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The Impact of Covid on Digital Support Sessions, Feb-April 2020

Over the last few months, industries have been upended. With shelter in place orders and social distancing guidelines, consumers have completely shifted their shopping habits, cancelled or postponed their travel, and adjusted their financial plans.

We looked at aggregated data over this period to see how these sudden behaviors impacted support sessions, which for the purposes of this data brief we're defining as: online sessions that included a visit to a part of the site that handles support related uses, such as a Contact Us or Contact Support page.

In this Quantum Metric Data Brief, we present the following takeaways:

- Consumers are flocking to self-service on support channels
- Spikes in volume are impacting customer journey
- Invest now in digital support optimization for long term impact
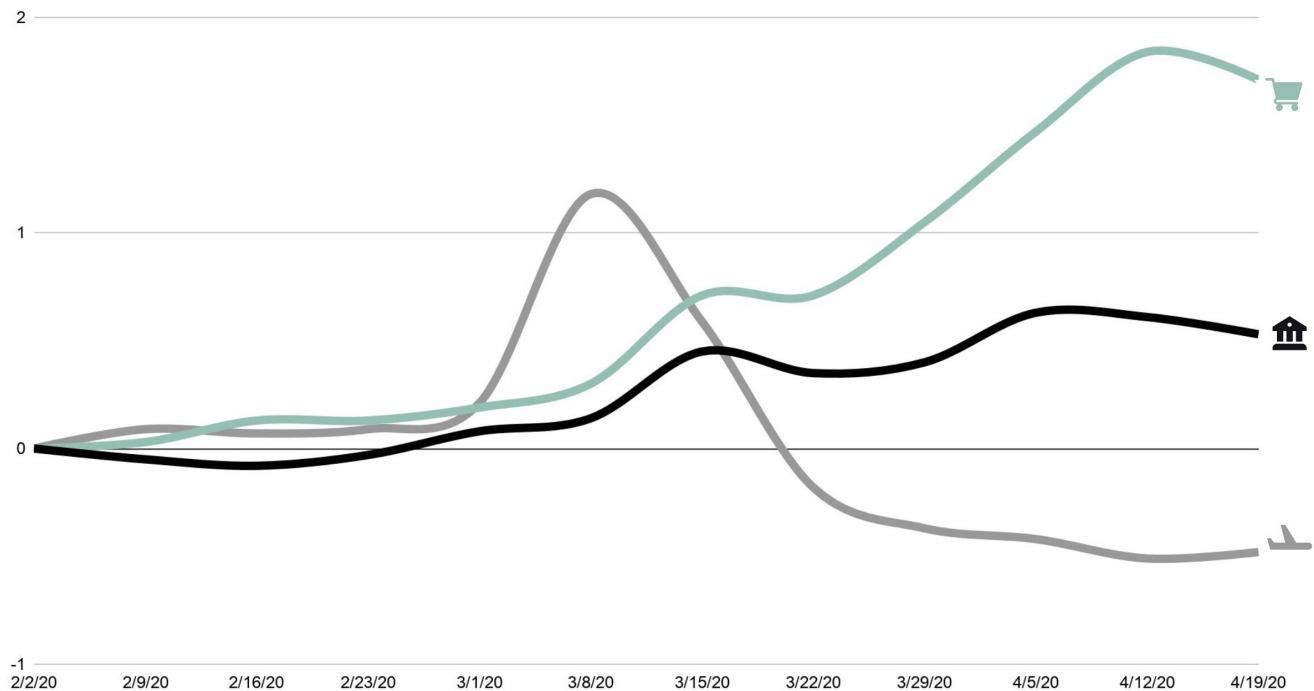
Methodology

The findings presented in this data brief are based on anonymous and aggregated browsing information on broad-category retail, travel, and business/finance sites collected via the Quantum Metric platform, from February to April 2020.

Support sessions double for retailers; travel sees initial peak then steep decline

Starting early March, there's a surge of support sessions for travel, retail, and finance sites. The surge is dramatic for travel, growing to 118% the week of March 8 compared to an early February baseline, then declining to levels below what's typical. It's clear that travelers moved quickly to contact airlines and hotels to cancel or postpone travel and since then have not booked new travel.

On the other hand, support sessions have grown steadily since the week of March 8, to nearly double now what it was in early February for retail and nearly 50% higher in business & finance.

Average Traffic Growth of Support Sessions, Feb-April 2020
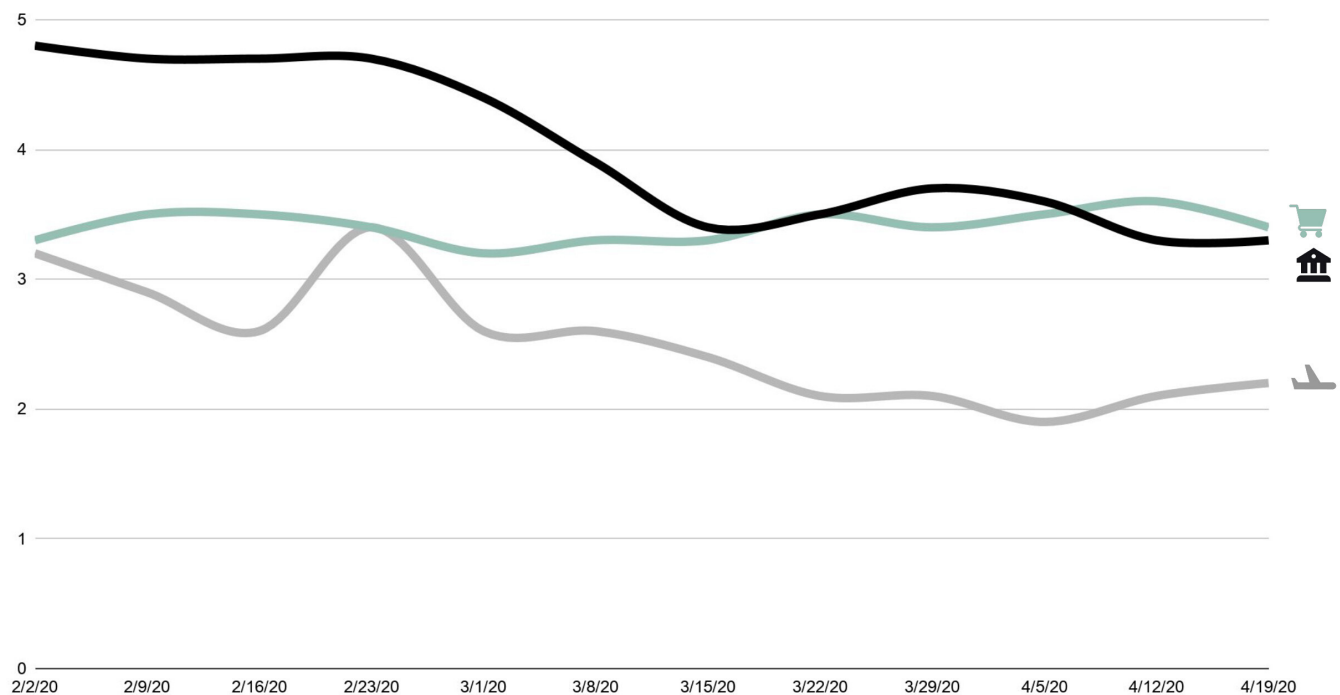
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Support rage clicks peak initially for travel; business & finance use time to resolve source

Interestingly, the travel category had a peak in rage clicking as early as the week of 2/23/20 as traffic volumes increased and many customers were unfamiliar with how to interface with the support systems.

As the crisis continued, we saw a large decline in the amount of rage clicks in travel and finance sites, indicating that the user experience was updated and/or customers grew more familiar with how the support sites operated. While retail and finance overall sees more rage clicking, finance sites were able to bring the number of sessions with a rage click down by over 30% during the last 10 weeks.

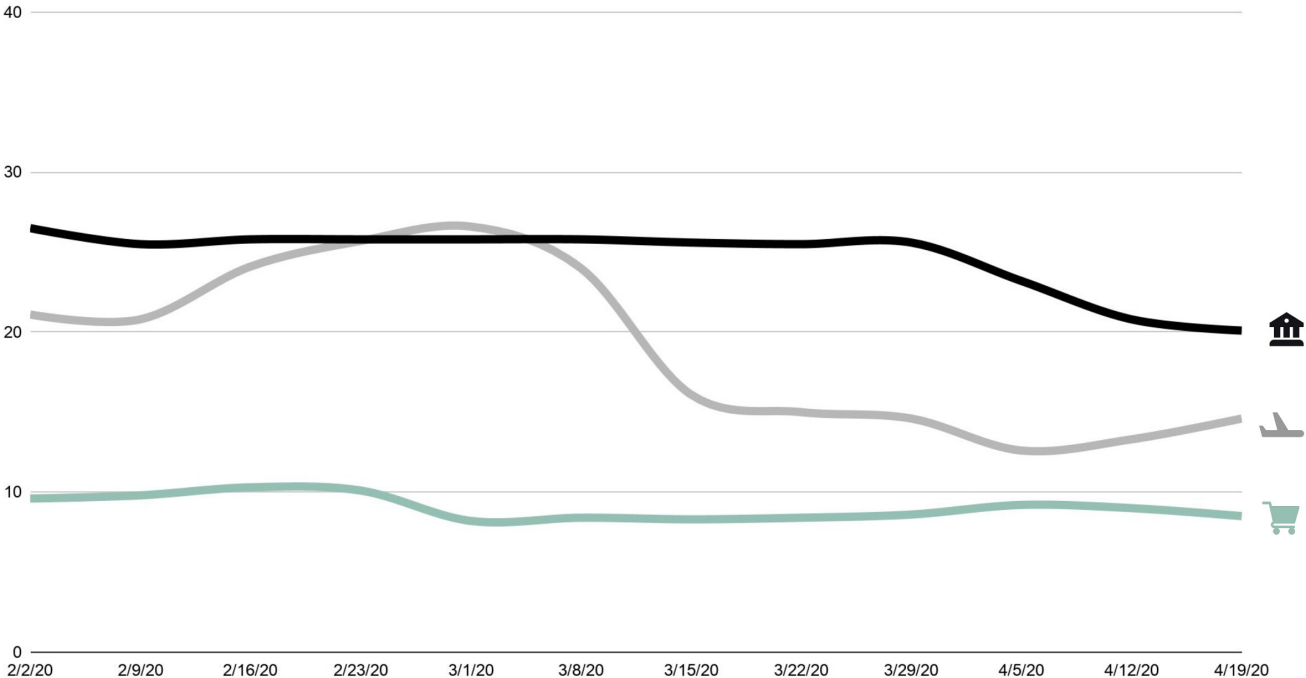Average Percentage of Support Sessions with Rage Clicks, Feb-April 2020

Support page performance causes consumer frustration

Especially during a time of seeking help, consumers are not the most patient. Which is why performance issues can be the source of real frustration in the user experience.

When reviewing support sessions with spinners, the visual loader consumers face when a page is loading, we found that the performance impact of back-end systems for travel was significantly worse than it was for retail. Travel systems worked hard to bring capacity up and handle the increase in load and are now roughly similar to retail's much lower number. Business and finance have been high throughout and just started to improve in April. An average of 9-20% of all support sessions across industries encounter a spinner.

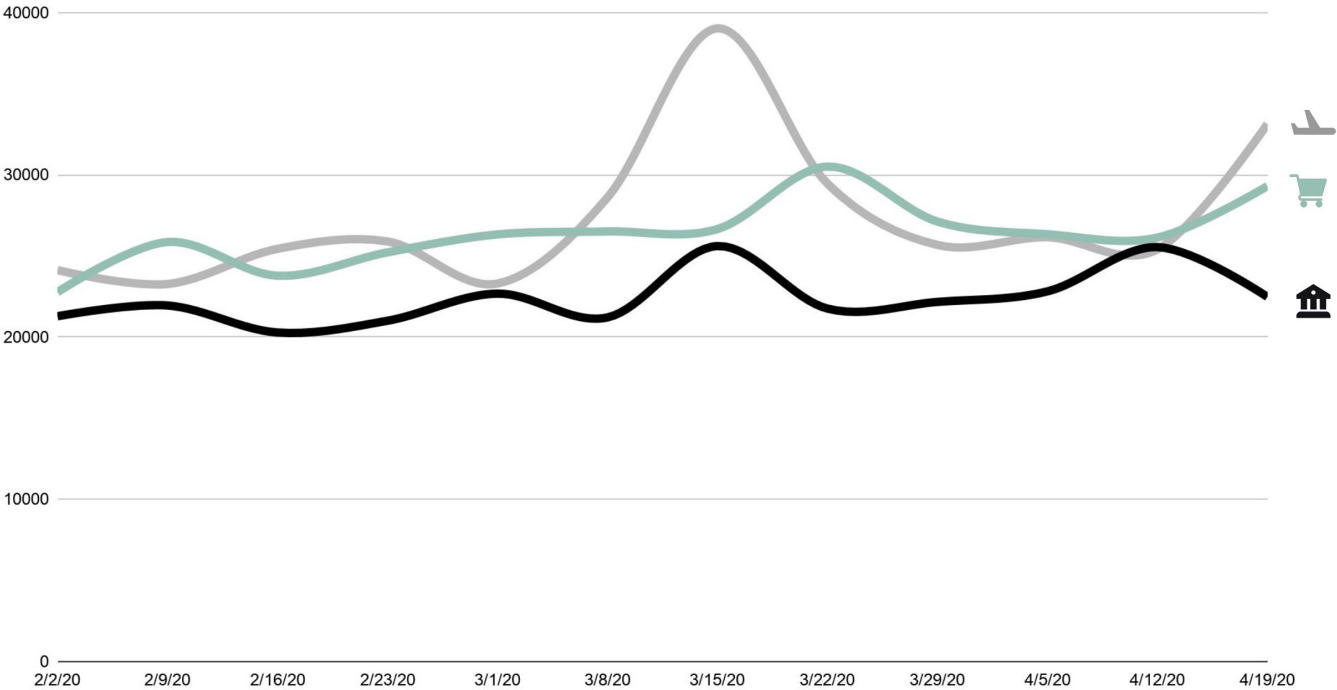Average Percentage of Support Sessions with Spinners, Feb-April 2020

Support page performance causes consumer frustration

Another measure of performance is the time to first paint, which is the amount of time a user waits for your site to start to render content.

Again, travel and retail were very similar until the spike in traffic for travel the week of 3/15/20 which increased the time for a page to begin loading by nearly 62%. Time to first paint also appears to be going up again recently so digital support channel performance is still creating some difficulties for users trying to access them.

Performance across the board is a big source of consumer frustration, and the support page is a section of the site that is not traditionally used to massive spikes in volume. Additionally, as it is not a revenue generating part of the site, those sections are not often prioritized when it comes to performance optimization. However, with industries now focused on cost minimization, we are seeing more efforts being put into non-revenue generating areas.

Average Time to First Paint during Support Sessions, Feb-April 2020

Recommendations

With consumers crowding sites looking for self-service functionality that is fast and simple, now is the time to invest in optimizing your digital support channels. Here are a few recommendations to consider that can have a lasting value to the business and reduce support related expenses:

01 Measure for a baseline understanding.

Monitor support related digital channels to get a sense of fluctuations in volume, consumer behavior, technical issues and opportunities.

02 Review through various lenses and dimensions.

From front-end UI/UX experience to back-end performance measurement, assess every aspect of the user journey.

03 Ensure ease of interface and integrations.

Provide customers the simplest path to self-help by including related details like reservation number or shipping information as they reach out to support.

04 Prioritize self-service issues to strengthen business continuity.

Address support issues with speed to encourage long-lasting customer enablement and thus loyalty.

Positive outlook

Overall, the data shows that there has been a marked improvement in support areas. Users are more familiar with how to engage digitally and the impact of the improved digital experience will continue long after the COVID-19 lockdown period.

About Quantum Metric

Quantum Metric helps companies build better digital products faster, by keeping business and technical teams aligned, efficient, and focused on what matters most to customers. Our platform gives businesses real-time visibility into how their digital business is impacted, where exactly customers are struggling or engaging, and what efforts need to be prioritized based on economic impact.

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