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How does the proliferation of e-commerce influence consumer expenditure patterns, and what factors contribute to the effectiveness of e-commerce strategies in stimulating consumer spending in the digital age ?

Research Paper by
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Introduction

The proliferation of e-commerce has significantly influenced consumer spending patterns, reshaping how individuals interact with retailers and make purchase decisions. The major driver of this shift has been the convenience of online shopping, allowing customers to shop anywhere, at any time without the constraints of limited store hours. This easy access and the ability to make online payments has led to a tremendous increase in consumer spending through online marketplaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, as consumers turned to online shopping to avoid physical interactions, making a substantial proportion of global purchases digitally. "As global internet access and adoption rapidly increase, with over five billion internet users worldwide, the number of people making purchases online is ever-increasing. In 2024, retail e-commerce sales are estimated to exceed 6.3 trillion U.S. dollars worldwide, which is expected to reach new heights in the coming years" (Gelder, 2024).

Additionally, integrating mobile devices into e-commerce has revolutionized the shopping experience, offering personalized and accessible options through mobile apps, payments, and loyalty programs. "Advances in e-commerce are the driving factors behind this shopping evolution. Consumers no longer have to go out to go shopping. E-commerce has brought the shopping experience to their fingertips via desktop and mobile devices, completely changing how consumers shop" (ESW, 2022).

E-commerce strategies such as using the omnichannel approach, which integrates online and offline experiences, have been crucial in stimulating consumer spending by maximizing customer satisfaction. Businesses have harnessed the power of reviews and recommendations to build trust and credibility, enhancing customer experience and retention. As e-commerce continues to evolve, it impacts both economic activities and social environments. This shift demands policymakers address challenges like security, competition, and consumer protection to reap its benefits.

E-commerce's accessibility and convenience have increased autonomous consumption drastically by encouraging spending through 24/7 shopping, an array of product ranges, and flexible payment options. Marginal consumption has also risen through personalized recommendations, impulsive buying, and lower prices offered online. The shift in consumer spending patterns also includes the increased frequency of smaller and more convenient purchases. Furthermore, Price comparisons and discounts have attracted more spending during online shopping by making them prominent with elaborate designs and colors that appeal to users. Meanwhile, psychological influences like instant gratification and social proof from reviews strongly influence buying behavior as they instill favorable perceptions in the customer's mind. Due to this, traditional retail faces significant competition from e-commerce, leading to hybrid models that integrate both online and offline experiences to improve customer experience and maximize sale conversion rates.

This research paper aims to delve into how spending patterns differ between offline and online shopping, exploring behavioral changes in consumer psychology since the rise of e-commerce. To achieve this, we will conduct a survey to ask questions that enable us to uncover the key factors driving consumer behavior in the digital age.

E-commerce has impacted various product categories differently, with fashion, electronics, and groceries becoming increasingly popular due to their better availability online. Consumers now have access to a wider range of products, can easily compare prices, and often seek discounts and read reviews before making decisions.The global reach of e-commerce has allowed consumers to purchase products unavailable in their domestic markets, hence expanding their horizons of product variety as customers and companies horizons to penetrate new markets. Social media and influencer marketing have become crucial in shaping consumer perceptions and driving sales as reviews and endorsements from these influencers and celebrities significantly influence purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the growth of digital wallets and online payment options has increased consumer confidence and convenience, further boosting online shopping.

Numerous factors contribute to the effectiveness of e-commerce strategies. A flawless user experience and visually appealing website design are crucial factors for boosting sales. Using personalization, targeted marketing, and leveraging data analytics to tailor recommendations, and drive customer loyalty for businesses. Social media platforms provide additional visibility and engagement opportunities, while promotions and discounts create a sense of urgency and encourage purchases. Reliable customer service and leveraging technology, such as AI-powered chatbots, enhances the overall shopping experience, fostering customer loyalty and increasing sales. It can be undoubtedly said that advancements in technology will continue to influence consumer spending patterns, hence making it essential for businesses to stay adaptive and customer-focused in this evolving landscape.
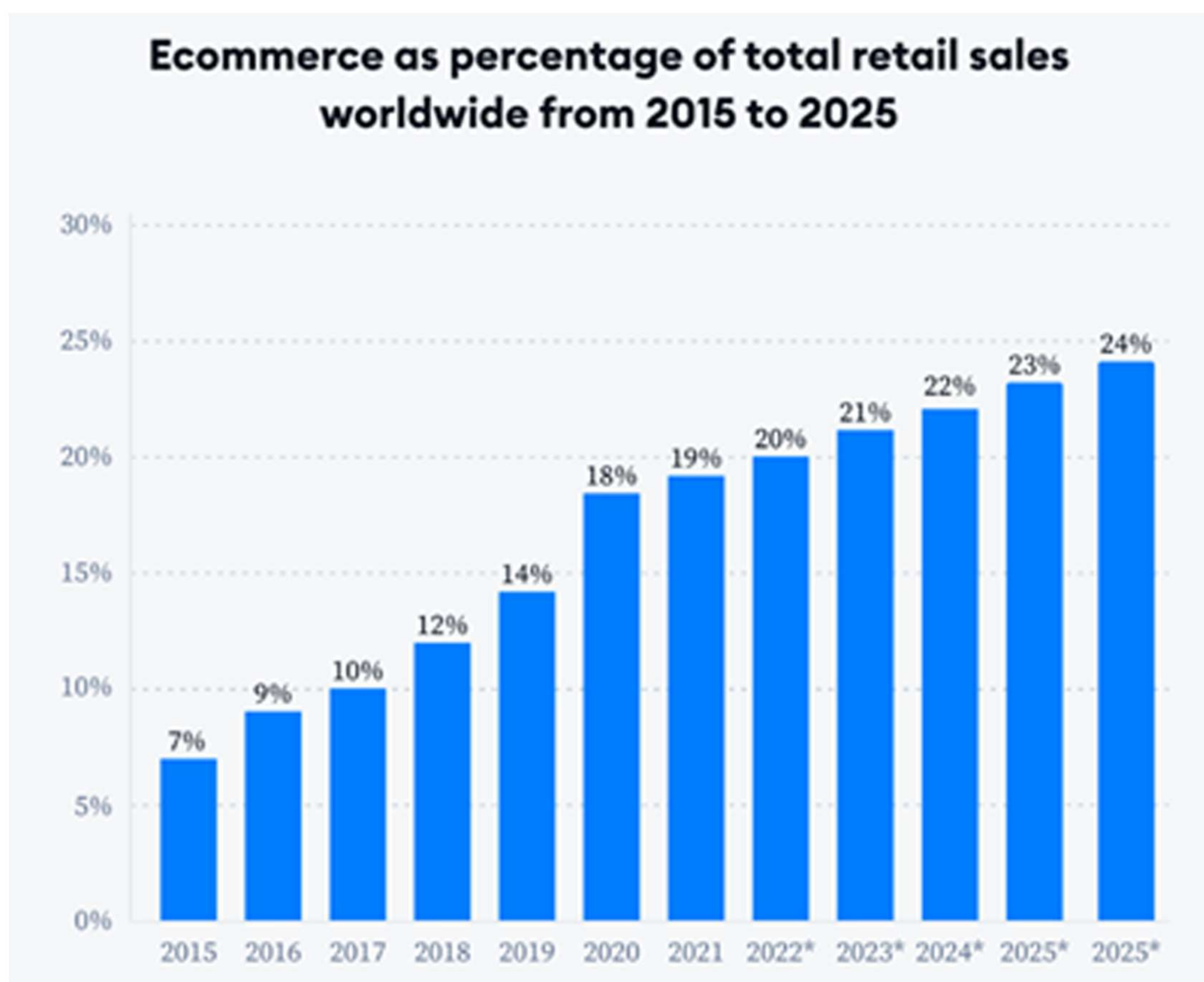
Impact of E-Commerce Proliferation on Consumer Expenditure Patterns

Changing Shopping Habits

The convenience of online shopping has led to shoppers preferring online stores over physical stores, and the number of online shoppers is ever-increasing.
"Over the past few years, the average order value for e-commerce purchases has increased globally, from around 118 U.S. dollars in September 2022 to around 126 U.S. dollars in the same month of 2023. In the fourth quarter of 2023, online shoppers spent an average of about 2.95 U.S. dollars per visit across all verticals" (Chevalier,2024).
The following graph shows that the percentage of retail shopping that takes place online is increasing year by year, indicating a change in shopping habits.

Ecommerce as percentage of total retail sales worldwide from 2015 to 2025

Year	Percentage
2015	7%
2016	9%
2017	10%
2018	12%
2019	14%
2020	18%
2021	19%
2022*	20%
2023*	21%
2024*	22%
2025*	23%
2025*	24%

"Currently, about 20% of all retail sales happen online. E-commerce sales make up a growing share of retail. As recently as 2017, online sales accounted for just 1/10th of all worldwide sales. By 2025, they are expected to represent almost 25% of total retail sales" (Fokina, 2024).

The biggest impact that e-commerce has had on consumer shopping habits is that consumers can shop from anywhere, anytime. They no longer have to wait until store hours to make a purchase, they can shop at any time within the comfort of their homes, while commuting to work, etc. Mobile shopping is on the rise as the ability to research and shop online has been around for a while, but with the spread of internet services and availability of seamless applications on mobile phones, mobile has taken e-commerce to the next level because shoppers can use the device at any point during the sales cycle.

"Online shoppers have clear preferences when it comes to device type. When comparing gadgets, the average purchase amount has always been the highest for desktops, with an order value of 170 U.S. dollars. This indicates that bigger purchases are made via desktop computers. However, consumers are more likely to complete orders when shopping on mobile devices. Mobile devices were also clearly preferred when browsing retail websites, with around three-fourths of consumers using smartphones instead of desktops or tablets" (Chevalier, 2024).

Now, consumers prefer a personalized experience while shopping, which is seamless and convenient on different devices and at all stages of the buying process. "People are 40% more likely to spend more than they'd planned if their experience is personalized" (ESW, 2022).

For example, GOAT, a mobile sneaker marketplace lets its users create wish lists. The app sends the users a push notification, when their wish-listed sneakers go on sale, or the price drops into the shopper's target price range. This way the company has created a personalized experience that is driving business. The company now has more than 7 million users globally.

"Based on the convenience they experience from online shopping portals, today's shopper expects a lot more variety even while visiting a retail store. The seamless online shopping experience has also impacted the behavioral expectations of shoppers, as they now expect the same smoothness, timely response, and convenience even for services (like at a salon) that generally cannot be offered online. Shoppers can also read comments online, instantly seeing how others feel about the product" (Mitchell, 2024).

Impact on Product Categories

E-commerce has significantly impacted product categories by making a wide range of products readily available to consumers to shop from at any time, anywhere. Electronics, fashion, and groceries have emerged as popular categories due to the convenience of online shopping, the same can be seen in the following graph.

Top Online Shopping Categories Worldwide in 2023

Category	Value
Fashion	$1070 billion
Electronics	$990 billion
Toys, Hobby & DIY	$720 billion
Furniture	$530 billion
Beauty, Health, Personal & Household Care	$450 billion

Fashion has seen increased sales from the ease of browsing and purchasing through mobile apps and websites. Electronics often see higher expenditure due to frequent technological advancements attractive online deals and increased customer knowledge through reviews and feedback. "Home furniture is the category in which consumers spent the most money per visit on average, at 3.41 U.S. dollars, followed by luxury apparel at 3.24 dollars" (Chevalier, 2024).

"Choosing the right products matters a lot to businesses because each industry has completely different values related to shopping cart abandonment rates, conversion rates, or average order value" (Fokina, 2024).

Consumers also get to choose from a wider range of products as many stores offer a wider array of products online than they carry in their brick-and-mortar counterparts. Many stores that solely exist online may offer consumers exclusive inventory that is unavailable elsewhere, which gives the customers a sense of exclusivity.

Consumers are also more price-sensitive and do comparison shopping. They have the ease of comparing prices and products online from a wide range available, they look for discounts on different websites and read product reviews. It influences consumer decision-making and expenditure.

Consumers now also have the option of purchasing products not available in their domestic markets as they have access to more information, and e-commerce has given them access to products from around the world. "New trade agreements and advances in e-commerce technology have opened the door for brands to sell outside their domestic markets and customers are bought in. Global cross-border sales are expected to hit more than $4 trillion by 2027" (ESW, 2022).

Shopping as a Social Activity

Before E-Commerce and social media sites, customers relied on salespeople to guide them about products and explain various features so that they could make the best purchase. Now customers enter stores, online and offline, armed with the information they need to make a purchase, thanks to the reviews they have already read online.
There is a growing onset of social media influencers, who people look up to for inspiration and reviews about various products, positive reviews or endorsements from celebrities go a long way in driving sales for a product or brand. "Today, 95% of shoppers read reviews before making a purchase. And it does not matter to consumers that these reviews are from strangers. They trust the reviews more than they trust what the brands themselves are saying. That's why consumers, not brands, are more responsible now for shaping the perception of a brand, says Chris Campbell, CEO of ReviewTrackers. These online reviews have become so important that 94 percent of people have avoided a business because of a negative online review, the company's research shows" (ESW, 2022).

Influence of Digital Payment Methods

With the growth of digital wallets and online payment options, consumers can shop online with increased convenience. It has increased consumer confidence and positively influenced consumer spending habits.

According to Statista, in 2023, mobile wallets accounted for approximately half of all global e-commerce payment transactions, making them the most popular online payment option worldwide. This is expected to expand at a CAGR of 14.9 percent between 2023 and 2027. Credit cards ranked second with a 22% market share in 2023, a figure that is expected to fall in the future years.

Although digital and mobile wallets were the most popular payment methods for online purchases around the world, other countries used them more. For example, digital or mobile wallets were most popular in the Asia Pacific area, accounting for over 60% of e-commerce transactions in 2020. In comparison, this method's transaction share was just around 20% in Latin America.

"Consumers in the United Kingdom and the United States both liked using digital or mobile wallets when paying for products or services online. One major difference between these two groups, however, was their approach to card payment methods. Approximately 30 percent of online shoppers in the UK made payments using debit cards, while U.S. shoppers had a clear preference for credit cards in 2020" (Best, 2024)

Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of E-commerce Strategies

User Experience and Website Design

User experience and website design are very important factors as it is crucial to ensure that when a shopper visits a website or app, they get a seamless experience and an attractive website so that they complete their purchase. Intuitive navigation and user-friendly interfaces go a long way in driving sales for a company.

"Many of us go day-to-day with a smartphone within arm's reach — which means shopping is also going mobile. The share of mobile commerce in all e-commerce has been on the rise, expected to reach 62% in 2027. In response, online businesses need to ensure their e-commerce sites are responsive on mobile and provide a seamless experience across all devices. This means optimizing content for smaller screens, enabling one-click ordering, and offering other conveniences that support on-the-go shopping" (BigCommerce, 2024).
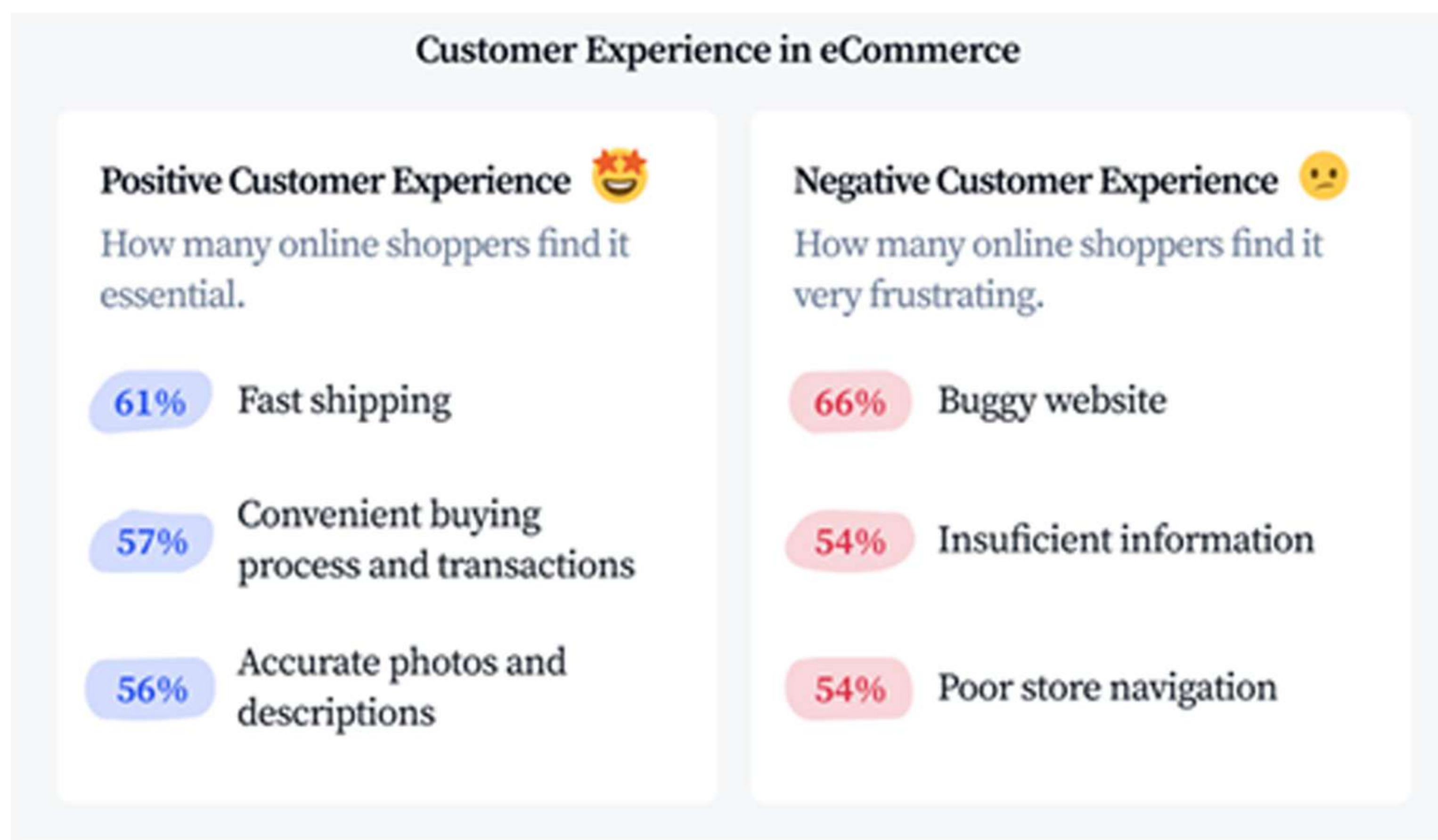
It is important to keep up with new trends and quickly respond to technological changes. Experts suggest that rather than relying on one vendor for all of the business requirements, an organization should take a composable commerce approach that allows businesses to choose best-in-breed vendors to create a robust, functional technology stack that works best for their business.

"Foundational digital literacy and analytics capabilities are critical enablers in achieving a long-term competitive advantage in e-commerce" (Chapple,2022).

All steps of a customer journey need to be taken care of, most importantly the checkout step. Even the smallest hiccup during the process can turn a sale into a lost customer, leading to an unnecessary loss despite having good products.

For many customers, the best checkout experiences are the ones that offer flexible payment options. "In fact, 13% of customers will abandon their carts if they don't see enough payment methods available. Focus on providing a variety of payment options such as credit cards, digital wallet payments like PayPal or Apple Wallet, or one-click checkout options like Bolt. In addition, you can offer financing options like buy now, pay later (BNPL), allowing you to connect your brick-and-mortar stores with your online store" (BigCommerce, 2024).

The following illustration highlights the importance of a Seamless User Experience.

Customer Experience in eCommerce

Positive Customer Experience 🤩
How many online shoppers find it essential.

- 61% Fast shipping
- 57% Convenient buying process and transactions
- 56% Accurate photos and descriptions

Negative Customer Experience 😕
How many online shoppers find it very frustrating.

- 66% Buggy website
- 54% Insuficient information
- 54% Poor store navigation

Source: Tidio

Personalization and Targeted Marketing

Research shows that personalization drives customer loyalty. In fact, a study from Google and Storyline Strategies found that 72% of consumers are more likely to be loyal to a brand if they offer a personalized customer experience. Organizations can make the best use of data analytics to tailor recommendations and offers. These personalized experiences leave an impact on consumer spending.

"For many, it looks like creating a seamless omnichannel experience that engages the customer at every touchpoint. For example, merchants can utilize product feed management tools like Feedonomics to streamline data optimization, product listing, and order syncing across their social and marketplace channels. From there, businesses can deliver a unique experience to each customer with personalized product recommendations, ad retargeting, push notifications, and even dynamic pricing" (BigCommerce, 2024).

However, with growing awareness about data privacy, consumers grow doubtful of how companies store and use their data, retailers can respond by giving customers the option to "opt-in" to personalization by volunteering personal data. Not only does this help in building trust with the customers but also makes it easier for organizations to be transparent about how they use customer data, and at the same time make the best use of the data for personalization and marketing.

Leading E-commerce companies invest in the right tools, partnerships, and capabilities to build an internal 360-degree view of consumers to meet shoppers' increased demand for personalization.

"Companies can aggregate transaction data, media exposure, and interaction data, website activity, first-party data, and additional data sets to link a consumer ID across multiple different data systems. With this information, organizations can take chronological views of consumers' engagement to build a fully automated, repeatable, scalable meth-odology to identify future activation oppor-tunities in a personalized way. This approach can capture meaningful business value: for example, a food company recently improved its return on digital advertising spending by more than 40 percent by targeting look-alike audiences using first-party data" (Chapple, 2022).

Social Media and Influencer Marketing

"Over the past couple of years, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have grown into more than just social media platforms — now they're also hubs for social commerce. In fact, Insider Intelligence estimates that 110.4 million people will shop via social channels in 2024" (BigCommerce, 2024).

Organizations can leverage social media platforms for brand visibility and engagement, they can go for influencer endorsements, and celebrity marketing to build brand awareness and consumer trust to drive purchasing decisions positively.

Owing to the popularity of experiences like one-click checkout and live shopping, these channels are becoming more and more customer-friendly, making it seamless for customers to search for and purchase products. In addition, social commerce has a low barrier, allowing small online businesses also to get a level playing field by marketing on social media handles to targeted customers in a cost-effective manner. It helps in enhancing brand awareness, growing their audience, and offering customers a frictionless buying experience.

Promotions and Discounts

E-commerce platforms use various strategies to create effective sales promotions and discounts that stimulate consumer spending. Companies can offer limited-time offers, flash sales, and seasonal discounts as they create a sense of urgency, prompting immediate purchases. Loyalty programs, subscription models, and referral bonuses can be used to reward repeat customers and encourage them to bring in new shoppers.

"From food and beverage brands to clothing rental companies, subscription services have taken over a wide range of e-commerce industries — and continue to grow. The Washington Post even predicts that, by 2025, the "subscription economy" will grow to $1.5 trillion. For many e-commerce brands, this business model is attractive as it not only offers continuous revenue but also increases customer loyalty. Coupled with a loyalty program, these subscription models can offer shoppers access to exclusive discounts and offers, early access to new products, and personalized customer support" (BigCommerce, 2024).

Additionally, bundling products at a reduced price and offering free shipping for orders over a certain amount add value and attract more sales. As consumers have become more price-sensitive with various options online, targeted discounts based on consumer behavior and preferences can help ensure that promotions are relevant appealing, and competitive at the same time.

Customer Service and Leveraging Technology

Reliable and accessible customer support is very important for any business, it helps in ensuring that the customer has a good after-sale experience as well, and increases the chances of repeat purchases.

New technologies can be leveraged for customer services. For example, by offering real-time assistance and personalized recommendations, chatbots not only streamline customer service but also foster customer relationships and affinity for e-commerce brands. Over the past few years, AI has changed the e-commerce industry drastically, allowing brands to automate every corner of their businesses. From streamlining customer service with chatbots to personalizing product recommendations to optimizing the supply chain, AI has positively impacted businesses to reach new heights.

"Technology-powered shopping portals also allow a comparatively better utility to customers, like an easy repeat of standard monthly grocery orders. The use of big data and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered systems that better monitor a customer's shopping pattern and behavior via online portals is a win-win—the consumers receive customized offers and promotions, and shopping portals benefit by pitching products with a high likelihood of being purchased" (Mitchell, 2024).

"In the near term, we can expect to see a few focus areas: AI will improve the individual's shopping experience by leveraging data to improve personalization and customer service. It will provide services similar to what a consumer expects when they interact with a real-life salesperson. For example, generative AI will help buyers find products, answer their questions, complete orders, and process refunds" (Stabler, 2024).

Primary Research Data Summary

This survey was conducted to gain insights into the demographics and preferences of a diverse group of respondents. A total of 55 individuals participated, representing various age groups, with the majority (50.9%) falling between the ages of 35 and 44. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 58.2% identifying as female and 41.8% as male. Most respondents are either self-employed, employed, or homemakers, providing a valuable perspective on consumer behavior and trends. This questionnaire aims to explore their preferences, habits, and attitudes toward various topics, offering a well-rounded understanding of the surveyed population.

The survey results reveal insightful trends in consumer behavior regarding online and offline shopping habits. A significant portion of the sample, 40%, engages in online shopping frequently, ranging from daily to bi-weekly, while 54.6% shop online less frequently, doing so monthly or every few months. In contrast, 68.5% of the sample prefers to shop offline on a monthly or less frequent basis.
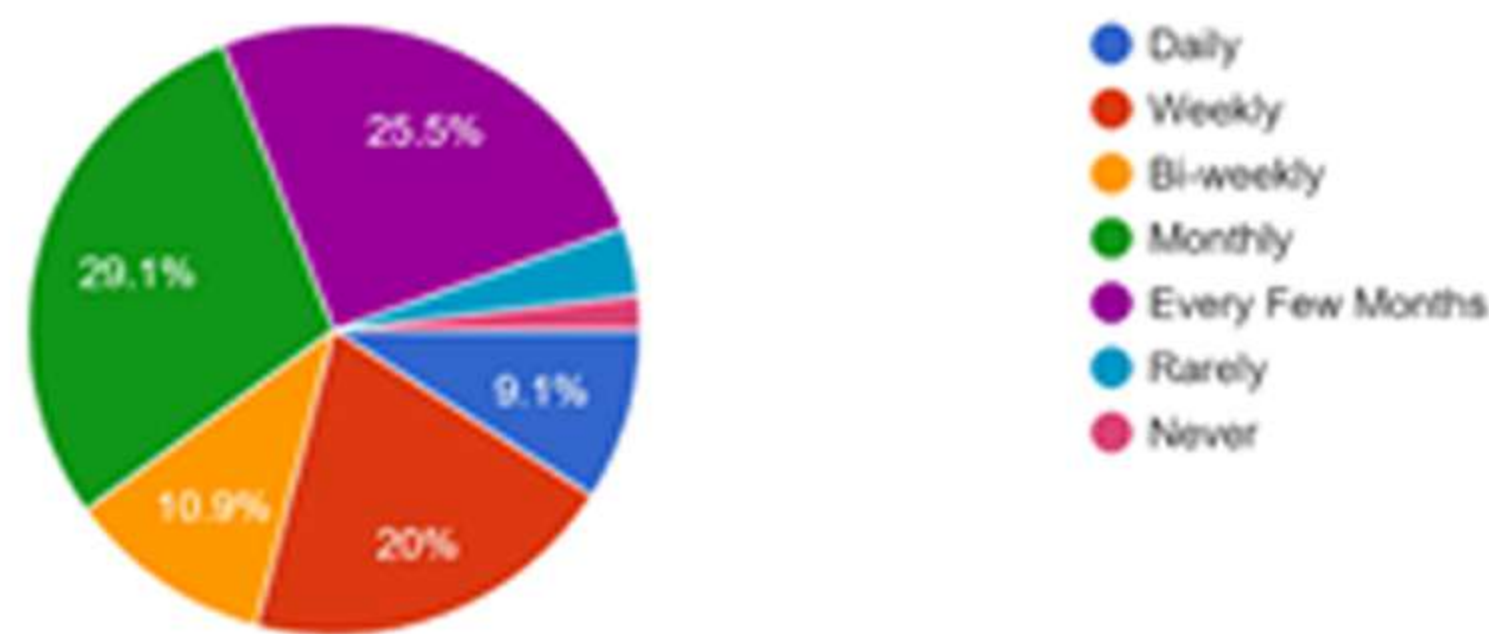
When it comes to spending, 72.8% of the respondents spend between ₹1,000 and ₹25,000 on online shopping, a figure that closely mirrors offline spending patterns, with 76.7% of the sample reporting similar expenditure. Fashion and Apparel emerged as the most popular category for online shopping, with 63.6% of the sample, while Groceries and Essentials dominated offline shopping preferences, with 70.9% of respondents favoring this category.

The pandemic has notably influenced shopping behaviors, with 87.2% of the sample indicating an increase in their online spending. Conversely, 72.8% reported no change or a slight decrease in offline spending. Product variety and availability are the main drivers for online shopping, whereas trust and security are the primary motivators for offline shopping.

Trust in online reviews is relatively high, with 76.4% of respondents relying on them when making purchase decisions. Additionally, 63.6% frequently use price comparison tools before making a purchase, particularly for high-value items and travel bookings. The rise of online shopping has also led to an increase in impulse buying, with 76.4% of the sample admitting that their impulse purchases have somewhat or significantly increased.
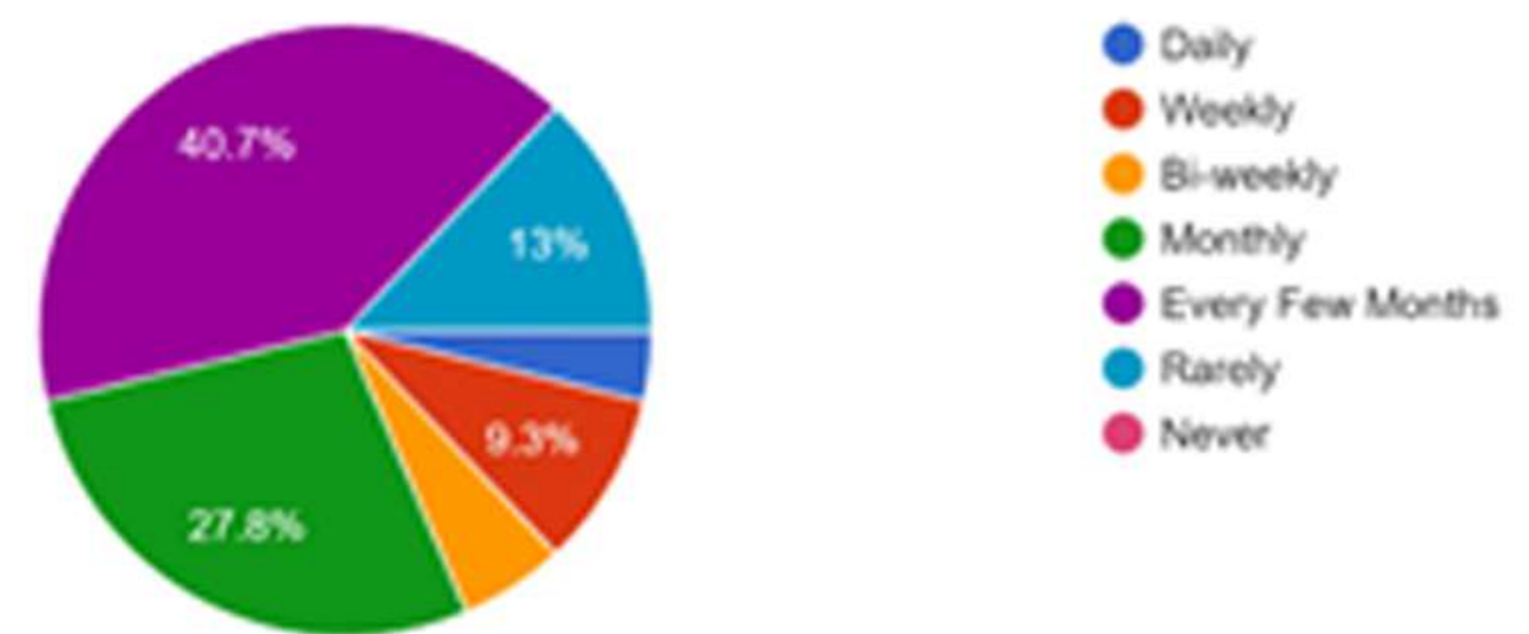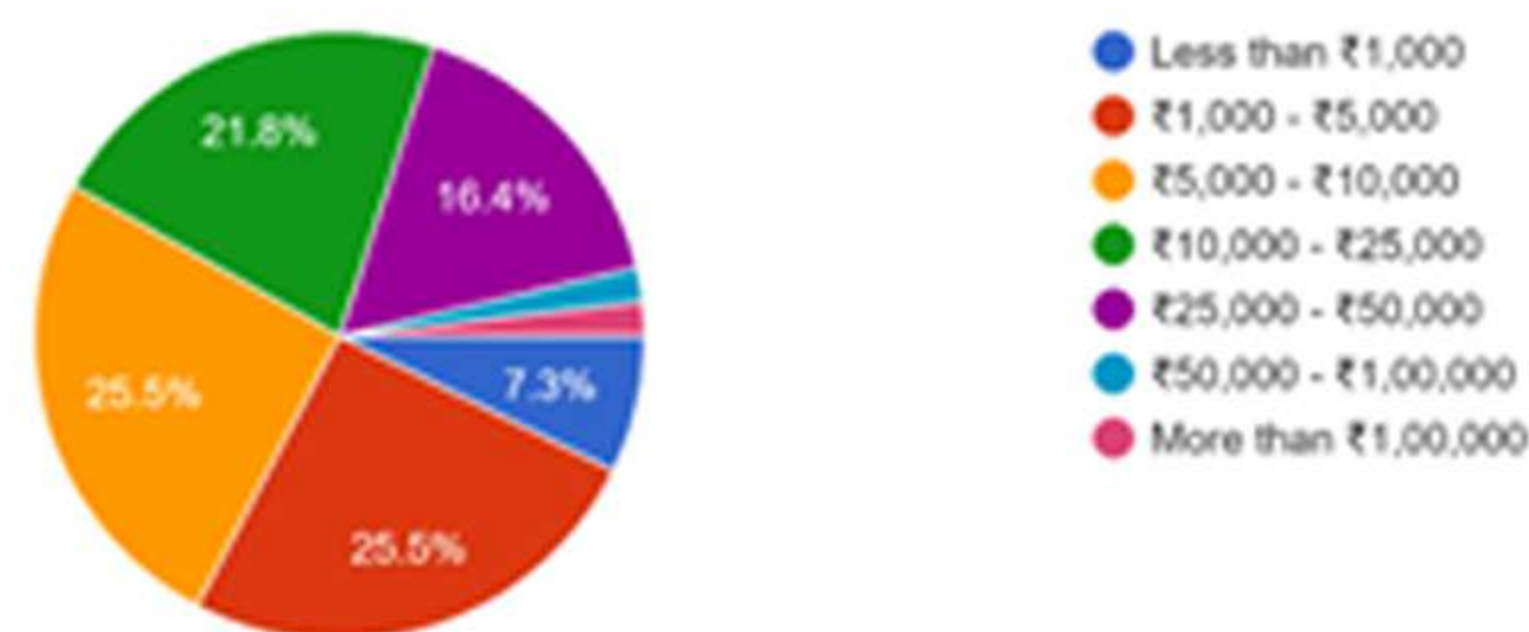
How often do you shop online?
55 responses

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Every Few Months
- Rarely
- Never

25.5%
29.1%
10.9%
20%
9.1%

How often do you shop offline?
54 responses

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Every Few Months
- Rarely
- Never

40.7%
13%
9.3%
27.8%

On average, how much do you spend on online shopping per month?
55 responses

- Less than ₹1,000
- ₹1,000 - ₹5,000
- ₹5,000 - ₹10,000
- ₹10,000 - ₹25,000
- ₹25,000 - ₹50,000
- ₹50,000 - ₹1,00,000
- More than ₹1,00,000

21.8%
16.4%
25.5%
25.5%
7.3%

On average, how much do you spend on offline shopping per month?
55 responses

- Less than ₹1,000
- ₹1,000 - ₹5,000
- ₹5,000 - ₹10,000
- ₹10,000 - ₹25,000
- ₹25,000 - ₹50,000
- ₹50,000 - ₹1,00,000
- More than ₹1,00,000

20%
9.1%
27.3%
29.1%
7.3%
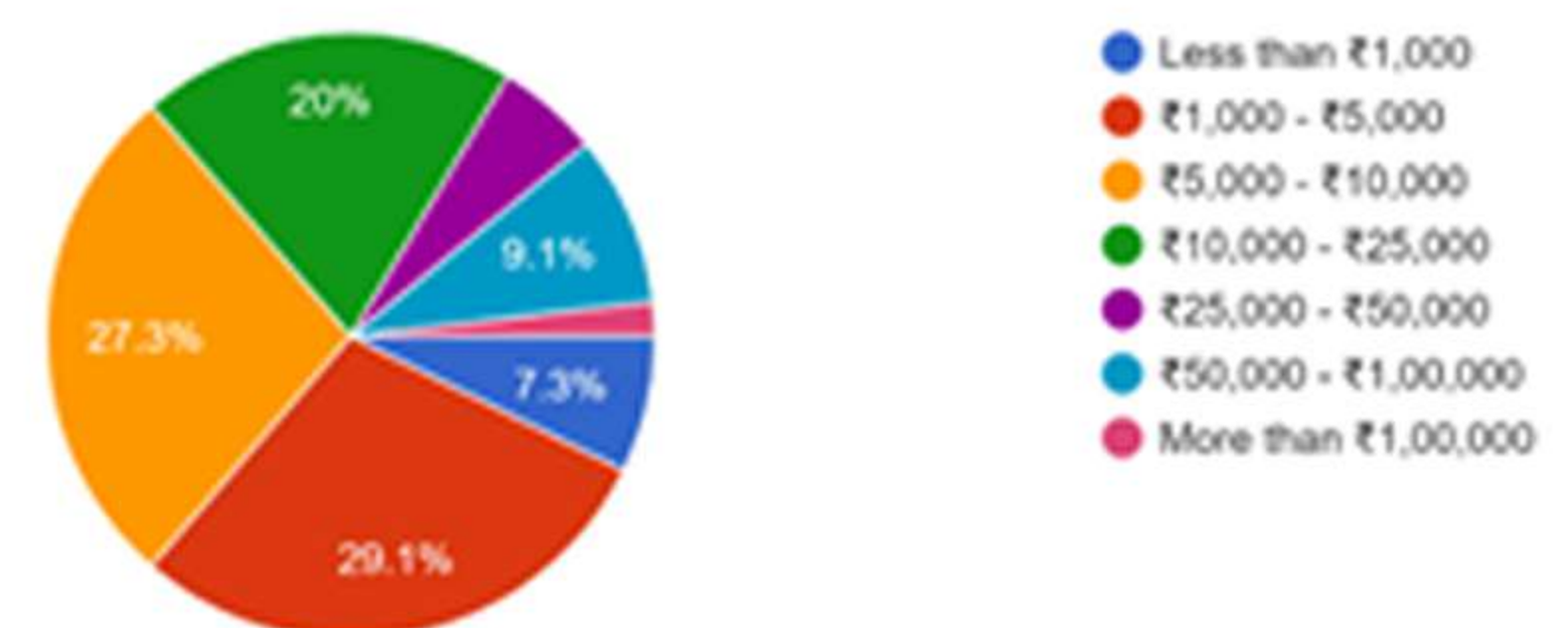
Which category do you spend on most online
55 responses

- Groceries & Essentials — 29 (52.7%)
- Electronics & Gadgets — 17 (30.9%)
- Fashion & Apparel — 35 (63.6%)
- Beauty & Personal Care — 24 (43.6%)
- Home & Kitchen — 12 (21.8%)
- Books & Media — 18 (32.7%)
- Health & Wellness — 9 (16.4%)
- Furniture & Decor — 8 (14.5%)
- Toys & Baby Products — 8 (14.5%)
- Travel & Experiences — 14 (25.5%)
- Luxury Items — 13 (23.6%)
- Gifts & Occasional Purchases — 12 (21.8%)
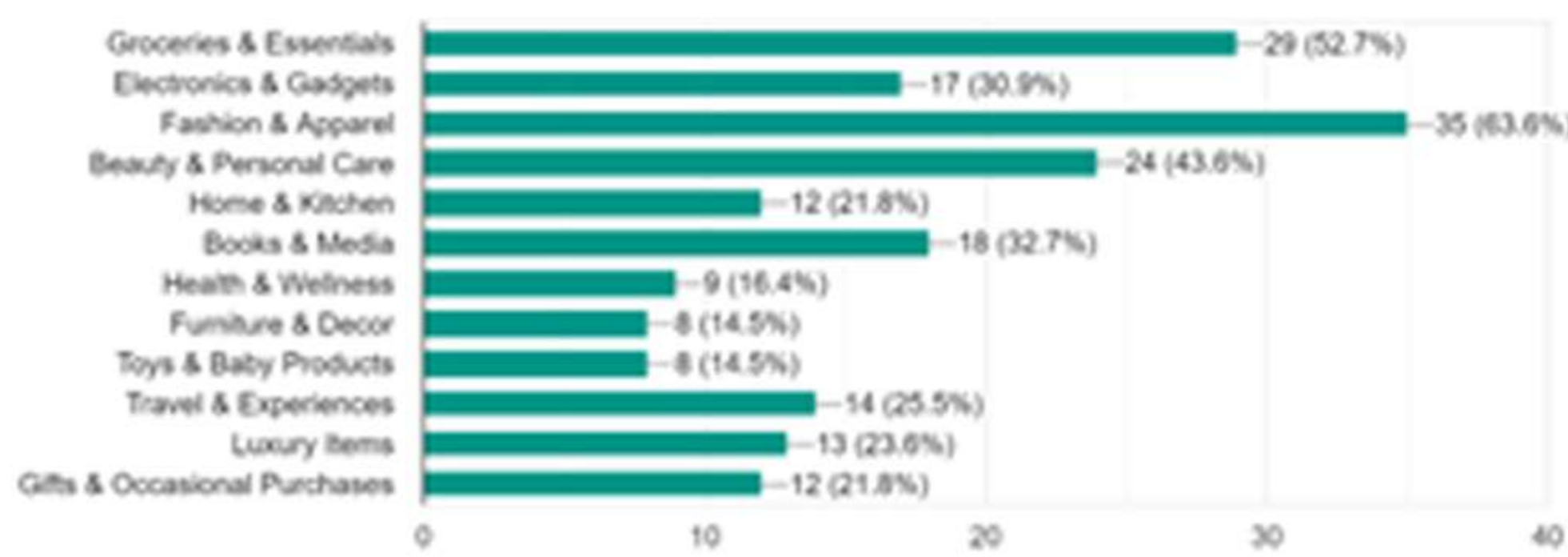
Which category do you spend on most offline
55 responses

- Groceries & Essentials — 39 (70.9%)
- Electronics & Gadgets — 20 (36.4%)
- Fashion & Apparel — 26 (47.3%)
- Beauty & Personal Care — 12 (21.8%)
- Home & Kitchen — 18 (32.7%)
- Books & Media — 8 (14.5%)
- Health & Wellness — 21 (38.2%)
- Furniture & Decor — 9 (16.4%)
- Toys & Baby Products — 2 (3.6%)
- Travel & Experiences — 11 (20%)
- Luxury Items — 16 (29.1%)
- Gifts & Occasional Purchases — 11 (20%)

How has your spending on online changed since the pandemic
55 responses

- Significantly Increased
- Slightly Increased
- No Change
- Slightly Decreased
- Significantly Decreased

34.5%
10.9%
52.7%
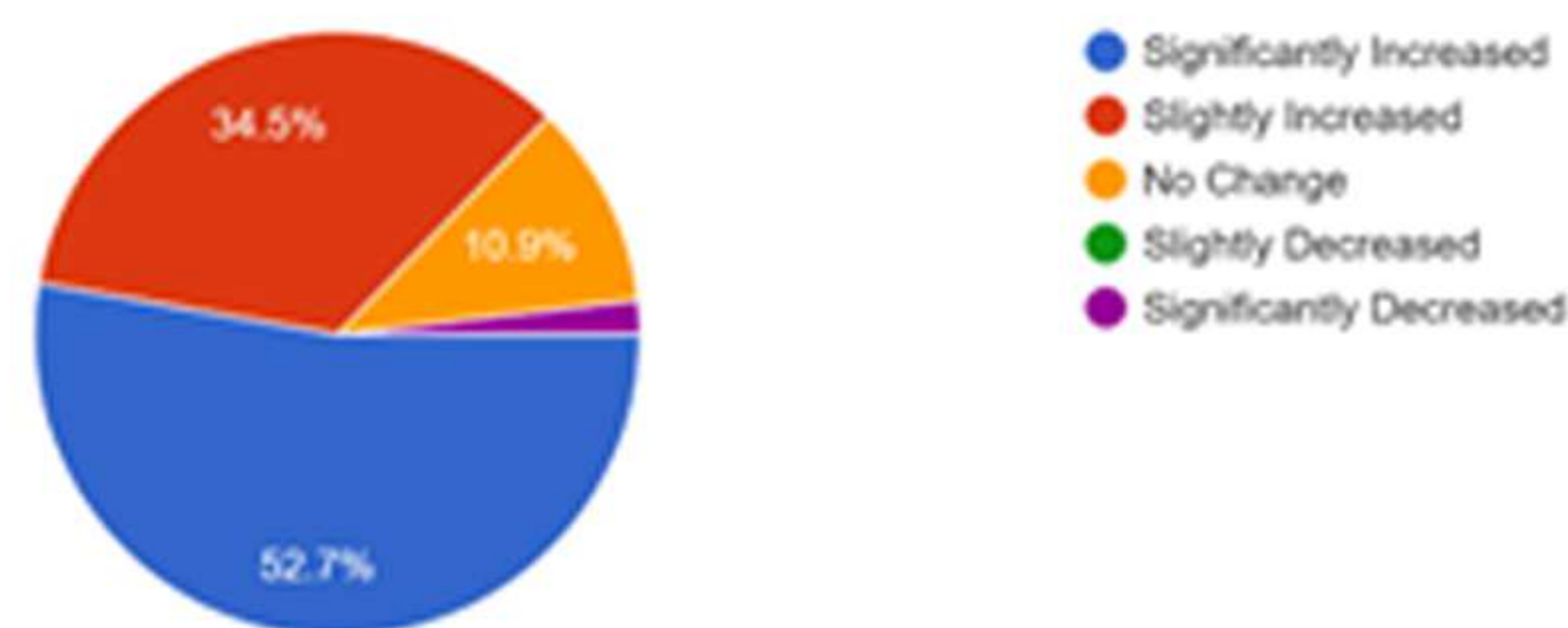
How has your spending on offline changed since the pandemic
55 responses

- Significantly Increased
- Slightly Increased
- No Change
- Slightly Decreased
- Significantly Decreased

47.3%
10.9%
10.9%
25.5%
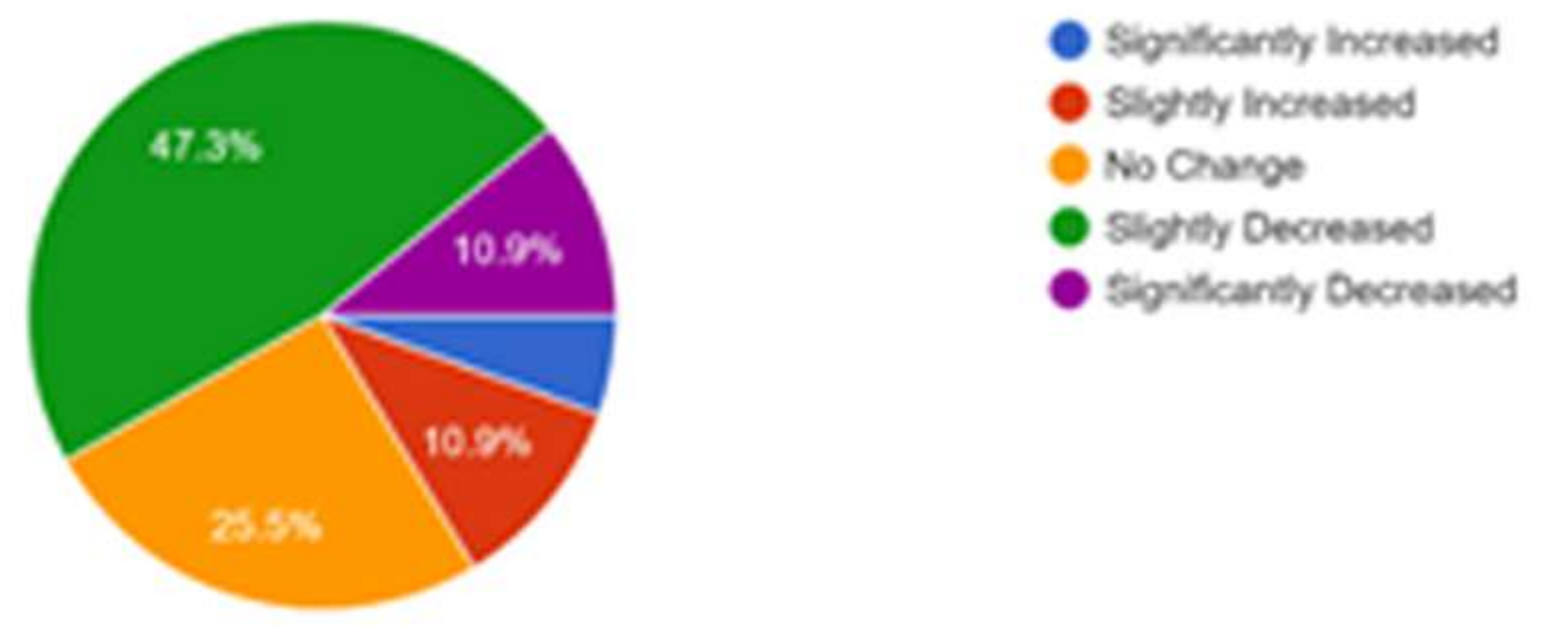
What motivates you to shop online
55 responses

- Financial Factors — 18 (32.7%)
- Product Variety & Availability — 41 (74.5%)
- Overall Experience — 19 (34.5%)
- Trust & Security — 5 (9.1%)
- Social & Emotional Factors — 5 (9.1%)
- External Influences — 3 (5.5%)
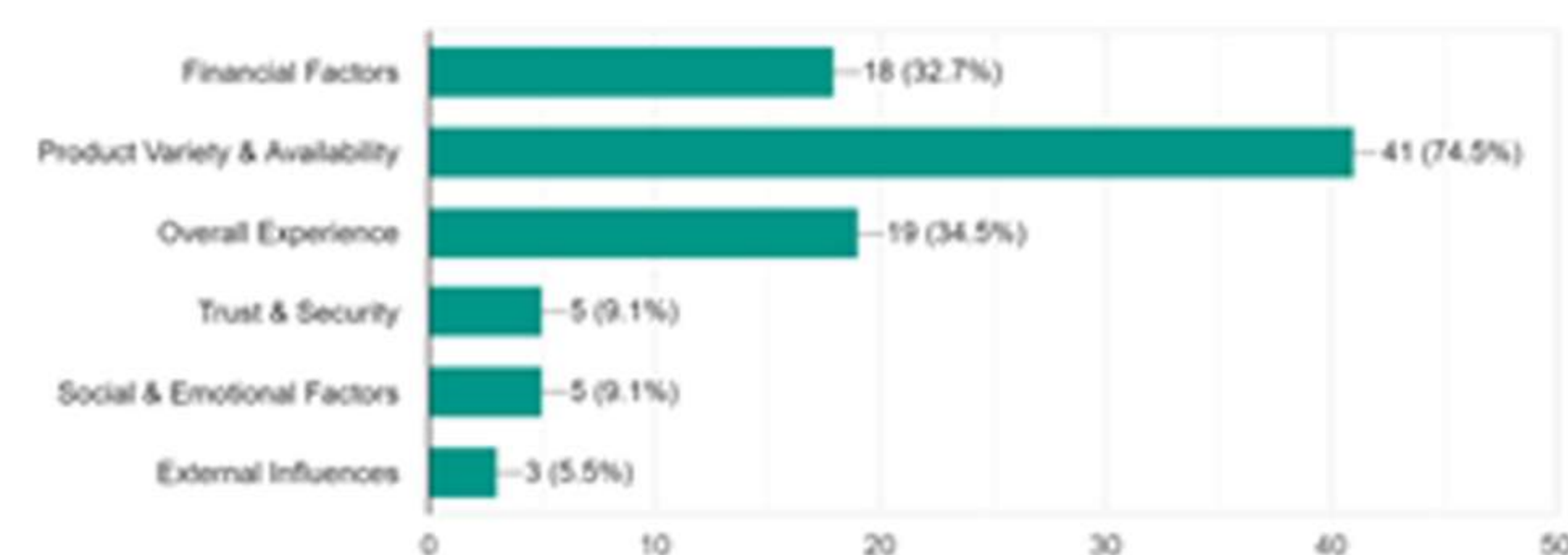
What motivates you to shop offline
52 responses

- Financial Factors — 7 (13.5%)
- Product Variety & Availability — 17 (32.7%)
- Overall Experience — 22 (42.3%)
- Trust & Security — 30 (57.7%)
- Social & Emotional Factors — 10 (19.2%)
- External Influences — 9 (17.3%)
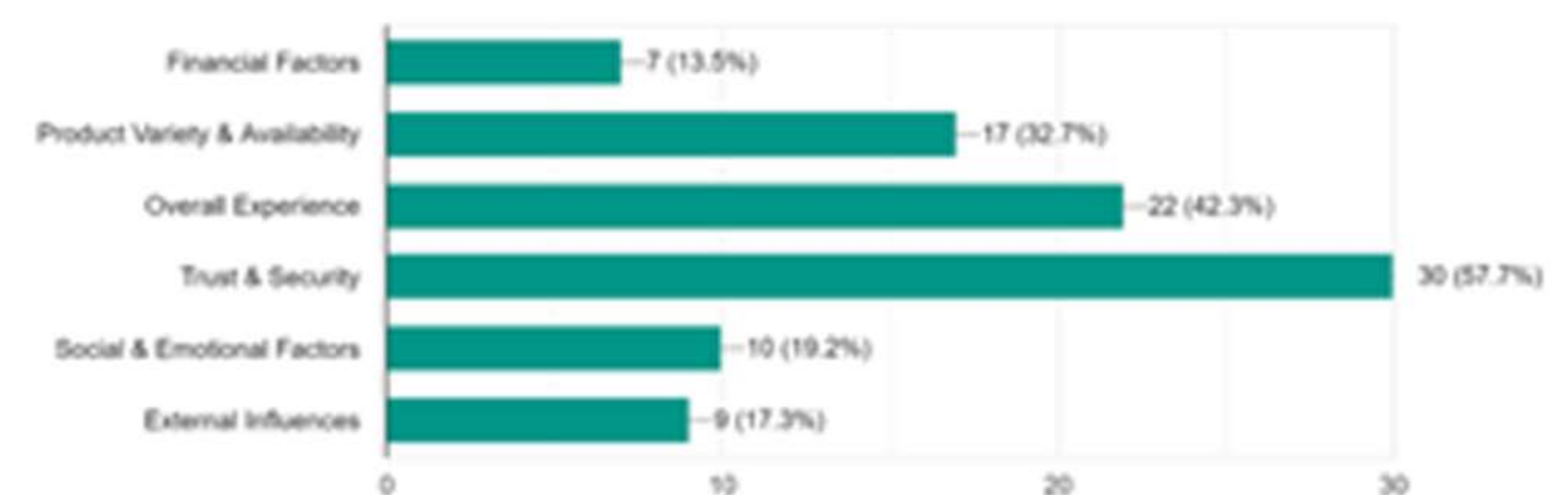
How often do you use price comparison tools or websites before making a purchase online?
55 responses

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

20%, 9.1%, 7.3%, 40%, 23.6%
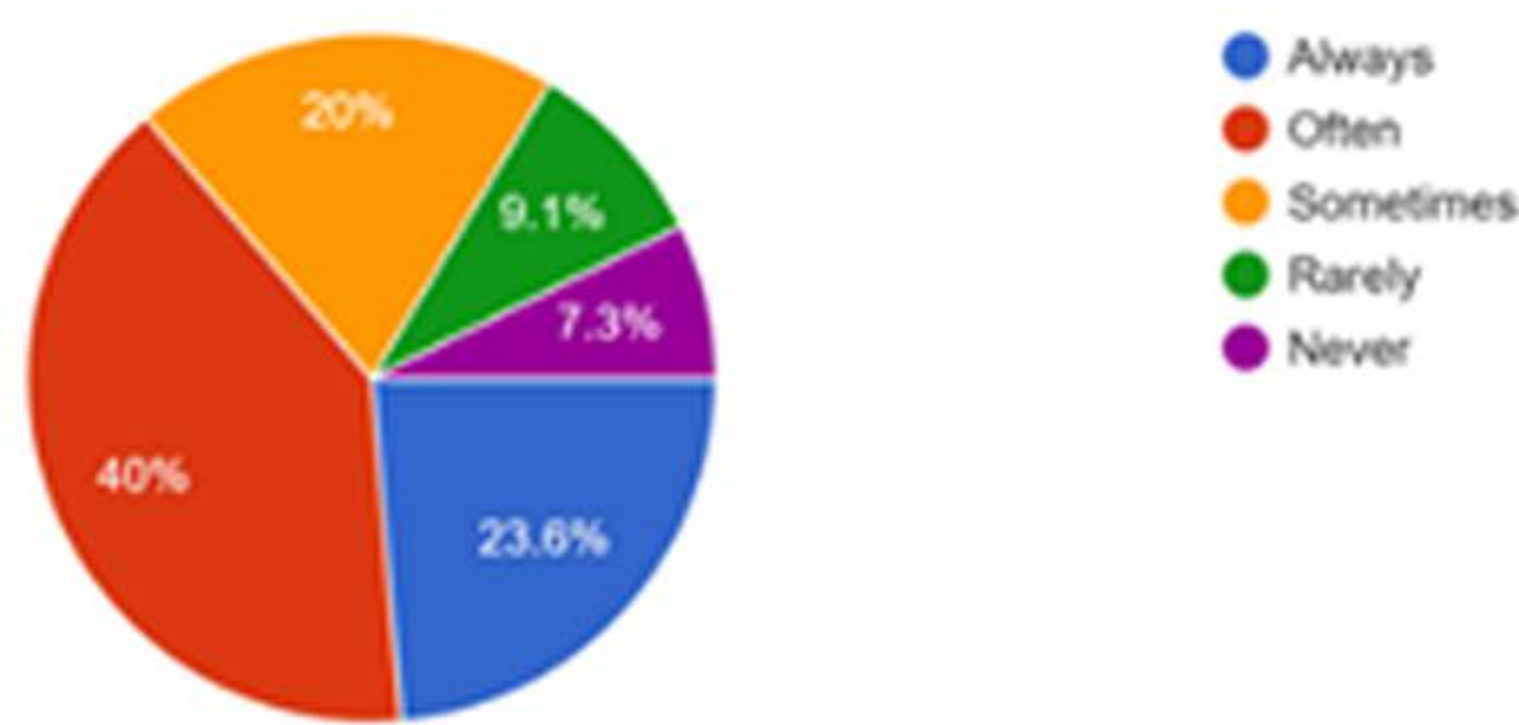
Do you feel that online shopping has increased your impulse buying?
55 responses

- Significantly Increased
- Somewhat Increased
- No Change
- Somewhat Decreased
- Significantly Decreased

23.6%, 47.3%, 29.1%
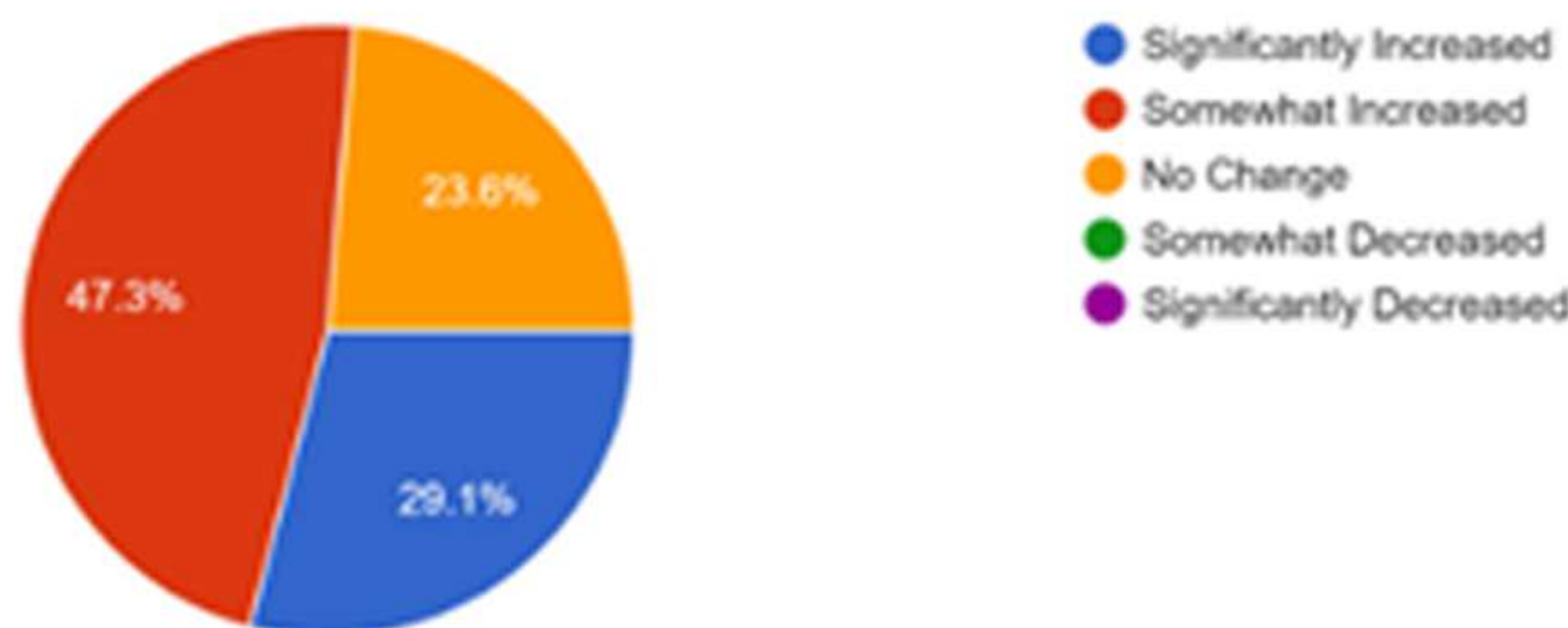
How much do you trust online reviews when making a purchase decision?
55 responses

- Completely Trust
- Mostly Trust
- Somewhat Trust
- Rarely Trust
- Do Not Trust at All

18.2%, 45.5%, 30.9%
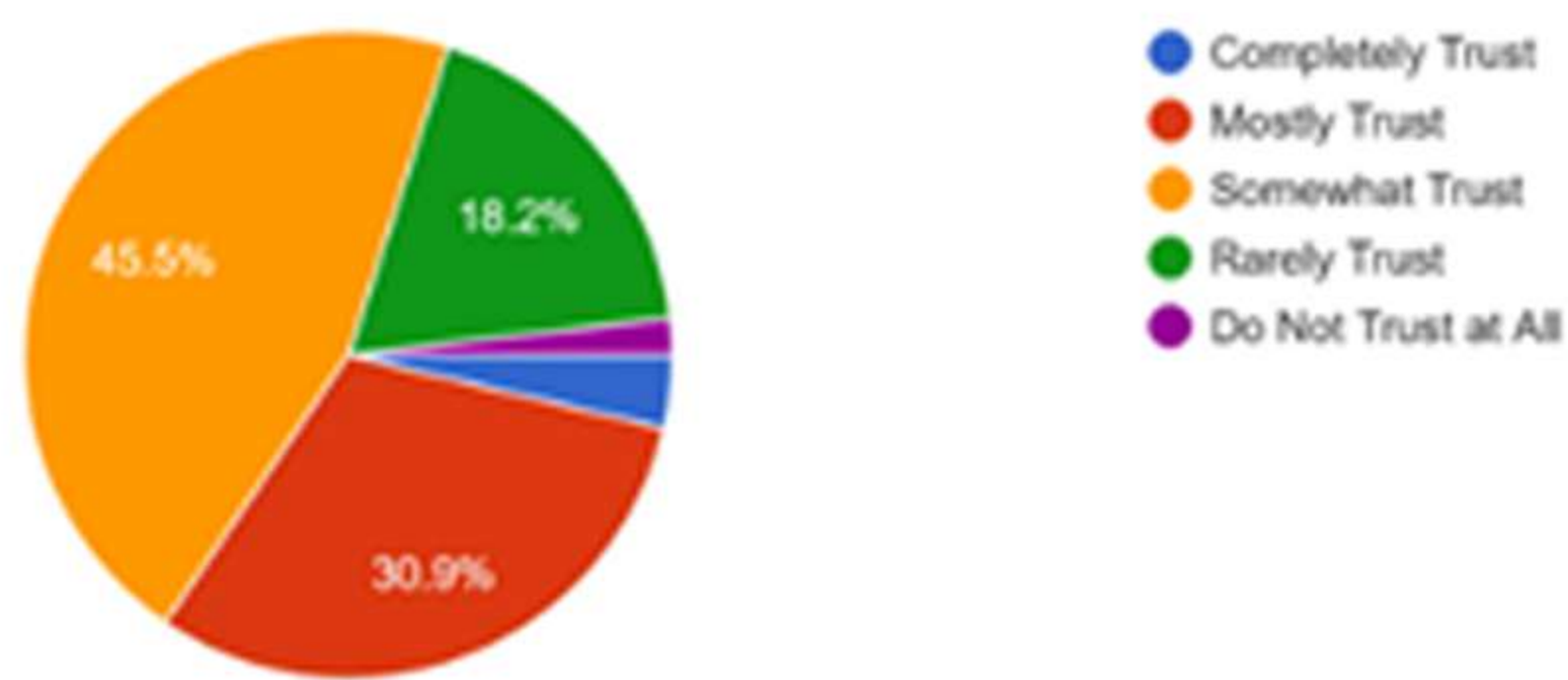
How has the increased use of e-commerce impacted your perception of traditional retail stores?
55 responses

- Increased Appreciation for Traditional Stores
- Decreased Appreciation for Traditional Stores
- Neutral/No Significant Change

38.2%, 40%, 21.8%
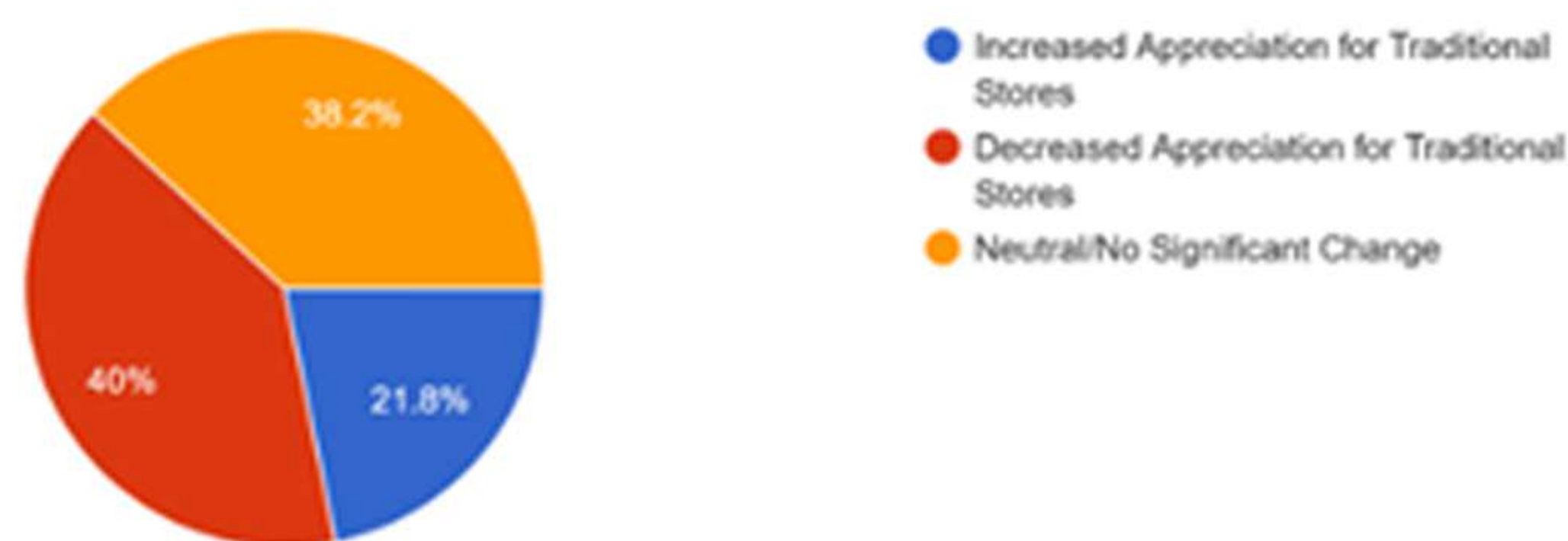
For which type of products do you use price comparison tools or websites before making a purchase online?
52 responses

- For Luxury Items: 15 (28.8%)
- For Travel & Bookings: 30 (57.7%)
- For Fashion & Apparel: 22 (42.3%)
- For Everyday Items (Groceries, Household Items): 15 (28.8%)
- For High-Value Purchases (Electronics, Appliances): 33 (63.5%)
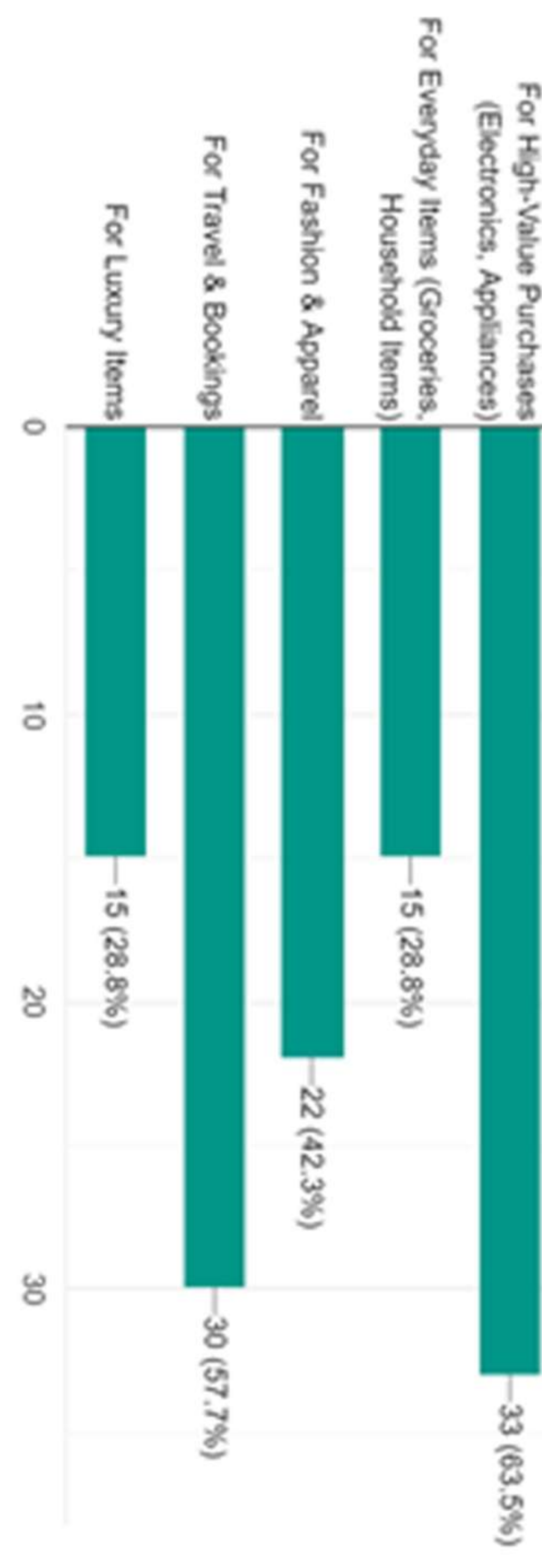
Conclusion

E-commerce has highly influenced the way people shop today. As discussed above, it has fundamentally reshaped consumer expenditure patterns, with significant increases in online purchases and shifts in buying behaviors with 87.2% of the sample indicating an increase in their online spending from our research.

Social media and influencer marketing have become vital tools for enhancing brand visibility and consumer trust, further boosting online sales. The convenience and variety offered by online platforms have also contributed to higher consumer confidence and spending. In fact, results from our survey showed that Product variety and availability was the leading motivation for online shopping.

"E-commerce gives consumers access to information, the ability to shop on different devices, and the option to share their experiences with others, which has completely altered their expectations and the way they shop. Customer shopping habits will continue to evolve with technology, and companies will have to continue to adapt to maintain relevance" (ESW, 2022)

Looking forward, advancements in technology and continued innovation in e-commerce strategies are likely to further influence consumer behavior and expenditure patterns, making it essential for businesses to stay adaptive and customer-focused in this ever-changing world driven by new trends and technologies.

"In the world of e-commerce, adaptation is key to success. By staying in the know of current e-commerce trends, businesses can position themselves at the forefront of the digital revolution — driving growth and fostering lasting connections with their audiences" (Stabler, 2024).

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