



The Growth & Expansion of Online Retail: COVID-19 & Beyond

Online Shopping Insights from Synthesio
Social Data & Ipsos Online Communities

Overview

1 in 2
consumers reported
discovering new brands
more than they were
prior to COVID-19

Retail has fundamentally changed due to stay at home orders and social distancing protocols in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 has put a stronger focus on online, touchless shopping, an increase in technology, and digital enablement within the shopping experience.

Consequently, eCommerce sales have seen explosive growth in 2020 – increasing as much in the past eight weeks as the past ten years, according to the U.S.

Department of Commerce. This seismic shift to eCommerce has enabled brand discovery for consumers as they spend more time online. [About half](#) of U.S. shoppers reported that they are discovering new brands more than they were prior to COVID-19, according to Ipsos' COVID-19 tracker, commissioned by Google.

Ipsos online communities in the U.S. helped to underscore the real people behind the computer and their feelings about the changing consumer experience. We conducted this research within Ipsos' U.S. syndicated online community, with 378 respondents between July 30th, 2020, and August 12th, 2020.



"My favorite thing about online shopping is the convenience of browsing during the wee hours of the night/morning, finding fun stuff that stores around here don't carry, and having these purchases delivered directly to me."

As consumers continue acclimating to increased time at home, online shopping both fights boredom and inspires – for some, bolstering a desire to spend on their homebound life. These consumers find themselves shopping for:

- Hobby-focused purchases
- Increased snacks/food
- Upgraded décor pieces
- Self-care/wellness items
- Organizational items



"I mostly buy organizational products for everywhere in our home. These products then need labels too. I have bought more than normal on Amazon."



"I've been shopping online for health and wellness products, as well as small home changes to make it different and more fun."

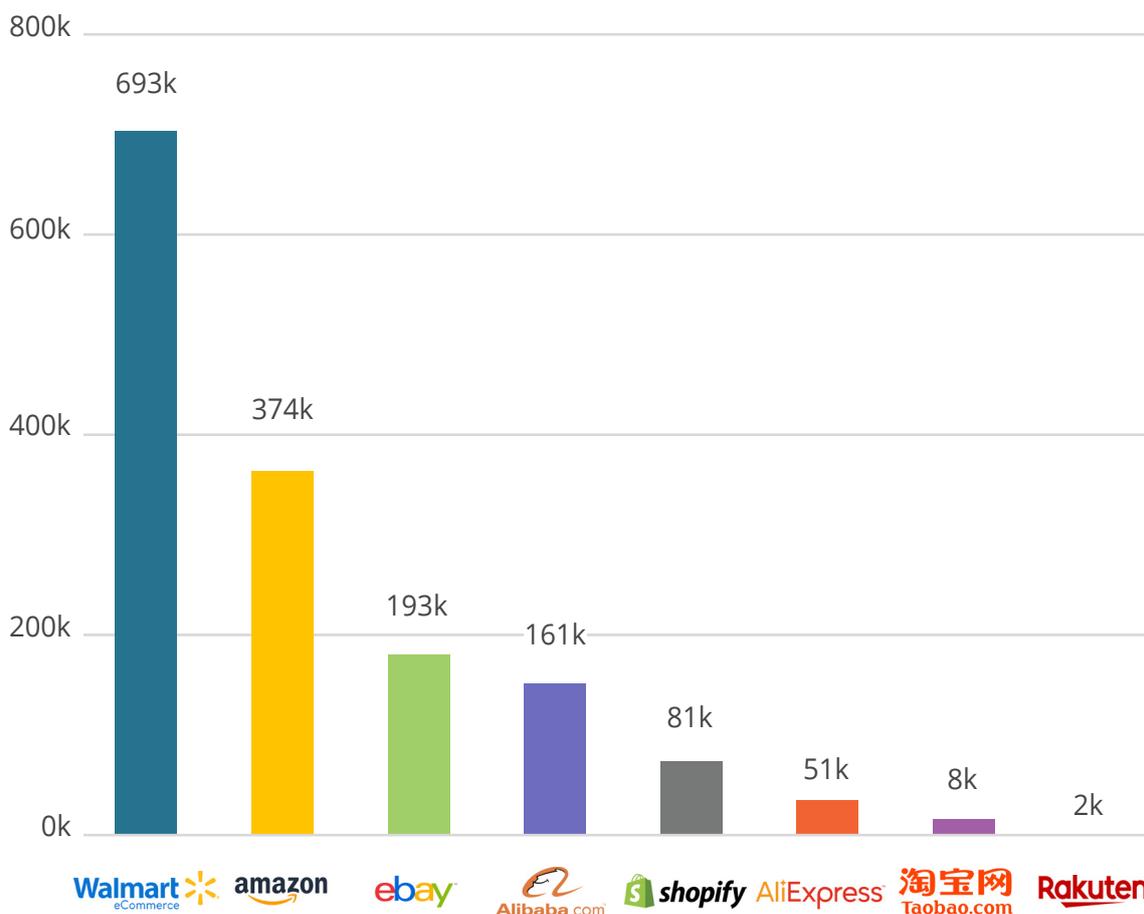
Increased reliance on digital also encourages trial in shopping across categories that previously sparked hesitation, namely those in which a tactile review is more central to the decision-making process (i.e., groceries, clothing, furniture, etc.).



"I used to look at, and touch, and even try whenever I wanted to purchase cosmetics, but I've been avoiding that and doing online shopping... I can take time and browse around, and sometimes I find something new and interesting."

Synthesio's social intelligence software has been tracking all online conversations about eCommerce since the beginning of the pandemic, gathering 1.5 million mentions in the past six months alone. Among websites shopped, Walmart dominates conversation online with 693,000 mentions between March to the start of September:

1.5M total mentions in the last 6 months (March 2020- Sept 2020)

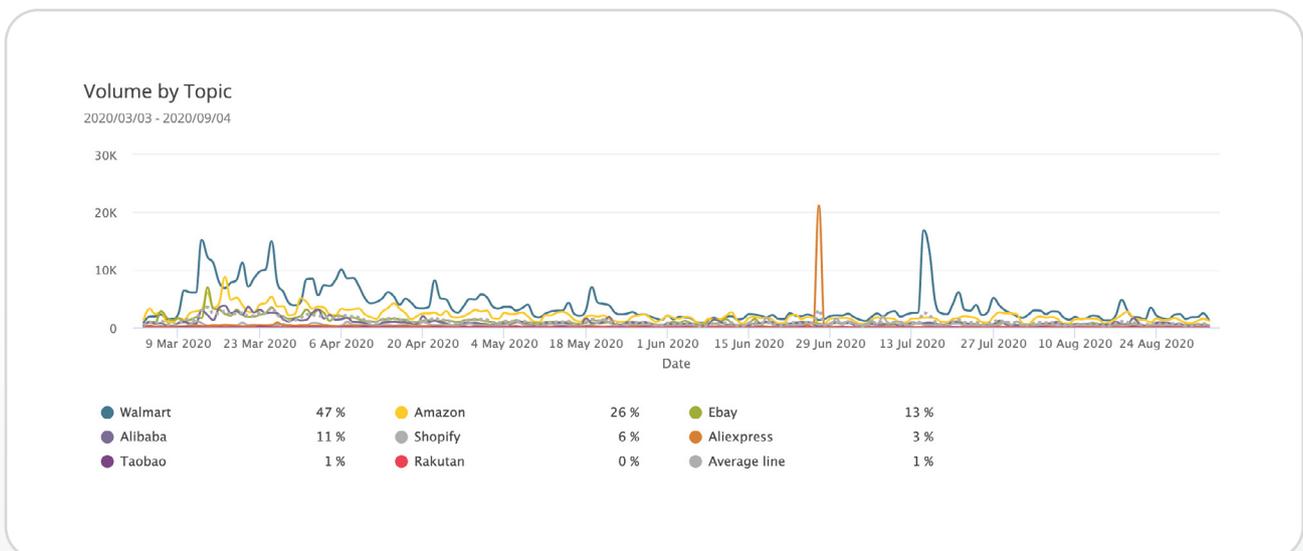


Real Conversations, Real Customers

Interestingly, despite Amazon's global dominance in the eCommerce market, Walmart's conversations have snowballed thanks to aggressive initiatives to grow Walmart's online presence. Walmart accounted for 47% of mentions about eCommerce in the past six months, while Amazon accounted for 26%.

Suppose we look at the evolution of the conversation about different global eCommerce sites. In that case, most conversations occurred at the beginning of the outbreak in March and April. This is because as consumers shied away from physical stores, online shopping was quickly accepted as the new normal. Though eCommerce conversation continued to be sustained throughout the pandemic, it returned to a more stable level.

We see two notable spikes in the conversation, one in late June for Aliexpress and another in mid-July for Walmart. It is intriguing to look into specific mentions to see why these occurred.



We quickly find mentions on Reddit that complain about the delayed shipping time in the AliExpress shopping experience due to COVID-19. Many customers expressed frustration with the amount of time it took for items to be delivered.

The same finding can be confirmed by looking at reviews on the AliExpress website itself, which are also indexed by Synthesio's social listening platform. While customers are still frustrated about the amount of time it took to get their items, they understand that the pandemic is an extenuating circumstance.

↑ Posted by u/Foreta-Classic 2 months ago

3
↓ **AliExpress Shipping**

Just ordered my RG350 from AliExpress back at the start of June and have never purchased from this site before. The tracking seems somewhat unreliable. Has anyone ordered from AE to the United States since the start of this COVID mess? How long was your delivery time?

6 Comments Share Save Hide Report 100% Upvoted

K***a
CA

★★★★★
Color: Black Logistics: China Post Ordinary Small Packet Plus

This product took 3 months to arrive. I do not blame them because it's the Covid-19 time. But if you don't want to wait for 3 months, I suggest you buy from Aliexpress when the situation gets better. The material is better than I expected.
28 Jun 2020 01:18

Helpful? Yes (0) No (0)

Looking into the spike in mentions for Walmart in mid-July reveals a different set of issues.

Consumers have mixed reactions that Walmart, the largest retailer in the U.S., implemented a mandatory mask rule for all their stores. Reactions from loyal customers on Twitter ranged from sarcastic that it took five months to implement, to upset about having to wear masks in the first place. These mentions reveal customers' overall frustration with the in-person shopping experience with new COVID friendly social distancing rules and capacity caps.

The image shows two tweets side-by-side. The left tweet is from user 'elle' (@purpledaizeee) and contains a retweet from 'njdotcom' (@njdotcom) with a photo of a woman wearing a face mask in a grocery store aisle. The right tweet is from 'Catherine Darois' (@basenji_rule) and includes a photo of a Walmart store exterior with people in line outside.

elle @purpledaizeee
really? very diligent, almost 5 months after the virus hit.

njdotcom @njdotcom · Jul 15
Walmart will require face coverings in all its stores, starting Monday nj-ne.ws/YzCIW6o

11:58 PM · Jul 15, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Catherine Darois @basenji_rule
Walmart, Kroger Will Require Shoppers To Wear Masks, Joining Other Big Retailers : Coronavirus Live Updates : NPR. (This is BS!!)

Walmart Will Require Shoppers To Wear Masks; Other Retailers Urged To Follow... Walmart and Sam's Club, as well as Kroger, join a growing list of retailers making masks mandatory in stores. The National Retail Federation is urging ... npr.org

11:59 PM · Jul 15, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Between the longer lines, contact with other people, and other such issues, consumers of the supercenter brand turn to their options online.

The image shows a Facebook post by Sam Darby and a comment by Wendy Mellon. Below the comment is a link to Walmart.com with the slogan 'Save Money. Live Better.'.

Sam Darby
I have rediscovered Walmart thanks to COVID 19. I tried Whole Foods (aka Amazon) and Instacart with my local supermarket but Walmart outdid them all by a long way with free curbside pickup and no extra charge substitution for out of a stock replacement. This caused me to start using them online. Guess what, they are cheaper than Amazon most of the time and I am a Prime member. Just think if they buy a share in TikTol they will have all the over 70s posting dancing videos.

Like · Reply · 1w · Edited

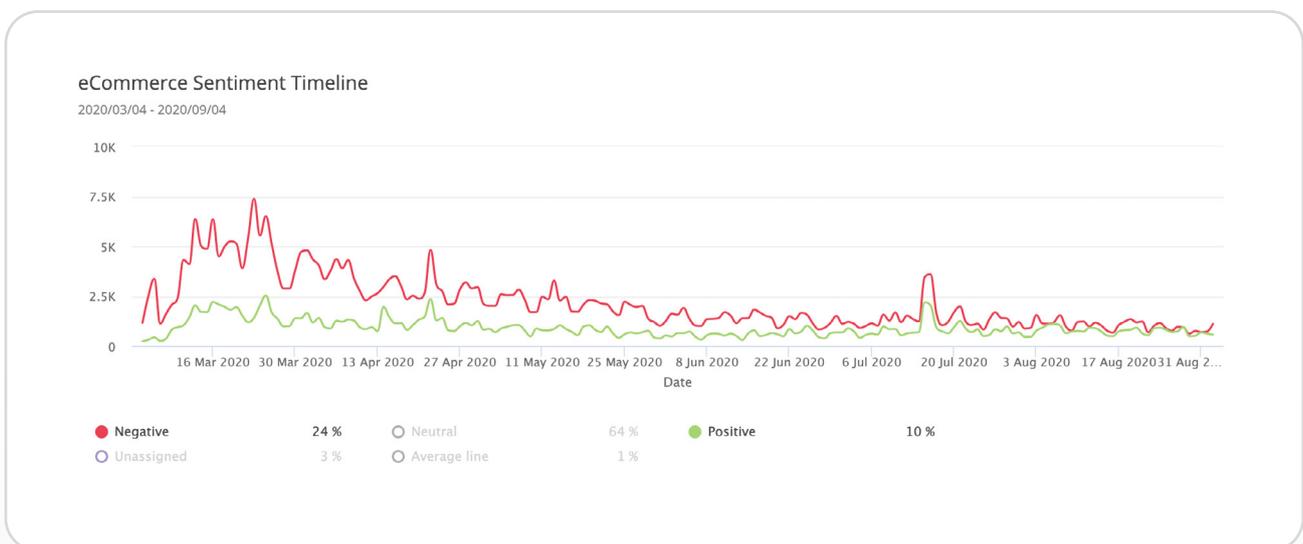
Wendy Mellon
I've been very happy with [Walmart.com](#) during the Pandemic! Shipping has been free for anything \$35 or over.

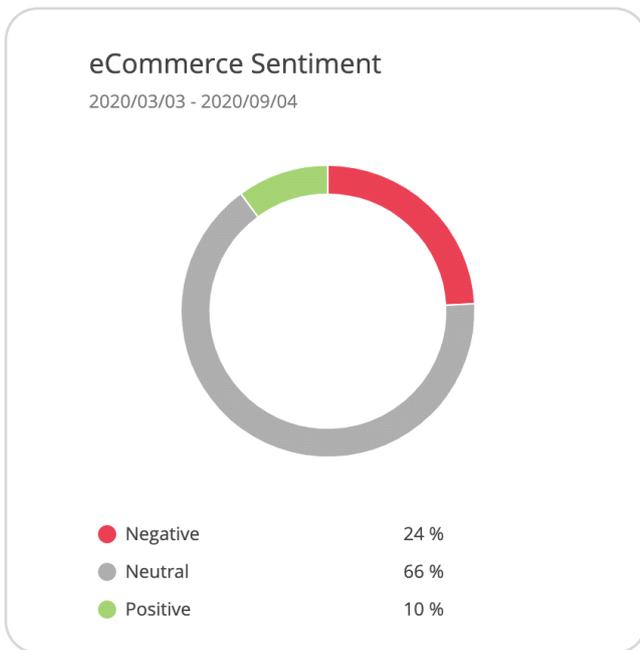
WALMART.COM
Walmart.com | Save Money. Live Better.

Like · Reply · 1w

Consumer Sentiment Reveals Mixed Emotions About eCommerce

Customer sentiment about eCommerce has fluctuated during the pandemic. One sample taken from a positive spike in late July reveals consumers speaking positively about convenience and safety during the COVID-19 crisis as significant reasons for switching their shopping habits to virtual. However, at the same time, much of the conversation is coded negatively from individuals concerned about shipping costs and the environmental impact of increased packaging. Other negativity arrived from distrust in others following the mask mandate. Interestingly, frustration arises from each side of the “mask debate.” This stems from both people not wanting to wear masks in the first place and people who believe it is necessary and don’t trust others to comply.





eCommerce Mentions during COVID have been more than **2X more negative (24%)**, compared to **positive (10%)**.

Ipsos online communities provide additional texture around eCommerce hits & misses in the U.S.:

Customers find frustration in:

- Delayed, damaged, or incorrect deliveries
- Battling virtual customer service channels
- Unmet product expectations in person
- Sold out offerings online
- A lack of immediacy post-purchase
- Understanding and acting on different return processes

Consumers appreciate:

- Increased access to selection variety
- Opportunity to research and read reviews
- Flexibility & freedom within browsing
- The cost-effectiveness of easy price comparison across retailers online
- Avoiding in-store crowds and lines
- Access to product availability online

“I think the lack of instant gratification has been frustrating about online shopping. And lately, shipping times have been delayed, adding insult to injury.”

“The best thing about online shopping is the ability to shop from the comfort of home whenever I want and the ability to take my time browsing.”

Looking Ahead: The Role of eCommerce Beyond COVID-19

With all of this in mind, it makes sense that eCommerce is undergoing a boom worldwide. Ipsos global eCommerce studies understand the pressing urgency of understanding consumer behavior as it relates to online shopping. Looking ahead, estimates underscore the pressing importance of a well-informed, continually evolving eCommerce strategy:

22%

...of global retail sales will be represented by eCommerce by 2023

\$6.5 trillion U.S.

...in global eRetail sales by 2023. That's \$6,500,000,000.

2.14 billion

...people worldwide will buy goods and services online as of 2021.

Consumers' own talk track aligns with the tone of these projections. They envision themselves sticking with a more substantial online routine – even beyond the loosening of COVID-19 restrictions.



"I think that online shopping is going to be my main way to shop going forward from now on. I will still go to stores from time to time, but if the item is something that I know is easy to get online, I will just do that...6 months, a year, and even after."



"Online shopping is bound to have a consistent, large presence in my life. Ultimately, I feel it is here to stay, and I see a lot of positives associated with it."



"It's all online now, and that is a way of life."

About Synthesio

Synthesio, an Ipsos technology company, is a global leader in the latest report on Social Listening Platforms published by an independent research firm. Synthesio provides brands and agencies around the world with social listening tools and audience insights to measure the impact of social and mainstream media conversations. The Synthesio Social Media Intelligence Suite surfaces actionable insights — both qualitative and quantitative — from the most extensive collection of data on the market. Business units can leverage Synthesio dashboards, pre-built use cases, customizable reports, and social media command center displays — coupled with Ipsos social intelligence services — to make strategic business decisions. Synthesio was founded in 2006 and has offices in New York, Paris, London, Singapore, and Brussels.

Talk to an expert and learn more about how our Social Media Intelligence Suite can help your business optimize campaigns and drive ROI.

Social Listening

Trend Detection & Insights

Signals is Synthesio's proprietary trend detector that uses data science to automatically surface insights that can easily be missed.

BI-Style Reporting

Dig deeper into social data with the most flexible, robust, and user-friendly social listening reporting on the market.

Audience Analysis

Understand your consumers on a deeper level, and turn that understanding into messaging and products that build meaningful connections with your audiences.

Command Center

Simply display your discovered insights with a command center that's powered by the largest collection of social data on the market.

Request a Demo Today!