

E-commerce trends in 2021: this is how Germans shop online

- **4 out of 10 online shoppers have been buying more online since the pandemic**
- **Half of them are interested in express delivery services for groceries**
- **Mega trend mobile shopping: Germans use smartphones for shopping sprees**

Berlin, 18th November 2021 – Electronics, winter boots, or a last-minute pint of milk: People in Germany not only spend more money and time shopping online during this second year of the pandemic, but they are also trying out new services and putting different products in their digital trolleys. What is more, half of online shoppers (50 percent) are also investing more time into shopping online – this number almost doubles when looking at younger people aged between 16 and 29 (59 percent) compared to older people over 60 years old (35 percent). At the same time, more products are being added to the virtual shopping basket: 4 out of 10 respondents (43 percent) report that they have been buying more online since the pandemic. This is shown by a representative survey of more than 1,100 internet users, commissioned by Germany’s digital industry association, Bitkom.

It has also shown that one fifth (20 percent) have started buying products like clothing, shoes, or accessories online for the first time during the pandemic. Every sixth respondent (16 percent) bought medicine online and ten percent sought medical advice online for the first time. Sixteen percent used an online delivery service to order pizza, sushi and co for the first time and 15 percent did their grocery shopping online for the first time during the pandemic.

Express delivery services are in high demand

The increasing focus on online business is especially apparent in the food sector with several express delivery services establishing themselves in a brief amount of time. They are primarily aimed at young people: 17 percent of those aged 16 to 29 have ordered on Gorillas, Flink, Getir and co – 10 percent have done so among all internet users. 40 percent of them, and even 51 percent among younger people, can see themselves using such a service in future. One reason why they have not yet tried is the lack of availability in their region, say 45 percent. “The pandemic has created a strong push for online grocery shopping although supermarkets and discount retailers were open throughout. New business models like express delivery services, delivering groceries in a matter of minutes, will make sure that more groceries will be bought online no matter the pandemic,” says Bitkom’s chief managing director, Dr. Bernhard Rohleder, when presenting the survey. A majority of internet users (61 percent) agree that express delivery services will change the overall shopping behavior of consumers. 46 percent view them as serious competition for brick-and-mortar food retailers. They have benefits: 8 out of 10 (79 percent) find them convenient and 73 percent timesaving. Almost half (49 percent) of internet users currently do not see themselves using an express delivery service. 60 percent of them rather go to their local supermarket.

One third shop online at least once a week

The number of online shoppers has remained relatively stable over the past few years. At the time of the survey, 95 percent of internet users stated they had bought or booked something online in the past 12 months (2020: 96 percent; 2019: 94 percent; 2018: 97 percent; 2017: 96 percent). This corresponds to 84 percent of the German population aged 16 and above, i.e., 58 million German citizens. More than one third (37 percent) shops online at least once a week – 4 percent do so daily. Those aged between 30 and 49 (53 percent) were the most frequent online shoppers.

On average, people spend 207 euros per month during their online shopping sprees. People aged 30 to 49 dig deepest into their pockets with 266 euros per month, while, at 114 euros per month, people

over 60 spend least. With monthly expenses of 230 euros, men are given to spending money more liberally than women who spend 180 euros. Their most expensive online purchase to date cost an average of 1,745 euros. Here, too, the expenses of the 30-49-year-olds are front place at 2,562 euros – and, at 1,999 euros, significantly higher with men than the 1,473 euros spent by women.

Platforms dominate e-commerce

Most e-commerce takes place on large platforms. More than three quarters of online shoppers (79 percent) typically buy goods on international online retail platforms like Amazon or eBay. Almost two thirds (64 percent) use the online shops of national retailers like Media Markt or Lidl; one third (34 percent) uses regional platforms like eBay-Kleinanzeigen or Yatego. 28 percent use online shops of independent regional retailers frequently. “There are now many tools that enable laypeople to set up online shops with hardly any prior knowledge,” says Rohleder. “However, online retailers should not rely too much on their own online shop and instead offer their products and services through several channels.” Platforms for buying and selling used goods like Vinted or Rebuy are used by one quarter of those surveyed (24 percent). Every tenth respondent (10 percent) is active on the marketplaces offered by social media platforms such as Facebook Marketplace.

When opting for an online shop, low prices are key: they are the yardstick for almost two thirds (64 percent). 56 percent go in for free shipping and 47 percent for free returns. A positive prior experience makes 53 percent buy more, while 46 percent value a large selection. Less relevant when choosing an online shop are seals of approval, certificates, or labels (20 percent), the location of the company headquarters (15 percent), or ways to submit customer reviews (13 percent).

Flexibility and convenience are valued online

The great popularity of online shopping is based on flexibility, convenience, and choice. Consequently, the most important advantages of online shopping include being independent of opening hours (71 percent) and home delivery (70 percent). 64 percent value the large choice of goods; 56 percent appreciate the time-saving aspect. Almost half of those surveyed (46 percent) say that prices are lower online. Moreover, satisfying daily needs online is becoming more relevant: 32 percent say that they shop online because there are little to no shops close to where they live (2020: 21 percent) – in rural areas, 55 percent say this (2020: 43 percent).

M-commerce: smartphones are the number one device for shopping

For the first time ever, the smartphone has become the most important device for shopping in 2021. Only last year, laptops still scored first place. 6 out of 10 people (60 percent) use their smartphone for shopping online; a few less use a laptop (57 percent). Only one year ago, 54 percent were using smartphones and 59 percent went shopping on their laptops. Especially young people shop with their phones: 81 percent among those aged 16 to 29 compared to only 24 percent among people aged 60 and over. A total of 38 percent use a stationary desktop computer and 27 percent a tablet. Like the previous year, only 2 percent use voice assistants like Alexa, Siri, or Google Home.

Retailers are seen as more responsible for sustainable trade

Transparent supply chains, less product returns, efficient distribution channels: sustainability is an important subject in online retail. Eight out of ten online shoppers (81 percent) hold the view that responsibility to make trade sustainable and climate-friendly lies with the retailers. 90 percent state that retailers should make sure to put as many goods as possible in one package. Almost as many (91 percent) want returned products to be donated instead of being destroyed. 89 percent think online retailers should pay more attention to human rights compliance in their supply chains and increase their activities in this field. 68 percent say it is important to them that goods are produced under fair conditions. Rohleder: “Consumers can control what retailers offer through conscious shopping behaviour.”

Over half of online shoppers also see these responsibilities on the consumer side: 54 percent say that responsibility for making online shopping sustainable and climate-friendly lies with the consumers. Some are already taking appropriate measures. About three quarters (74 percent) group together individual orders. 57 percent try to buy as many sustainably products as possible and 41

percent pay attention to distances of product delivery routes. 43 percent would accept a surcharge for environmentally friendly packaging.

On the issue of returns, online shoppers also show an environmental consciousness. Two thirds (67 percent) say that they return less products. 17 percent, however, say they order goods even though they intend to return them at least sometimes – 4 percent do this regularly. Compared to the previous year, this figure has decreased by 5 points. Rohleder: “The ecological awareness is there. Now it has to be translated into online shopping practice. Increasingly, retailers are contributing, e.g., by creating additional transparency by describing a product’s environmental properties or by offering a CO2 compensation option for packaging.”

Methodology note: The basis of these data is a survey conducted by Bitkom Research and commissioned by Germany’s digital industry association, Bitkom. Between mid and late October 2021, 1,109 people in Germany aged 16 and over were surveyed online. The survey is representative of the population.

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