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A woman with blonde hair is standing in a modern clothing store, looking at a rack of beige coats. She is wearing a light blue button-down shirt with a bow at the neck, a white cardigan, blue jeans, and white loafers. In the background, another woman is visible near a mirror, and various clothing items are hanging on racks. The store has a clean, minimalist design with large windows and geometric ceiling lights.

Making Every Moment Matter

Meeting Expectations
and Driving Loyalty
with Meaningful
Store Experiences

Great Challenges, Greater Opportunity

The retail market is competitive, complex and ever-changing. Even the most sophisticated and successful retailers have operational pressures to contend with. Lower consumer sentiment and less brand loyalty mean retailers are having to work even harder to earn every purchase.





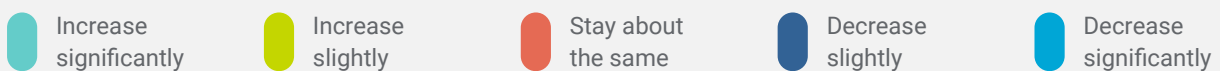
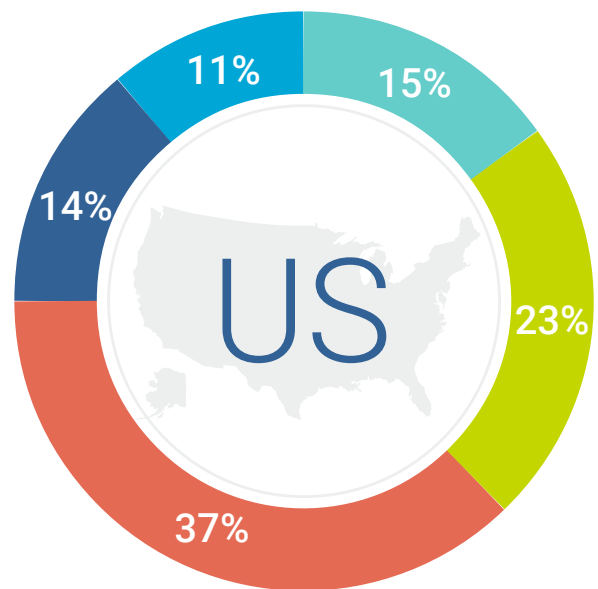
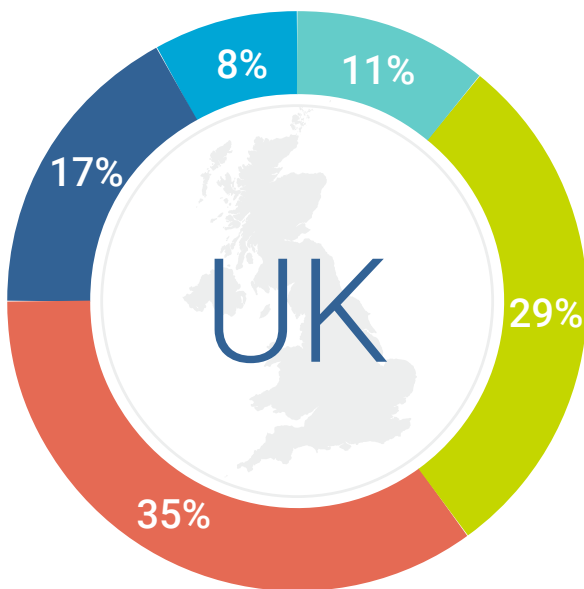
Aptos conducted a survey spanning diverse consumers across the UK and the US to uncover valuable insights for today's omnichannel retail brands.

Notably, the research found that consumers have the desire to keep spending, with the majority (75%) saying their discretionary spending will either increase or stay the same in 2026. This presents an opportunity for retailers that prioritize meeting consumer needs and expectations.

Yet, spending plans are susceptible to change. Sixty-four percent said that inflation and cost of living rank as the top factor that will influence their spending plans in 2026.

Other factors that would impact spending are changes in income and employment (30%) and economic outlook (27%). Personal savings goals (26%) and changes in lifestyle and interests (18%) can also have an impact.

How do you expect your overall discretionary spending to change in 2026?



Physical Retail Still Rules

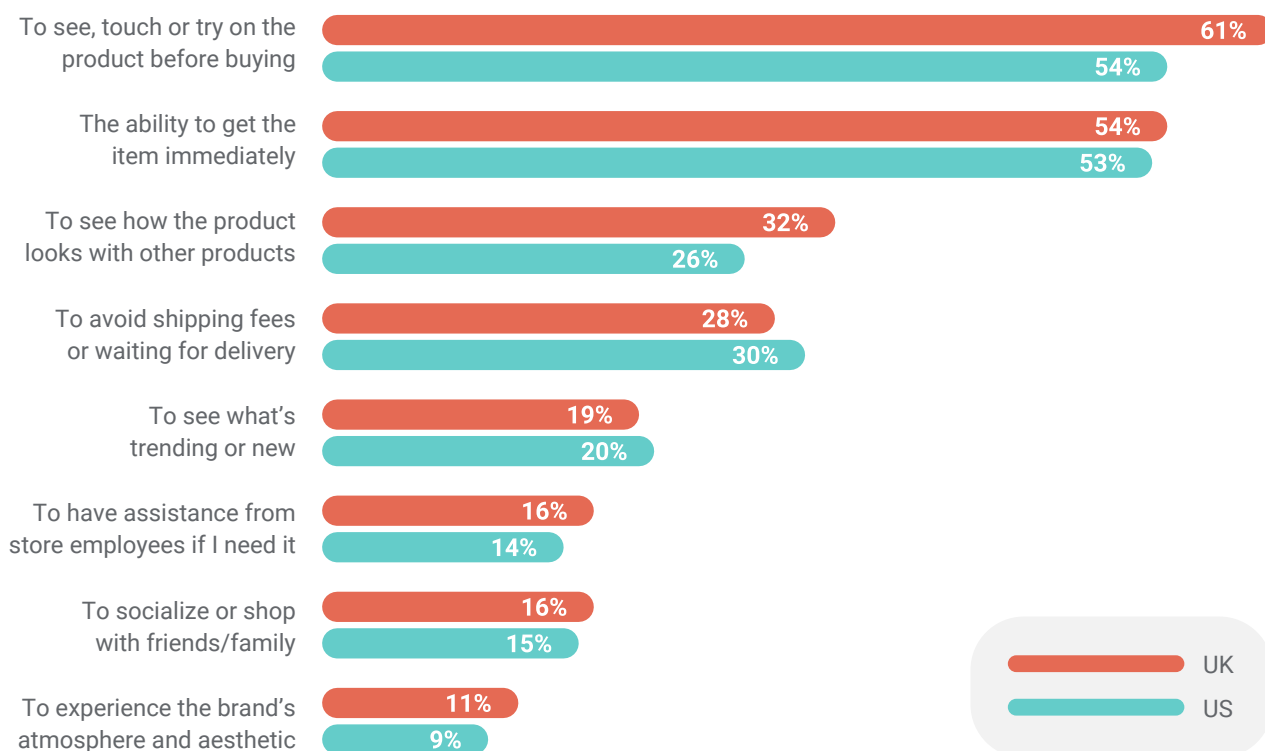
Physical retail has proven remarkably resilient, serving as the centerpiece of the modern customer journey. Its enduring popularity stems from the fact that physical stores offer unique advantages that digital channels simply cannot replicate, focusing heavily on sensory experience, human connection and immediate gratification.

The appeal of stores was made evident in our research. In fact, nearly a fifth (19%) of the survey respondents said they visit stores

multiple times a week just to browse, with no specific purchase in mind. A full 50% indicated that they visit stores once a week or more to make a specific purchase. Neither of these statistics includes grocery store visits, where more frequent trips are expected.

Among younger consumers, the rate of store visits is even higher: 59% of 25-to-34-year-olds go shopping one or more times per week with no specific purchase in mind, compared to 33% of 55-to-64-year-olds.

What are the most important reasons you choose to shop in a physical store instead of online?



Tactile experiences hold tremendous draw for both UK and US consumers. For many products, such as apparel, home goods, beauty and electronics, customers crave the ability to see, touch and try on an item before committing to a purchase.

Physical stores can also yield instant gratification. When a shopper needs or wants

an item immediately, the ability to walk into a store and walk out with the product in hand beats even the fastest same-day delivery.

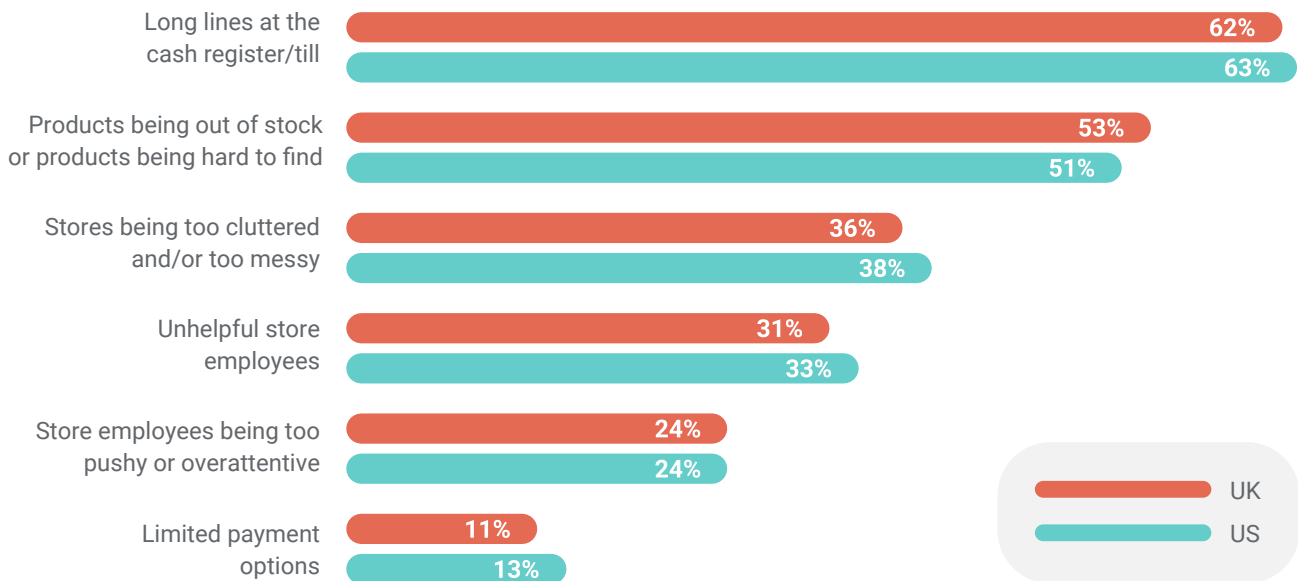
Regardless of why a consumer chooses to visit a physical store, there remains a clear appetite for doing so. It's therefore essential that retail brands make the experience as enjoyable and memorable as possible.

Avoiding In-Store Shopper Frustrations

The desire of consumers to visit stores cannot be taken for granted. With ever-increasing ways to shop digitally, retailers must take stock of the

in-store challenges being cited by customers and address them effectively if they are to create and maintain brand loyalty.

When shopping in a physical store, what are the most annoying pain points?



Though there are multiple reasons for shoppers to become frustrated in stores, some are easier to resolve than others. For instance, long lines at the checkout – which was the biggest pain point for both UK and US consumers – can be addressed with mobile point-of-sale solutions, which allow transactions to occur throughout the store and can be used for line-busting during peak sales spikes.

The second-biggest frustration was products being out of stock or hard to find.

Overall, 28% of consumers would react to an out-of-stock situation in the store by searching online inventory on their mobile device and placing an online order themselves. This is particularly true for younger generations, with 37% of respondents who are 18 to 24 saying that is how they'd proceed if a store did not have their desired item, with this figure dropping to just 15% of those 65 and older.

Additionally, across both UK and US audiences, there exists a lot of opportunity to “save the sale” when a product is out of stock in the store – again, this is more evident with younger generations. For example, only 11% of UK consumers ages 25 to 34 indicated that there was nothing a retailer could do to save the sale, meaning 89% of that audience could still be willing to make a purchase when an item is not immediately available in the store they're shopping at.

Here lies a powerful reminder of the importance of networkwide inventory visibility that is accurate, up-to-date and exposed both to customers when they are interacting with a retailer's digital presence and to store employees so they can conduct ‘endless aisle’ transactions and prevent a lost sale.



Digital Influences on Stores

While the vast majority of retail sales still happen in stores, the influence of digital is already huge – and growing.

According to our survey, Google or other search engines (34%) and Amazon or other major online marketplaces (20%) are the most common starting points for product research. This is followed by social media (17%) and brand websites and apps (12%). Currently, AI and chat services (6%) lag behind. But not for long.

A global survey by Capgemini found that three-quarters of consumers are open to generative AI product recommendations, and 68% want GenAI tools to aggregate search results from online search engines, social media platforms and retailers' websites to provide a one-stop shop for highlighted purchase options.

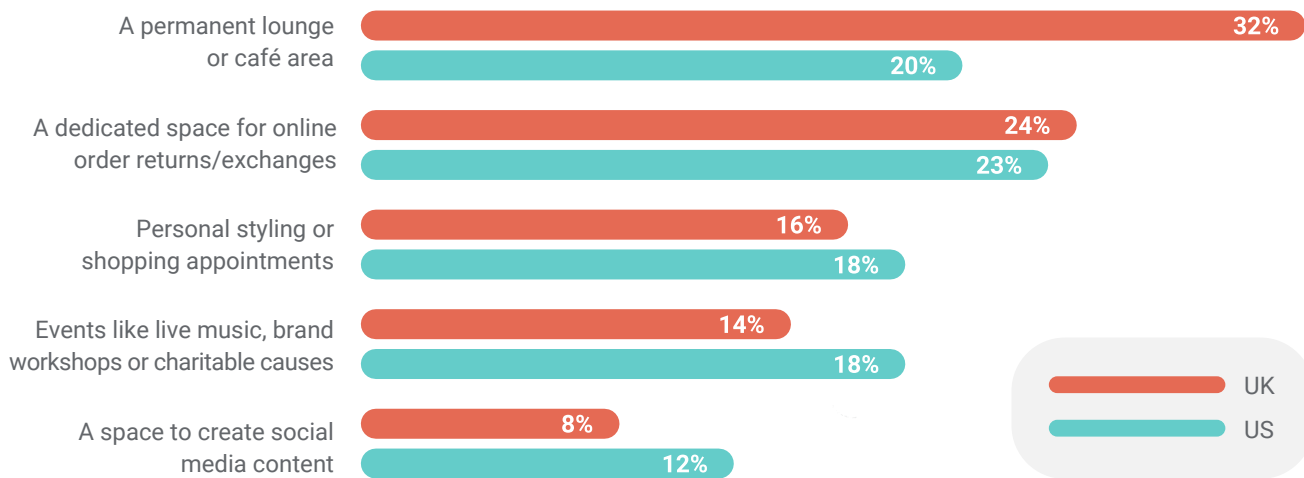
New technologies are already reshaping shopping habits, and brands must ensure they have the right infrastructure in place to adapt to emerging behaviors if they are to stay competitive.

Store Differentiation Drives Better Experiences

In a saturated and highly competitive market, store differentiation can make the difference in turning a one-time visitor into a loyal brand advocate. Increasingly, consumers crave in-store experiences that feel thoughtful and

tailored. Going beyond the status quo to deliver meaningful moments is the key to attracting audiences – and keeping them coming back for more.

Which of these would be most likely to encourage you to visit a store?



Retailers must also consider how the age of their audience might affect their expectations. For instance, a permanent lounge or café area appeals to 36% of individuals over 65, with just 18% of 25-to-34-year-olds prioritizing a café in their store experience.

Personal styling or shopping appointments are another area where we see varying preferences by age range. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents aged 18 to 24 prioritize this service, whereas only 9% of those 65+ feel the same way.

Having a dedicated space for online order returns and exchanges is something that was consistently valued across all ages and by both UK and US shoppers. Yet UK and US opinions diverged when it came to the top priority, with UK respondents favoring the lounge or café area, and the US market prioritizing the dedicated space for returns.



The Mandate for Meaningful Moments

The customer journey is no longer a choice between physical or digital but a continuous loop. Shoppers demand easy access to inventory, flexible options for fulfilment and sensory experiences to enjoy. Retailers that can't deliver risk losing sales to retailers that can.

To build long-lasting relationships, retailers must prioritize satisfaction-driving shopping moments while minimizing operational failures that frustrate consumers.

Once friction is removed, the opportunity is to differentiate. Whether it's appealing to

the Gen Z shopper with personal styling or serving the older consumer with a permanent in-store lounge, sustained loyalty will be earned by tailoring experiences that go beyond transactions and instead deliver on connection, expertise and convenience.

In a competitive market where spending is susceptible to economic headwinds, you can no longer afford to provide an average store experience. Retailers must treat every customer interaction as a chance to build a relationship, making every moment matter.

Methodology

This independent research was performed by global market research firm 3GEM Media Group, which surveyed 4,000 consumers in the UK and the US in October 2025. Questions encompassed predicted discretionary spending changes and expectations and frustrations

around in-store shopping experiences. As well as detailing overall findings, results were broken down by nation, gender, and age to provide interesting comparisons and valuable insights for retailers.



About Aptos

Aptos is the global leader in unified commerce solutions for retailers. Our modern, cloud-native POS and advanced enterprise technologies are trusted by hundreds of retail brands around the world. For over 40 years, Aptos has delivered software solutions that help retailers inspire loyalty, maximize revenue and reduce costs.

Learn more at www.aptos.com.