Stress Shopping

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS AND SHOPPING IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL EXPERIENCES
Introduction

For today’s businesses, experience is the shortcut to success. If you can master the art of providing a great experience – whether a user experience, customer experience or even employee experience – then you hold the keys to a successful brand.

But what does ‘experience’ really mean? As marketers and business owners we’ve grown accustomed to talking in these terms – but we can’t always define them.

As abstract an idea as experience sounds, the reality is that it’s really quite simple – experience is a feeling, it’s an emotion. A good experience is a feeling of contentment, of ease; a bad experience is a feeling of inconvenience, of annoyance, even one of stress.

Now stress may sound like a strong word to associate with digital experiences, but not all stress manifests itself in red-faced shouting. In reality, psychology teaches us that we experience stress every day, with micro-stressors bubbling under the surface as a result of minor concerns, inconveniences, and yes, even purchase decisions.

So what is the relationship between shopping, customer experience and stress? What are the subtle micro-stressors that marketers so often miss when attempting to build a positive experience? And, most importantly of all, how can brands identify these micro-stressors and remove them from their customer journeys?

These are the questions that Clicktale sets out to address throughout this report. Calling upon research from psychologists, real-life case studies and a survey of over 2000 US and UK consumers, Stress Shopping represents one of the most comprehensive industry reports on the relationship between consumer shopping, digital experiences, and stress.
Methodology

This report incorporates research from 2091 consumers, with 1010 from the US and 1081 from the UK. Commissioned by Clicktale and conducted by independent research agency Censuswide, all data was collected from a combination of online and phone surveys.

Using a combination of qualitative multiple-choice selections and quantitative open text responses, these surveys asked consumers about their shopping habits, customer experience expectations and their perceived stressors throughout the buying process. Responses were then analyzed and summarized by Clicktale’s in-house experts.
Myth of the rational consumer

When asked about their purchase decisions, consumers overwhelmingly agree that they are wholly rational when they shop, always picking out the best deals and only ever buying things they absolutely need.

But is this really the case? None of us like to be viewed as irrational, particularly when it comes to how we spend our money. As such, can we really believe consumers when they tell us that—when it comes to deciding what to buy—they only respond to hard facts?

Psychologists, economists and data scientists think not.

In a 2017 study of 100 big data professionals, Clicktale found that only 24% believe consumers to be fundamentally rational when they shop. The remaining 76% believe that, to understand the psychology of shopping, we must look beyond logic and reason, and start to see consumers as emotional, or even irrational, decision makers.

32% of shoppers claim they only ever buy things they absolutely need

78% of consumers believe they are fundamentally RATIONAL when they shop

76% of data professionals think consumers are fundamentally IRRATIONAL when they shop
As shoppers get older, they grow increasingly convinced of their own rationality, with the number of consumers claiming that they are ‘fundamentally rational’ increasing in direct correlation to age.

Men are also 9% more likely than women to view their decisions as fundamentally rational.

Despite this view, women believe they are more likely to secure discounts and bargains, both on and offline. Women are also more likely to be satisfied with their purchase decisions further down the line.
The retail reality

Despite the majority of consumers claiming to be fundamentally rational and only buying what they need, the evidence suggests a very different shopping mindset.

76% of shoppers don’t stick to what is on their list while shopping in store, often adding impulse buys as a result of sales and discounts. Surprisingly, such impulse shopping is just as prevalent online, with 79% of ecommerce shoppers admitting that they struggle to stick to a set shopping list.

While offers and discounts are encouraging impulse buys both online and offline, the appeal of such deals is still much greater when shopping in-store.

Shoppers are not only more tempted by special offers in-store, they are also more satisfied once they find them.

Despite claiming that they are fundamentally rational, the reality is that very few consumers come to a store with a set list of items in mind and walk out with those exact purchases. Most of us are influenced by spur of the moment decisions, discounts, bargains and even the store environment itself.…
Despite the abundance of choice online, consumers are still more likely to actively hunt out bargains in-store than they are when shopping online.

They are also 5% more likely to be tempted by special offers when browsing in-store.

In-store discounts aren’t dead
The emotional shopper

While it could be argued that shopping for in-the-moment bargains is not necessarily irrational, the reality is that there are a whole host of consumer buying behaviours that do not make rational sense.

Women are almost twice as likely to shop when they’re bored as men.

When asked why they shop, consumers respond with a baffling array of emotive reasons, ranging from hunger, to boredom, to social anxiety and awkwardness. These emotion-driven purchases are not only more prevalent among certain products (food, clothing and books being the most common cures for boredom) but also appear to be growing more common with each generation.

"The behavior of a consumer can vary drastically from day to day, with a good or bad mood directly impacting how they perceive their interactions with a brand."

Liraz Margalit, PhD.
Head of Behavioral Research, Clicktale
Muzak to our ears

With shopping preferences and decisions influenced by consumer emotions, many supermarkets and retail stores have worked out that stimuli such as music, aisle layouts and lighting can all impact the products that people buy and the amounts they spend.

In one study, conducted by the psychologists Charles Areni and David Kim, shoppers were found to spend significantly more on wine when classic music was played throughout a store. A similar study found that slow music played in stores provided a more leisurely shopping experience, making consumers more likely to browse and impulse-buy.

In the digital age, these emotional stimuli are just as applicable online, with everything from page layouts to search speeds all impacting the moods of customers and, ultimately, the number of items that find their way into the shopping cart.
Rise of the ‘stress shopper’

In addition to boredom and hunger, a growing number of consumers are now shopping because they feel stressed. 40% of shoppers use ‘retail therapy’ as a way to calm down, while 74% have stress-shopped in the past.

As with the other emotional shopping trends identified in this research, young people (those aged 16-24 years) are the most likely to use shopping as a way to relieve stress, with 62% now stress-shopping either on or offline. Women are also 12% more likely to stress shop than men and are 16% more likely to believe that shopping does genuinely have a calming influence upon stressful situations.

Percentage of consumers who stress shop (per generation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-43</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>50%</td>
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What do people buy when stress-shopping?

- **Food**: 35%
- **Clothes**: 29%
- **Cosmetics**: 14%
- **Books**: 13%
- **Holidays**: 13%
Given that so many consumers are using shopping as a way to alleviate stress, the last thing that businesses and retailers want to do is offer shopping experiences that add to, rather than reduce, the stress levels of their customers. As things stand however, this happens all too often.

Currently, 1 in 5 consumers find that going shopping makes them feel stressed, while nearly a third (32%) have lost their temper when browsing in a store. Even more surprisingly, many shoppers are stressed out by shopping online, with 12% saying online shopping makes them feel stressed and 15% saying they’ve lost their temper with an app or an ecommerce site.

Given that shopping is supposed to be fun– and even relaxing – for consumers, these raised stress levels suggest that something is going seriously wrong when it comes to both on and offline store design.

“*How an experience makes customers feel has a bigger influence on their loyalty to a brand than effectiveness or ease in nearly every industry.*”

Forrester
Where are the shopping stress-points online?

When shopping online, consumer stress levels appear to steadily rise, reaching their peak at the checkout. Here shoppers are most fearful of losing their progress, with websites freezing during the checkout process proving the biggest source of consumer stress – followed by slow loading times and hard to navigate websites.

Mobile users experience similar worries, with problems at the checkout proving the number one source of stress, followed by unexpectedly freezing apps and slow loading times.

But it’s not just at the checkout that shoppers are suffering from stressful customer experiences. 65% of consumers are frustrated by unhelpful product recommendations, while 83% feel stressed because of difficulty navigating ecommerce sites. These issues also appear to be amplified for older generations, with over 55-year-olds finding these issues particularly stressful when shopping on mobile apps.

86% of shoppers feel stressed if they reach the online checkout and a voucher code doesn’t work

75% of consumers feel stressed if a mobile app freezes at the checkout phase

81% of online shoppers find slow loading times stressful

“Innovation in customer experience begins when companies explore the real customer journey to then reimagine touchpoints and click paths for modern behaviors, preferences and expectations.”

Brian Solis
Principal Analyst, Altimeter
By using Clicktale’s experience analytics, marketers and brands can uncover deep insights into customer mindsets and moods online.

This insight is what Clicktale calls the customer’s Digital Body Language (DBL) and can incorporate everything from clicks, to hovers, app-taps and scrolls. By building an understanding of the customer’s DBL, brands can monitor for subtle stressors that previously would have gone unnoticed. These stressors can then be removed from the buying process, providing visitors with the best possible customer experience.
Interestingly, many of the stress-points that we’ve seen emerge online are reflected in the offline shopping experience.

As with mobile sites and apps, issues at the checkout remain a major source of frustration in-store, with 85% of consumers feeling stressed if there is an unexpected issue such as a declined voucher or broken card machine. The only issue considered more frustrating are long lines – which once again coincides with the slow loading and wait times that are causing consumer stress online. In fact, having to wait in line is now considered only slightly more stressful (5%) than having to wait for an ecommerce site to load.

Difficulty finding items and navigating a store also score highly, being considered just as stressful as hard-to-navigate webpages and sites. Where the older generation is more likely to feel stressed when shopping on a mobile device, young people are the most likely to become stressed when attempting to shop in-store. In fact, 16-year-olds are seven times as likely to report high stress levels when shopping in-store as those over the age of 55.

Where are the shopping stress-points in-store?

- 79% of shoppers are stressed out by unhelpful staff interjecting with product recommendations in store
- 83% of shoppers are frustrated by hard to navigate store layouts
- 83% of shoppers are stressed out by shop assistants following them around a store
Five ways to solve the shopping stress-points

For today’s brands, the fastest way to ensure customer loyalty is by providing a stress-free shopping experience. This experience should not only minimize consumer stress, it must also account for all of the different mindsets, moods and emotions that shoppers may experience as they work their way through a purchase journey.

But how can brands build such a stress-free and emotionally positive experience? And how can they start to recognize the subtle emotional annoyances that cause a stressful shopping experience?

1. Identify your stressors

Before a brand can start to remove potential stress-points from its customer journey, it must first identify where those stressors are most likely to occur. To uncover these insights, brands must look beyond traditional website analytics and start to consider Experience Analytics. They must start to explore new metrics, examining everything from hovers, to scrolls to ‘rage clicks’. Only by examining these subtle signifiers can brands start to understand their customers’ Digital Body Language and uncover the real sources of stress online.

2. Look beyond feedback

While the vast majority of brands are already using customer surveys and NPS scores to monitor sources of stress, such direct feedback doesn’t always provide the most accurate results. Of those surveyed, 1 in 20 shoppers said that they regularly lie on customer feedback forms, either as a result of embarrassment or the so-called ‘participant bias’ (wanting to please those running the survey). To overcome this, brands must start to look not only at what shoppers say, but how they act. Only then will they uncover those subtle stress-points that consumers themselves may not even be aware of.
3. Put customer service first

When designing a customer journey, it’s very easy for marketers and web developers to work in a silo and forget to interact with other areas of the business. For many such designers, customer service becomes an afterthought, as, if a site is designed correctly, visitors should never have to interact with the customer service team. In reality however, this is rarely the case.

Customers will always have questions and queries, and customer service teams will inevitably remain a big part of the buying process. In fact, consumers rank a fast and responsive customer service team as their #1 factor for improving experiences. With this in mind, brands must work hard to ensure that access to customer service and support teams remains a central part of their website flows and customer journeys.

4. Provide answers

It’s not always possible to remove sources of stress from the buying cycle. Websites inevitably require maintenance and apps cannot survive without updates. Unfortunately, all of these things weaken the customer experience, increase stress levels, and are ultimately out of a business’ hands. What brands can do however, is prepare their customers for such changes.

Our research found that even the most basic forms of explanation – whether a customized error page or a ‘back in five minutes’ sign – reduce the number of consumers reporting stress by 13%. By building such explanations into the user journey, brands can significantly improve customer experiences at the most difficult moments.

5. Think about emotions

In the age of big data, it’s all too easy for brands to get wrapped up in the idea that all decisions must be based on hard facts and rational evidence. But, no matter how much people want to see themselves as wholly rational beings, the reality is that consumers shop with their hearts just as much as their heads. Shopping is a highly emotive activity, being driven by happiness, boredom, hunger and even stress.

It is also an activity that results in a great range of emotions, and brands must do their best to understand those emotions and to help consumers walk away with a positive feeling. This is not only the secret to a positive customer experience, it is also the secret to a successful business.

The secret to customer retention?

When it comes to encouraging brand loyalty, consumers now rank stress-free shopping as more important than discounts, CSR initiatives and personalised content, placing it alongside ‘convenience’ and ‘variety’ at the top of the list.
The last word...

Through a combination of psychological research and experience analytics, Clicktale provides brands with unprecedented insights into the consumer mindset.

By uncovering those data points that exist between traditional metrics – the stressors, experience gaps and digital body language – the Clicktale Experience Cloud allows businesses to understand their customers not as numbers in a spreadsheet, but as human beings. In turn, this understanding provokes better products, better experiences, and ultimately better results.

To find out more about Clicktale, the psychology of stress and the role of Digital Body Language, visit clicktale.com