

Online shopping's missing mojo: over three in four consumers say ecommerce is functional - but where's the fun?

Discovery is the missing piece in ecommerce - Criteo's latest research shows how brands can turn online browsing into a more joyful experience

London – 3rd April 2025 – Online shopping seems to lack magic and has become a mechanical, predictable process. [Criteo](#) (Nasdaq: CRTO), the commerce media company's new report [The Spark of Discovery - Reigniting The Emotion of Ecommerce](#) revealed that three-quarters (76%) of consumers say online shopping lacks excitement, with nearly a third of respondents (29%) describing it as a chore. As online retailers prioritise efficiency, brands risk missing the moments of discovery that drive loyalty and engagement amongst shoppers and eroding opportunities for an emotional connection.

Ecommerce is efficient, not emotive

The thrill of browsing, stumbling upon an unexpected find and making an impulse purchase is fading fast. Today, 61% of shoppers turn to online shopping purely for convenience, while a third (36%) lament the loss of 'unexpected finds' – a key driver of retail joy. Consumers crave more than just speed and efficiency; they want surprise, spontaneity, and emotional connection in their digital shopping experiences. When it comes to celebrating major life milestones, only 18% of consumers choose to do so through online shopping. Instead, they prefer to mark memorable occasions with in-person experiences that online shopping has yet to replicate.

Are brands making a lasting impact?

Some brands have a tough time building genuine connections with consumers. Over a third (39%) of shoppers say engaging ads make them feel positively towards a brand, but when it comes to deeper brand relationships, some digital marketing strategies could be revised. When directly engaging with a brand, 41% feel excited when reading a positive review or forum discussion, proving third-party endorsement is a powerful driver of brand trust. Customers also want brands to understand the context of their transactions, as 43% of online shoppers expect brands to use their data to create personalised experiences.

Online retail must compete for consumer attention



Brands are jostling to stand out to their target audiences in a fragmented consumer journey. Almost 4 in 5 (79%) consumers feel online shopping is lonely, and 78% say they are overwhelmed by too many product choices. Worse still, only 50% find online shopping relaxing or enjoyable.

55% of brand leaders believe influencers drive traffic, but only 29% of consumers say influencer content makes them feel positively towards a brand. Instead, 73% of consumers say visiting a brand's website contributes to their excitement, underlining the important role of owned digital experiences in driving brand engagement and trust and highlighting a vital opportunity for brands to connect with shoppers.

Discovery is the key to brand growth

Despite clear consumer demand for more engaging shopping experiences, almost all brand leaders (98%) believe their discovery strategies are effective and 80% stating their approach contributes to brand growth. While 79% of brands acknowledge that data privacy concerns hinder their ability to refine discovery strategies, this also presents a clear opportunity - almost half (43%) of online shoppers are open to brands using their data when it leads to better, more personalised experiences, provided it's done transparently and with trust. With more than four in five (83%) brands set to lean on AI tools to improve user experience, and the use of commerce data vital to building accurate pictures of customer behaviour for properly personalised experiences, the ecommerce industry is at a turning point.

Marc Fischli, Executive MD EMEA at Criteo, said:

"Once, shopping was about excitement - the thrill of the unexpected, the delight of discovery. Today, we no longer 'go shopping' - we are always shopping - but that hasn't made the experience more exciting. Instead, online retail has become a functional necessity, optimised for speed but stripped of surprise and spontaneity. Our research shows that consumers crave the thrill of the unexpected, yet too often, discovery is being left to chance. Brands that don't reinject joy into the shopping journey risk fading into the background of a transactional, forgettable experience.

But there's a clear opportunity: with the right mix of emotional storytelling and real-time data, brands can create serendipitous moments that feel personal and intuitive - delivering the magic of the 'perfect find' even when consumers aren't actively searching for it. AI and data-driven strategies can elevate discovery beyond just targeting the right audience at the right time; they should create moments of inspiration. Consumers are telling us they want brands to understand them beyond just their purchase history. Those who craft experiences that feel exciting and



immersive - instead of just efficient - will be the ones that capture attention, foster loyalty, and ultimately drive long-term growth."

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Methodology

Criteo partnered with Harvard PR and market research specialist Vitreous World to conduct a representative global online survey with a sample size of 6000 consumers and 600 brand leaders across six markets - the UK, US, France, Germany, Japan and South Korea.

The survey explored the topic of discovery and joy in shopping. All data points referenced are global figures. The consumer survey was conducted February 7th-17th 2025, and the B2B study February 10th-27th 2025.

About Criteo

Criteo (NASDAQ: CRTO) is the global commerce media company that enables marketers and media owners to drive better commerce outcomes. Its industry leading Commerce Media Platform connects thousands of marketers and media owners to deliver richer consumer experiences from product discovery to purchase. By powering trusted and impactful advertising, Criteo supports an open internet that encourages discovery, innovation, and choice. For more information, please visit www.criteo.com

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