



# Changes in Consumer Habits: Implications for Convenience Stores and Gas Stations





# Introduction

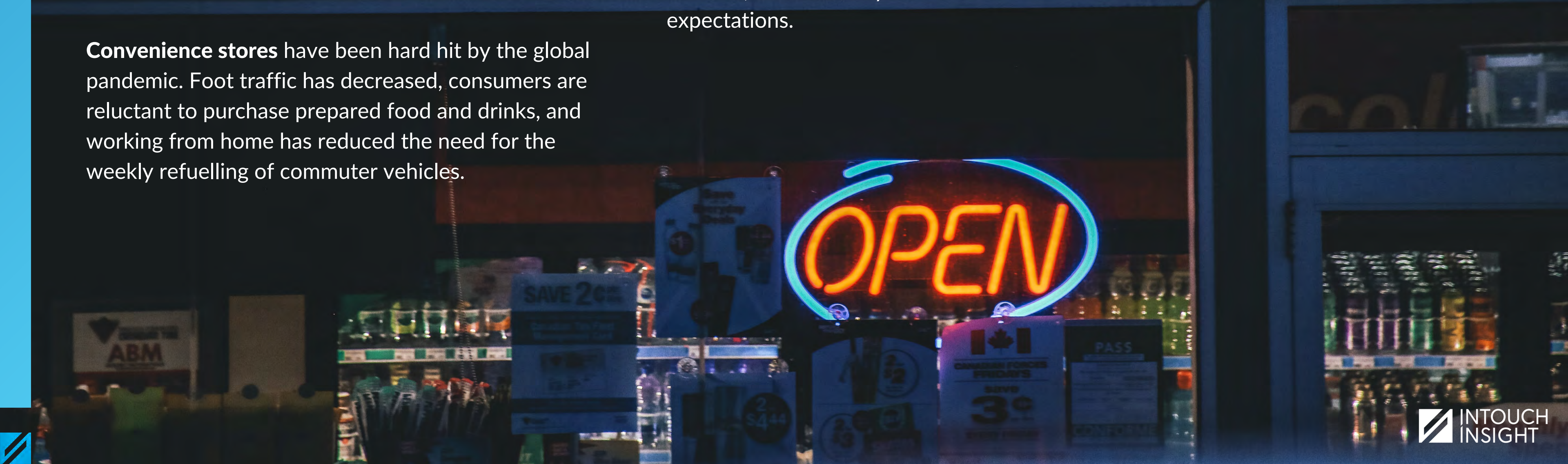
At **Intouch Insight**, we provide experiential and operational expertise to businesses around the world. We are on a mission to better understand how consumer habits are changing due to **COVID-19**.

In May, we leveraged our platform LiaCX™, to learn about the experiences of thousands of individuals across North America.

**Convenience stores** have been hard hit by the global pandemic. Foot traffic has decreased, consumers are reluctant to purchase prepared food and drinks, and working from home has reduced the need for the weekly refuelling of commuter vehicles.

Some businesses have launched mobile apps with delivery services to supplement their regular business, while others have installed plexiglas coverings and increased their cleaning operations to help reassure customers and to protect frontline employees.

In this report, we will look at the implications that COVID-19 has had on **consumer habits** as they pertain to interactions with **convenience store providers** and **gas stations**, and how they will need to evolve to meet consumer needs and expectations.





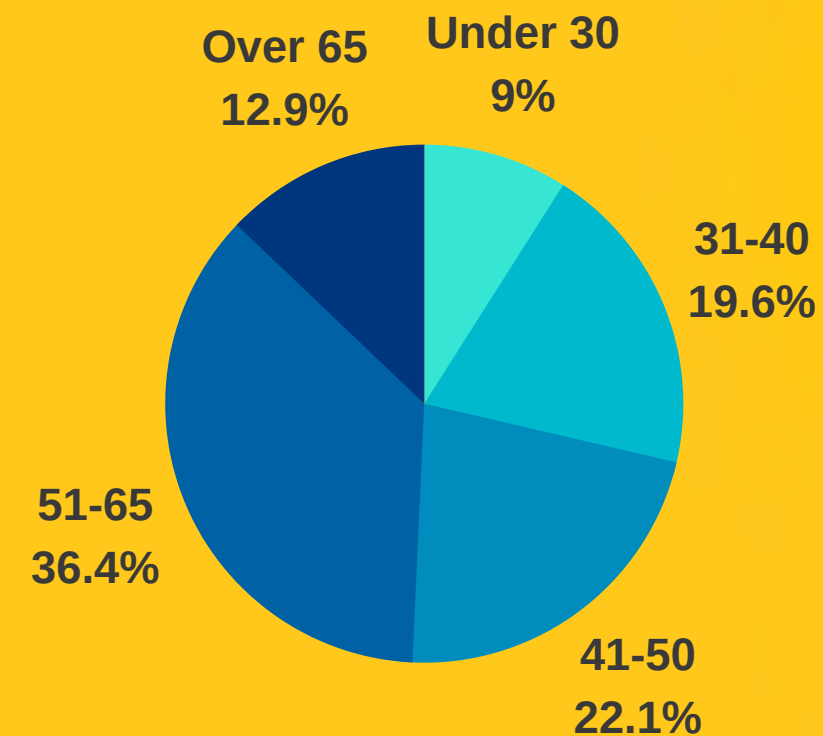
Our survey received over **2000 responses** from across North America (see survey respondent demographics below).

**The survey included three primary areas of focus:**

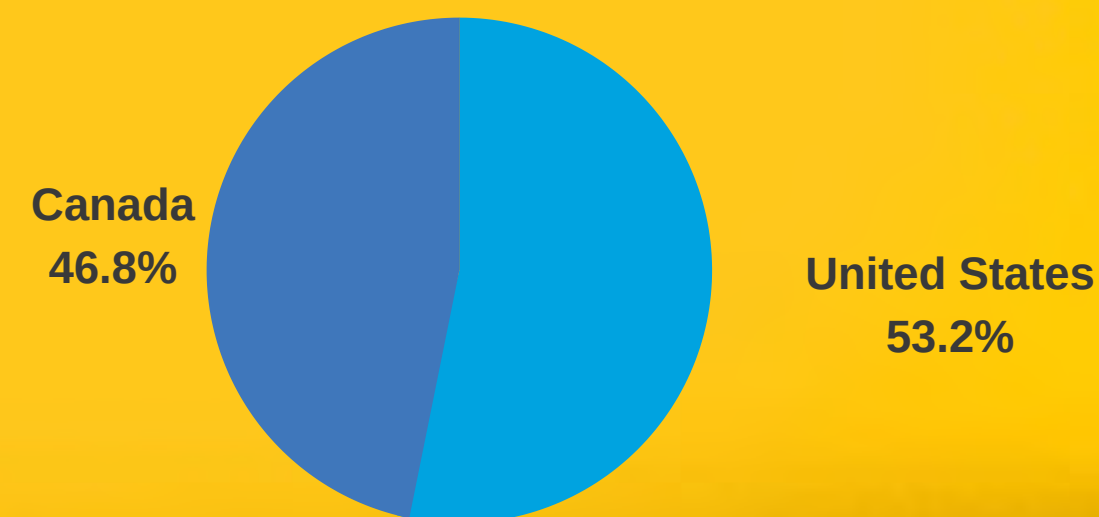
- How consumer habits have changed when engaging with c-stores and gas stations?
- What do consumers expect?
- How should c-stores adapt to meet new health and safety guidelines and expectations?

In this report, we examine how consumer habits and expectations have shifted, and what that means for customer-facing businesses that handle the selling of daily essentials such as fuel, tobacco, alcohol and prepared foods.

**AGE**



**LOCATION**





A man with short dark hair, glasses, and a beard is smiling and looking into a glass-fronted freezer in a grocery store. He is wearing a blue polo shirt. The freezer is filled with various frozen food items, including bags of frozen vegetables and boxes of frozen meals. The background shows other shelves and products in the store.

## Initial Findings

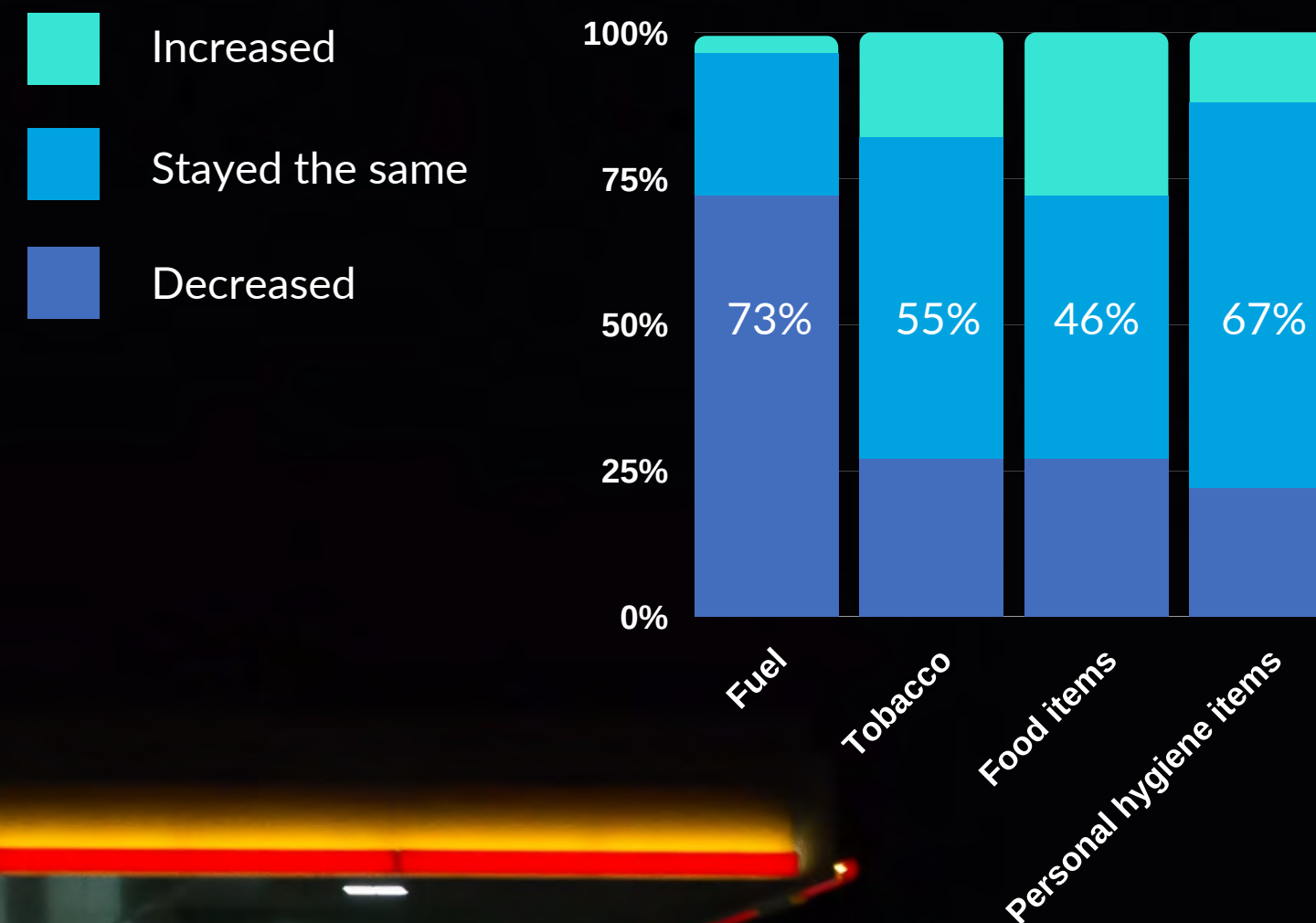
According to our **survey respondents**, the **frequency** of their visits to **convenience stores** and **gas stations** has **decreased by 73%** since the pandemic began.

This number varied slightly between Canada and the United States, with a decrease of **76% in Canada** and **70% in the United States**, according to our survey responses.



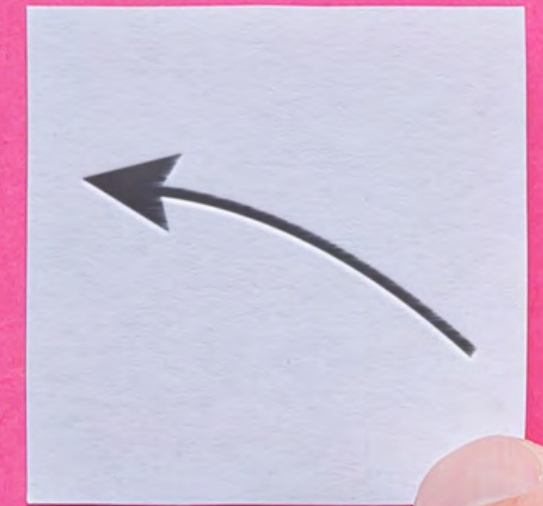
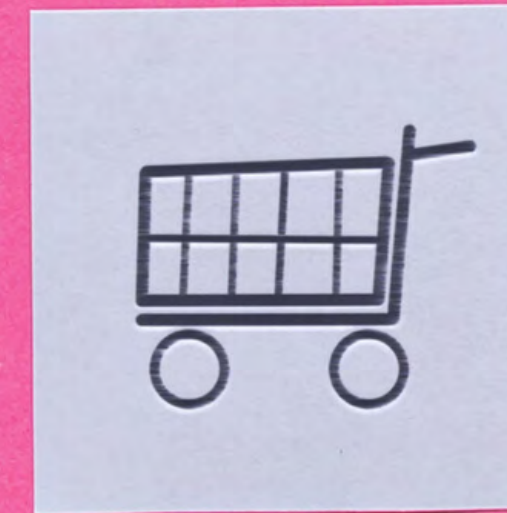
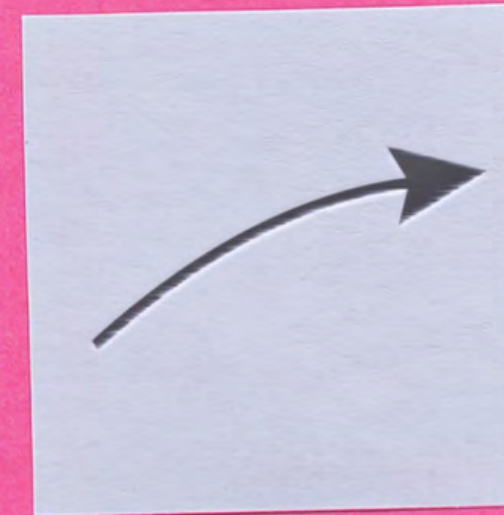
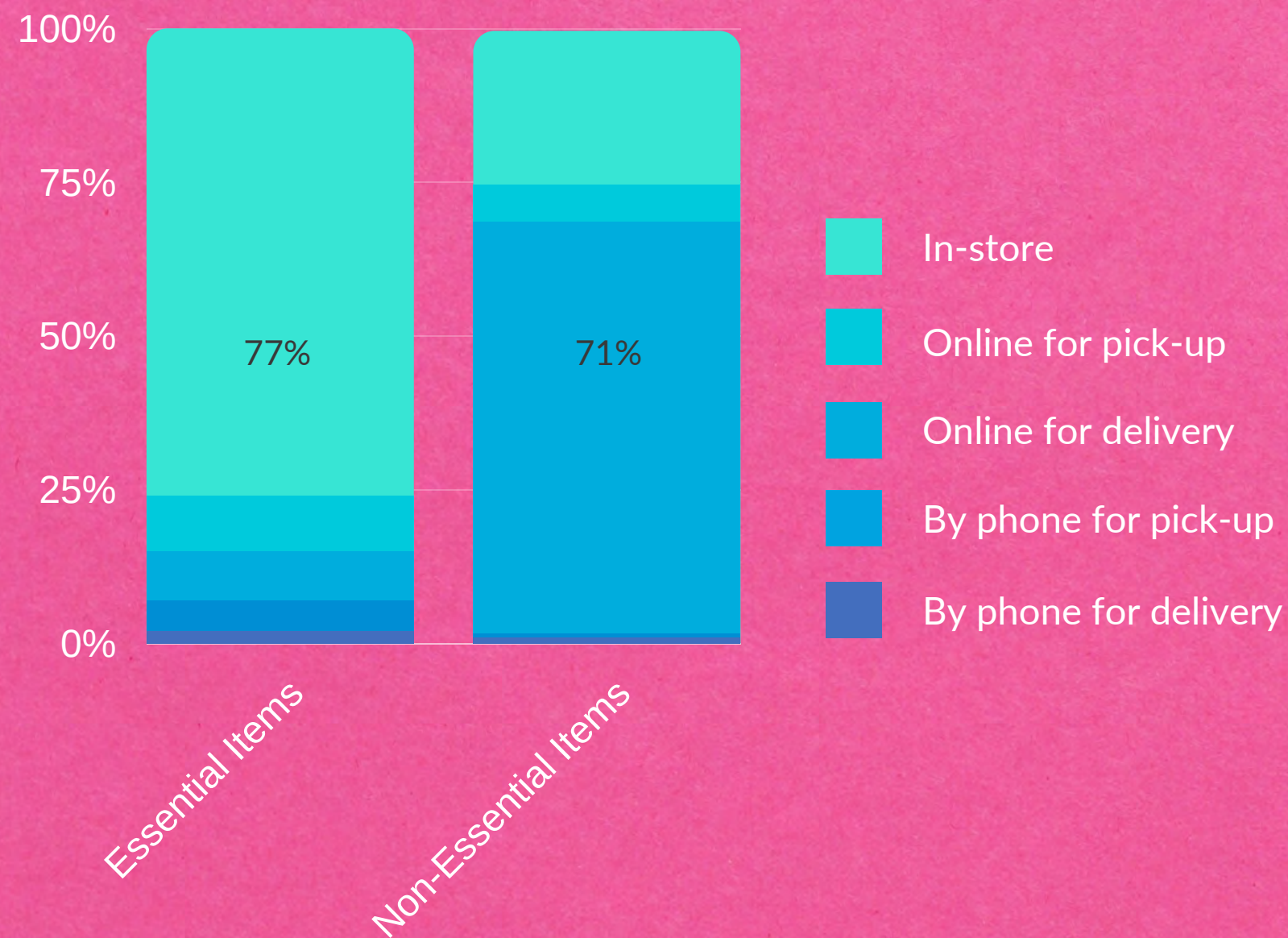
On average, the purchasing of **fuel** has **decreased** by **73%** **according to our respondents**. This can be attributed to the fact that more and more people are working from home and commuting less on a daily basis.

The purchase of **tobacco**, **food items**, and **personal hygiene products** at convenience stores and gas stations has **remained relatively the same** (as you can see from the chart on the right).





When it comes to the purchase of **essential goods**, **70% of respondents** said they were making their purchases **in-store**, whereas **non-essential** items like clothing, electronics and entertainment, were mostly being purchased online.





# Key Findings

## ONE

Across the board, **cleanliness** is viewed as a **top priority** for **consumers everywhere**.

## TWO

Our survey results demonstrate a generalized **reluctance to use communal facilities in public places**, such as **restrooms**. There also seems to be a **preference for crew-service over self-service** at this time.

## THREE

**Visibly** reinforcing **safety measures** and **social distancing guidelines** creates an added layer of **trust, comfort, and reassurance** that consumers are looking for when engaging with a physical business location.






**Cleanliness and proper sanitization is a top priority to every kind of consumer.**







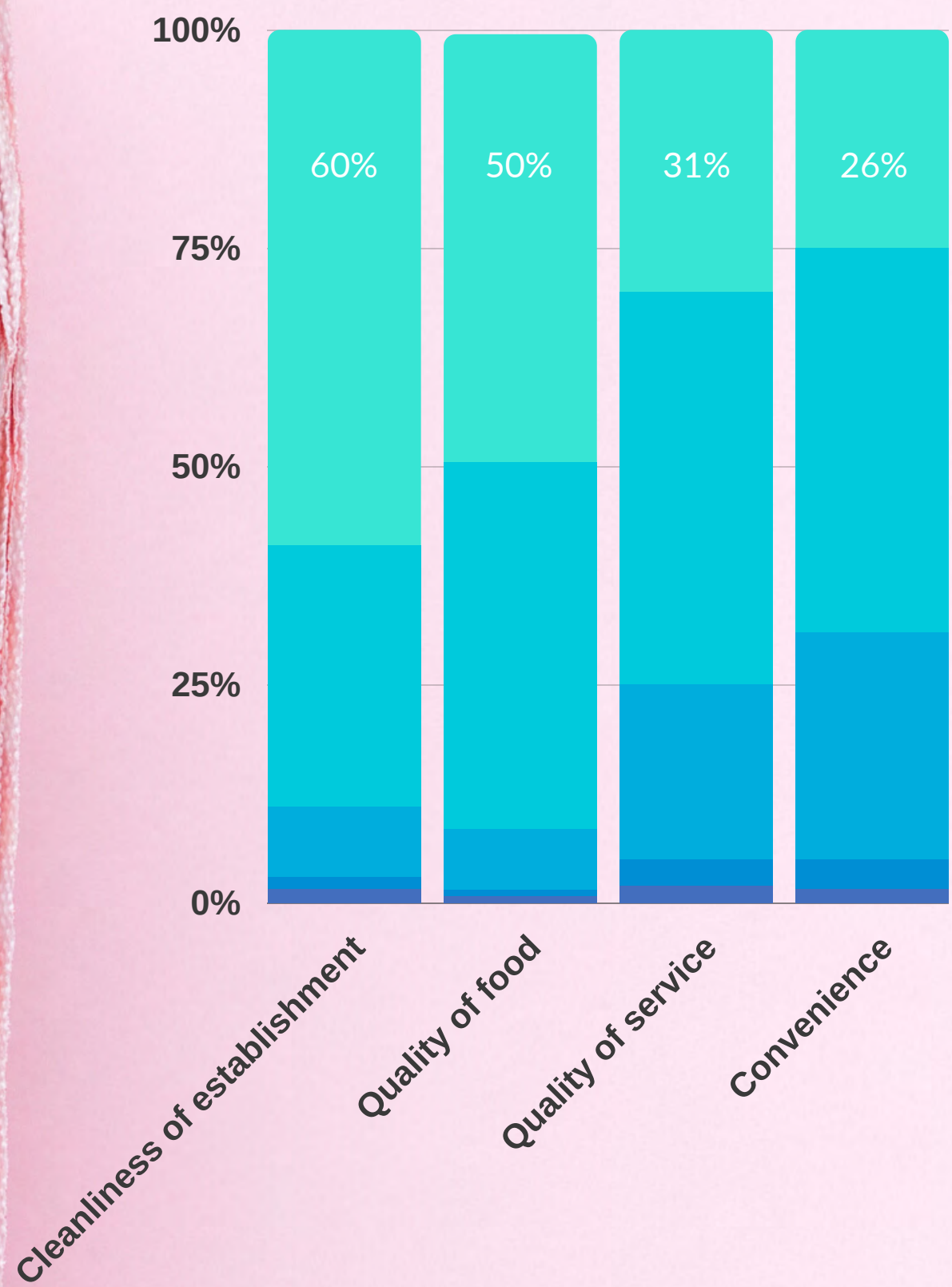
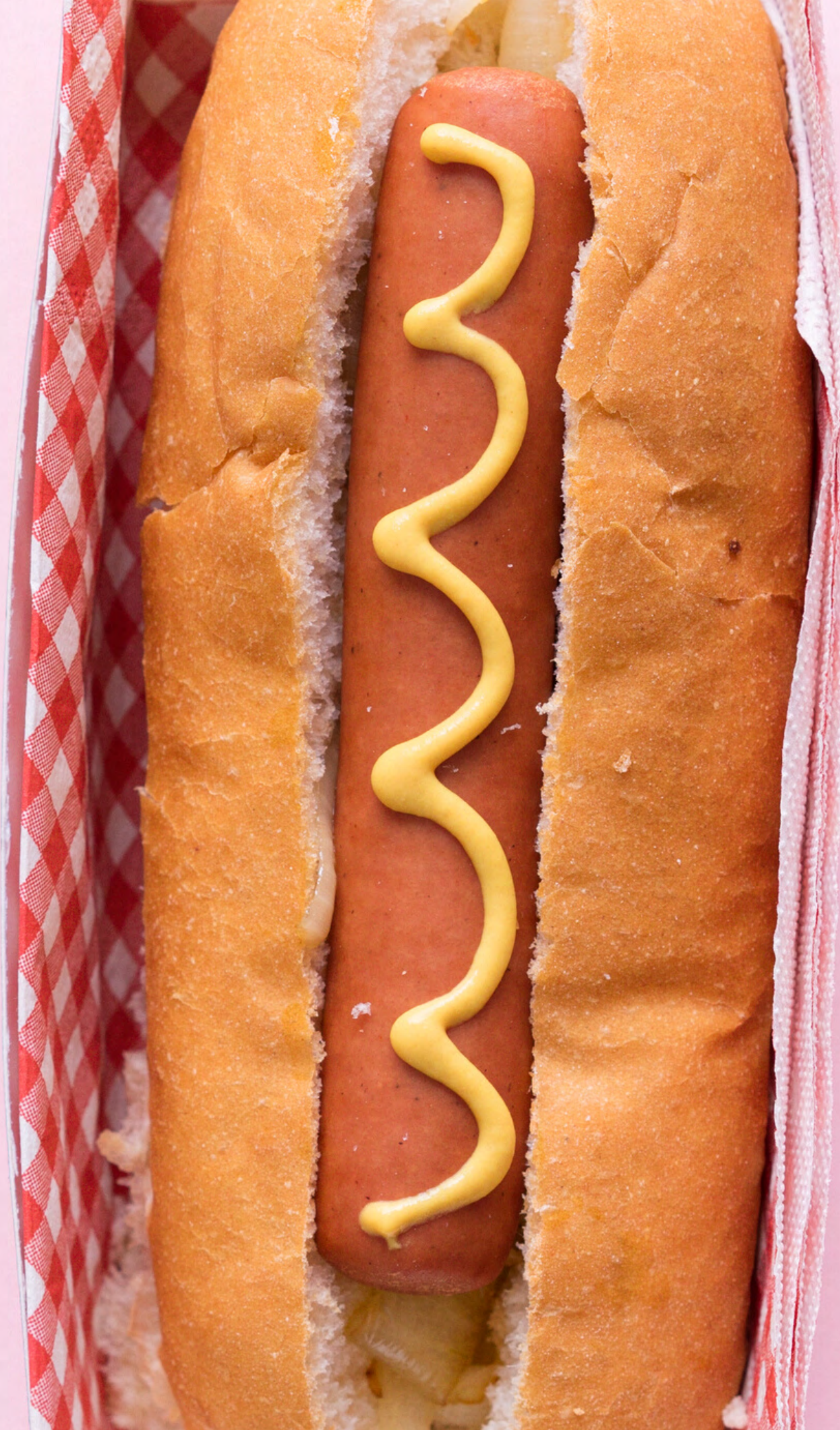
**62% of our respondents** shared that **cleanliness** is a **top priority** when making the decision to make an **in-store purchase**.

**Crowd-control measure** were ranked as the second highest priority for consumers, with **42% of respondents** feeling that it is **extremely important** to them and will influence their decision to purchase in-store.



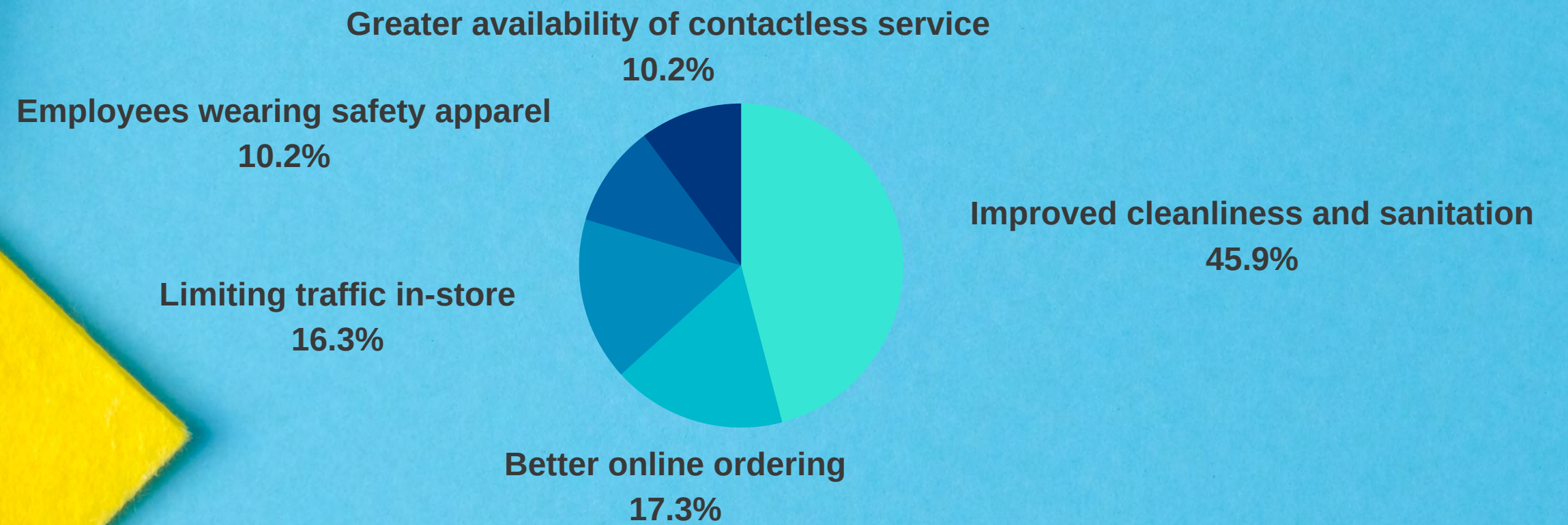
When it comes to ordering **prepared food**, these are the most important factors, according to our respondents...

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not important





As we look ahead, **46% of respondents** said that the **number one change** they hope to see businesses make in the face of future potential waves of COVID-19 is **improved cleanliness and sanitation.**

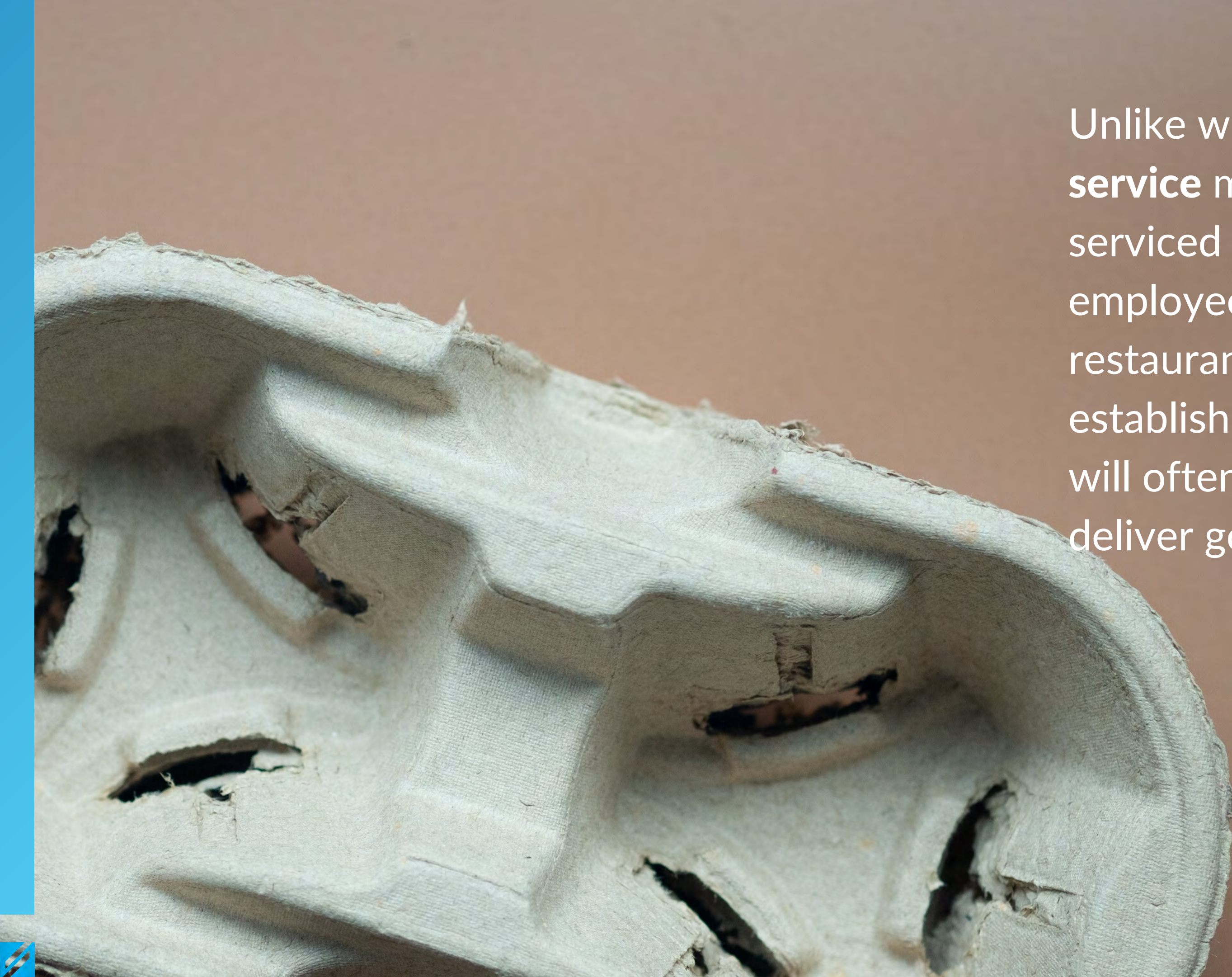






Embracing **crew-service**  
and the **future** of your  
**facilities**





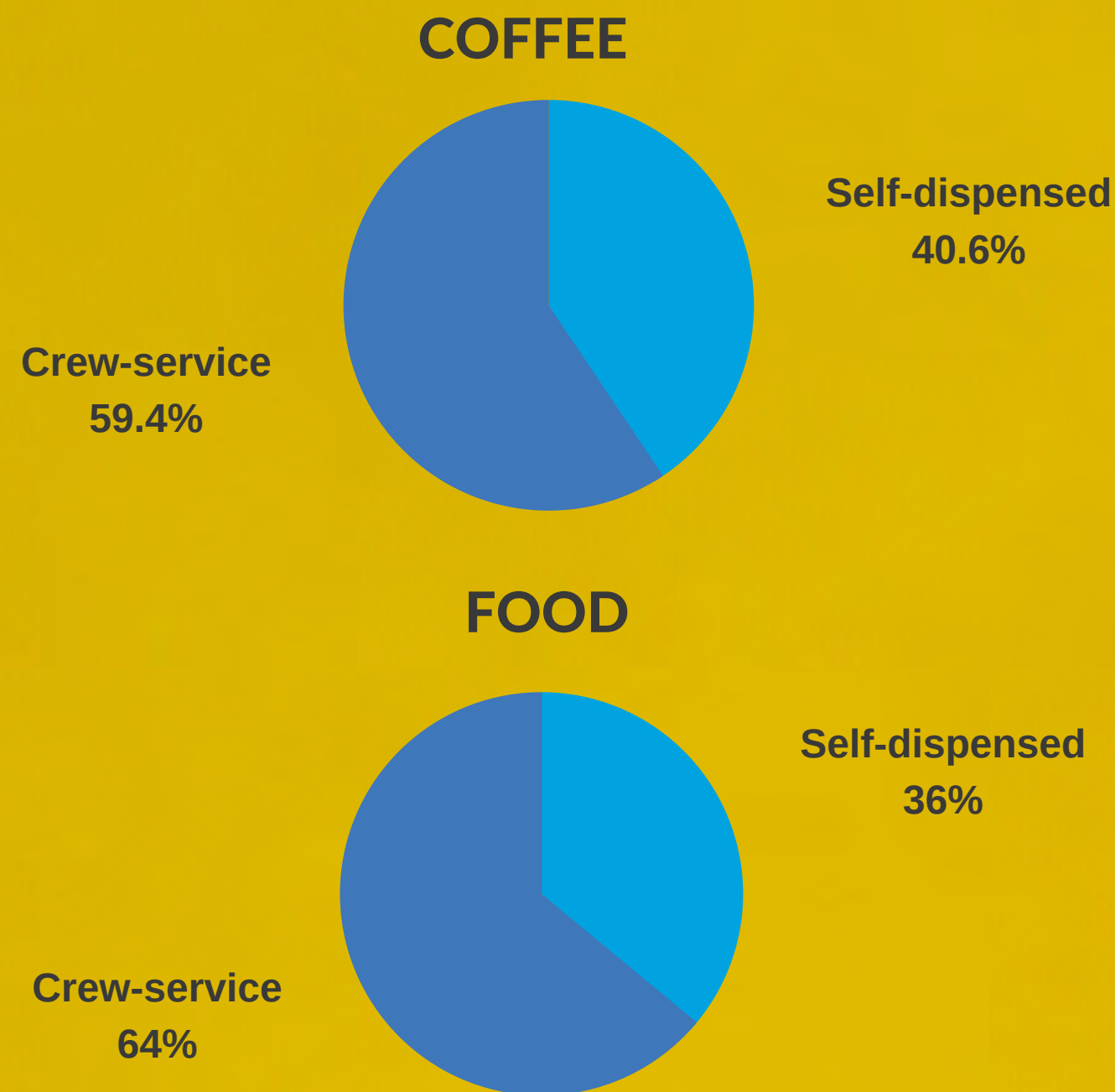
Unlike with **self-service**, **crew service** means you are being serviced by a customer-facing employee of the business, restaurant, or food service establishment. This individual will often take your order, and deliver goods in real-time.




At **c-store** and **gas stations**, consumers expect to grab **coffee** and **prepared food** from you when they're out and about and on the go.

Our respondents shared that in today's climate, they would feel more **comfortable** purchasing **coffee** and **prepared food** via **crew-service**, as opposed to **self-service**.

**60% of respondents** would prefer **crew-service** when purchasing **coffee**, and **64% of respondents** said the same when purchasing **prepared food**.



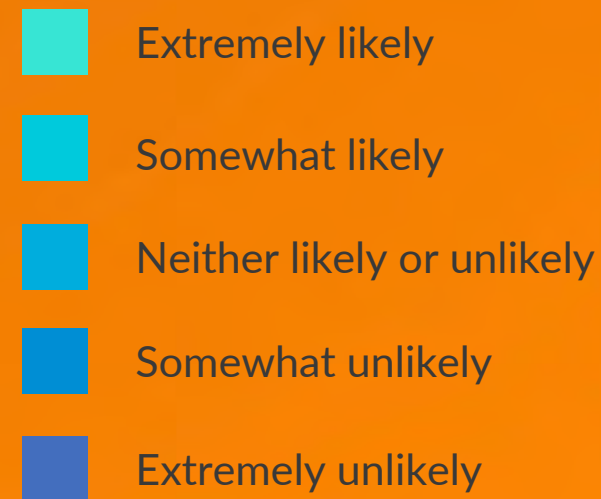




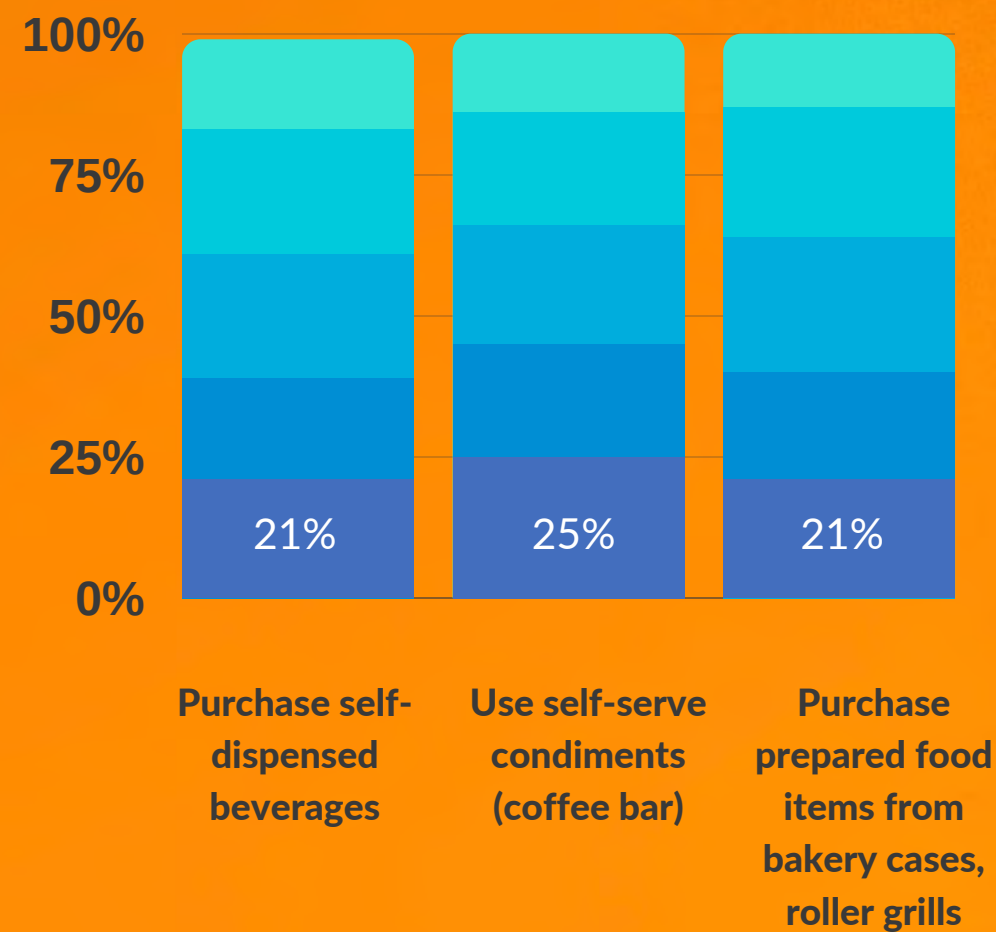
Interestingly enough, the only time we see that preference change drastically is when it pertains to the purchasing of **fuel**.

**84% of respondents** said they would prefer to **self-serve** when **purchasing fuel**.





When shelter-in-place and social distancing measures are relaxed, how likely will you be to engage in the following activities?



If we now take a moment to talk about **facilities** and how they **correlate** with **self-service areas**, according to our respondents, we are seeing some **increased reluctance** towards using **condiment stations, self-serve coffee machines, roller grills, and bakery cases.**



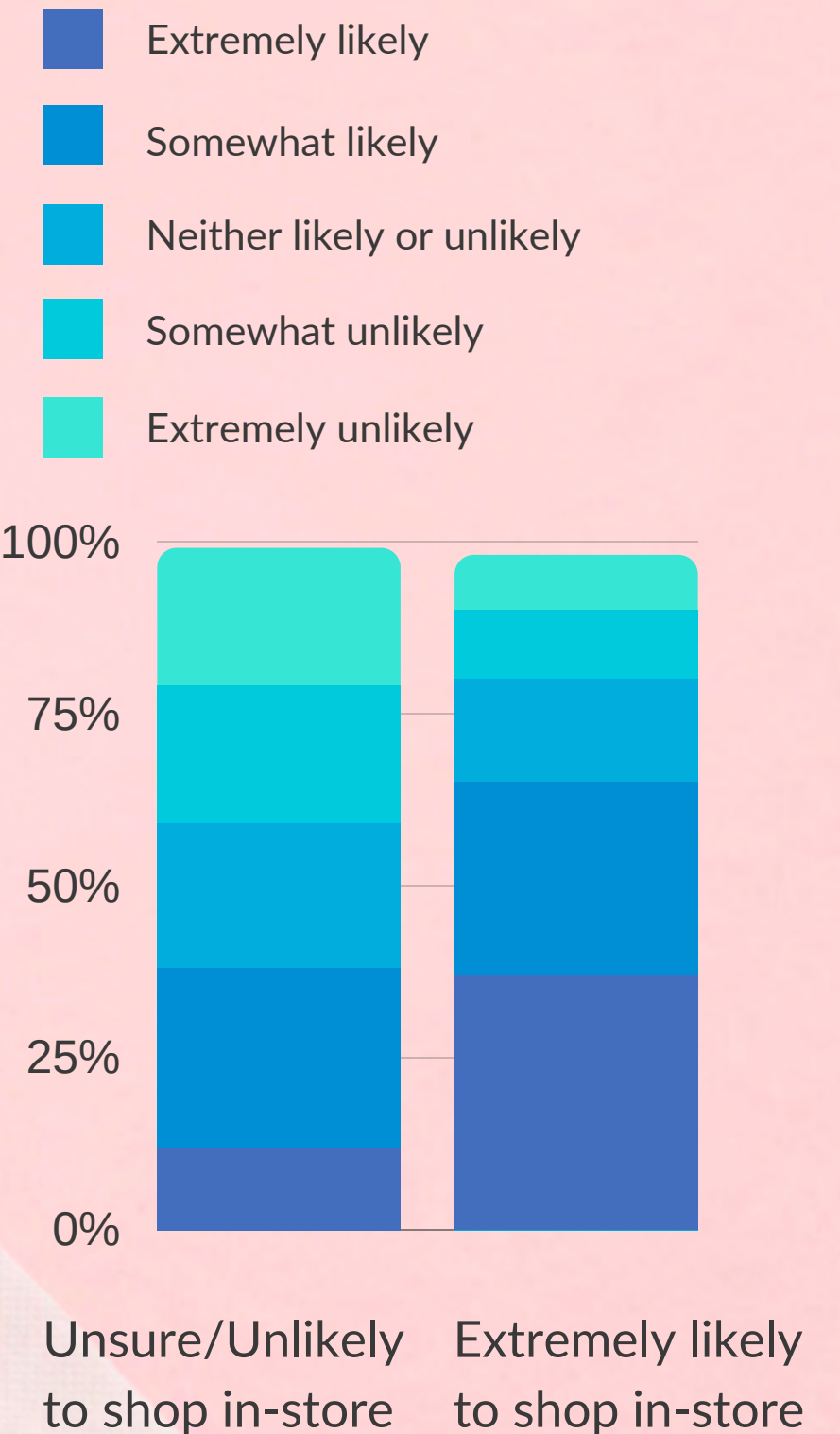


And, another thing to consider is your restroom facilities.

Individuals who are **unsure/unlikely about shopping in-store** are also **25% less likely** to be **comfortable using your facilities**.

This is another area where **cleanliness, comfort, and safety** need to be reinforced **visibly and frequently** and engrained in your daily operations.

**NOTE:** How likely are shoppers to use your facilities?








Visibly reinforce  
your **health and**  
**safety guidelines**  
and **standards**





When shelter-in-place and social distancing measures are relaxed, **52% of respondents** said that **improved cleanliness** and **sanitization** would make them feel more comfortable.

But it will also be important to **visibly reinforce** your new **health and safety standards** and **protocols** in a way that your customers can **see**.

Almost **50% of respondents** said that **seeing disinfectant wipes** and **hand sanitizer** available for customer use would be extremely important to them and would add to their comfort.



SORRY  
WE ARE  
CLOSED

COVID-19

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not important

**NOTE:** The data ranks how important the following factors will be in making consumers feel comfortable entering a physical store once shelter-in-place and social distancing measures are relaxed.





40% of respondents said they want to see social distancing measures and **guidelines reinforced and posted** and that **it is extremely important** to them.

While 39% of respondents feel that **visibly seeing employees cleaning surfaces is extremely important** to them and find it would add to their **comfort**.



**39% of respondents** also feel that seeing more **food covers around prepared food** and **plexiglas guards for employees** would be **extremely important** to them and their comfort.

And, **36% of respondents** want to see **employees visibly wearing safety apparel**.





# The time to act is **now**.

As a convenience store or gas station operator you are essential and on the frontlines everyday. It's important that you take a step back and objectively look at your infrastructure.

As a business, you need to learn the pain points that your customers are experiencing and identify the areas that will help you drive repeat business.

It has never been more important to **listen to your customers**.

You need to be able to anticipate consumer needs, and understand that things may never go back to the way they were.





# Key Takeaways

Looking ahead, here are some steps you can take today to ensure the safety of your employees and customers, as well as adding to their on-going comfort and trust in your business.

**Cleanliness** and **security** should be a number one priority. Make **disinfectant** and **hand sanitizer** available in-store to customers, make **cleaning** a **visible** and **constant activity**.

Embrace **crew-service** and rebuild your work force. **Self-service** as it pertains to **prepared food** and **beverages** is not something consumers are interested in at this time.

Visually reinforce health and safety standards. Consider getting **contactless soap-dispensers**, **taps**, and **hand-dryers**, and providing **cleaning audit sheets** that customers can see. Make sure to implement **food covers** and **plexiglas guards** wherever possible. And, have your employees **wear safety apparel**.

If your customers find it easy to shop with you, and feel safe and comfortable doing so, they'll keep coming back.



# About Us

At Intouch Insight, our focus is on enabling businesses to collect insights that drive improvement and influence outcomes. Though a lot has changed over our past 40 years in business, our focus remains the same.

We are on a mission to be the leading software and services provider, offering an integrated solution that enables our clients listen to their customers, interpret the results, and create actionable plans to align operations with customer expectations.

By leveraging our deep expertise and flexible software platform, our clients are empowered to delight their customers and improve their bottom line.



## To contact us:

1-800-263-2980 ext. 1  
letschat@intouchinsight.com  
intouchinsight.com



## Offices

### Ottawa

400 March Road  
Ottawa, ON,  
Canada  
K2K 3H4

### Montreal

2963 Joseph A.  
Bombardier  
Laval, QC  
H7P 6C4

### Charlotte

1061 Red  
Ventures Drive,  
Suite 175  
Fort Mill, SC  
29707

**Please note:** For additional survey points and data insights please contact [letschat@intouchinsight.com](mailto:letschat@intouchinsight.com).