

The results of our 2021 consumer survey are in, and the message is clear: don't believe the hype. Contrary to what the media tells us, people are not changing their shopping behavior. They're not shopping earlier, and they do not care much about supply chain constraints, and Facebook is not a dying brand. All of these assumptions are wrong.

Bottom line? It's been a tough year, but nothing has changed.





**Holiday Shopping Trends:** 

Forget Everything You're Hearing About Consumer Behavior in 2021

### The Unexpected Consumer Behavior Report for 2021

What If Media Group surveyed more than 100,000 consumers, resulting in a comprehensive, research-based report designed to help brand manufacturers and retailers plan for this year's holiday season.

In it, you'll discover consumer sentiments on spending and concern with the current state of the retail industry. Some of the key insights we'll explore include:

- Supply chain delay concerns.
- Local shopping preferences.
- Prioritizing domestic products.
- Sale pricing.
- Social media inspiration.
- Brand and retailer loyalty.
- In-person vs. online shopping.
- Spending expectations.

As always, if you have any questions or would like to speak to us about how to take your holiday sales to the next level, What If Media Group is here to help. Don't hesitate to reach out!





We Know What the Media Tells Us, But What Do Consumers Really Think?

Many brands expected to find themselves facing myriad challenges this holiday season. The concerns keeping retailers up at night include unpredictable shopping habits and behaviors, the ever-present threat of the pandemic and the potential for more lockdowns, supply chain volatility, and wildly fluctuating market surge.

But while the landscape behind the frontlines continues to lurch like a roller coaster, not much has changed from a consumer point of view. In fact, consumers are not as concerned as you think they are.

In fact, the data does not support most media reporting in any meaningful way. Have consumers lost faith in the media? Or is current industry news being manipulated to steer another agenda entirely?





### Understanding Holiday Spending Behavior In 2021

From the Suez Canal debacle of last year to container and capacity shortages, trade embargoes, and rising freight costs, the supply chain is having its 15 minutes of fame—for all the wrong reasons. For brands, it's headline news. For consumers, not so much.

Are you making purchases earlier in anticipation of growing supply chain, inventory, and fulfillment concerns?

From this survey response, we can conclude that consumers, inarguably, do not care about supply chain delays and are not changing their behaviors this year because of it. While retailers struggle to balance inventory with demand, consumers have adopted a more agile approach. In truth, most people don't think much about issues beyond their own immediate needs and concerns. They'll shop when it's convenient, and they'll purchase what's available.









### Have your savings increased this year?

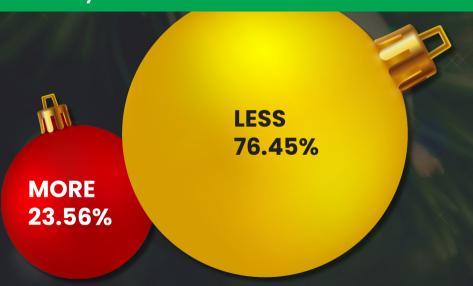


We can glean from this that even though circumstances may have changed for some, it has not affected everybody. As savings increase, consumer spending decreases, so these numbers would indicate that consumer confidence is still relatively high. However, they could also reflect income changes forced by the pandemic, such as income decreasing because of the economic slowdown.





# Do you plan on spending more or less than you did in the 2020 holiday season?



Most consumers are spending less, which correlates to the savings holding pattern reflected in the previous stat. It is odd, though, that people expect to spend less even though they do not intend to change their shopping behaviors and are generally unconcerned about increasing prices.

This is another eyebrow-raising instance that casts shade on the media and their role in public opinion. People are just not as concerned as the media would have us believe.

We're curious to know what you retailers think about this insight? Does the data align with the consumer behavior you're seeing?

Drop us a line and let us know!



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# This holiday season, do you plan on shopping locally?



YES 30.10%



There is a massive trend to push shopping local in just about every community across the nation. It makes sense for many reasons—supporting the local economy, building sustainable communities, putting money back into neighborhoods and the small businesses that make them unique—but are consumers buying?

Our survey says that two-thirds of consumers do not plan to shop locally. This could be for any number of reasons, from proximity, mobility, convenience, local assortment, or convenience. Of the responding group, men who intend to shop local are in the 51-55 age group, while "yes" answers from women came from all age groups.

Those that preferred to shop local stated that avoiding shipping was a motivator, either due to cost or immediacy. Shipping, as we know, has been unreliable, so many shoppers might prefer local options to ensure their purchases don't get lost in the shuffle.

So, the online shopping trend hasn't changed, and no one is shopping locally to avoid shipping delays.



# Where is holiday shopping inspiration coming from?

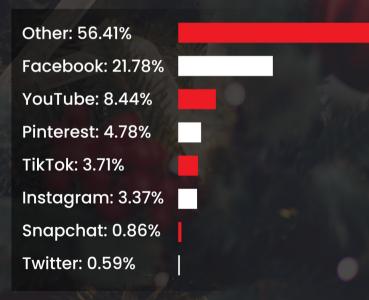


Know Your Audience to Identify Their Motivations

Meeting your audience where they congregate is critical to understanding their motivations and preferences. The better you know your buyers, the easier it is to anticipate their needs.

The next round of questions seeks to understand where shoppers are getting ideas from and what inspires their purchases.

For context, "other" was most chosen in the 36-45 age group. TikTok and Snapchat results were represented by women 24 and under.





It might come as a big surprise for some to see Facebook as the top consumer social media platform. Based on these results, we clearly need to reconsider media reports looking to play down the importance of Facebook as an inspiration channel. Despite all the chatter about its "dying brand" and dwindling market share, it continues to be the top destination for people looking to buy.

Newer social media platforms are having viral moments, but it's critical not to focus your efforts on the shiny new things. Just because a platform is trending does not mean it will work for you. TikTok, in particular, is a very narrow demographic, so it's not the best place to focus your ad spend unless that's your audience.

In better practice, a data-driven approach will deliver the results you want. When you follow the data, you eliminate the guessing game and avoid the urge to make blind decisions based on what your competitors are doing.

What If Media Group enables intelligent targeting to enable customized marketing campaigns that help you achieve your targets. With over one billion customer interactions each month, you can be confident your ad budget is well-spent and look forward to a more predictable ROI.



What Are Consumers Buying, and When Are They Buying It?

Timing is everything. While some retailers put a massive push on early cyber sales, the data tells us that consumers do not care.

### Where is holiday shopping inspiration coming from?





These numbers should inform your strategy in a meaningful way. Your audience is not shopping ahead of time, which still gives you plenty of time for marketing outreach.

Some ideas: Change up your pricing strategy, stock your inventory for December, or advertise deals in December when your customers are ready to buy. Smart advertising starts with What If Media Group as you'll be where your customers are and maximize your ad spend.



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# What type of item will you be giving as gifts most this holiday season?



**Clothing: 24.93%** 

Cash or checks: 16.70%

Homemade items: 10.50%

Toys and games: 10.34%

Electronics: 8.58%

**11** Other: 0%

Respondents were split almost evenly between male and female but favoring females by a small margin. The majority of gift cards and electronics came from men of all ages, clothing from women of all ages. Cash and checks were primarily chosen by women in the 51-75 age group and men of all ages.

Here's your action plan: During the end of November and through December, bring prices down for the win. If we know consumers are waiting until the last minute to spend, it's a way to gain loyalty and increase transactional spending.

Offer an incentive of a gift card with every purchase at checkout, with or without spending thresholds. For example, you could increase the value of the gift card offered as the purchase increases. In addition to bringing new customers into the fold, you'll attract individuals looking for gift cards who might shop with you because they're getting something free.



#### In Conclusion

If there is one thing we can definitively conclude from our survey results, it's that you can't put a lot of stock in the media hype that appears to shape our world. Public opinion aside, the data doesn't lie.

Here are some key takeaways from our 2021 survey on holiday shopping trends:

- Consumers are shopping later, not earlier.
- They are not concerned about prices or sale shopping.
- They won't hesitate to go to another store to get the item they want.
- Their preference is for in-person shopping, but online options are still important.
- Facebook is a solid choice as a digital marketing channel. Focus more on channels that matter to your audience, and don't put all your focus on platforms with a narrow demographic.
- Convenience is important.
- Shopping local is not a priority for most shoppers.
- Gift cards are a popular choice across demographics, especially with male shoppers.

And finally, since consumers plan to spend less this holiday season, you'll need to appeal to their sense of value and hit them at the right time to capture that business. Knowing that they'd just as easily shop the competition, the time is now to ramp up your marketing outreach and position yourself as their last-minute, go-to choice.



Ultimately, great market research and actionable data are what's going to help you find customers. Getting to know and understand your customers is a daily endeavor, and you can't leave it to chance.

What If Media Group has been powering data-driven customer activation since 2012. We help retailers like you understand their audience and what drives them. Our market research is highly effective at helping you find customers for your product offerings.

In challenging times such as these, we all need a voice of reason to help us cut through the media noise, especially when much of it is manipulated to suit the publisher's (or advertiser's) agenda.

As 2021 winds to a close, if you're like most retailers, you're looking ahead and wondering, "how can we do better?" and we have the answer. What If Media Group is here to help you find new solutions to scale success.

If you are ready to take advantage of 2021 holiday spending behaviors and outplay your competitors, we've got the data you need to crush it. The "other guys" might be focused on the shiny new trends, but we're single-minded with our eyes on the prize. With data as your guide, you'll always know where the truth lies.

To learn more about how to expand your reach and conversion volume this holiday season, let's connect!



#### **About What If Media Group**

Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Fort Lee, New Jersey, What If Media Group is an award-winning performance marketing company that enables the world's leading brands to acquire valuable new customers at scale. Using sophisticated targeting technology, we leverage data-driven engagement and re-engagement strategies across multiple proprietary marketing channels gaining valuable insights based on millions of daily consumer ad interactions.

What If Media Group is a recipient of several awards including Crain's Fast 50 and is on the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

# About The Survey

The data this paper is based on are the results of an online survey related to consumer holiday shopping trends conducted within What If Media Group from November 18th to November 22nd, 2021. 142,000 randomly selected adults responded, and the findings have a 99% confidence level with margin of error +/- 2.5%.

What If Media Group's proprietary ad-serving technology includes a real-time survey module that was used to facilitate data collection for this study. Data was weighted to the 2010 US Census.

