

What Digital Shopping Habits in the UK May Look Like Post-Pandemic

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eMarketer Editors

UK consumers' shopping habits have undergone a change that is unlikely to be reversed. According to our latest forecast, noncommerce retail sales will drop by 16.0% this year, followed by a recovery in 2021. However, sales will never reach pre-pandemic levels.

A May 2020 survey from [McKinsey & Company](#) found that more UK adults expected their digital shopping habits for grocery and nongrocery to either increase or stay the same post-pandemic, compared with the portions who anticipated declines. Physical shopping was among the behaviors most likely to stay the same.

Change in Consumer Behavior After the Coronavirus Pandemic* According to UK Adults, May 2020

% of respondents

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease
Shop digitally for groceries	26%	52%	22%
Shop digitally (not grocery)	22%	66%	12%
Domestic travel	19%	53%	28%
Shop in physical grocery stores	16%	67%	17%
International travel	16%	47%	37%
Shop in physical stores (not grocery)	15%	60%	25%
Go to movies, concerts and other events	15%	50%	35%
Go to the mall	14%	51%	35%

*Note: May 21-24 n=1,002 ages 18+; *compared to before the coronavirus pandemic*

Source: McKinsey & Company, June 2, 2020

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“In terms of these habits across age groups, the patterns we’ve seen during lockdown look set to extend longer term,” said Bill Fisher, eMarketer senior analyst at Insider Intelligence and author of our new report, “[UK Digital Trends by Generation 2020](#).”

“Everyone is likely to shop more digitally,” he said. “But large proportions of older consumers are looking forward to things returning to how they were.”

According to Amy Jackson, business director at digital marketing performance firm Incubeta, “The high street will bounce back to some degree, though not as it was pre-COVID-19. I think people will start to go back to an environment where you’ve got shopping, hospitality and cinemas. This still trends toward younger demographics but will definitely pick up in older groups, too. They don’t necessarily go onto the high street to purchase. The experience is why they’re going. It’s that human element that people have been missing out on this year. It’s going to have a massive impact next year.”

Some 42% of UK digital buyers said they expect to shop more digitally post-pandemic vs. just 6% who expected to shop more in-store, per a May 2020 [ChannelAdvisor](#) study. However, there was a clear generational split that made up that average.

The 18-to-45 age groups were more likely to shift habits online, with those 26 to 35 most likely to do so (59%). The 56-and-older cohorts were least likely to increase digital shopping (31%), with twice as many indicating that “nothing will change.” Notably, though, the youngest cohort was most likely to shop more in-store in the future.

How Do UK Digital Buyers Predict that the Current Coronavirus Pandemic Will Affect Their Future In-Store vs. Digital Purchasing Habits?

% of respondents, by demographic, May 2020

	Will shop more digitally	Nothing will change	Will shop more in-store
Gender			
Female	40%	52%	7%
Male	44%	51%	5%
Age			
18-25	46%	44%	10%
26-35	59%	35%	6%
36-45	43%	53%	4%
46-55	37%	58%	5%
56-65	31%	62%	7%
66+	31%	64%	6%
Total	42%	52%	6%

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: ChannelAdvisor, "COVID-19 Consumer Shopping Habits" in collaboration with Dynata, May 22, 2020

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While these figures may seem to present a common image of older consumers being left behind in regard to digital adoption, that isn't necessarily the case. "The biggest difference that we could see is in the groups ages 56 and older," said Izabela Catiru, product marketing manager at ChannelAdvisor. "Before the crisis, 70% of this group said they shopped online occasionally or rarely, and now 31% predict that they're going shop more after lockdowns and with more frequency than before March 2020."