

UK consumers covet sustainable retail in 2021

But its price tag, not so much

ARTICLE |

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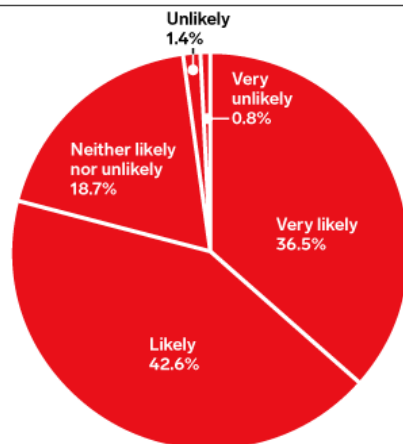
Digital has been a retail reality for UK shoppers over much of the past year, thanks to lockdown orders requiring nonessential retailers to shutter their physical stores for long periods of time. Delivery options have thus been in the spotlight more than ever. And with the pandemic also making ethical consumption top of mind, sustainability has become a hot topic for consumers—and so it must for retailers, too.

In our recent report [“Western Europe Retail Trends 2021: 7 Predictions for the Coming Year,”](#) we outlined how mindful shoppers will look for more local, eco-friendly options in order to lessen their environmental impact. Local obviously represents the most conscientious option, but where that’s not possible, sustainable delivery becomes a key consideration for the mindful shopper.

According to November 2020 research from returns management platform ReBound, 79.1% of UK digital buyers who’d made a return in the past 12 months said they would be likely or very likely to choose more sustainable delivery options if made available to them.

Likelihood that UK Digital Buyers* Would Choose More Sustainable Delivery Options if They Were Offered When Shopping Digitally, Nov 2020

% of respondents



*Note: ages 18-75; *have returned an item in the past 12 months*
Source: ReBound, Jan 27, 2021

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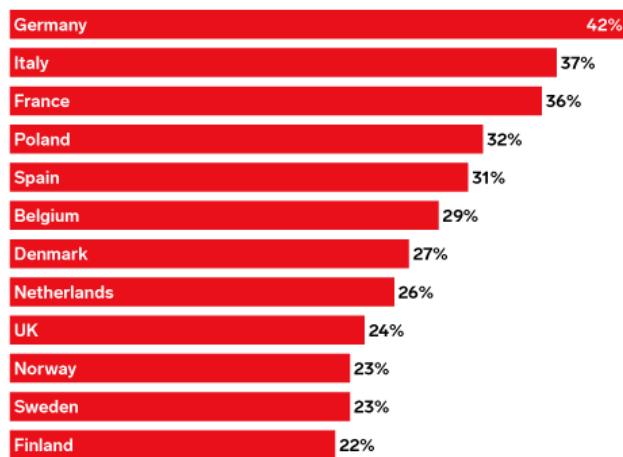
The study also found that about 75% of respondents intended to shop more with retailers and brands that are making their delivery and returns processes more sustainable. So, this topic isn't something retailers can choose to ignore. A failure to consider ethical delivery could mean a failure to retain customers.

As is often the case, though, a consumer's intentions and their actions can tell very different stories. In the UK, in particular, while the intention to use retailers with sustainability credentials is widespread, the willingness to play a role in supporting these credentials—that is, by paying extra for the privilege—is far less impressive.

According to Q2 2020 polling by Nepa for PostNord, only 24% of digital buyers in the UK were willing to pay extra for a more eco-friendly delivery. This was one of the lowest response rates across the European countries covered by the survey, with Germany way ahead at the top of the list—42% of respondents there said they'd be happy to pay.

Digital Buyers in Select Countries in Europe Who Are Willing to Pay Extra for a More Eco-Friendly Delivery, Q2 2020

% of respondents



Note: ages 15-79

Source: PostNord, "E-commerce in Europe 2020" conducted by Nepa, Nov 11, 2020

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Things may not have changed much since this survey was carried out. When the ReBounce study asked how much respondents would be prepared to pay for a sustainable returns method, only 2.8% indicated that they'd be prepared to pay more than £2.00 (\$2.55), with 28.8% saying they wouldn't be willing to pay more at all. The vast majority, nearly 80%, wanted to pay £0.50 (\$0.64) or less.

The message from consumers in the UK seems fairly clear: They increasingly expect sustainable practices from retailers, but they don't want to foot the bill.