started grocery shopping online more due to COVID?*
3. *Have you started using curbside pickup anywhere due to COVID?*
4. *When COVID is not a risk, will you visit stores as much as you did before?*
5. *In general, what is your main reason for shopping online?*
6. *Do you think your approach to shopping in-store/online will change because of COVID?*



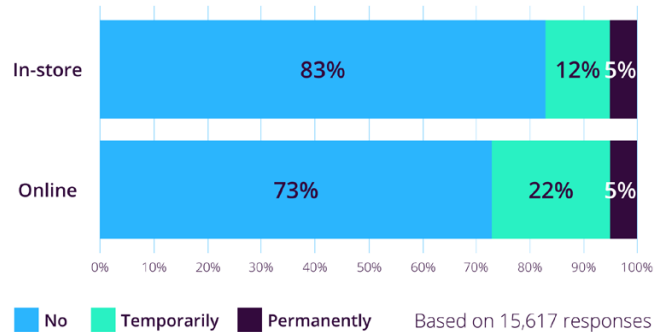


### "Have you generally started shopping more online due to COVID?"



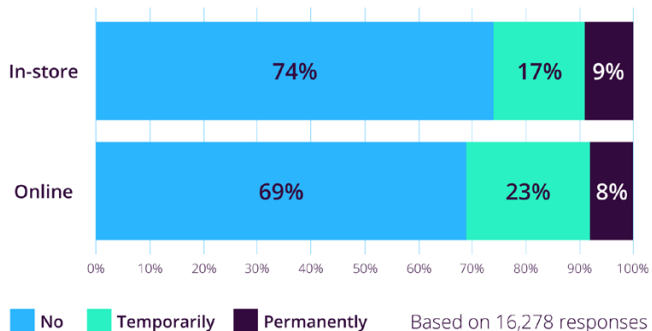
64% of in-store shoppers claim their habits haven't changed at all due to COVID. Online shoppers appear to be more cautious, with 20% of polled customers saying they plan to use this channel permanently even after the pandemic.

### "Have you started using curbside pickup anywhere due to COVID?"



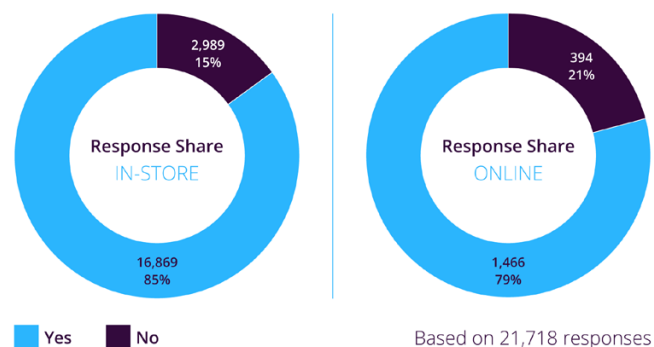
Only 5% of customers – in-store and online – plan to use BOPIS (buy online pickup in-store) services permanently. While safety concerns have driven an increased adoption, the data suggests for most this was a practical necessity rather than motivated choice.

### "Have you started grocery shopping more online due to COVID?"



Again, in spite of the spike of use in 2020, less than 10% of consumers claim that their use of online grocery channels will be a permanent move. As grocers look to sustain a boom year, the in-store offer will remain a critical concern for a majority of customers.

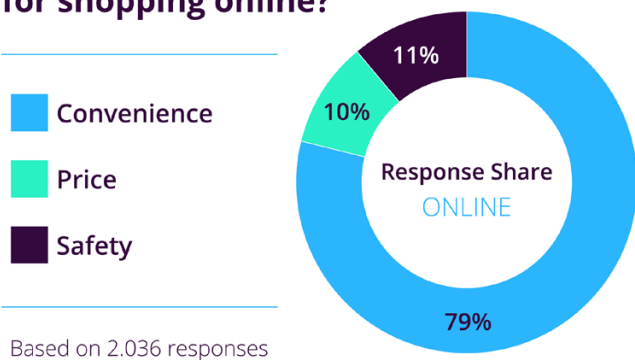
### "When COVID is not a risk, will you visit stores as much as you did before?"



85% of in-store and 79% of online customers will continue to visit physical retail outlets with the same frequency as they once did once health and safety risks are no longer a concern. Online is growing but the 'physical is dead' narrative, increasingly appears out of touch.



### "In general, what is your main reason for shopping online?"



79% of consumers choose online for convenience over price and safety. For retailers this is a mindset to be conscious of – if you can't replicate the in-store experience online, how convenient can you make it for your customers to shop with you instead?

### "Do you think your approach to shopping in-store will change because of COVID?"



### "Do you think your approach to shopping online will change because of COVID?"



Based on 21,792 responses

We see a strikingly similar response on either channel to the question of changing shopping behaviours – with 37% in-store and 38% online responding that COVID has had no impact. A large swing in behaviour occurred in 2020 – but how quickly will the pendulum return?

## Executive Summary

There is no doubt that the last year has required retailers to adapt and innovate like never before. However, suggestions that the pandemic has created a seismic, permanent, and singular shift in our expectations of shopping look to be unfounded. When it comes to the simple act of shopping it appears that most consumers yearn for a return to the experience of visiting stores, interacting with sales staff, physically browsing items before purchase and maybe even just being part of a busy crowd.

This is not to say that retail will ever (or should ever) be the same again. The pandemic has taught us that digital investments are a necessity, but that these innovations should not be treated as stand alone. Retailers need to ensure that digital seamlessly enhances the in-store experience and vice versa. If digital can take on some of the heavy lifting of stock tracking, search, consumer reviews and delivery then maybe we will see the store truly deliver on the full experience of retail as theatre that has been promised for so long.

Most of all this will require retailers to stop thinking about and managing the two channels as separate and interchangeable and finally embrace the promise of omnichannel retail.



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