



International buying behaviours, trends and insights

**What is driving international e-commerce
purchasing behaviours?**

A Consumer Trend Guide, from Whistl

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Introduction



Whistl has conducted a research study, to understand changing customer international buying habits. Technology and connectivity offer accessibility to purchase worldwide, products which may be cheaper abroad or simply not available in local markets.

Our research study was conducted online from 25th to 29th March 2020. All participants were sourced from a large international online panel provider.

This study was undertaken to understand the current trends in the purchasing habits of consumers in each of the following well developed e-commerce countries:

- UK
- Republic of Ireland
- France
- Germany
- Australia
- United States

The surveys were completed in the native language for each country and based on a sample size of 200 representatives per country.

Trends have been highlighted in this guide to give you some insight and provide advice on how to prepare your business to increase future e-commerce sales, attract new customers, and improve conversion rates.

Who is purchasing goods and services from abroad?



Whether you're looking to grow your business domestically within the UK or internationally, online marketplaces are great channels to sell on to expand your reach and also assess new markets.

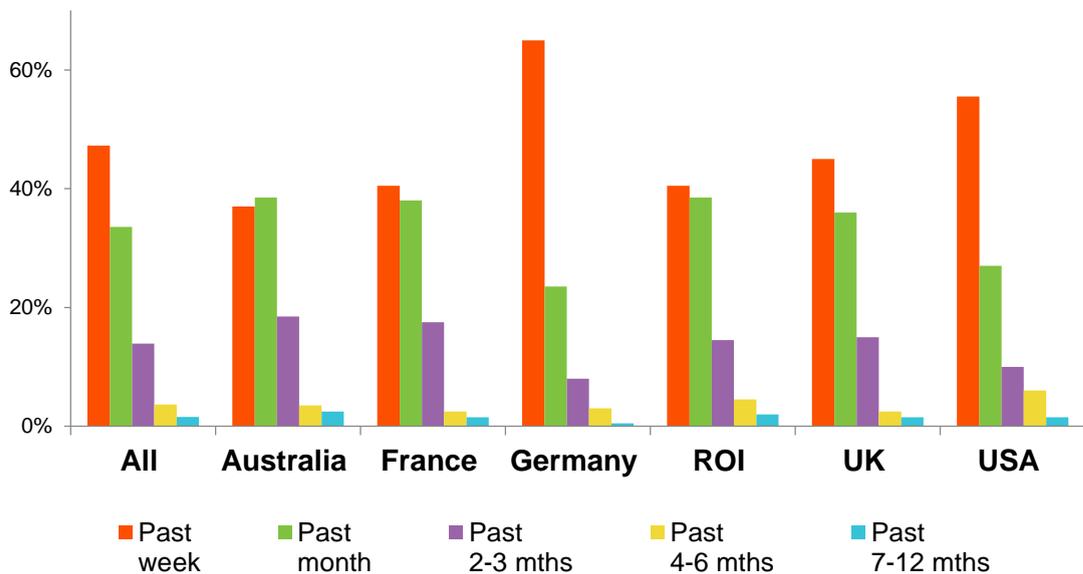
When focusing on improving your cross-border e-commerce opportunities, businesses must take the time to understand their existing and potential consumers to ensure that they can buy with confidence, to maximise future sales and revenue from each transaction. Companies that have taken the time to understand general hesitations to international buying are in a better position to overcome them.

Own Country Purchasing:

When reviewing the domestic purchasing habits of the six surveyed countries, over **70% had purchased online within the past month** (over 80% in the UK, the US and Germany), rising to over 90% within the past 2-3 months. The Republic of Ireland, France and Australia had a similar frequency of purchase, with Germany and US having a greater number of respondents purchasing in the last week.

Own Country Purchasing – In General

47% of items purchased online, within the past week



S1. When was the last time you purchased a product online that arrived in the post or by courier?

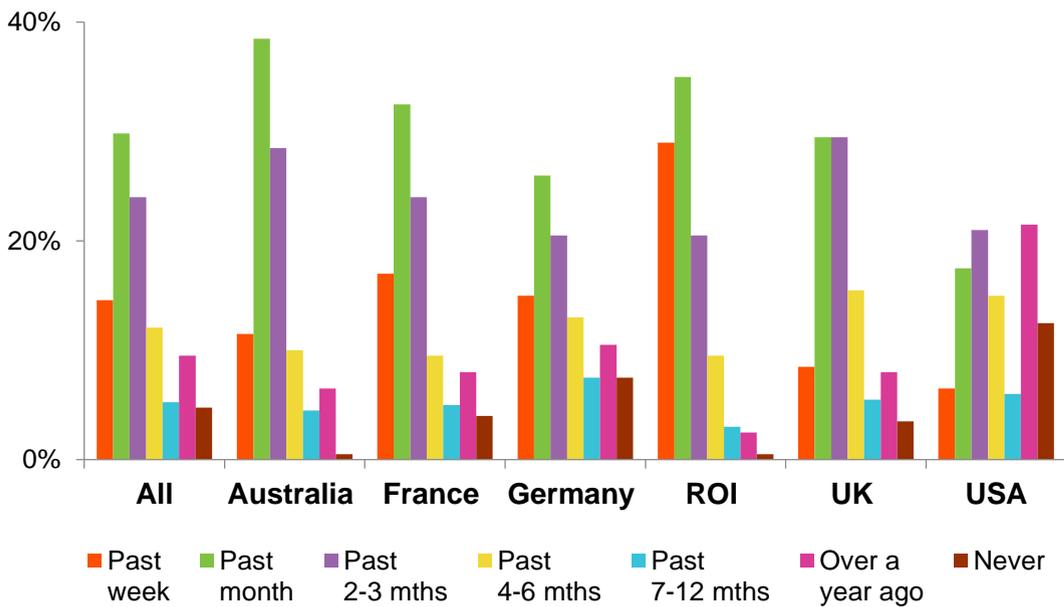
International Purchasing:

Online international cross-border purchasing and frequency patterns were quite different to own country purchasing trends.

For example the Republic of Ireland had the highest proportion of shoppers who shop online from abroad at each point in time, while the United States had the lowest.

International Purchasing

30% of purchases were made from international countries, in the last month



S2. When was the last time you purchased a product online from another country that arrived in the post or by courier?

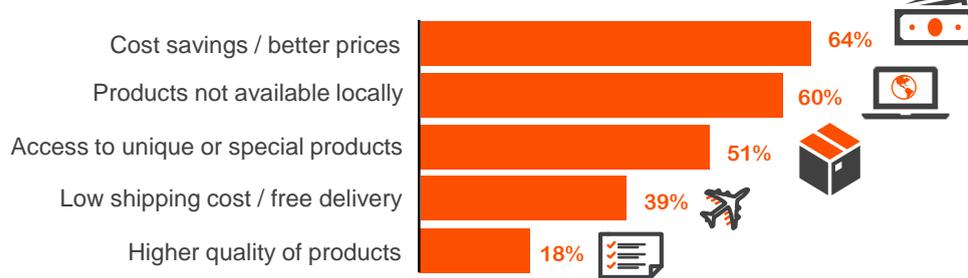


Analysis of your customer base by country of origin could give you some key insights into their purchasing habits.

What are the advantages of international purchasing?

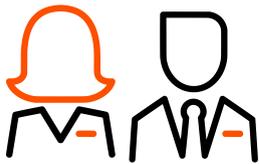


The top five reasons for cross-border shopping:



Gender Preferences:

Across all countries, there were few significant differences based on gender and age.



Men prioritized financial benefits/available technology:

- Cost savings 66% v women 63%
- Exchange rate 18% v women 14%
- Access to better technology 16% v women 12%

Women prioritised product access; shipping; fashion trends:

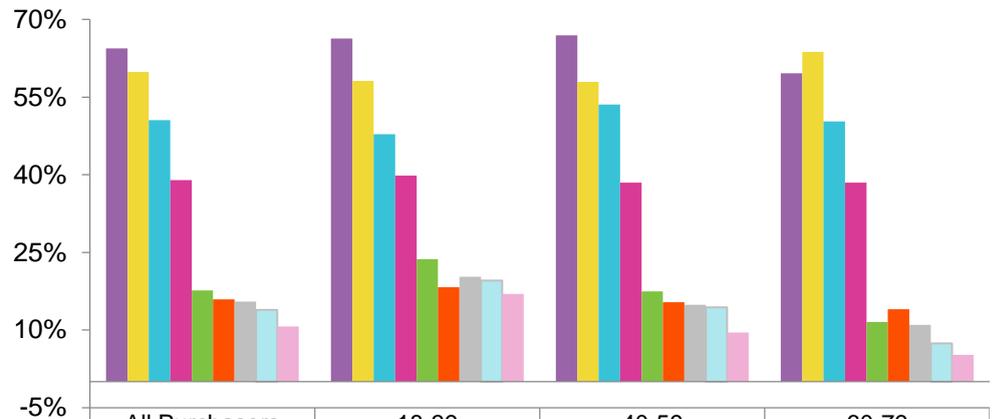
- Products not available locally 62% v men 58%
- Lower shipping costs/ free shipping 40% v men 37%
- Up to date fashion trends 14% v men 7%

Demographic Preferences:

- Shoppers aged between 60 – 79 mention cost savings 10% less than the two younger groups 18 – 39 & 40 – 59-year-olds.
- 18 - 39 -year-olds rated access to better technology +65%, higher product quality +50%; earlier product access +45% more than the 60 - 79 age group.

Advantages of buying online from abroad

64% cited cost savings/better prices as the reason for cross-border buying



	All Purchasers (n=1143)	18-39 (n=389)	40-59 (n=390)	60-79 (n=364)
Cost savings / better prices	64%	66%	67%	60%
Products not available locally	60%	58%	58%	64%
Access to unique or special products	51%	48%	54%	50%
Low shipping costs / free shipping	39%	40%	38%	38%
Higher quality products	18%	24%	17%	12%
Take adv. of good exchange rate	16%	18%	15%	14%
Access products earlier (foreign market)	15%	20%	15%	11%
Access better technology	14%	20%	14%	7%
Keep up with international fashion trends	11%	17%	9%	5%

Q1. What are the advantages of buying online from other countries? (select any that apply)

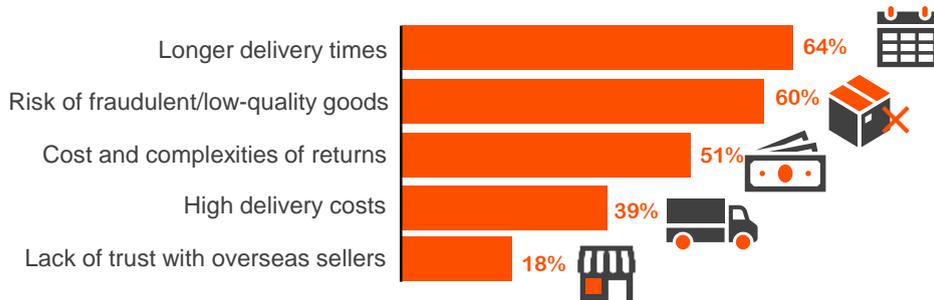


Review your product range against the availability of cross-border markets to understand if you have a strong USP to highlight in certain locations.

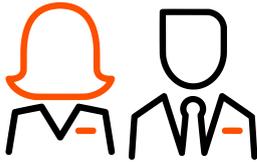
What are the disadvantages of international purchasing?



What drove negative attitudes towards cross-border shipping?



Gender Preferences:



Men had more concerns with trust, customs and customer service than women:

- Lack of trust with overseas sellers 31% v women 29%
- Access to customer services 27% v women 21%
- Cost / complexities of customs imports 26% v women 24%

Women had more concerns about the timeliness of deliveries and product quality than men:

- Longer delivery times 68% v men 66%
- Risk of fraudulent/low-quality goods 57% v men 47%
- Cost and complexities of returns 48% v men 45%

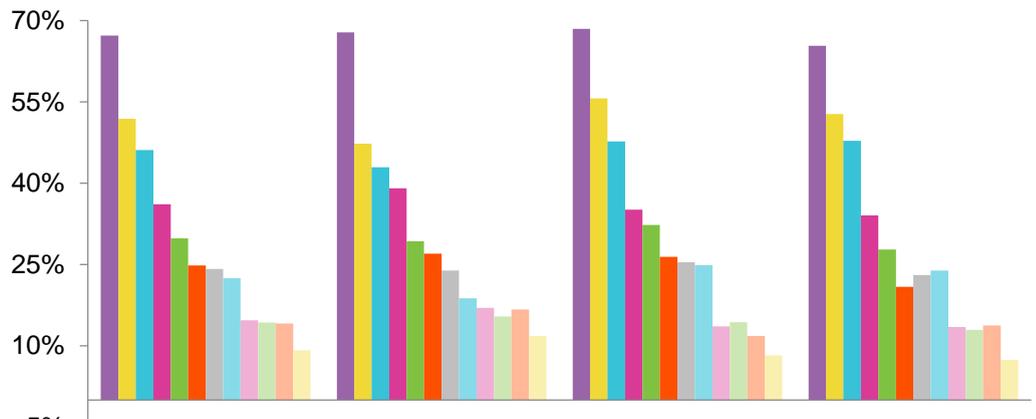
Demographic Preferences:

Opinions across age groups were very similar.

- The risk of receiving fraudulent goods or low-quality items had a slight difference with 47% of 18 – 39 -year-olds seeing this as a disadvantage versus a slightly higher percentage in the 40 – 59 -year-old group (56%).

Disadvantages of buying online from abroad

67% cited longer delivery times as the disadvantage when cross-border buying



	All Purchasers (n=1143)	18-39 (n=389)	40-59 (n=390)	60-79 (n=364)
Longer delivery times	67%	68%	68%	65%
Risk of fraudulent / low quality goods	52%	47%	56%	53%
Cost & complexity of returns	46%	43%	48%	48%
Higher delivery costs	36%	39%	35%	34%
Lack of trust with overseas sellers	30%	29%	32%	28%
Cost / complexity of customs / import	25%	27%	26%	21%
Access to customer services	24%	24%	25%	23%
Concerns re payment / personal details	22%	19%	25%	24%
Having to pay in a foreign currency	15%	17%	14%	13%
Lack of product / brand recognition	14%	15%	14%	13%
Website in a foreign language	14%	17%	12%	14%
Lack of preferred payment options	9%	12%	8%	7%

Q2. What are the disadvantages of buying online from other countries? (select any that apply)

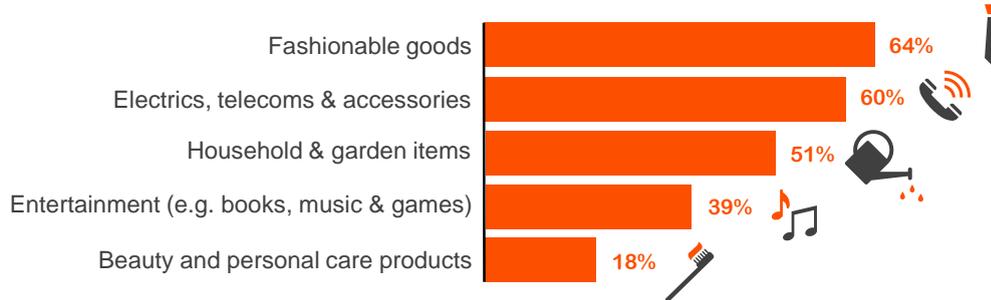


Create more valuable sales with up to date product reviews, accurate item descriptions and clearly detail delivery estimates and return processes.

What goods are being purchased internationally?



Most Popular International Purchases:



Gender Preferences:



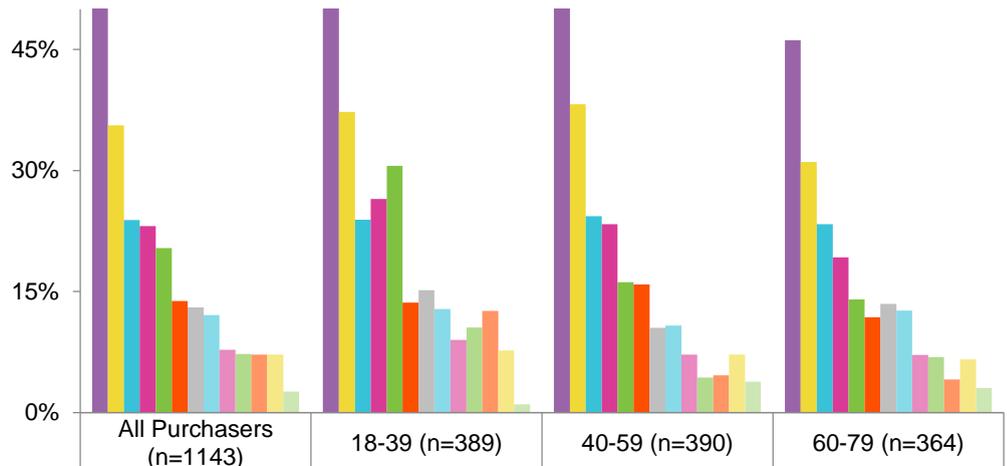
- Men were more likely to buy electronics and sporting products than women.
- Women purchasing more clothing, household and beauty products than men.

Demographic Preferences:

- Almost two-thirds of those aged between 18 – 39 had bought clothing, shoes or accessories versus only 46% of 60 – 79 -year-olds.
- 18 – 39 -year-olds were also purchasing more beauty and personal care products than the older generation.

Items purchased online from abroad

54% of all purchases are for fashion items (Clothing, Shoes, Jewellery)



	All Purchasers (n=1143)	18-39 (n=389)	40-59 (n=390)	60-79 (n=364)
Clothing / Shoes / Fashion acc / Jewellery	54%	63%	51%	46%
Electronics / Telecoms / Accessories	36%	37%	38%	31%
Household (inc. Furniture & Garden)	24%	24%	24%	23%
Entertainment (Books, Music, Games)	23%	26%	23%	19%
Beauty & Personal Care	20%	31%	16%	14%
Sporting & Outdoor	14%	14%	16%	12%
Healthcare	13%	15%	11%	13%
Art / Collectibles / Hobby	12%	13%	11%	13%
Petcare	8%	9%	7%	7%
Food & Wine	7%	11%	4%	7%
Baby & Children	7%	13%	5%	4%
School & Office Equipment	7%	8%	7%	7%
Car accessories / Tools	3%	1%	4%	3%

Q5. In the last 12 months/over a year ago, what kind of items have you purchased online from another country? (select any that apply)

Country Differences:

- Shoppers in the Republic of Ireland bought more clothing, shoes and accessories than the other countries surveyed, as well as beauty/healthcare and entertainment products.
- France purchased a higher percentage of telecommunication and electric items but significantly fewer healthcare products than the other 5 countries surveyed.
- Shoppers in the UK, and Germany were less likely to purchase beauty and personal care products from abroad. American shoppers bought fewer household, and entertainment products from international markets.

To find out more country specific differences visit www.whistl.co.uk/countries



Create more awareness of your online store by targeting key markets and demographics who buy similar products, most often.

Attitudes to international purchasing



If your e-commerce business is looking to create more cross-border sales, then understanding the trends in attitudes and shopping behaviours can ensure that your online store continues to grow, so you can expand your reach and access new markets.

Awareness of International Buying:

Our research showed that most shoppers were aware they were buying a product from abroad either at the point of searching online, browsing on websites, or when selecting their product of choice.

Difficulties or Complications in Cross-Border Purchasing:

Few (3%) across the countries surveyed **experienced difficulties** when making their most recent purchase from abroad, of which the most mentioned difficulty was that of delivery not arriving as quickly as desired.

Delivery Times and Customs:

On average, **international items take 13 days to arrive**. 13% had additional customs/import costs to pay and two-thirds were aware of these costs when purchasing. Over half paid these additional costs at the point-of-purchase.

Returns:

Across all of the six countries surveyed **one third checked the returns procedure** but this varies by country, with less than a quarter in France and 45% in the Republic of Ireland checking it. Among those who did check the returns procedure, most did so when selecting their product/s.

To find out more country-specific differences visit www.whistl.co.uk/countries



Make the cross-border sales process easier for your customers with clarity on customs processes, ensuring swift and uncomplicated deliveries.

What countries are we buying from?



Most Popular Countries for Cross-Border Purchasing:

China topped the list for 5 out of 6 of the countries surveyed, the exception of the surveyed list was the Republic of Ireland who bought the majority of items from the UK.

	#1	#2	#3
Australia	China	USA	UK
France	China	UK	Germany
Germany	China	Austria	UK
Republic of Ireland	UK	China	USA
United Kingdom	China	USA	Germany
United States of America	China	UK	Canada

China took a significant lead across all the product categories with more buyers purchasing items than the other countries. The UK ranked 2nd and USA 3rd amongst the countries surveyed.

Proximity in geographical locations also impacted purchasing patterns with the Republic of Ireland purchasing the most from the UK, the USA purchasing from Canada and Germany are purchasing goods from Austria.

Most Popular Categories by Market:

- Clothing, shoes & accessories: China 70%, UK 40%, USA 34%
- Electronics, telecoms & accessories: China 75%, UK 38%, USA 29%
- Household good: China 75%, UK 40%, USA 29%.

However, China did not dominate in all product categories, our research showed that the UK and USA market shares were more even for two categories:

- Entertainment – China 54%, UK 51%, USA 46%
- Food & wine – China 54%, UK 40%, USA 31%.



Popularity of products and proximity in location could create stronger sales for certain cross-border markets.

What are the most popular e-commerce sites?



Most Popular Sites:

Unsurprisingly, **Amazon and eBay dominated in all the countries surveyed**. Amazon was most popular in France, Germany, and the UK with over 70% purchasing from the online retailer. In Australia only 41% used the site in the last 12 months, however, eBay (69%) was more popular with Australian shoppers.



Most shoppers across our surveyed countries didn't mind where the product is coming from. This was especially prevalent for shoppers in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.



Shoppers in Australia and the Republic of Ireland were significantly more relaxed about using eBay to buy from abroad, those in UK and USA were warier.



Wish was the most popular e-commerce site of choice in the Republic of Ireland and Australia.

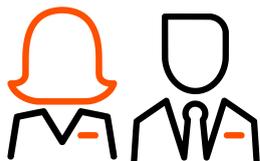


AliExpress was cited as the most popular in France and in the Republic of Ireland.

Demographic Preferences:

- Shoppers of all ages and gender were also more inclined to purchase with Amazon and eBay.
- Though younger shoppers purchased more items from AliExpress, Alibaba, ASOS, and Etsy compared to older shoppers.

Gender Preferences:



- Men are more likely to purchase of eBay than women.
- Women are more likely to spend on fashion and trendy favourites through Wish, ASOS & Etsy.

How are consumers discovering international e-commerce sites?



The Number of Sites Visited:

On average our surveyed shoppers used **2.1 websites to make an international purchase** in the last 12 months. The French used the most sites, 2.5 on average, and Americans the least, 1.6 websites.

Research, Browsing and Purchasing:

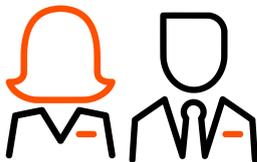
When asked how shoppers found the items they purchased **78%** said it was through **internet search engines** such as Google, Bing or Yahoo, etc. However, cross border purchases were also influenced by:

- Family and friend recommendations (18%)
- Retailer websites, such as Amazon, eBay, etc (14%)
- Social media adverts they saw on Facebook, Instagram, etc. (13%)

Demographic Preferences:

There were very small differences in age groups with the younger being directed by friends and family recommendations and social media adverts more than those in the older age bracket.

Gender Preferences:



- Slightly more men used an internet search to find items.
- A marginal proportion of women were influenced to purchase after seeing a social media advert.



78% found sites through search engines. Improve discoverability and invest in search engine marketing for key international markets and maximise sales with save my basket and favourite item tools.

Payment Preferences

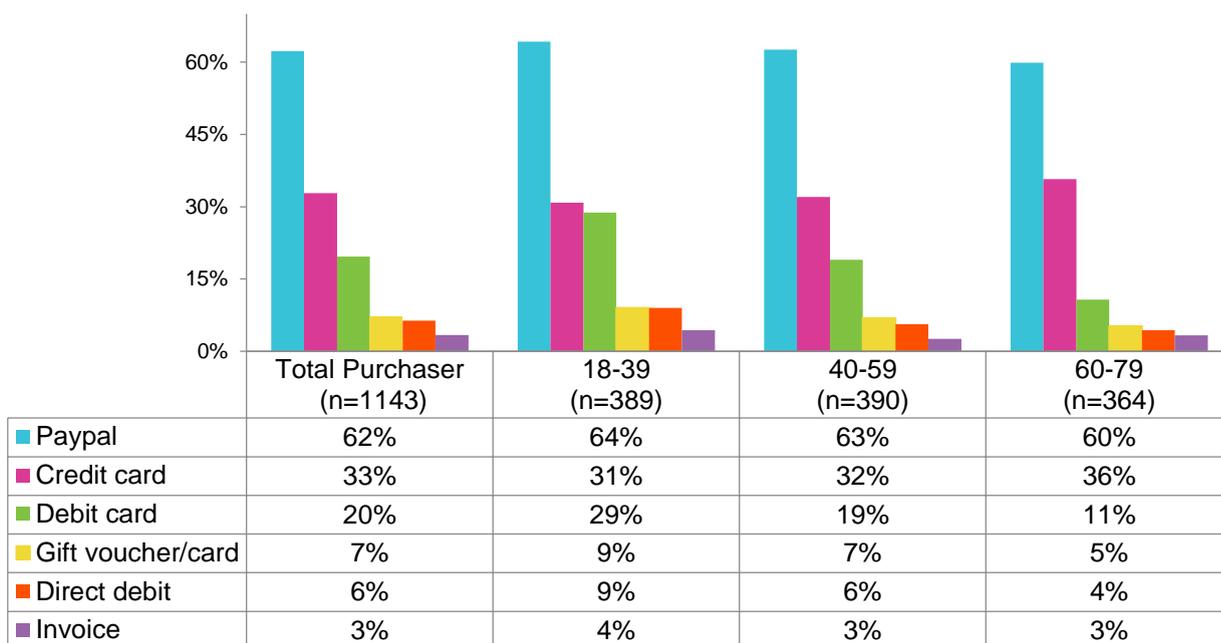


1. **PayPal** was the most preferred payment method, with only Americans preferring to pay by credit card.
2. Paying by **credit card** was the second preference for the other countries, with the Republic of Ireland shoppers preferring debit cards.

Demographic and Gender Preferences:

There were minimal differences between gender and age, with only a minor preference of debit card payments for those aged between 18 – 39 -year-olds, compared to 60 - 79 -year-olds.

International online payment preference: PayPal is the payment option of choice amongst all age groups



Q22. What is your payment preference when paying for items you buy online from another country?



Give customers trusted, convenient and efficient ways to pay for goods. PayPal and credit card are preferred by consumers.

Forecast: international purchasing habits



Global online shopping has become even easier over the last few years, with one button purchasing, improved delivery times, and more consumer choice from marketplace sellers and e-commerce sites.

To get a gauge for the future, our surveyed respondents were asked how their shopping habits had changed in the last 12 months and how they predict their purchases to change in the next 12 months.

Historical (last 12 months):

The surveyed respondents were asked how their shopping habits had changed in the past 12 months. Overall the majority of shoppers (65%) said their cross border shopping **habits had remained the same within the last year.**

32% of shoppers in the Republic of Ireland indicated that their international purchases had increased in the last year. The USA and Australia showed the biggest decline.

The main drivers of the historical trend were lower prices and better product availability.

Forecast (next 12 months):

When individuals were asked how their international shopping habits would change in the next 12 months, overall there was a **slight decrease.** Shoppers in the Republic of Ireland showed the highest intention to increase shopping. Other countries were likely to decrease or maintain levels of shopping internationally. The country most likely to slow down purchases was the USA.

Drivers for this change in consumer views could be based on economic uncertainty with Covid-19 and Brexit for the United Kingdom and European countries, at the time the survey was conducted.

How Whistl can Help your Business?

Whistl offers clients a diverse portfolio of both domestic and international parcel shipping solutions to help you to fulfil your customers' delivery expectations. Our delivery management services are tailored to your business so we can help you mitigate some of the top barriers to cross-border shopping, such as delivery choice and customs.

To find out how we can help your business contact us on 01628 703 538 or to set up an account visit www.whistl.co.uk/enquiries to provide us with more details and we will call you back.

Summary/Conclusion



The results of this research study reveal there are many important factors for cross-border retailers.

Though different markets will have some distinct shopper profiles and possible implications, retailers should look at their customer base to address any localised factors for the countries that they are selling to the most or would like to create more sales from.

Whistl has carried out some more specific country analysis for each of the six markets these insights can be reviewed by visiting www.whistl.co.uk/countries

When it comes to selling internationally, there are various factors retailers and brands should closely consider:

- Most popular countries for cross-border purchasing
- Demographic differences across markets for cross-border shopping
- Concerns and disadvantages that preventing customers from cross-border shopping
- Customer service and shipping (delivery windows, cost, custom process, out-of-stock, and returns)
- The retail experience (ease of navigation, product descriptions, and payment security)

Whistl can help your business avoid the frustration of delays at customs, with our International Gateway Service, we can offer businesses, brands, wholesalers, and retailers a full-service import customs clearance service.

To find out more contact us on 01628 703 538 or visit www.whistl.co.uk/enquiries

The Guide's Research Methodology



As customers' buying habits evolve, they are expanding to countries across the globe. Technology and connectivity offer accessibility to purchase worldwide products which may be cheaper abroad or simply not available in local markets.

When purchasing internationally, there are more complicated factors involved and customers from different countries have differing motives for purchasing. Businesses wishing to take advantage and grow in foreign markets must also be aware of the shoppers who are hesitant or unaware of international buying and understand how to overcome this.

Whistl conducted a research study to understand more about customer international buying habits from a selection of six countries, to give more of an insight into these activities and thoughts on purchasing from abroad. The survey was conducted between 25th-29th March 2020.

We surveyed 1,200 adults, split equally between the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Germany, France, Australia, and the United States, to gain a nationally representative sample of adults.

Quotas were set to create even demographic splits for each country:

- Gender: n=100 Male; n=100 Female
- Age: n=67 aged 18-39; n=67 aged 40-59; n=66 aged 60-79
- Regional limits were set to obtain a representative regional split by population in each country.

The respondents were screened on the frequency of online purchasing in general and from countries outside of their domestic residence.

Thank You

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