



# Life in a pandemic: future of retail

Survey among salaried  
professionals of India

Humans in a pandemic series

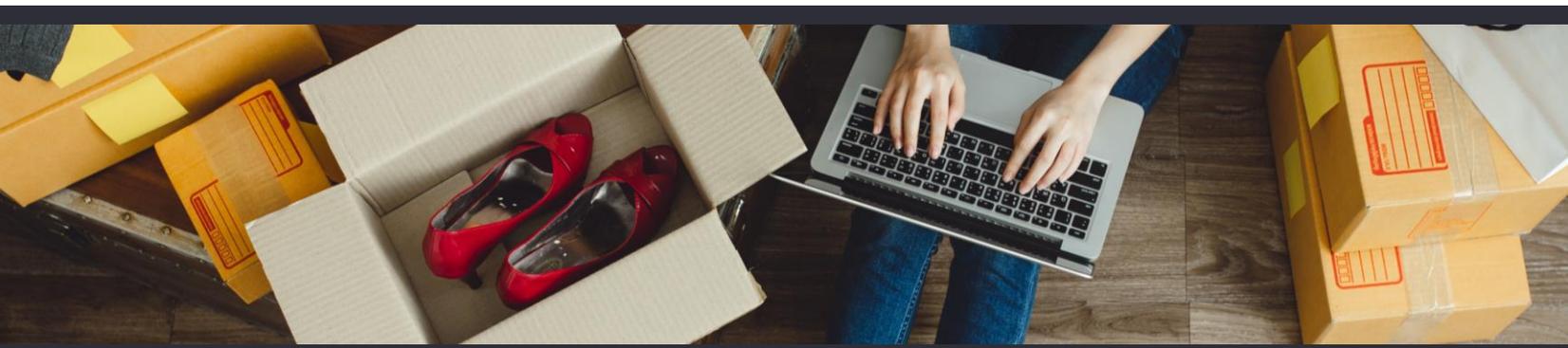
**November 2020**

## Background

Retail has always been a very competitive industry where the chase for margins is unpredictable. Customers hop from one player to the other in search for the best deals. The pandemic is further challenging the status quo with reduced footfalls, disrupted supply chains, and a distant recovery having its overhang on the sector. While overall consumer demand is yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels, retailers with a physical-only presence face greater challenges with customers shifting online at an unprecedented rate.

In this milieu, retailers need to be agile and transform their businesses across the customer's purchase journey to address concerns and existing pain points. Digital transformation, along with other innovative initiatives is indeed an imperative rather than a choice to maintain market share.

The second instalment of 'Life in a pandemic' looks at the impact the pandemic on consumer preferences for in-store retail shopping. To understand both the near term pandemic related impact as well as longer term customer preferences, this study was conducted with salaried professionals in India whose income has not been impacted by the pandemic.



## Hypothesis

1

### Digital acceleration

- ▶ Digital adoption to increase across all steps of the value chain to avoid physical contact and enhance customer experience
- ▶ Customers to be wary of trials and physical contact. AR/VR and other contactless technologies to aid consumers on virtual/digital shopping journeys

2

### Discretionary categories to have longer recovery periods

- ▶ Premium, non essential segments to have longer recovery periods and reduced spends

3

### Quick, click and pick

- ▶ Customers to prefer faster and more convenient shopping experience
- ▶ Deliveries and pick ups to be major value adds for the customers

4

### Hyper-localization

- ▶ Customers to prefer shops in proximity and avoid travelling larger distances

5

### Planned and purposed

- ▶ Safety concerns would result in customers doing more planned shopping. This is likely to have its impact on impulse purchases, cross selling and POS targeting
- ▶ Customers are likely to spend lesser time in stores and browse online for options prior to in-store visit

# EY collected responses from 436 respondents from different age groups, gender and city types

## Sample size and methodology

### 1. Created a survey questionnaire

- ▶ Created a survey questionnaire on Qualtrics based on industry standards, and by reviewing the available literature and best practices
- ▶ The survey sections are based on the hypothesis

### 2. Participants' criteria

- ▶ Sample size: minimum 385 respondents from the salaried class, split in terms of gender, age groups and city types
- ▶ Women: minimum 30%
- ▶ Between 24-40 years: maximum 90%

### 3. Setting up a panel

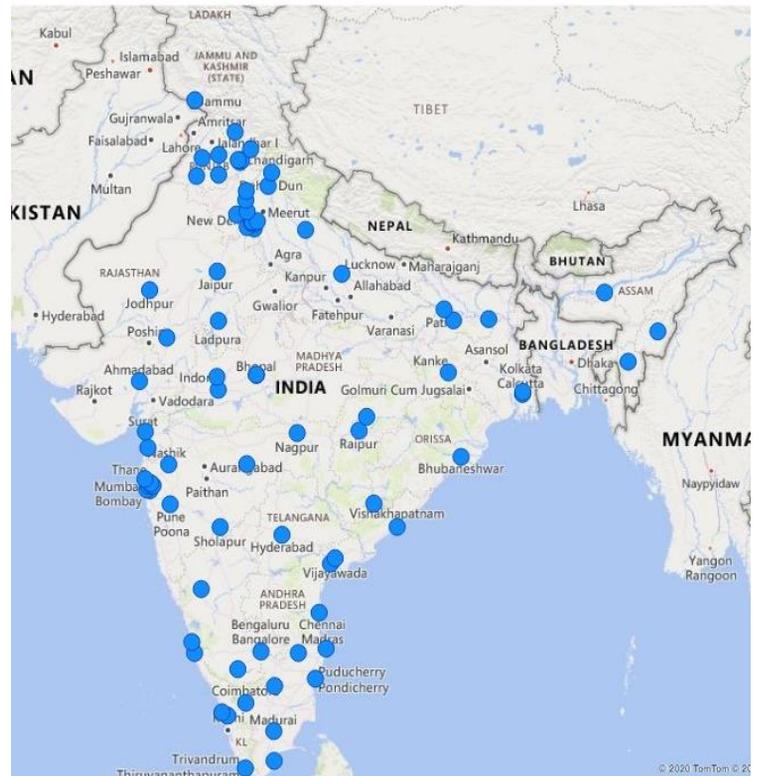
- ▶ To achieve the data set, EY collaborated with a learning platform affiliated with five universities across India (Jaipur, Nashik, Chandigarh, Mangalore and Dehradun) to set up a student and faculty panel who worked with the EY panel to reach out to more salaried professionals

### 4. Conducting survey

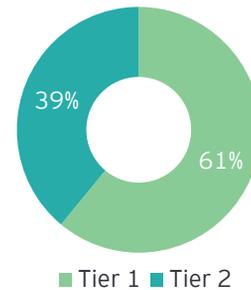
- ▶ The faculties were given a target with an exact breakdown of the number of respondents each had to achieve
- ▶ The faculties conducted presentations to explain the survey to the students
- ▶ Students then set out to conduct the survey keeping the criteria in mind
- ▶ We also used the EY mailing group to circulate the survey and used snowballing technique to reach the required targets

### 5. Analysis and reporting

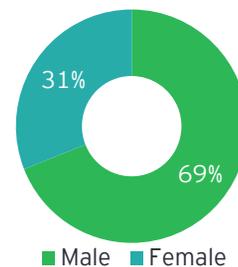
- ▶ Data was compiled and analysed using Power BI
- ▶ Trends and insights were evaluated to create the detailed report



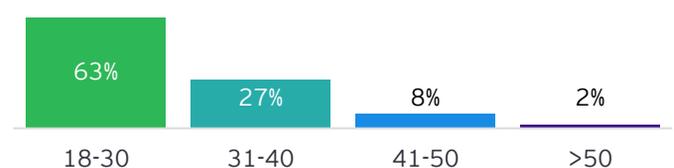
### City Type



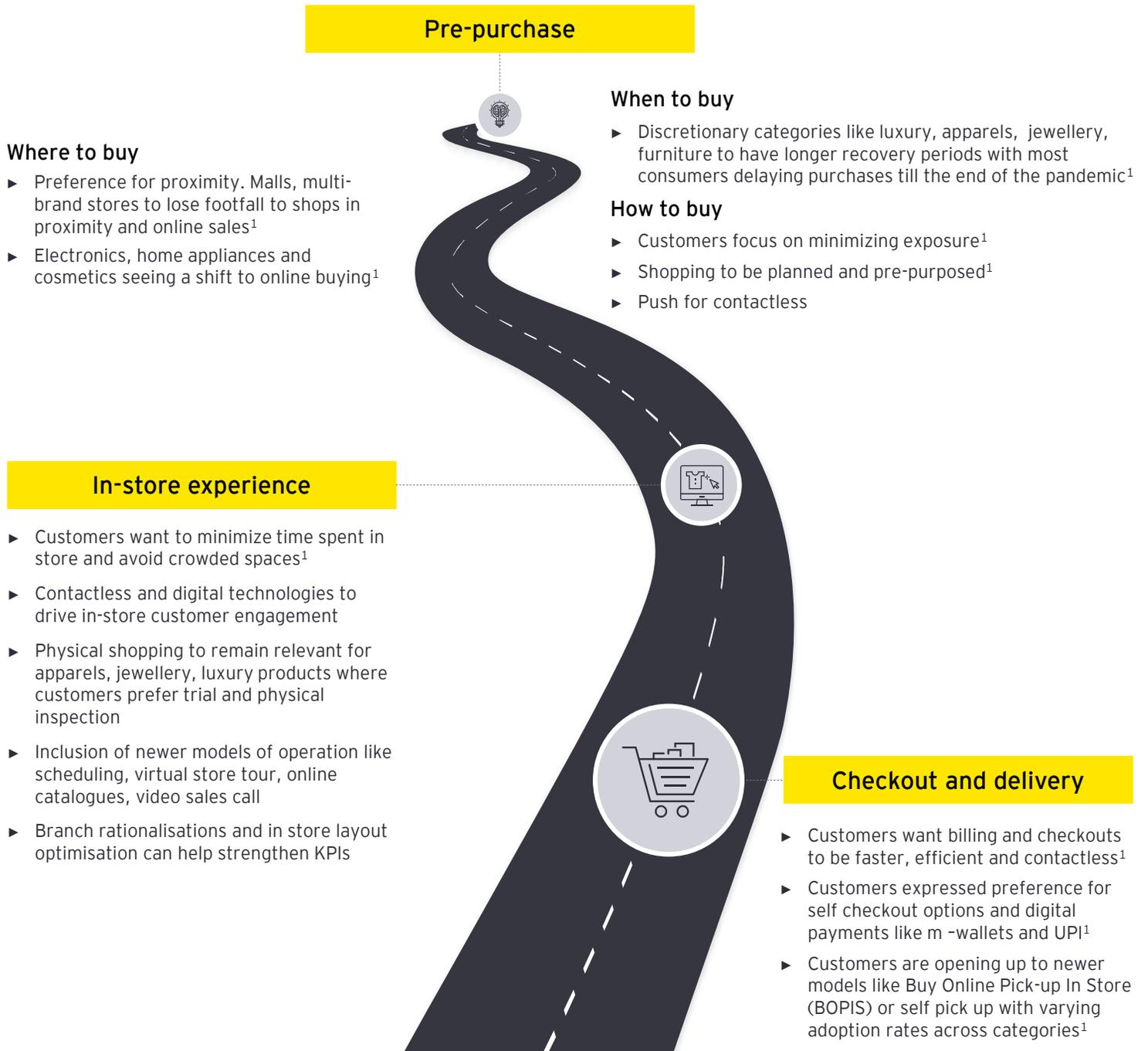
### Gender



### Age split



# We have identified various touchpoints across the customer's retail journey that will need to evolve



<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# Pre-purchase



# Pre purchase journeys have elongated with customers re-evaluating when, where, and how to buy....

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

Billing and checkout

The pandemic has transformed the entire shopping experience of a customer at each stage of the purchase journey - pre purchase, during purchase and post purchase. The pre-purchase consideration stages have elongated as the consumer now factors in much more thought before the actual purchase.

While earlier a shopper would just decide on the products, brands, channel, outlet and budget of a commodity, now the questions have become more rudimentary. Shoppers are pondering over how far they are willing to travel to shop, when they should travel to shop, where should they shop from, what should they be spending on, how should they be shopping and whether they should be shopping at all<sup>1</sup>.

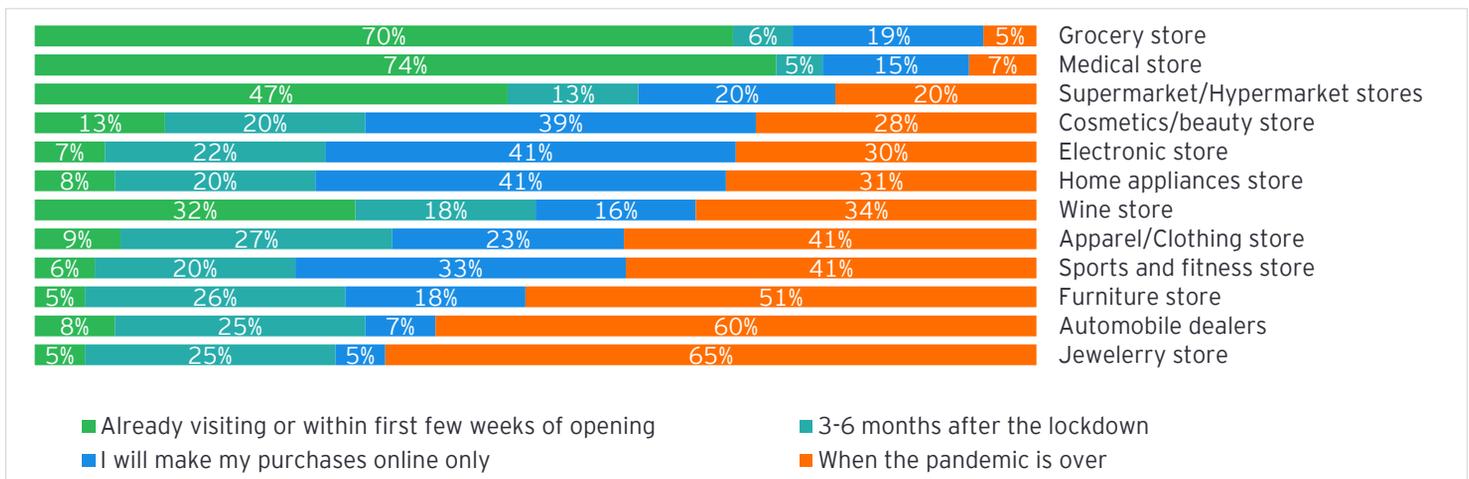
**Customers express an increasing willingness to shop online for home appliances and electronics, however automobiles, furniture and jewellery will still remain predominantly offline experiences**

- ▶ Electronics, cosmetics and home appliances are seeing a shift in buying behaviour with approximately 40% customers preferring to buy online<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In jewellery, automobiles and furniture, customers still prefer to purchase through offline channels with less than 20% customers reporting a willingness to make online purchases in these categories<sup>1</sup>

## When to buy?

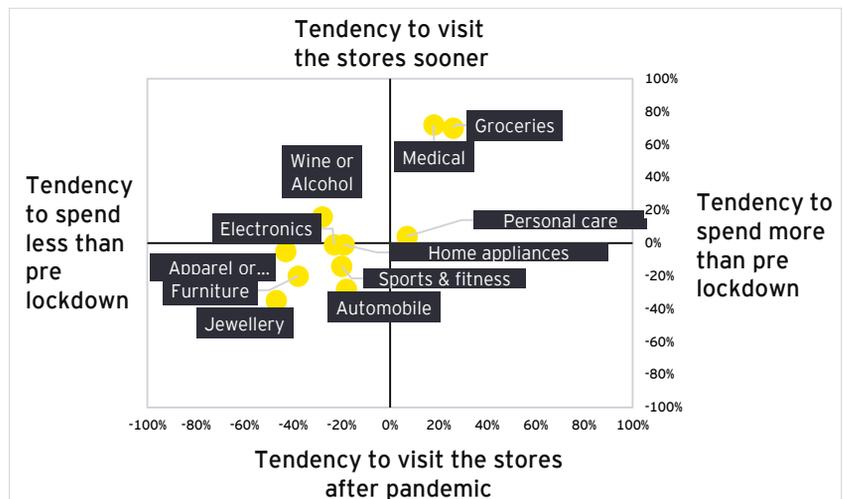
While groceries and non-prescriptive medicine category will have strong growth with customers already shopping for such products and increasing spends from pre-pandemic levels, apparels, accessories and furniture stores will experience a longer term recovery with customers delaying purchases till after the pandemic.

### Q: After the lockdown is over and all stores are open, when are you likely to visit them?



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Customers are moving online across categories. However, in categories like jewellery, luxury, apparel and furniture, customers still value in-store experiences of physically inspecting the product and the relationships with the retailers and brands. These categories must strengthen their omni-channel capabilities with the online and offline channels complimenting each other underpinned by the experience of exclusivity for which customers pay a premium



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

...customers are open to switching from their preferred shops based on factors like proximity, availability, variety, safety and hygiene

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

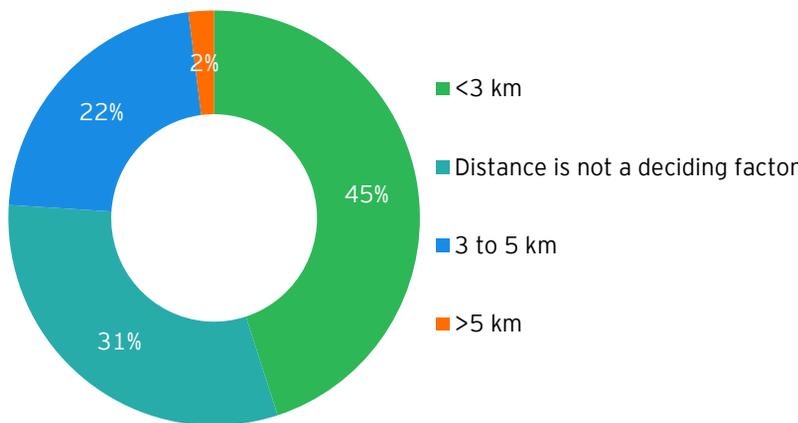
Billing and checkout

**Where to buy?**

Customers are wary of travelling long distances to shop at their preferred locations, with 67% customers not willing to travel more than 5kms for shopping<sup>1</sup>

Of the customers surveyed, 45% wanted to avoid travelling more than 3kms for shopping<sup>1</sup>. In terms of type of retailers, malls and multi-brand stores are losing their status quo as preferred shopping locations as shops in proximity gain in preference. About 50% customers who preferred shopping at malls and multi-brand stores indicated that they would now prefer to shop at locations closer to home<sup>1</sup>. Further, 78% customers responded that they would not enter stores that seem too crowded and 51% responded that they would go to an alternate store if there is a queue outside their regular store<sup>1</sup>.

**Q:How far are you willing to travel to shop or visit a particular store?**

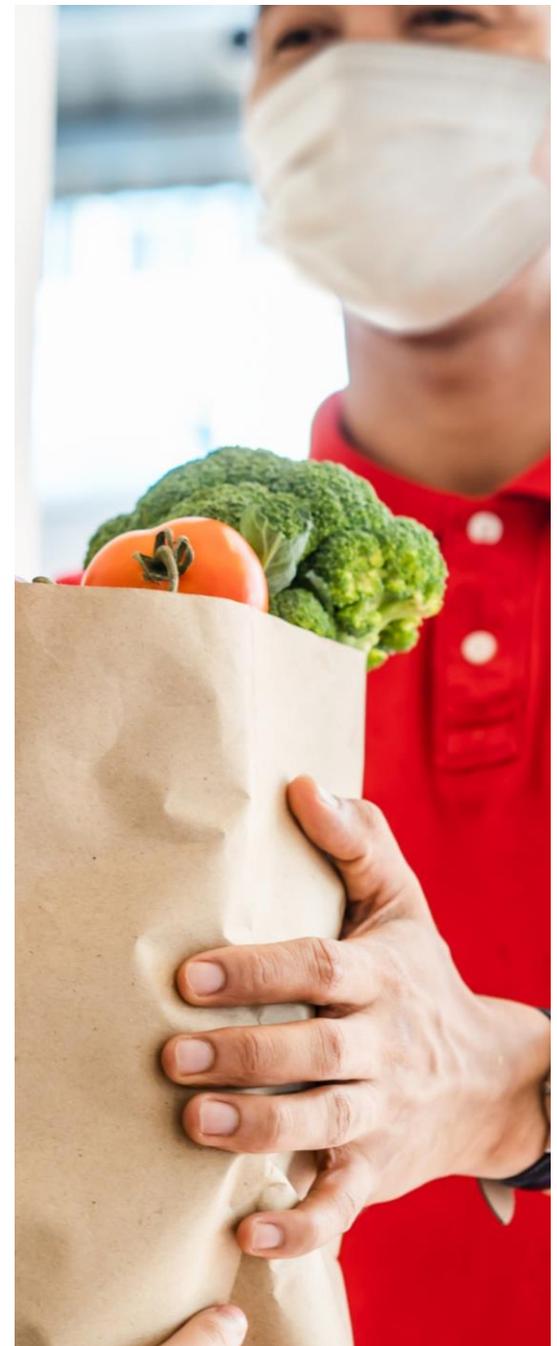


Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

**Q:What was your preferred location of shopping before the lockdown and after the stores open?**



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020



<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# Retailers can no longer depend on price differentiation alone to attract and retain customers

Pre-purchase

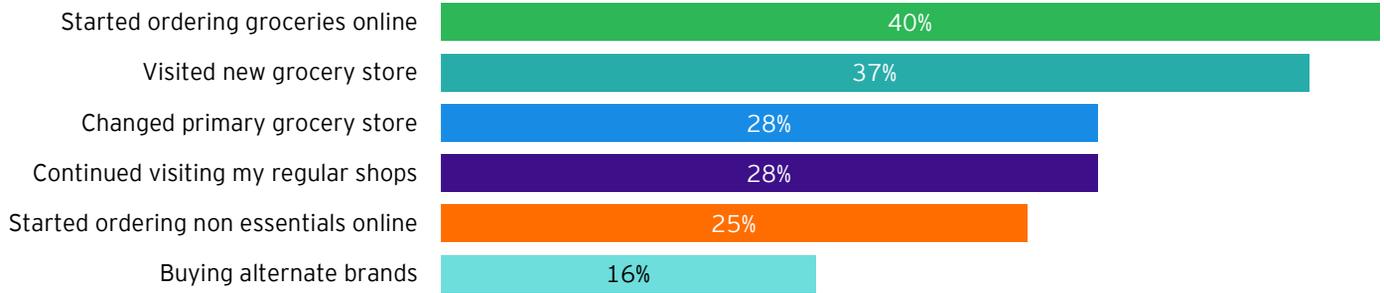
In-store experience

Billing and checkout

Customer are willing to experiment with new shops. 46% customers chose to go to new stores (over regular stores) due to proximity, better sanitization measures and less crowding<sup>1</sup>. For 28% customers, this change was permanent<sup>1</sup>. Retailers must emphasise hygiene and sanitization in store and health and wellness in their products to attract customers.

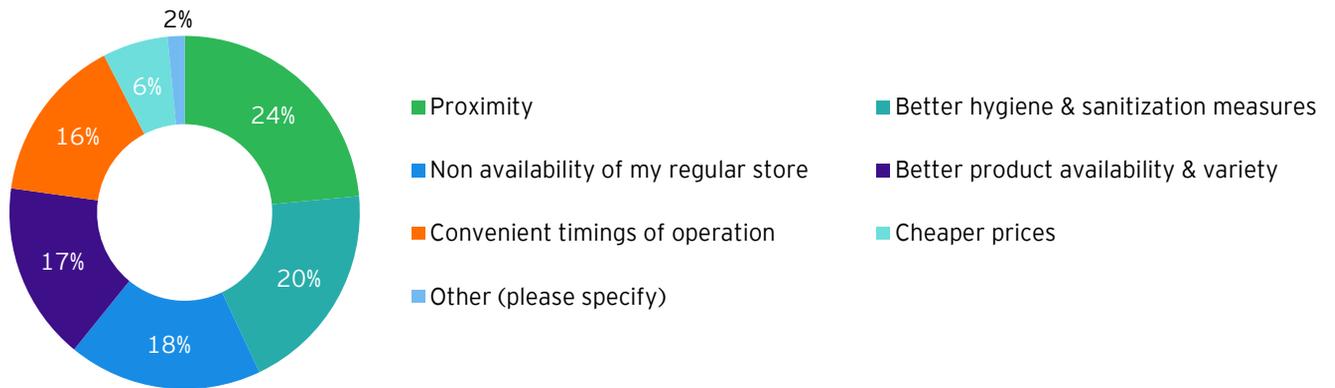
## Q: In context of shopping during the pandemic select all that apply to you

Store visit behaviour post lockdown (Select all that apply)



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

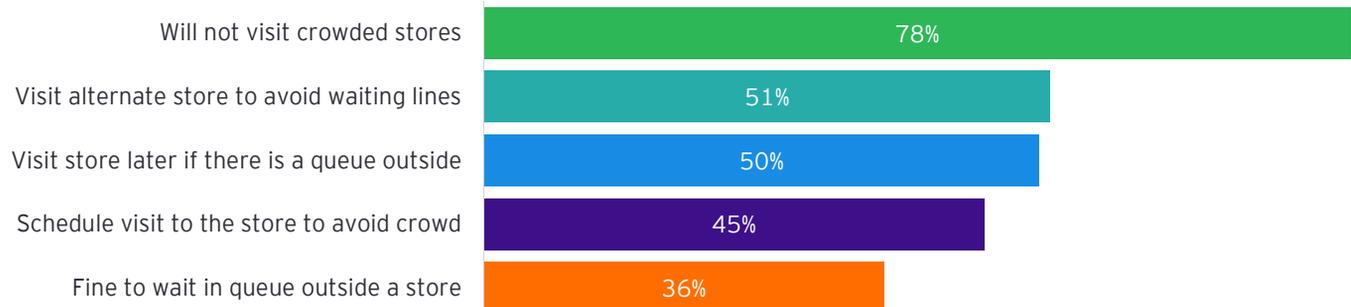
## Q: Why did you visit an alternate store? (Select all that apply)



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

45% customers said they would prefer to schedule their visit to stores as majority customers said they would avoid crowded stores and queues<sup>1</sup>

## Q: Which of the following will you consider before entering a store? (Select all that apply)



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# Customers express a willingness to try alternate brands that are local, emphasize health and hygiene and that can be delivered home

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

Billing and checkout

Concern for safety, proximity, product availability have become key influences while deciding on the choice of shop and brand. 70% respondents reported that they would switch to other brands that promise better hygiene and safety<sup>1</sup>. 56% would prefer brands that have better online services and delivery<sup>1</sup>.

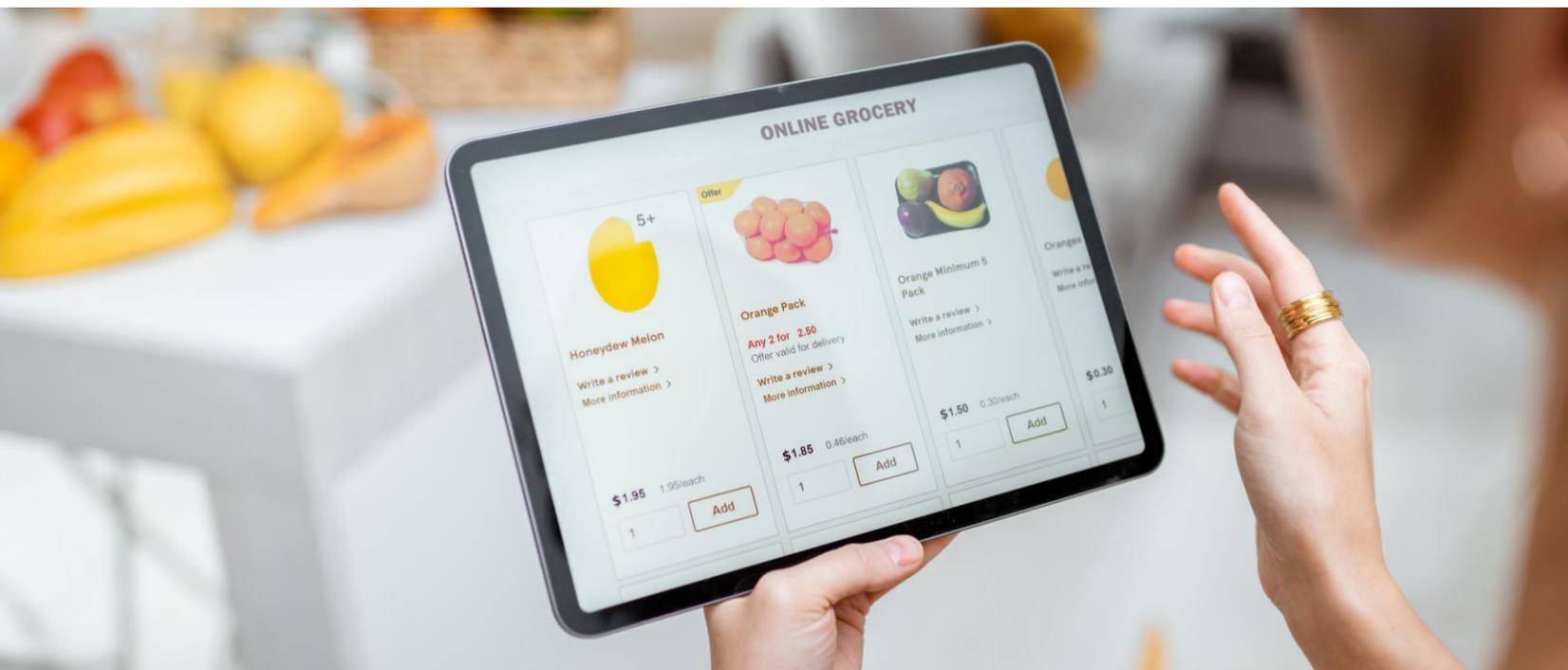
44% customers also stated that they would prefer local brands over international ones given the “vocal over local” trend initiated by the government at the time of the survey<sup>1</sup>.

## Q: Select all statements that apply with reference to brand preference



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

With fear and safety concerns still looming large on the minds of shoppers, the consideration is not just on price or quality but also centred around safety, health and convenience. Retailers will need to focus on making their customers aware of the safety and precautions associated with the product and its retail.



<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Retailers will need to optimize their store layout and adopt practices that reduce crowding and enable customers to shop quickly....

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

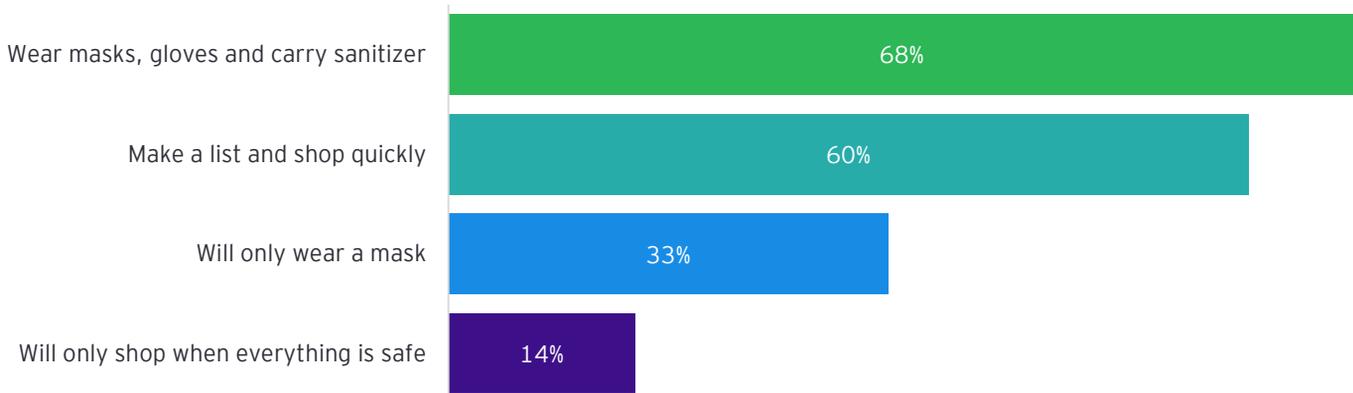
Billing and checkout

How to buy?

Going shopping is no less than going on a mission during the pandemic with 68% customers preferring to wear protective gear and 60% customers making shopping lists to reduce time spent in store<sup>1</sup>

68% respondents stated that they would wear protective gear like masks and gloves while shopping and also carry sanitizers<sup>1</sup>. 60% customers would have a pre-planned list of things to buy so as to be able to finish the shopping agenda as quickly as possible<sup>1</sup>.

Q. How will you go about planning for visiting a store? (Select all that apply)



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020



<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# ....retailers and brands will need to device interactive and empathetic messaging with an emphasis on safety, hygiene and convenience

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

Billing and checkout

Retailers can leverage emerging technologies given below to increase brand recall and consideration in the mind of the shoppers

## Mainstream and recent

- ▶ Digital interactive signages around safety, in store customer footfalls, offers, etc.
- ▶ Online presence and apps
- ▶ Search engine optimization
- ▶ Chatbots
- ▶ Influencer marketing
- ▶ Geo targeting
- ▶ Promo spend optimization
- ▶ Geo fencing
- ▶ In-store communication

## Emerging

- ▶ Predictive modelling to ascertain online search patterns for targeted marketing
- ▶ Micro customer segmentation
- ▶ Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), Key Opinion Customers (KOCs) for targeted advertising
- ▶ Private Traffic Marketing
- ▶ VR/AR assisted demos

Retailers will need to focus on how well they differentiate their service while also providing the health, safety and hygiene demands of the customers. Further, retailers will need to also address the key changes in the areas of how, when, where, what customers choose to buy and change their modus operandi accordingly.

## Key implications

1. Retailers must focus on empathetic messaging addresses customer concerns and emphasises their efforts to ensure a safe shopping experience.
2. Retailers that do not trade in differentiated product or service offerings (Grocery, multi-brand retail, non-branded), will need to either capture larger footfalls from their catchment areas or increase the catchment area altogether through targeted advertising and promotions.
3. Shoppers of luxury, jewellery categories prefer to shop physically in store to inspect and try out products. Stores need to find innovative ways to interact and engage the customers.
4. Portfolio rationalization for multi-category retailers in terms of expected demands for each category.
5. Retailers of categories, such as grocery and medicines, that are in the nature of repetitive periodical purchases, can come up with preferential and exclusive discounts for their high value customers based on purchase history. This will strengthen deeper connections with customers and promote retention and footfall.



# In store experience



# Customers are concerned about exposing themselves to the pandemic and are therefore looking for more efficient ways of shopping that enable them to spend less than 15 minutes in store

Pre-purchase

**In-store experience**

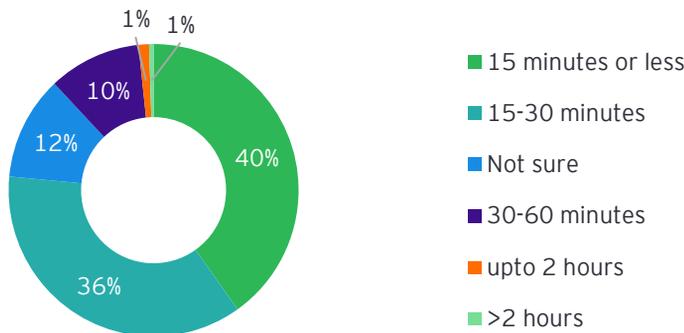
Billing and checkout

Most customers want to minimize the time spent and physical contact inside a store. Innovation is required in categories like apparel, jewellery, luxury where customers value in-store experiences

The traditional brick and mortar channel of retail has been under siege by online/omni channel platforms ever since mobile technology evolved. With the onset of COVID-19, there is an increasing thrust on retailers to readjust their business operations to account for increasing preference for online and contactless purchases and also decreasing preference for visiting stores physically.

Customers are looking for efficient ways of shopping as they want to limit their exposure outside the sanctuary of their homes to protect themselves from the pandemic with 40% respondents were unwilling to spend more than 15 minutes in any particular store<sup>1</sup>.

## Q: Going forward, what is the maximum time you are comfortable spending in a store?



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

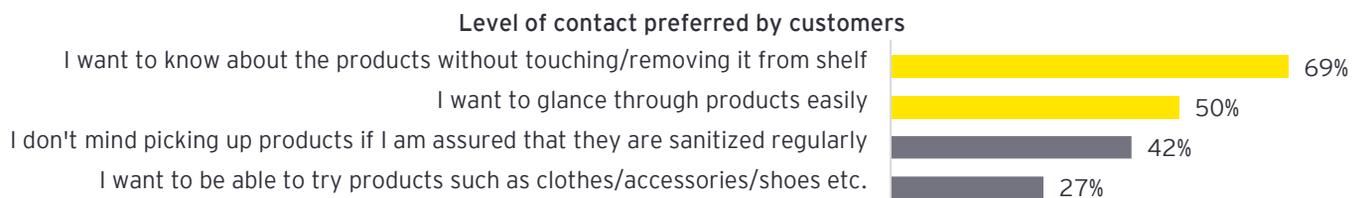
## Way arounds to assess physical attributes like size, fit, feel of the product will be needed for efficient delivery of service and meeting customer satisfactions

Further, given that majority of the customers are either not willing to enter the store nor willing to spend more than 30 minutes inside the store, the entire in-store shopping experience that might have therapeutic for some is instead causing anxiety<sup>1</sup>.

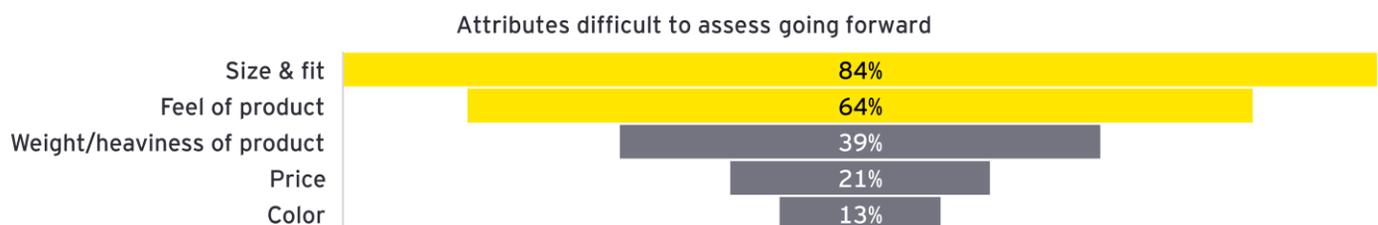
69% customers respondents want to know about the products without touching or removing products from the shelf<sup>1</sup>. Naturally, that would result in difficulty to assess the physical attributes like size, fit, feel of the product.

Use of recent and emerging technologies like AR, magic mirrors, kiosks, RFID/QR enabled information screens, in store messaging and communication will aid in improving the customers in store experience in the post pandemic era

## Q: While shopping, how much contact with products are you comfortable with? (Select all that apply)



## Q: What are the things you might find difficult to assess moving forward while shopping? (Select all that apply)



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# Majority of the customers are willing to pay a premium to aid retailers in making their in-store shopping experience faster, more seamless and contactless

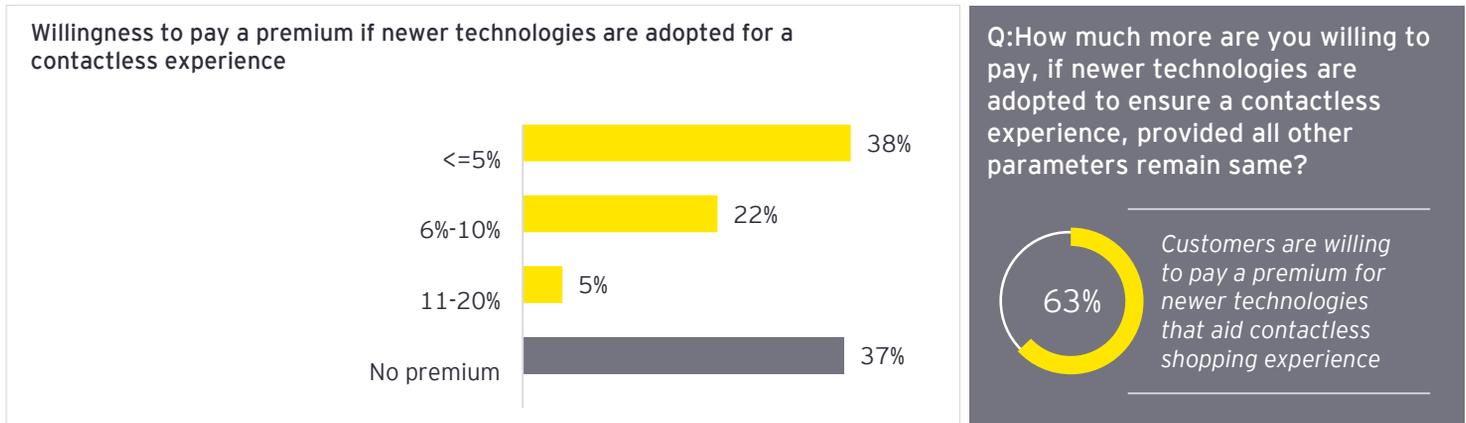
Pre-purchase

**In-store experience**

Billing and checkout

Investments in new age technologies that enhance in-store experience are not just stop gap initiatives, but are likely to yield long term benefits in terms of increased customer satisfaction, engagement and retention

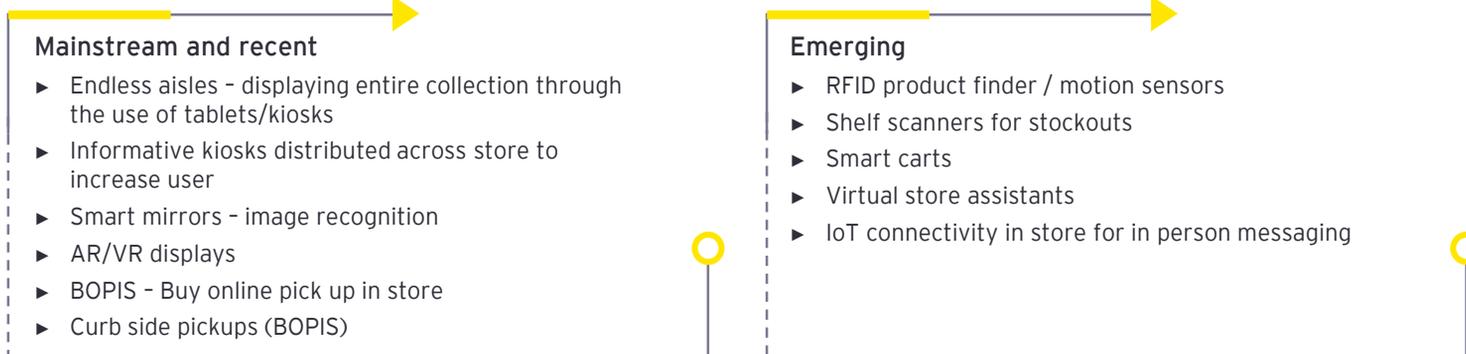
Leveraging technologies like AI, VR and automation will help retailers provide customers with enhanced experiences that optimize their shopping experience. Adoption of these technologies will provide the dual benefit of increased sales and streamlined backend costs. Customers are also willing to pay a premium to stores that adopt technologies that make the shopping experience more efficient and contactless<sup>1</sup>.



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Discussed below are some mainstream and emerging technologies that can aid retailers in enhancing the in-store experience.



## Key implications

1. Retailers need to invest in digital infrastructure in store to improve the shopping experience and efficiency for customers with a focus of differentiating the experiences of high value customers.
2. Stores can look to schedule customer visits, especially for premium categories where footfall is limited and customers expect and appreciate personalized attention and service. Additionally, for non premium categories as well, stores can look to provide personalized services to premium, high value customers such as booking appointments and sales representatives. This also provides an opportunity to upsell and cross sell products.
3. Deploy navigation technologies that will help customers efficiently navigate through stores based on items in their basket to reduce touchpoints and time spent in store.
4. Stores can opt for innovative sales models where part of the collection can be shown online prior to the visit through video calls or online catalogues. The shortlisted favourites in the correct sizes and variations can then be tried out and seen in person at a scheduled visit in store.
5. Data backed decision making on store inventory, planogram, SKUs, heatmaps, staffing and layout to minimize overcrowding, optimise layout of products (e.g. keep high value products in areas of higher footfall) and gain nuanced understanding of customer preferences.
6. Branch rationalisation based on continuous performance evaluation and finding alternate use cases such as warehousing, experience centres, etc.

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# Checkout and delivery



# Point of purchase and delivery are quick wins in the contactless technology implementation plans

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

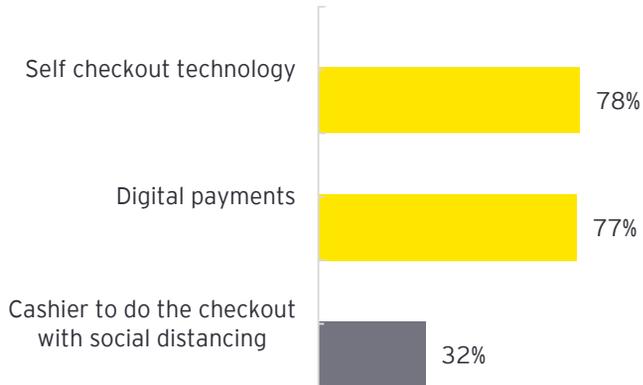
Billing and checkout

Emerging technologies like IoT and AI can help retailers deliver seamless and efficient checkout experiences

The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of contactless technologies among customers. While the concern to limit contact with others is driven by the pandemic.

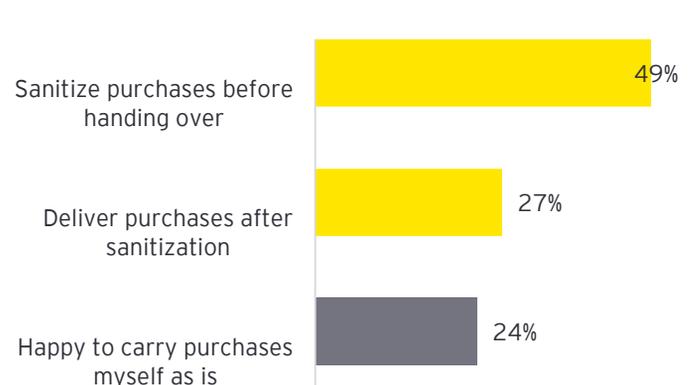
- ▶ 76% customers want their purchases to be sanitized again after purchase<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 76% customers prefer to pay via UPI or digital wallets<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 78% customers would prefer to use self-checkout kiosks<sup>1</sup>

**Q: During checkout, which experience would you prefer? (Select all that apply)**



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

**Q: How would you prefer your purchases to be handed over to you?**



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Customers are expecting the building blocks of contactless technology - digital payments and self check out kiosks - to become mainstream in the near future. In addition, adoption of emerging technologies like AI and IoT will enable organizations to transform their contactless offering.



<sup>1</sup>. EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Tailoring technology investments with product and customer strategy will enable retailers to optimize customer experiences and stay ahead of competitors.

Pre-purchase

In-store experience

Billing and checkout

#### Mainstream and recent

- ▶ Digital wallets and UPI
- ▶ Self Checkout kiosks

#### Emerging

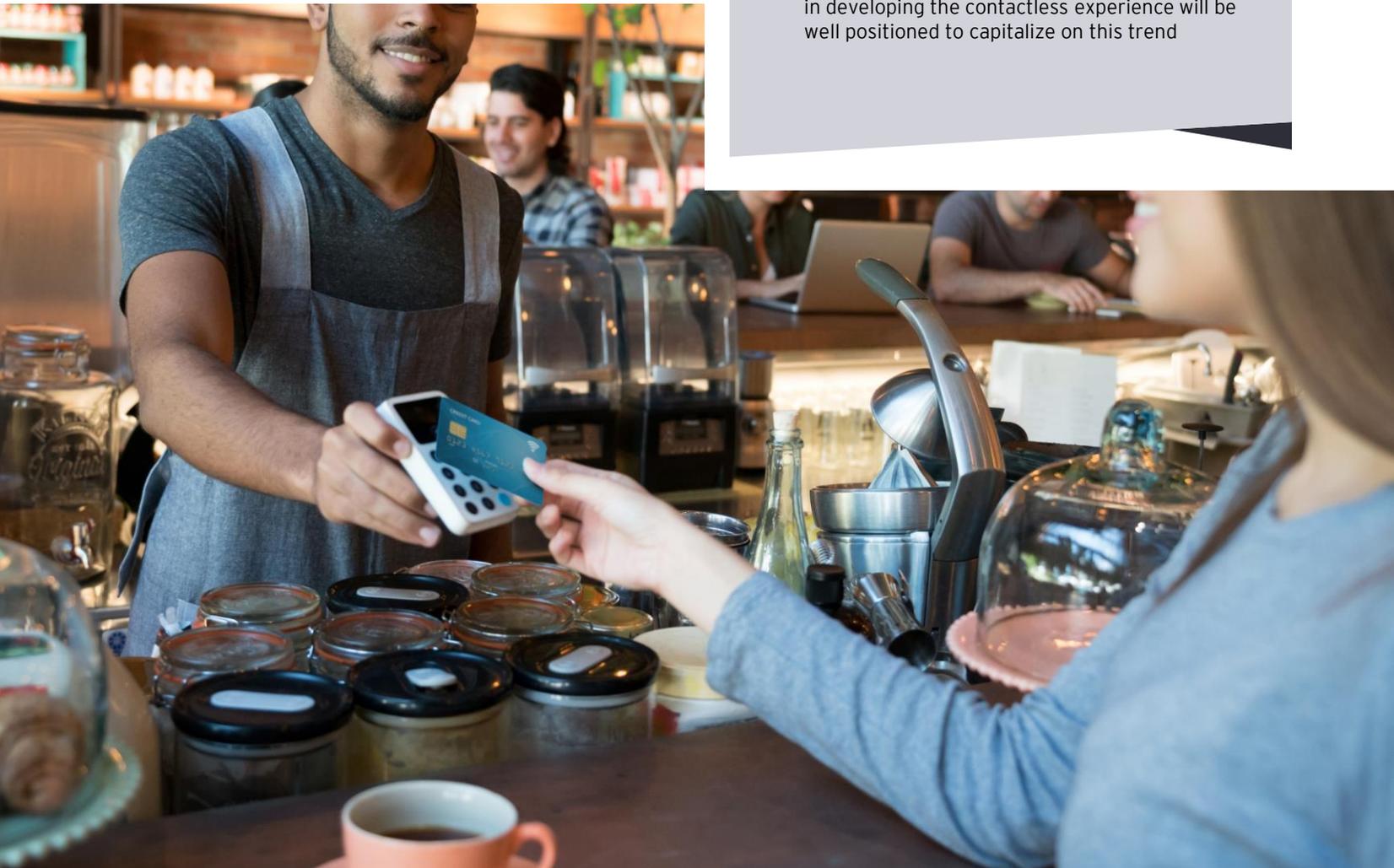
- ▶ AI based repurchase recommendations
- ▶ AI based cross sell / upselling
- ▶ IoT connectivity in store for automated checkouts

#### Amazon Go pioneers a complete contactless experience for grocery shopping<sup>(1)</sup>

Amazon launched a completely contactless shopping experience for grocery shoppers, using what it calls the 'Just walk out' technology. Leveraging a combination of AI, Deep Learning and RFID sensors, shoppers can simply walk into an Amazon Go stores, pick up required items and walk out. No cashiers, no queues. Shoppers log in through the Amazon Go app. The technology detects when products are taken or returned to the shelves and keeps track of them in the virtual cart. Customers are billed on the Amazon app when they walk out of the store.

#### Key implications

- ▶ Sanitization efforts in store need to be well-communicated to customers to empathize with their concerns and assure them that safety measures to protect customers are in place. Further efforts to sanitize products at the point of purchase need to be visible to the customer
- ▶ Contactless technologies are becoming a must have for retailers as customers are looking for effective and efficient shopping experiences. Retailers that have the initial building blocks in place, supported with a longer term investment in developing the contactless experience will be well positioned to capitalize on this trend



<sup>1</sup>. <https://www.pocket-lint.com/phones/news/amazon/139650-what-is-amazon-go-where-is-it-and-how-does-it-work>

# Customer preference for buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS) is increasing amidst a desire to reduce time spent in the store

Pre-purchase

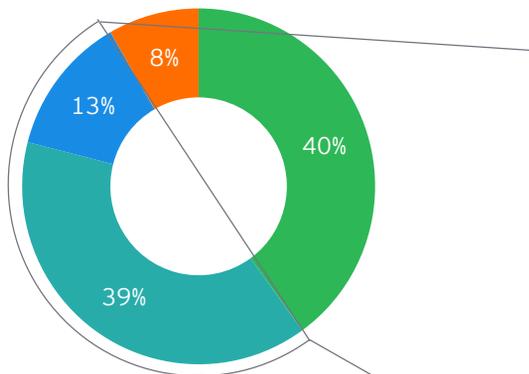
In-store experience

Billing and checkout

Customers are indicating a preference for more efficient ways of shopping in order to reduce the time they spend at retail stores

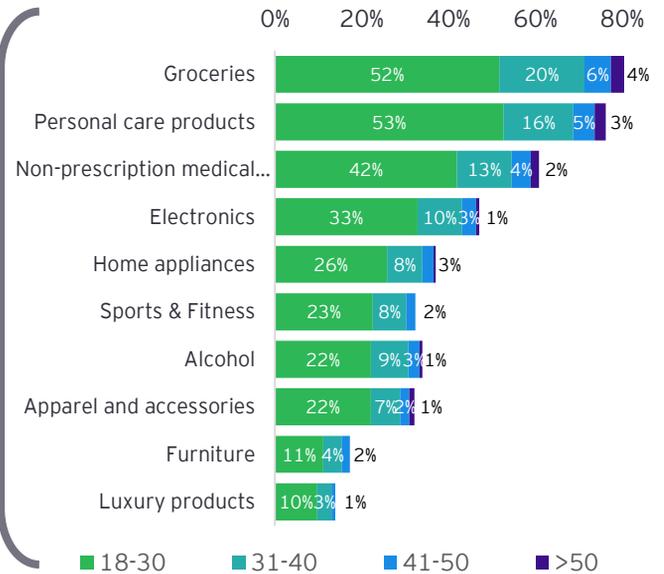
- ▶ 79% customers express a preference towards BOPIS, with 39% customers willing to adopt the technology across all product categories<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 81% customers are willing to adopt BOPIS in the grocery and personal care product categories<sup>1</sup>

**Q: Would you be okay to order over phone/app and pay online and collect your order later from the store to maintain social distancing?**



- Depends on type of shop
- Yes that's what will happen in days ahead
- No I need to see things in real to make a purchase decision
- Not sure

**Q: Which type of products are you comfortable with ordering over phone and self-pickup? (Select all that apply)**



Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

Source: EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

## EY assists in implementing self checkout technology at a leading fashion retailer

A fashion retailer with more than 75 stores across the GCC, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the Indian subcontinent offers an exhaustive and impressive range of furniture, home furnishings, home accessories, and kitchenware. The challenge was to provide a digital experience to customers and also reduce the total checkout time. This was achieved through a customized solution to provide flexibility to customers to self-checkout items and integrating the CRM and POS system.

EY helped in developing the custom mobility app enabling customers to self-checkout with a minimum number of steps. The app has an interactive UI, is integrated with the existing billing system and loyalty system to ensure customer purchase history is maintained and points are earned. The technology provides both long term and short term benefits. It is helpful in reducing the time spent in store and crowding at billing queues during the pandemic. Additionally, it enhances customer experience and engagement.

## Key implications

- ▶ Invest in technologies that make the checkout stage seamless and efficient such as, fast tag lanes, smart carts, self service kiosks, etc to reduce friction. However, fraud management and maintaining discipline are challenges which retailers will need to tackle in innovative ways.
- ▶ The emerging 'planned buying' behaviour of customers along with streamlined and efficient checkout experiences will influence impulse purchases. Retailers must take these developments into account to optimize their product placement across stores.
- ▶ Use of geo-tagging technologies to enable express delivery within reasonable distances and charges based on kilometres travelled.
- ▶ Implementation of newer modes like curbside pick ups, drive through pick ups, shared pick up points for sister brands, can help retain and capture customers who prefer to limit social interactions during the pandemic. Further, this provides the opportunity to leverage on impulse purchases. Additionally, these business models can help out in the longer term by providing customers with added flexibility across their purchase journey.

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

# There is a significant change in consumer behaviour that is impacting how they evaluate purchase decisions and their expectations from the retail experience

1

## Spend priorities across categories

Customers are exercising caution and reducing spend on non essentials; groceries and non-prescriptive medicines emerge as clear winners

- ▶ Grocery and non-prescriptive medical care categories witnessed a 20% increase in net spend<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Apparel and Jewellery might see a slightly longer recovery period with a reduction in net spend of ~45% and over 40% customers stating that they would postpone purchases in these categories till after the pandemic<sup>1</sup>

2

## Innovative channel strategy

Customers express an increasing willingness to shop online for home appliances and electronics, however for automobiles, furniture and jewellery customers will predominantly prefer offline experiences

- ▶ Electronics, cosmetics and home appliances are seeing a shift in buying behaviour with approximately 40% customers preferring to buy online<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In jewellery, automobiles and furniture, customers still prefer to purchase through offline channels with less than 20% customers reporting a willing to make online purchases in these categories<sup>1</sup>

For premium categories like luxury, jewellery, apparels that are still preferred to be purchased via physical outlets, retailers can work to enhance in-store experience while meeting safety concerns by leveraging technology and innovative roundabouts

3

## Preference for proximity - near to home wins

Customers express an increasing willingness to shop online for home appliances and electronics, however for automobiles, furniture and jewellery customers will predominantly prefer offline experiences

- ▶ 46% customers did not go to their primary grocery store and visited alternate stores due to proximity, sanitation and crowd. For 28% customers, this change was permanent<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ About 50% customers who preferred shopping at malls and multi-brand stores indicated that they would now prefer to shop at locations closer to home<sup>1</sup>

Consumer purchase decisions are moving beyond product attributes like price and quality, with increasing importance on purchasing channel and safety

4

## In-store shopping as we knew it is going to change

Customers are looking for efficient ways of shopping as they want to limit their exposure outside the sanctuary of their homes to protect themselves from the pandemic

- ▶ 76% customers are not willing to spend more than 30 minutes in a store<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 80% customers would avoid stores which are crowded<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 76% customers indicated that they would like their purchases to be sanitised again at the point of purchase<sup>1</sup>

Retailers need to invest in digital infrastructure in store to improve the shopping experience and efficiency for the customers

5

## The 'untact' customer journey

Customers are willing to adopt technologies that help make their shopping experiences more efficient and are even willing to pay a premium for it.

- ▶ 75% customers would prefer to use digital payments and self check out facilities to limit contact and make checkout a seamless experience<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 69% customers would like to know product information without touching products while shopping<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Size, fit and feel are features customers feel they would find difficult to assess in a contactless environment
- ▶ 67% customers said they were willing to pay a premium for services and technology that made the shopping experience more efficient<sup>1</sup>

This is a double win for retailers as implementing emerging technologies to increase the efficiency of operations in the short term and also provide them with substantial and sustainable cost savings across the value chain

<sup>1</sup> EY COVID Impact Retail Survey, 2020

## This report is a product of the EYFCUX Design lab

EYFCUX focuses on understanding human sentiments, business ecosystems and their impact on each other.

We want to study how fragile human relationships evolve in the current situation and how these evolving situations challenge loyalties, long-established behaviours and the resulting digital awakening.

We provide user research, design thinking and customer experience design.

Get in touch with us for more such reports!

### Key Contacts



**Mahesh Makhija**  
Digital & Emerging  
Technologies Leader, EY India  
mahesh.makhija@in.ey.com



**Shashank Shwet**  
Customer & Design Leader,  
EY India  
shashank.shwet@in.ey.com



**Shilpa Singhai**  
Director, Digital & Emerging  
Technologies, EY India  
shilpa.singhai@in.ey.com



**Radha Agarwal**  
Manager, Customer & Design,  
EY India  
radha.agarwal@in.ey.com

### Contributors



**Vivek Kapoor**  
Sr. Consultant  
Consulting, EY India



**Smita Hansdah**  
Sr. Consultant  
Consulting, EY India



**Sonakshi Garg**  
Consultant  
Consulting, EY India



**Praveen P**  
Consultant  
Consulting, EY India



**Armaan Ireland**  
Associate Consultant  
Consulting, EY India

# Our offices

## Ahmedabad

22nd Floor, B Wing, Privilon,  
Ambli BRT Road, Behind Iskcon  
Temple, Off SG Highway,  
Ahmedabad - 380 015  
Tel: + 91 79 6608 3800

## Bengaluru

6th, 12th & 13th floor  
"UB City", Canberra Block  
No.24 Vittal Mallya Road  
Bengaluru - 560 001  
Tel: + 91 80 6727 5000

Ground Floor, 'A' wing  
Divyasree Chambers  
# 11, O'Shaughnessy Road  
Langford Gardens  
Bengaluru - 560 025  
Tel: + 91 80 6727 5000

## Chandigarh

Elante offices, Unit No. B-613 & 614  
6th Floor, Plot No- 178-178A,  
Industrial & Business Park, Phase-I,  
Chandigarh - 160002  
Tel: + 91 172 671 7800

## Chennai

Tidel Park, 6th & 7th Floor  
A Block, No.4, Rajiv Gandhi Salai  
Taramani, Chennai - 600 113  
Tel: + 91 44 6654 8100

## Delhi NCR

Golf View Corporate Tower B  
Sector 42, Sector Road  
Gurgaon - 122 002  
Tel: + 91 124 443 4000

3rd & 6th Floor, Worldmark-1  
IGI Airport Hospitality District  
Aerocity, New Delhi - 110 037  
Tel: + 91 11 4731 8000

4th & 5th Floor, Plot No 2B  
Tower 2, Sector 126  
NOIDA - 201 304  
Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.  
Tel: + 91 120 671 7000

## Hyderabad

THE SKYVIEW 10  
18th Floor, "Zone A"  
Survey No 83/1, Raidurgam  
Hyderabad - 500032  
Tel: + 91 40 6736 2000

## Jamshedpur

1st Floor, Shantiniketan Building  
Holding No. 1, SB Shop Area  
Bistupur, Jamshedpur - 831 001  
Tel: + 91 657 663 1000

## Kochi

9th Floor, ABAD Nucleus  
NH-49, Maradu PO  
Kochi - 682 304  
Tel: + 91 484 433 4000

## Kolkata

22 Camac Street  
3rd Floor, Block 'C'  
Kolkata - 700 016  
Tel: + 91 33 6615 3400

## Mumbai

14th Floor, The Ruby  
29 Senapati Bapat Marg  
Dadar (W), Mumbai - 400 028  
Tel: + 91 22 6192 0000

5th Floor, Block B-2  
Nirlon Knowledge Park  
Off. Western Express Highway  
Goregaon (E)  
Mumbai - 400 063  
Tel: + 91 22 6192 0000

## Pune

C-401, 4th floor  
Panchshil Tech Park  
Yerwada  
(Near Don Bosco School)  
Pune - 411 006  
Tel: + 91 20 4912 6000

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