



# **E-COMMERCE TRENDS REPORT**

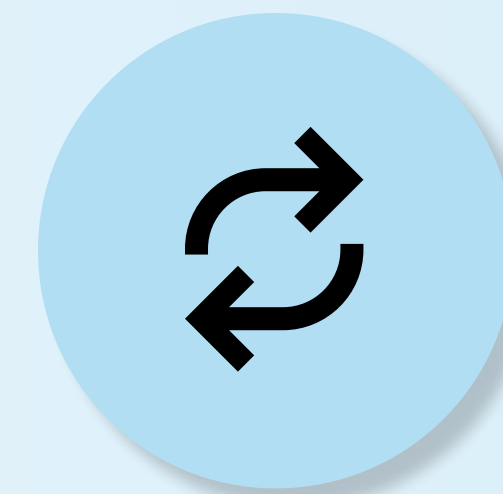
Clicks, carts and conversions:  
What today's online shoppers really want  
(and how to deliver)

# What really drives online shoppers to buy or abandon their carts?

We surveyed 24,000 online shoppers to bring you in-depth insights into how the world browses and buys online.

Explore how shoppers' expectations shift across generations. From frustrations to purchase drivers, this report reveals what matters most – from the rise of social commerce and growing opportunities in cross-border shopping, to the demand for seamless delivery and flexible returns.

**Uncover what makes today's online shoppers click 'buy now' –** and why they abandon their carts – so you can grow your e-commerce sales.



# Inside this report



## The e-commerce landscape

See how shoppers browse, buy and subscribe online – and what’s stopping them from checking out. From payment preferences to cart dealbreakers, dive into today’s e-commerce habits.



## Social commerce

Social platforms aren’t just influencing shopping – they’re driving it. Discover which platforms are rising, how to convert shoppers and how social is set to shape the next five years of e-commerce.



## Marketplaces

Which marketplaces are winning over shoppers?



## Black Friday

Do shoppers still believe the Black Friday hype – or are they losing trust in retailers’ offers and prices?



## Cross-border buying behavior

Where are shoppers buying from, how often and what’s holding them back? Get the insights you need to grow in new markets.



## Delivery & returns

Free delivery, flexible returns, real-time tracking – see what it takes to get shoppers to click ‘buy now’ or risk losing the sale.



## Extra insight

How do different generations browse and buy online?

# Meet the people behind the purchases

Understanding diverse shopper preferences

**In today's dynamic e-commerce landscape, consumer preferences and needs vary significantly across different demographics and generations. As online shopping continues to evolve, it is essential for businesses to recognize these differences and adapt their strategies accordingly.**

This report delves into the unique insights regarding the purchasing behaviors of various generations, highlighting how understanding these preferences can empower companies to engage effectively with their customers.

By tailoring their offerings and experiences to meet the diverse needs of shoppers, businesses can transform casual browsers into loyal buyers, ultimately enhancing conversion rates and driving growth.



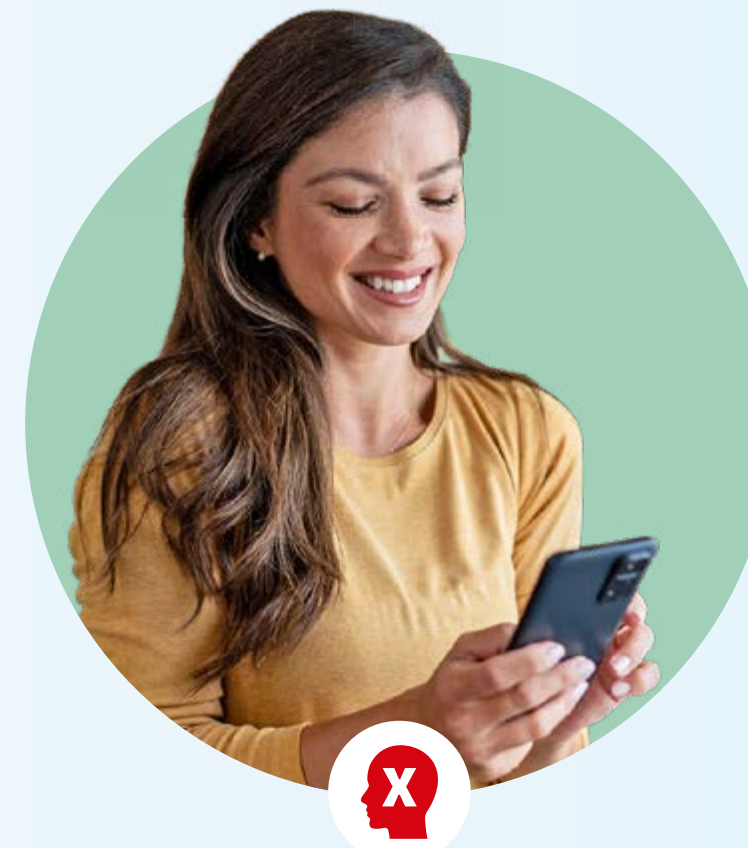
## Gen Z

Gen Z shoppers are respondents who were born between 1997–2012



## Millennials

Millennial shoppers are respondents who were born between 1981–1996



## Gen X

Gen X shoppers are respondents who were born between 1965–1980



## Baby Boomers

Baby Boomer shoppers are respondents who were born between 1946–1964



# The e-commerce landscape



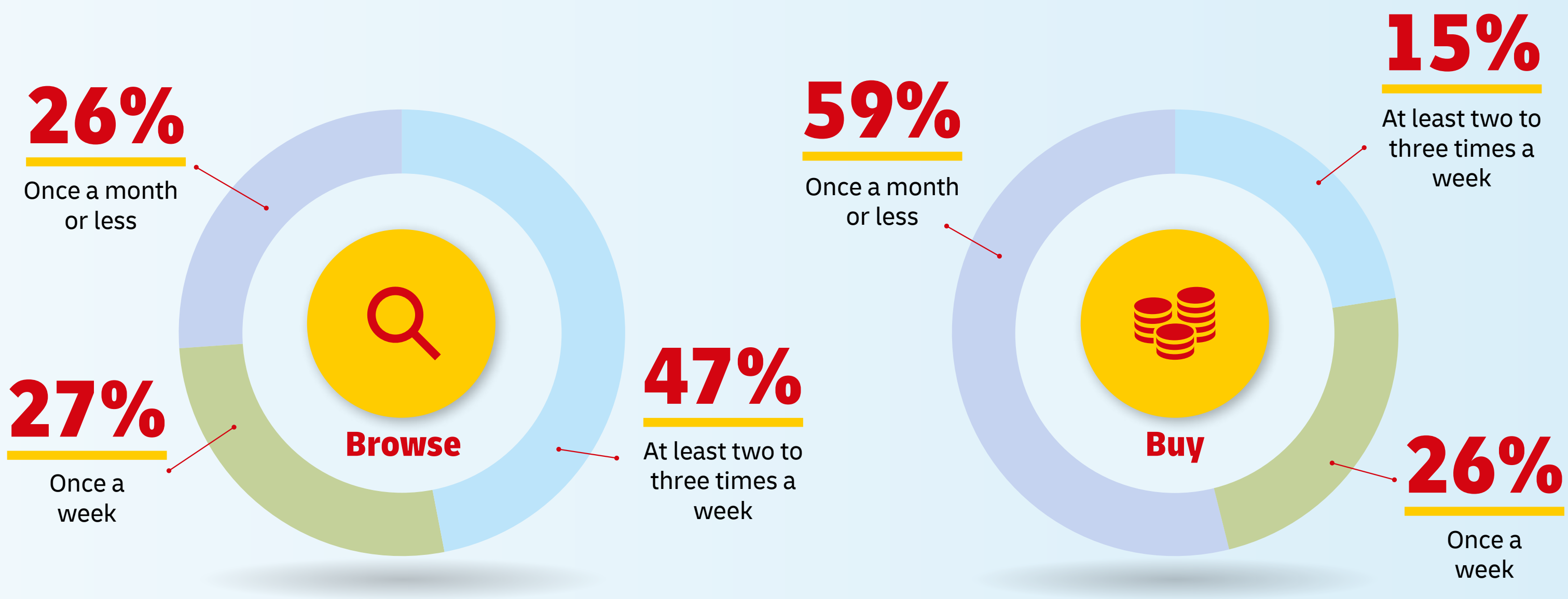
Today’s shoppers are anything but one-size-fits-all. They live in different countries, span different generations and have their own motivations for shopping online.

To succeed in today’s competitive e-commerce market, online retailers need to understand how they can attract a diverse mix of generations – and turn these browsers into repeat buyers.



## The conversion challenge

Shoppers browse more than they buy – but getting the online journey right at every touchpoint can turn clicks into sales.

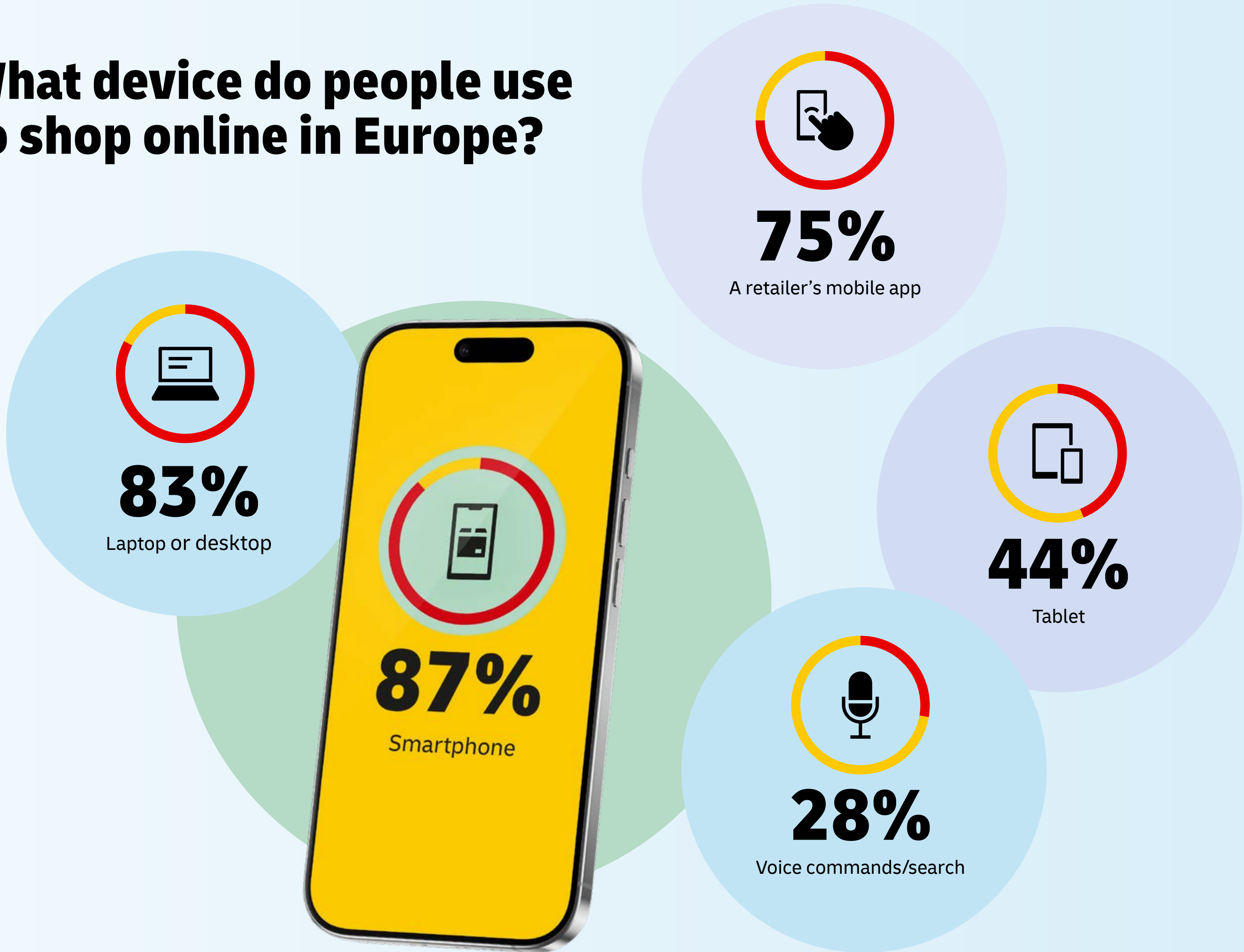


# Shopping starts in the palm of your customer's hand

87% shoppers use their smartphones to shop – but it's not just about mobile browsers anymore. Retailer apps and voice commands are changing how people buy online.

By the end of 2025, the worldwide value of voice-enabled purchases on smart home devices is forecast to reach 164 billion Euro.<sup>1</sup> However, as people speak differently than they type, you need to ensure your website and product listings reflects this more natural, conversational language.

## What device do people use to shop online in Europe?



<sup>1</sup> Statista, 2023

# If delivery's not fast or free, expect frustrated customers

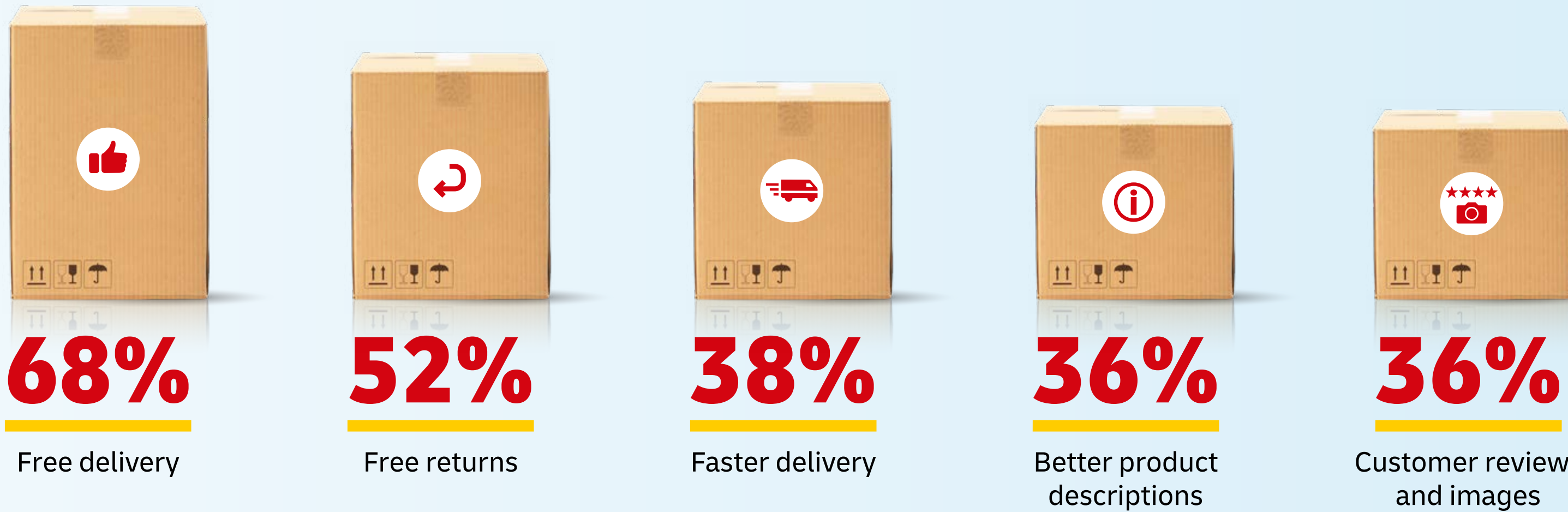
Delivery and returns are make-or-break moments for shoppers around the world. But the good news? Shoppers biggest frustrations are your biggest opportunities to improve.

There's no such thing as truly 'free' delivery or returns – but including this cost in your product pricing instead of adding additional charges at checkout could be the solution.

## What are shoppers' biggest frustrations?



## What improvements do shoppers want?

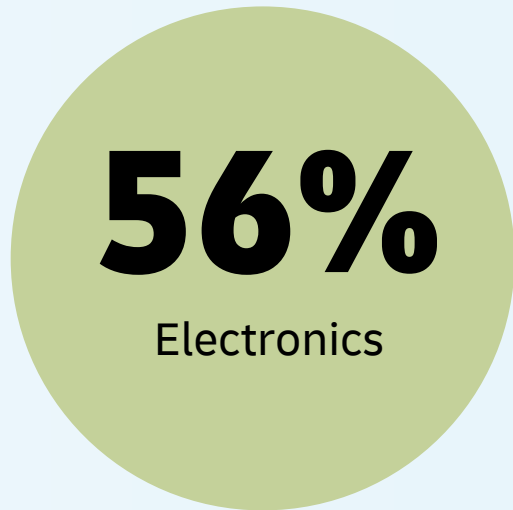


# Inside the world's digital cart

## What do shoppers buy online?

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Clothing                     | 63% |
| Electronics                  | 56% |
| Footwear                     | 49% |
| Books                        | 40% |
| Cosmetics & beauty products  | 39% |
| Sport, leisure & hobby items | 38% |
| Toys or games                | 36% |
| Household products           | 30% |
| Health supplements           | 30% |
| Food & beverages             | 26% |
| Pet food/products            | 25% |
| Jewellery                    | 23% |
| CDs, vinyl or DVDs           | 18% |
| Designer goods               | 16% |

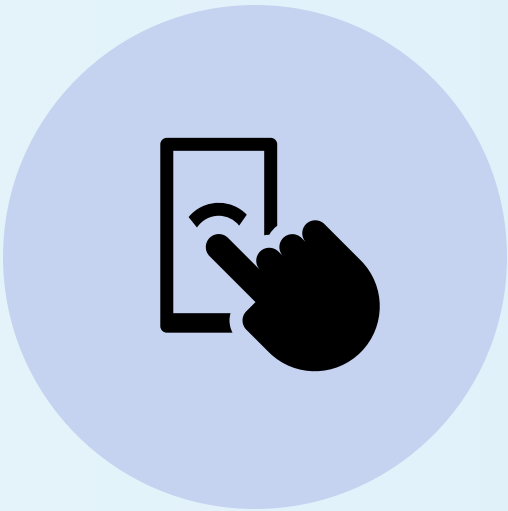
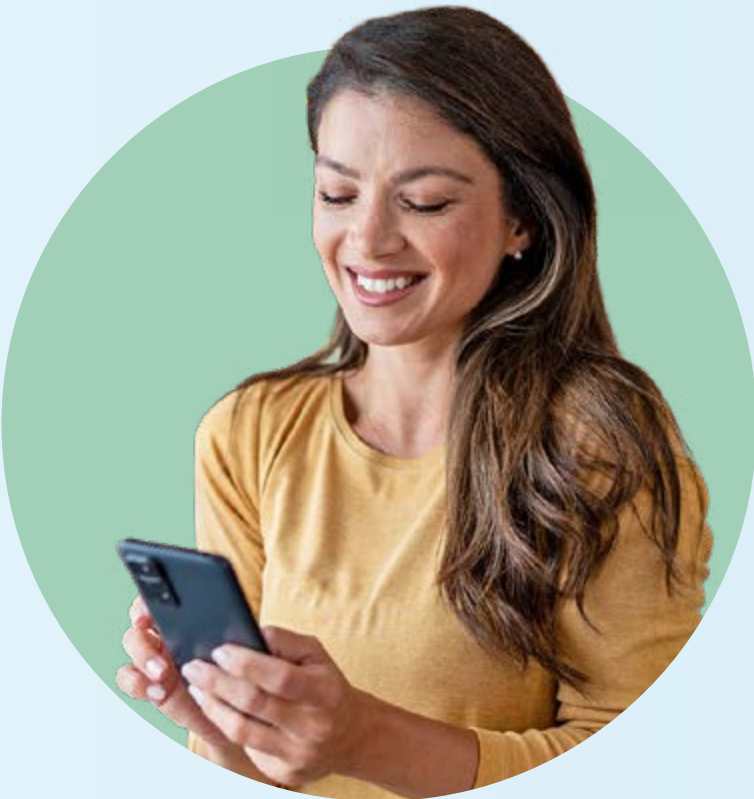
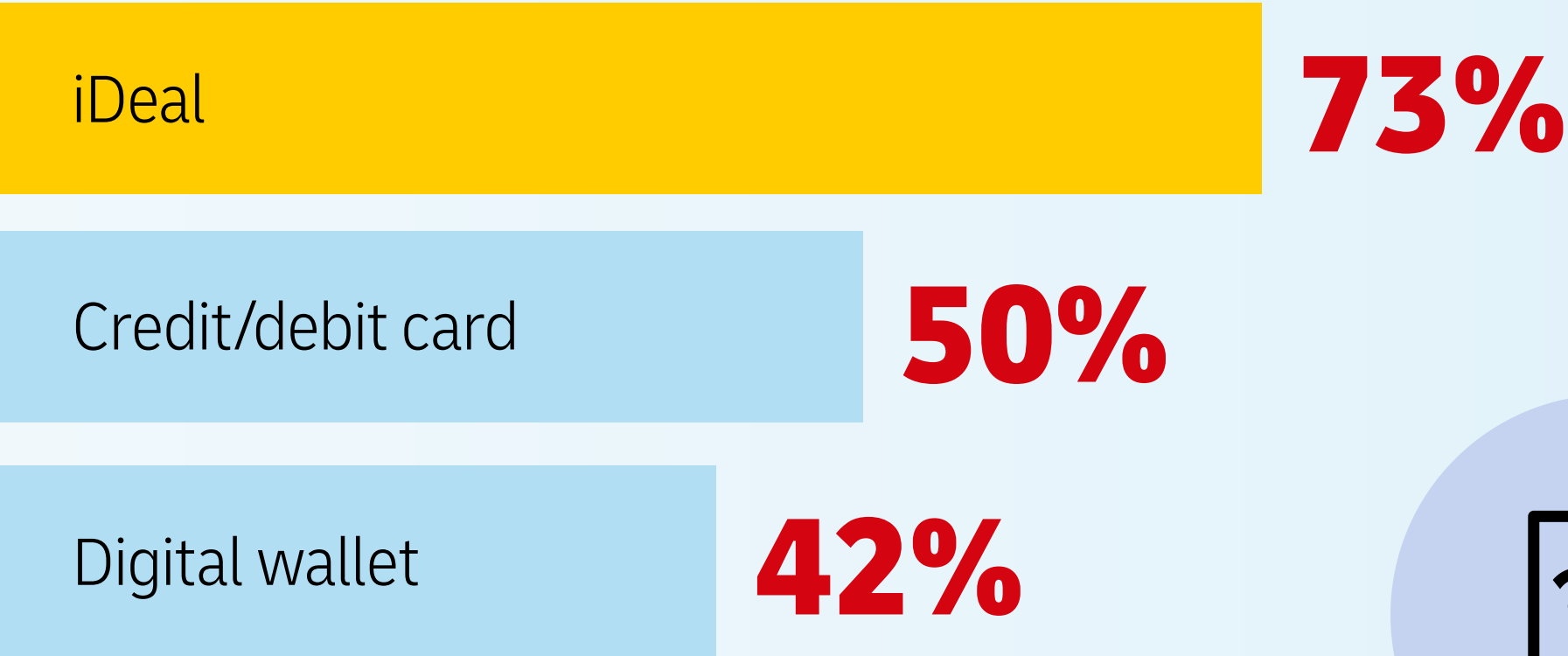
## What do shoppers buy online the most in Europe?



# Digital payments dominate the checkout

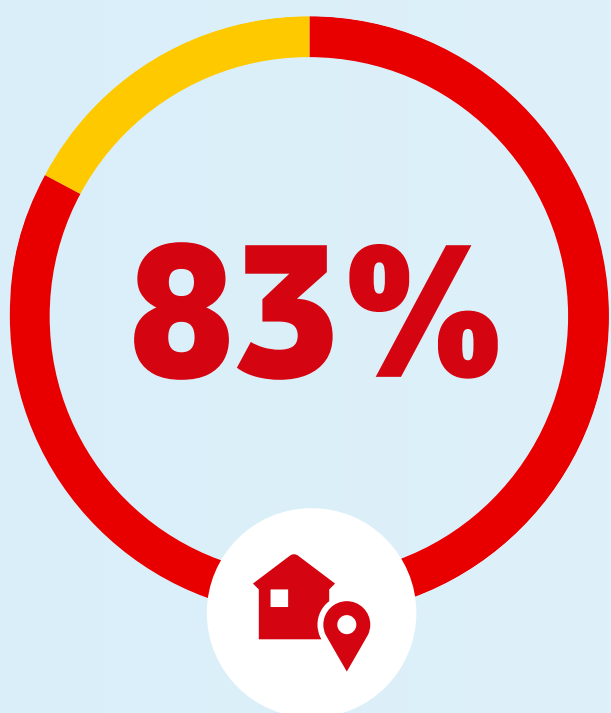
The payment options you offer matter more than you might think – 1 in 3 shoppers say they’ve abandoned their cart because their preferred payment method wasn’t available. Giving customers choice, including the digital payment options many expect, can stop them dropping out just before they click ‘buy now’.

## Which payment methods do shoppers prefer in the Netherlands?



# Check out your checkout – it could be costing you sales

Knowing what’s stopping shoppers from completing their purchase is key to getting them over the line at checkout. Slow delivery is the number one reason shoppers walk away.



of shoppers would abandon their cart if their preferred delivery option wasn't offered



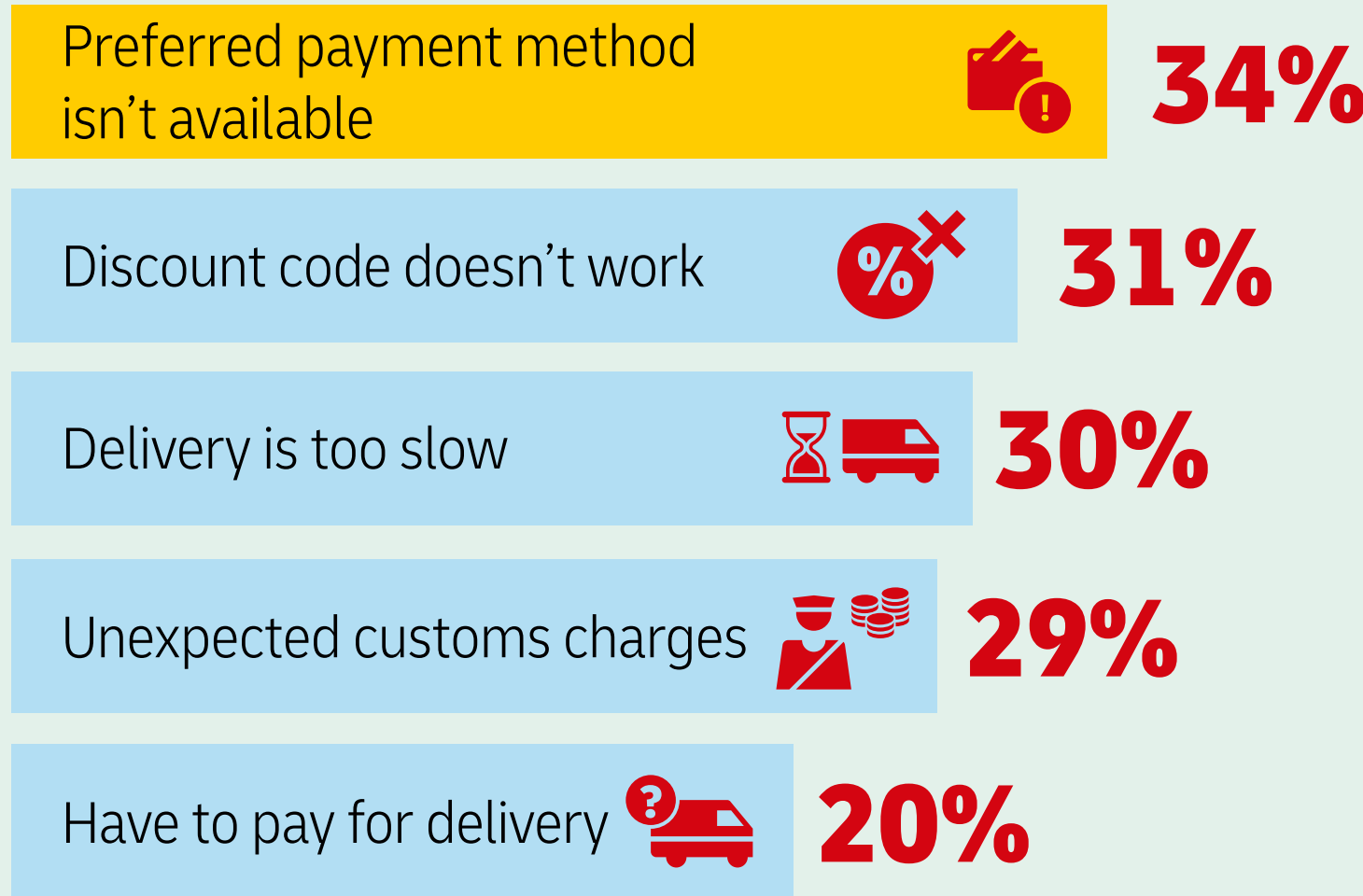
of shoppers would abandon their cart if their preferred returns option wasn't offered



**8 in 10**

shoppers won't shop with a retailer if they don't trust the delivery and returns provider

## Why do shoppers abandon their carts in Europe?



# It's not just about having reviews – it's about shoppers trusting them

No matter what you sell, reviews matter. But it's not just about quantity, it's also about quality and trust. If reviews are too brief, too generic or too few, trust breaks down – and so does the sale.

Encourage customers to leave feedback about the products they buy, ideally with photos or videos. If you don't already, consider using verified purchase badges to build extra trust. Ultimately, when shoppers trust what they read, they're far more likely to complete their purchase.



8 in 10

shoppers say customer reviews influence their buying decisions



45%

say customer reviews and images would improve their online shopping experience

## What makes people trust customer reviews in Europe?

47%

Customer photos or videos

50%

Detailed descriptions of the product

51%

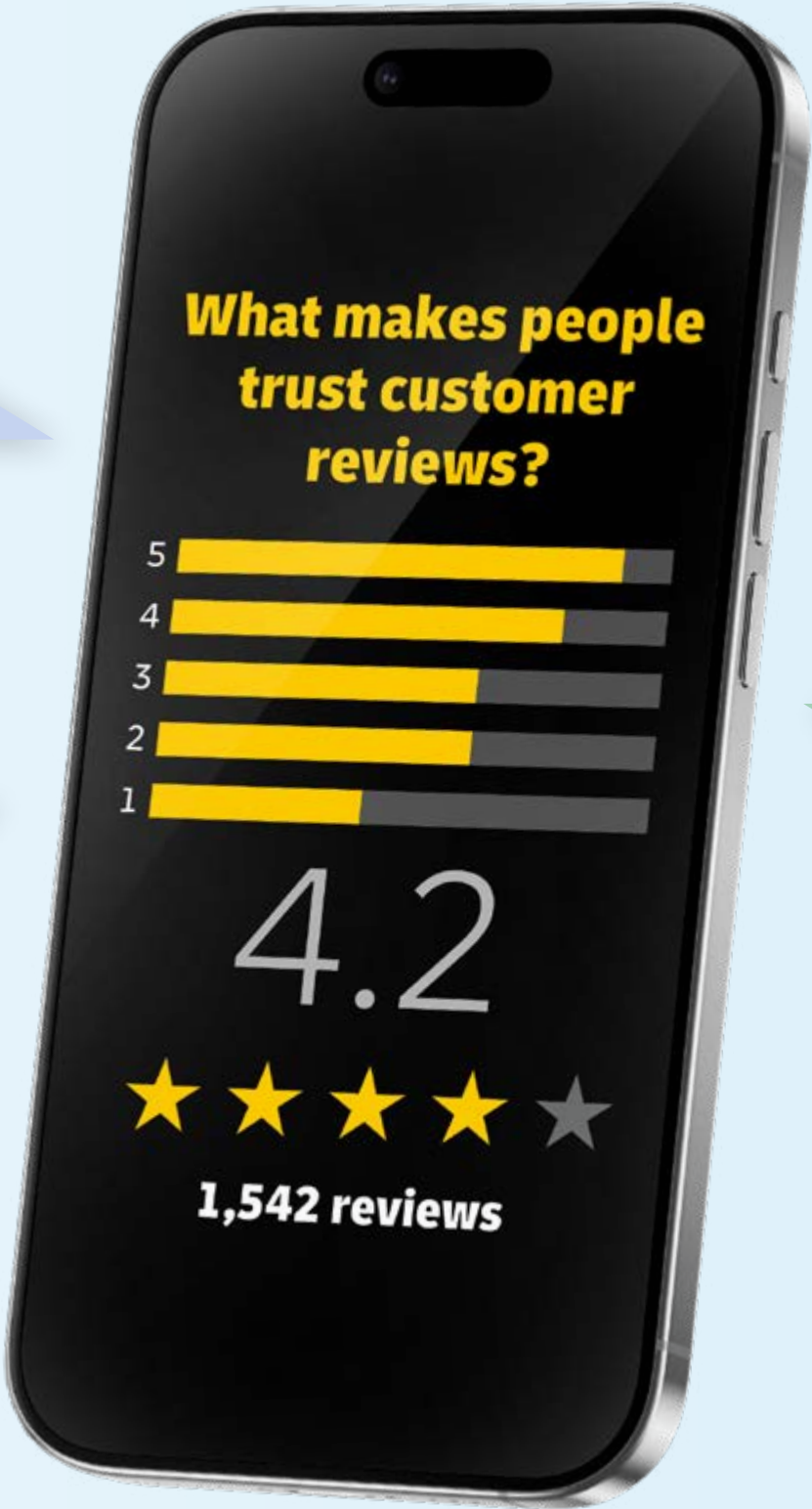
A large number of reviews

38%

Retailers responding to customer reviews

43%

Verified purchase badges



# The sign-up that keeps shoppers coming back

34% of shoppers across the globe have an online shopping subscription – but it’s not just about monthly refills or surprise boxes anymore. People are signing up for delivery and returns subscriptions – giving them convenience, speed and savings all year round.

The top reason consumers choose subscriptions? Convenience. The second? To save money.<sup>3</sup> Subscriptions create the perception of ‘free’ – free delivery, free returns, free access – and that keeps shoppers coming back.

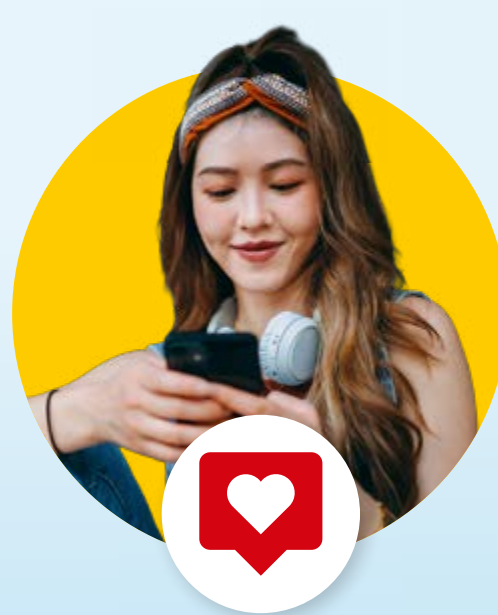
Subscription models can increase customer lifetime value, create predictable revenue and build loyalty – all while driving repeat purchases.

## Who’s signing up for online shopping subscriptions the most?



44%

Gen Z, and social shoppers



43%

Millennials

## In the fast-growing subscription market – forecast to reach 687 billion Euro by 2025<sup>4</sup> – what can your business do to succeed?



**Highlight why subscribing beats one-off purchases** – whether it’s savings, convenience or exclusive access.



**Give customers flexibility** – let them skip, pause or cancel anytime.



**Offer perks, personalization and ongoing value** to retain subscribers.

<sup>3</sup>Statista, 2025 <sup>4</sup>Statista, 2022



# Social commerce

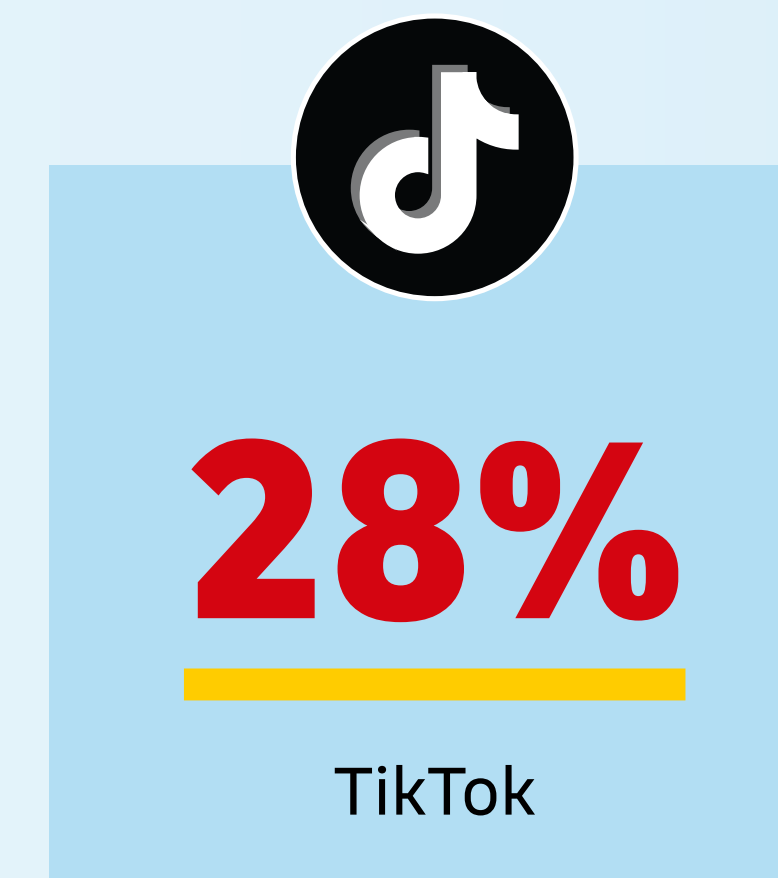
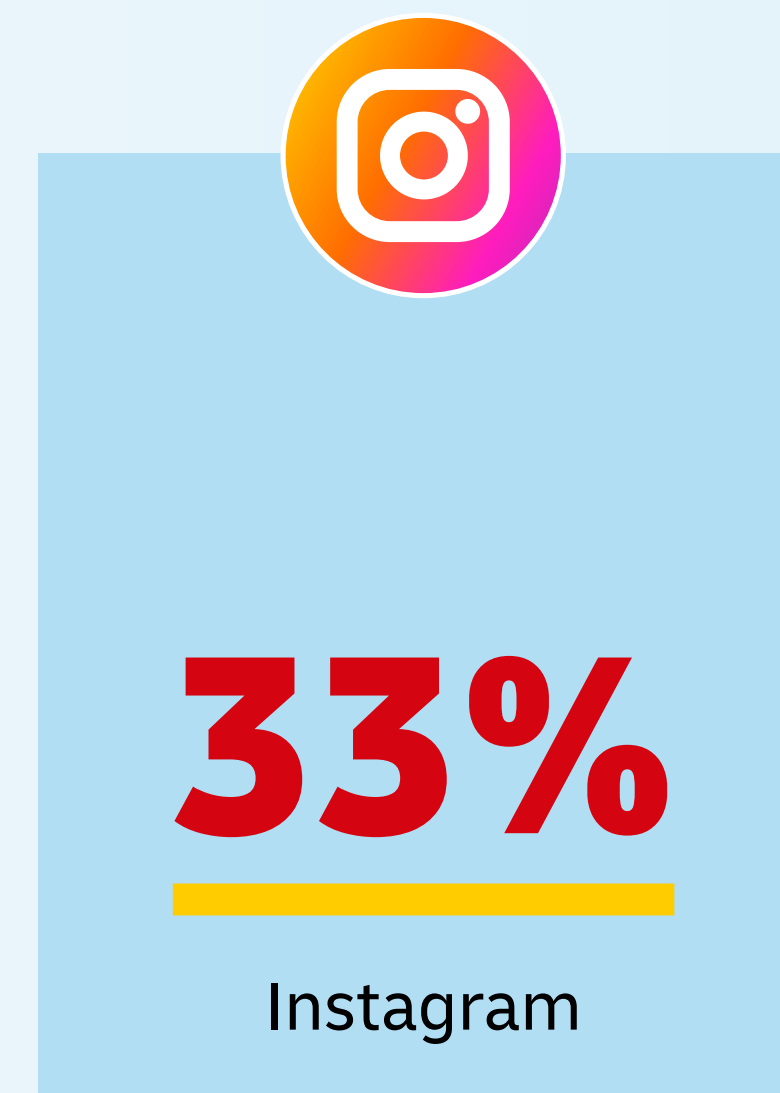
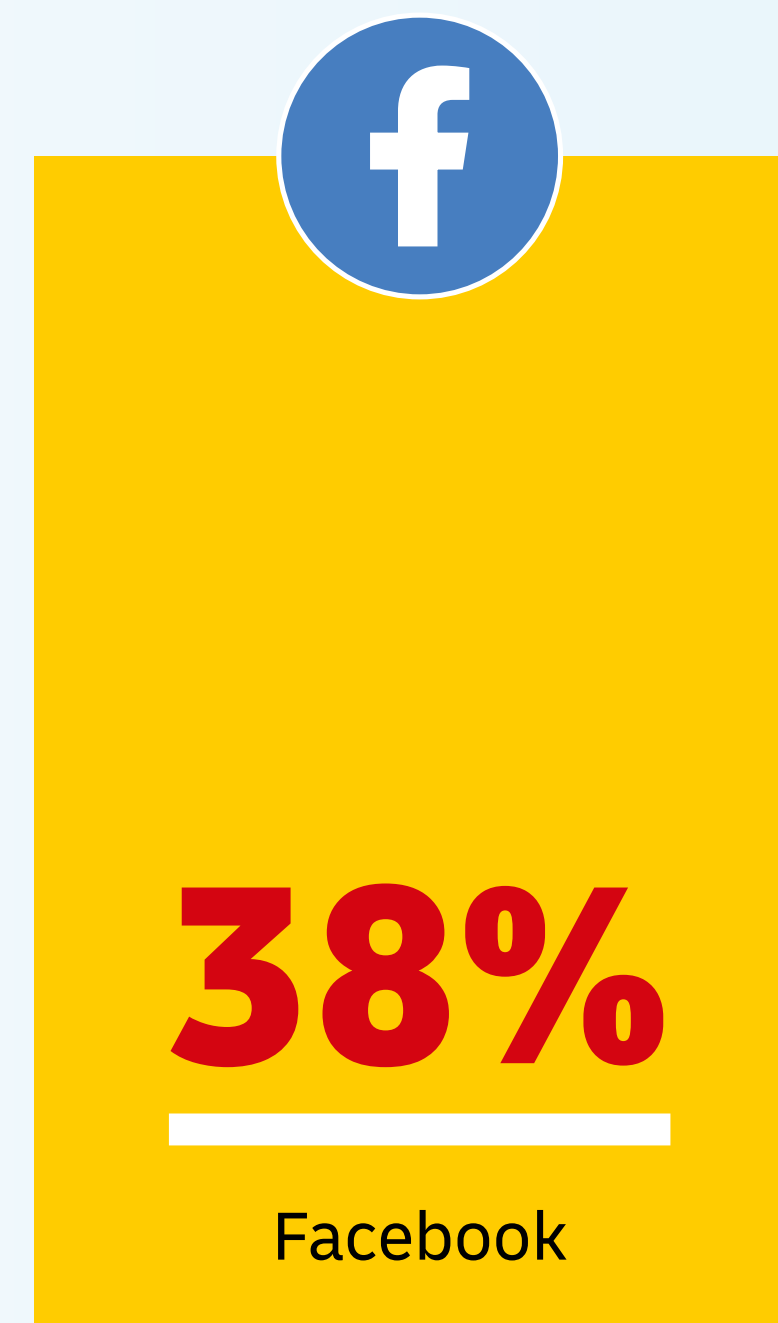


Social media isn't just where shoppers discover products – it's where they increasingly buy them.

From targeted ads and influencer campaigns to live demos and customer support, social platforms offer multiple ways to reach, engage and convert customers. Whether it's through exclusive deals or shoppable posts, social commerce is a part of the e-commerce journey your business can't afford to ignore.

## The platforms turning scrolls into sales

Which social platforms do shoppers buy from in Europe?



Shoppers say they may primarily shop on social media within the next five years

# Social media isn't just influencing purchases – it's increasing them

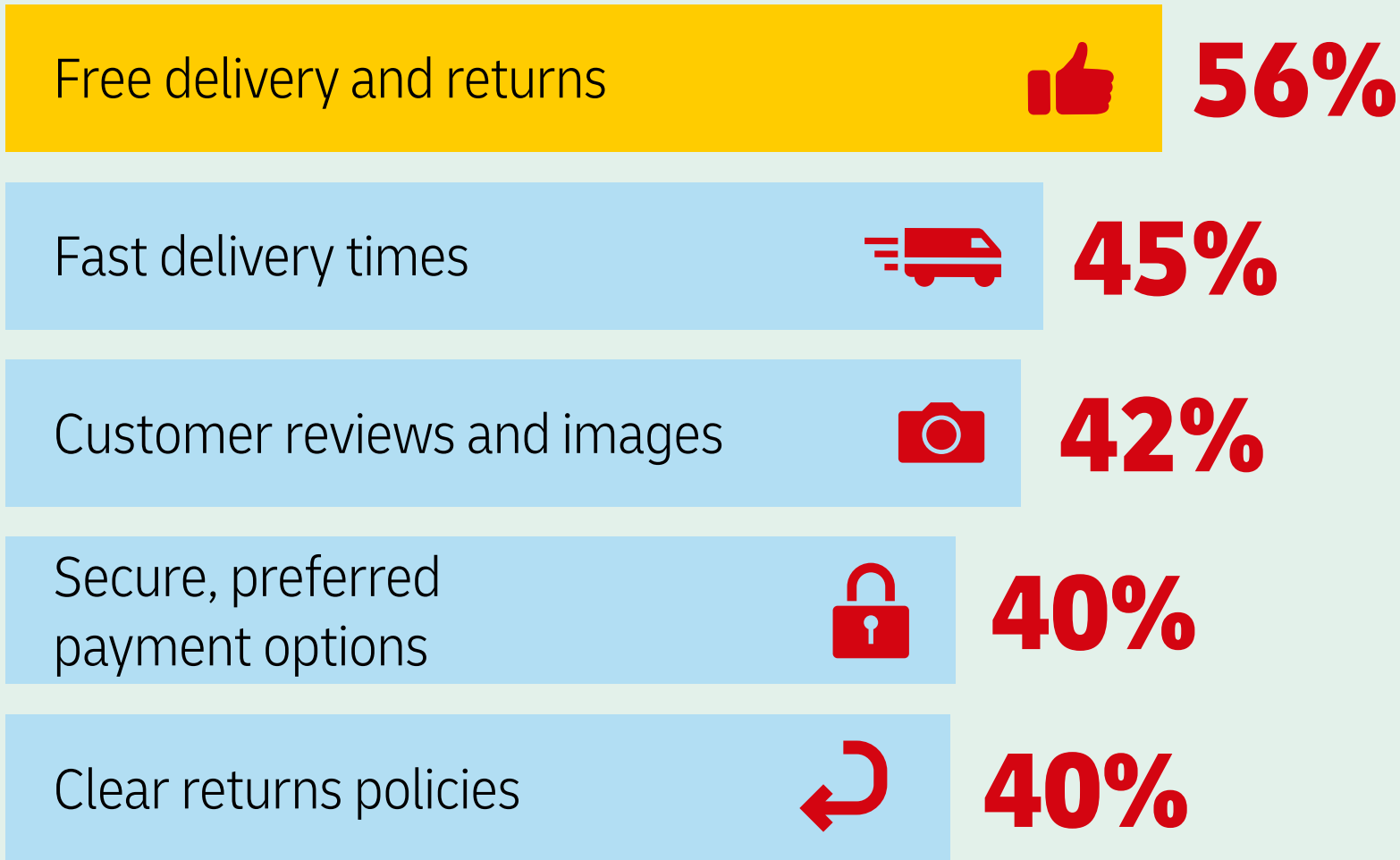
Social commerce generated an estimated 571 billion Euro in 2023. This figure is expected to grow in the coming years, and is forecast to exceed one trillion Euro by the end of 2028.<sup>5</sup>

## How has social media changed shoppers' buying habits in Europe?



<sup>5</sup>Statista, 2025

## What gives European shoppers the confidence to hit 'buy now' on social media?



**Shoppers are spending more time and money on social media, but trust is still a barrier for some.**

To grow your sales on these platforms, focus on what builds shopper confidence and act on those expectations. Delivery and returns are a key area to get right – shoppers want to know they can easily send something back if it's not quite right.

**Trending now**

Social media can turn an unknown product into a bestseller overnight. **Gen Z are quick to follow what's trending**, with 88% saying viral products influence what they buy.

**75%**

of shoppers say trending or viral products influence their buying decisions

**Going live**

Live shopping events on social media are **growing in popularity** – only 34% of shoppers say they're not interested. These events give people a chance to interact with brands, grab a deal or get first access to new products. They're especially popular with social shoppers and younger generations.

**5 in 10**

global shoppers say they are interested in live-streamed shopping events

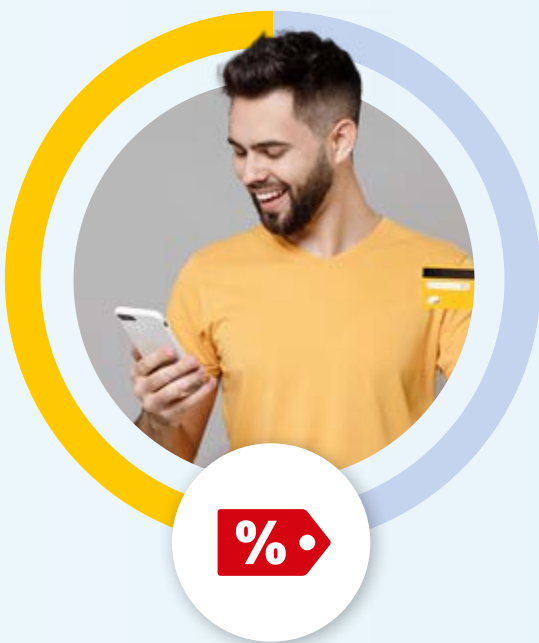
# The social content that makes shoppers click

Social media might not always be where the sale happens, but it's what gets shoppers ready to buy. Social platforms are vital sales channels for e-commerce businesses. From targeted ads and influencer campaigns to live product demos and customer support, they offer countless ways to engage and convert shoppers.

## What content influences shoppers' decisions in Europe?



Customer reviews



Offers or discounts



Posts from a brand's account



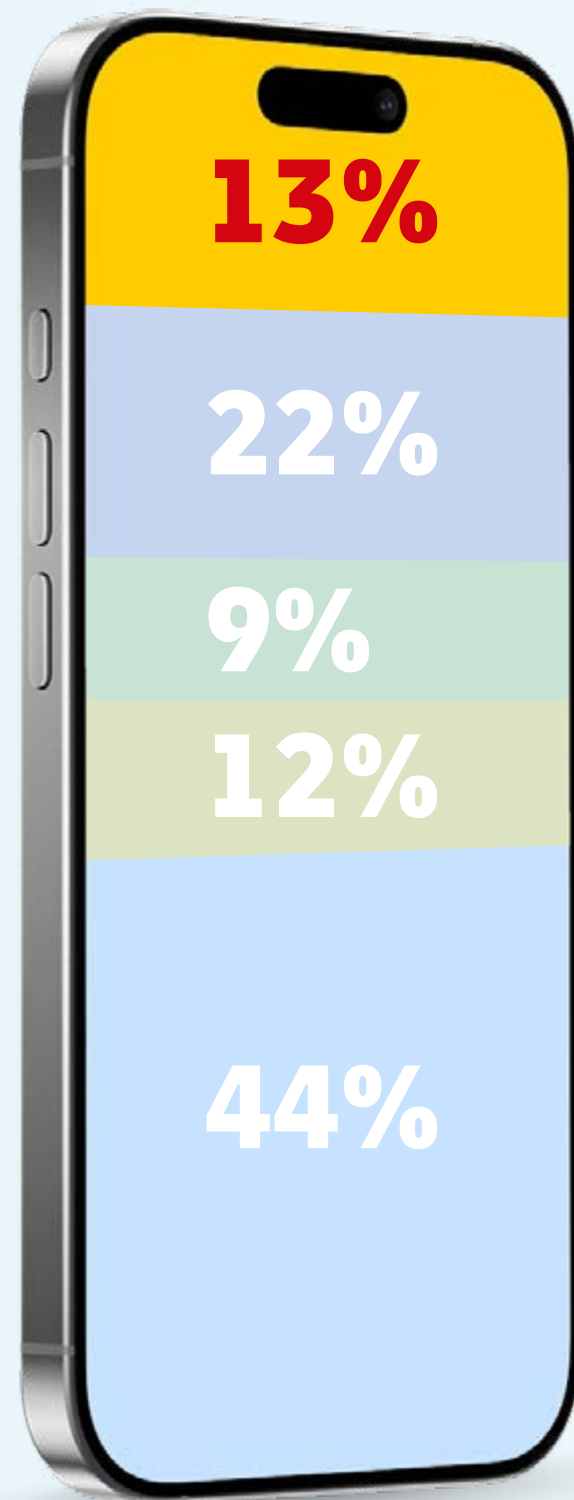
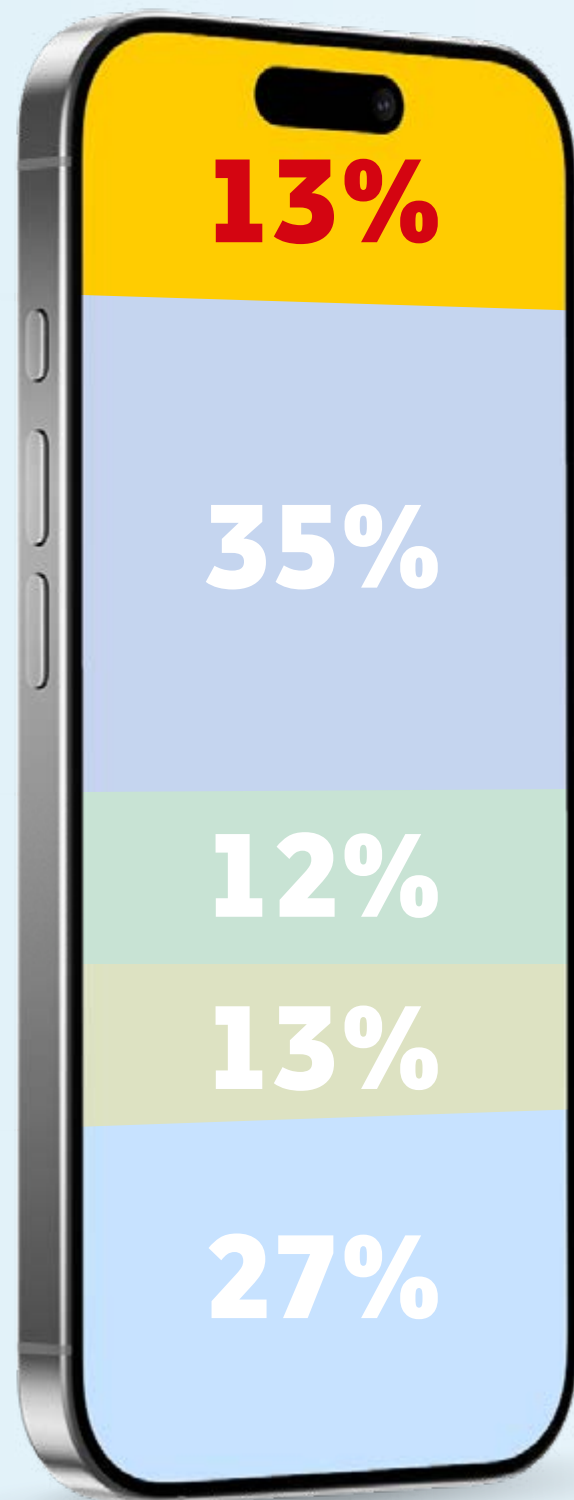
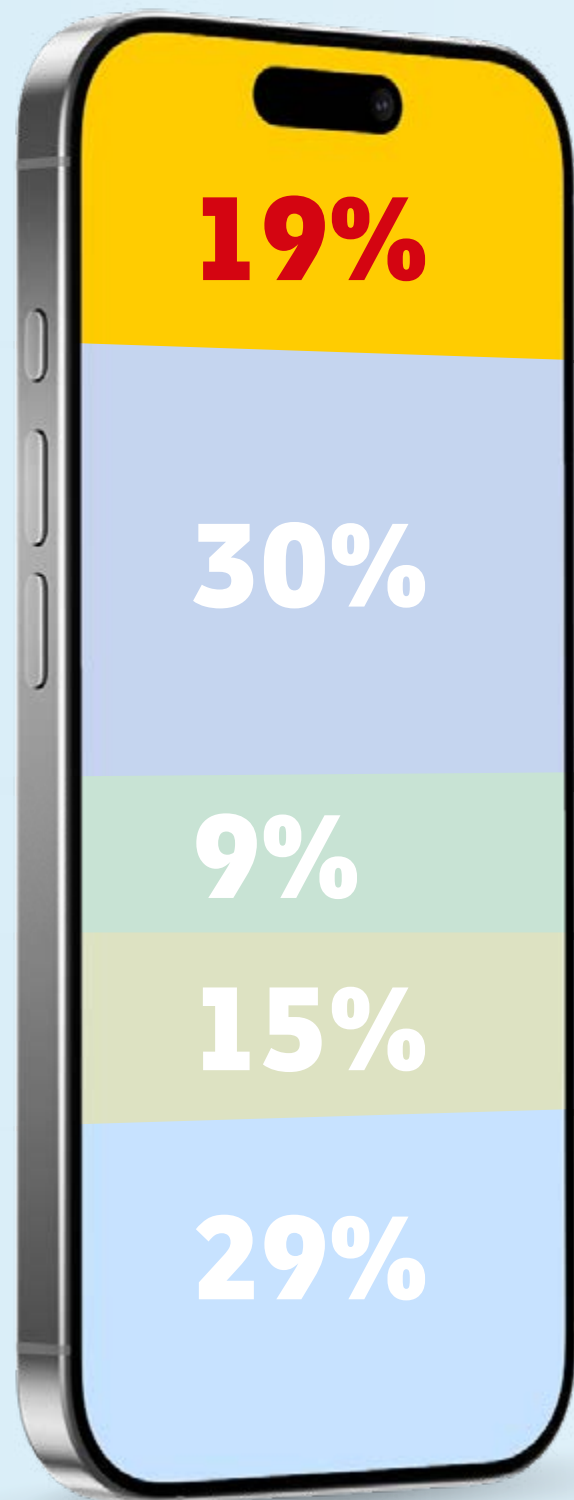
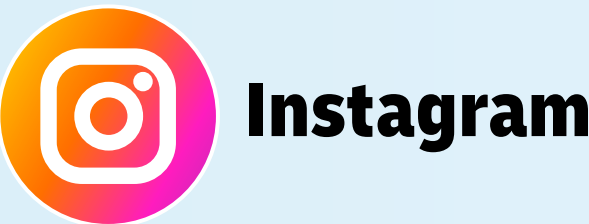
Shoppable posts



User-generated content

# Revealed: The social platforms set to rise

How will shoppers' buying behavior change on each platform by 2030?



Buy more Buy the same Buy less Might use in the future Would never use



67%

Millennials are the biggest users of Facebook, with 67% saying they plan to shop the same or more on the platform over the next five years. Meanwhile, Gen Z is driving growth across most other channels – especially TikTok (34%) and Instagram (40%), where they plan to increase their shopping the most.

However, not all generations are following the same trend. **Baby Boomers remain resistant to TikTok, with 60% saying they would never use it to shop.** Gen X are split on most social platforms – except for Facebook, where 1 in 4 say they plan to shop more in the years ahead.



60%



# Marketplaces

Marketplaces are the go-to shopping destination for consumers worldwide.

With endless choice, different price points for every budget and hassle-free experiences, it's easy to see why they dominate the online shopping landscape. But shopper behavior isn't the same everywhere – preferences vary by country, and each market has its own leading platforms.

Understanding the marketplaces shoppers buy from is key for e-commerce businesses looking to grow.



## Vinted

is the most popular with shoppers who buy refurbished or recycled products online



## Shein

is most popular with Gen Z shoppers



## eBay

is most popular with Baby Boomers



# Black Friday



56% of Gen Z trust retailers’ prices, compared to just 38% of Baby Boomers.

Along with social shoppers, they’re also more motivated by limited-time deals – so consider creating a sense of urgency with your Black Friday offers.

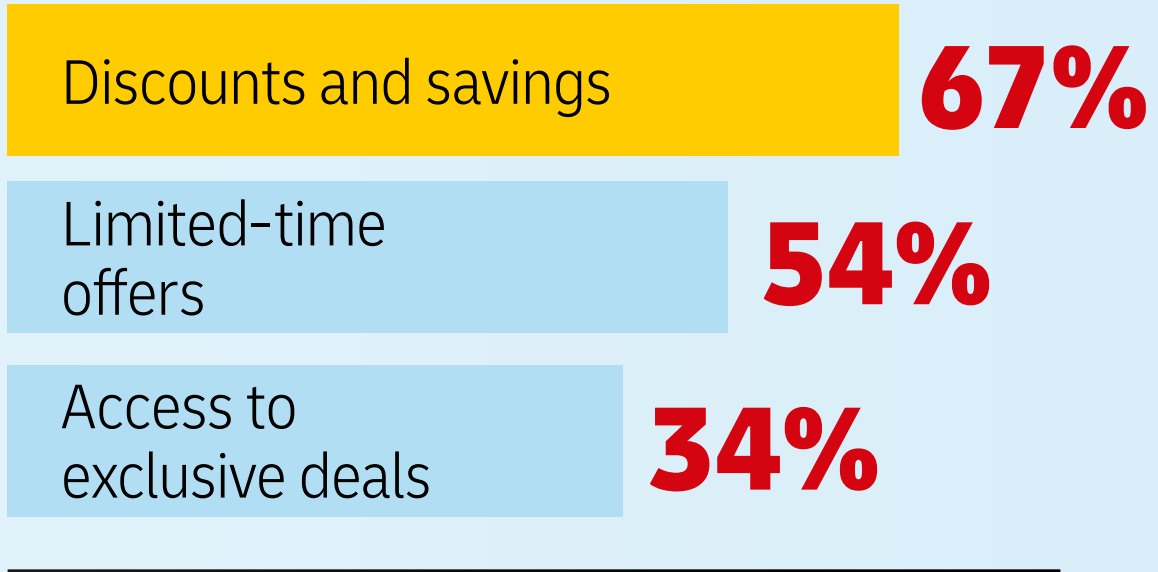
## Do shoppers still believe the Black Friday hype in Europe?

Younger generations are the most active and most trusting Black Friday shoppers.



|              | Buy more or the same | Buy less or not at all | Completely or mostly trust retailers’ offers |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Gen Z        | 78%                  | 22%                    | 56%                                          |
| Millennials  | 81%                  | 19%                    | 54%                                          |
| Gen X        | 74%                  | 26%                    | 46%                                          |
| Baby Boomers | 64%                  | 36%                    | 38%                                          |

## What motivates consumers to spend?



## Do shoppers trust retailers’ offers and prices during this time?



**38%** of shoppers buy electronics during this seasonal sale



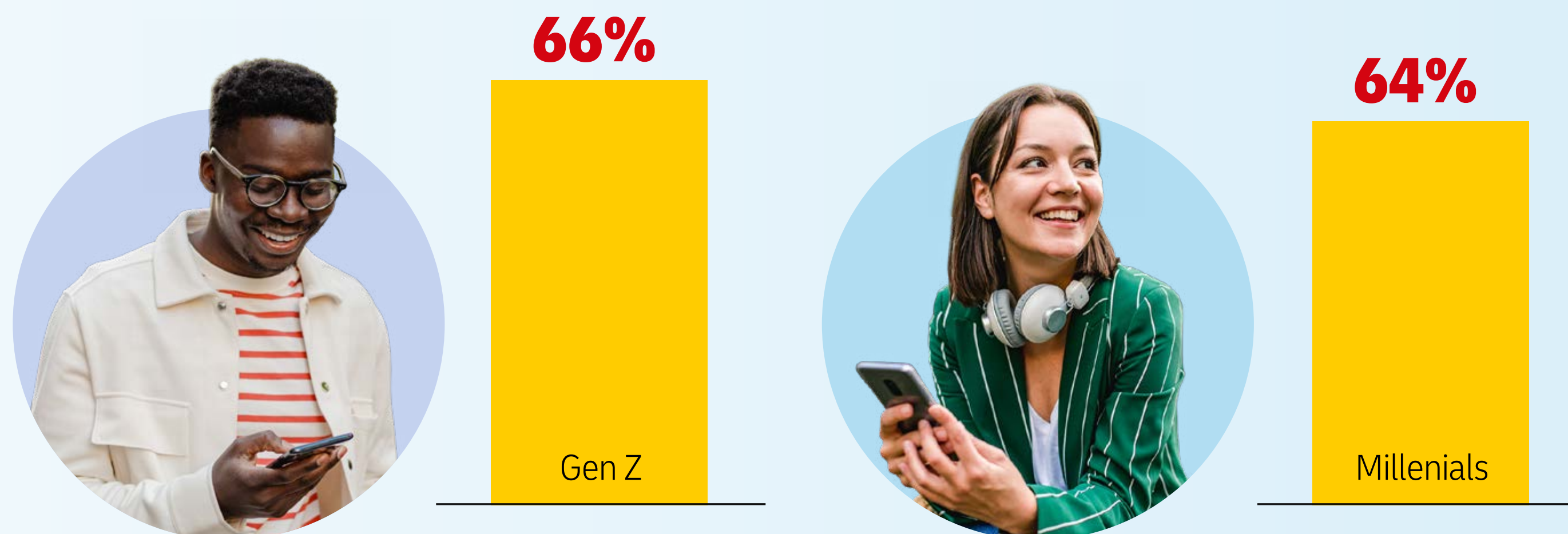
# Cross-border buying behavior

Consumers want more choice, better prices and unique products – and they’re looking beyond borders to find them.

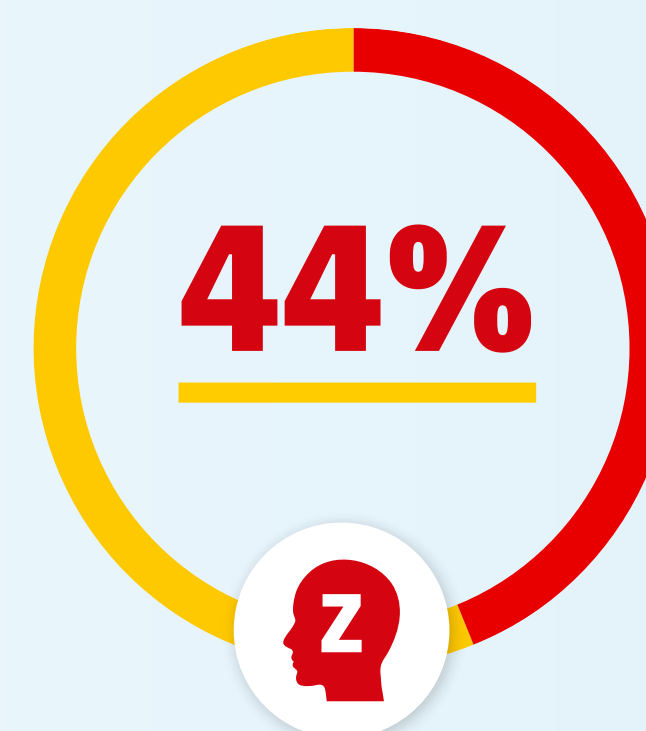
But purchasing from an international retailer comes with high expectations. Trust, delivery and returns all influence the decision to click ‘buy now’.

For retailers, it’s a chance to reach a wider audience and grow your sales. The demand is there, now it’s about delivering on it.

## Who buys from other countries the most in Europe?



shoppers buy from other countries at least once a month

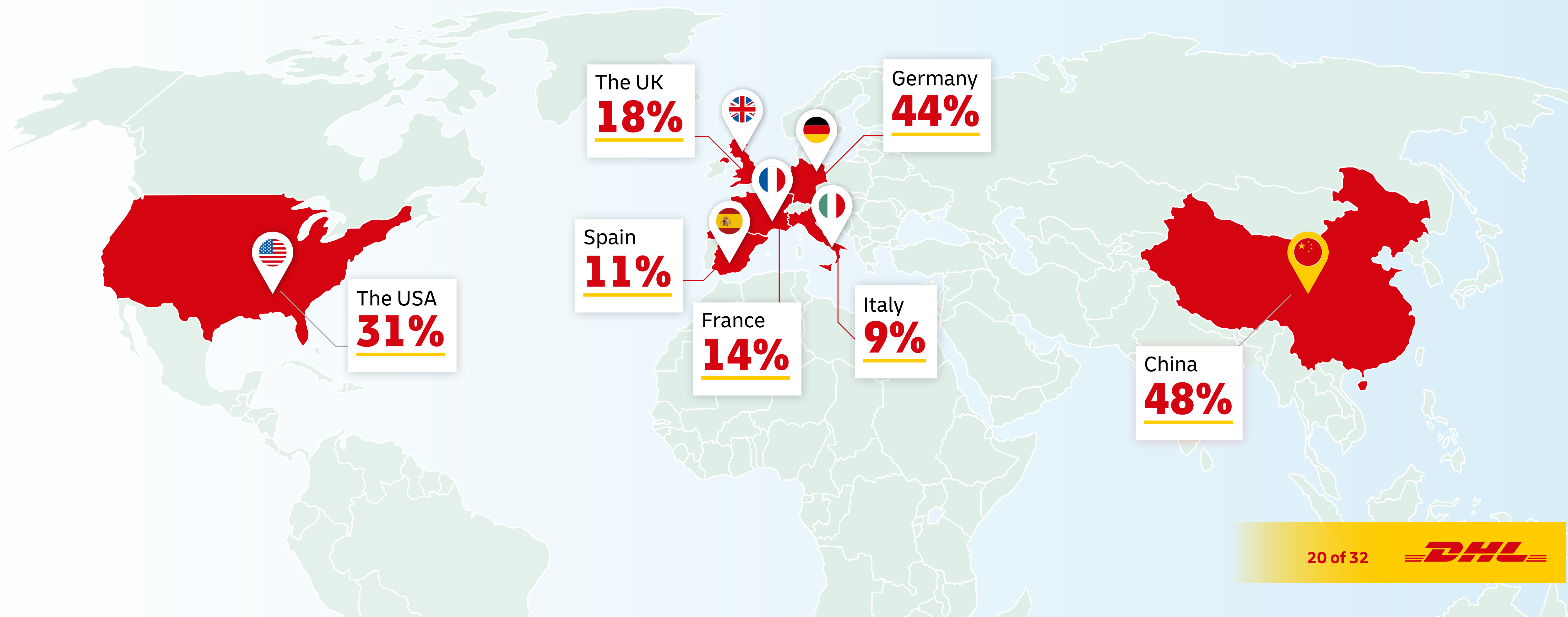


of Gen Z buy from other countries at least once a month



# Where the world shops: The winning markets for cross-border sales

Which countries do shoppers buy from the most in Europe?



# Price opens the door – trust and delivery keep it open

Cross-border opportunities hold real growth potential for online retailers.

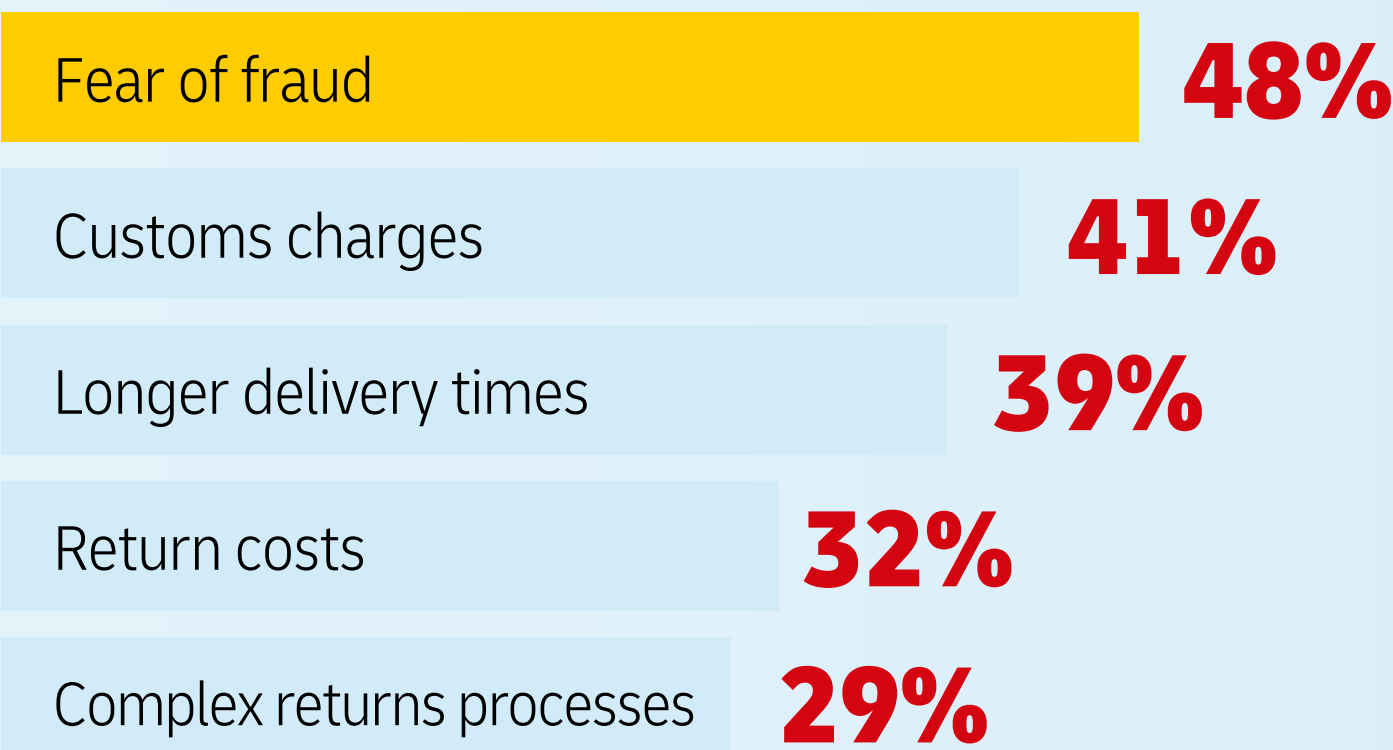
If you're expanding into new markets, check that your pricing aligns with local competitors. To build trust and secure sales, offer secure payment options, be transparent about your returns offering and offer prices in local currencies.



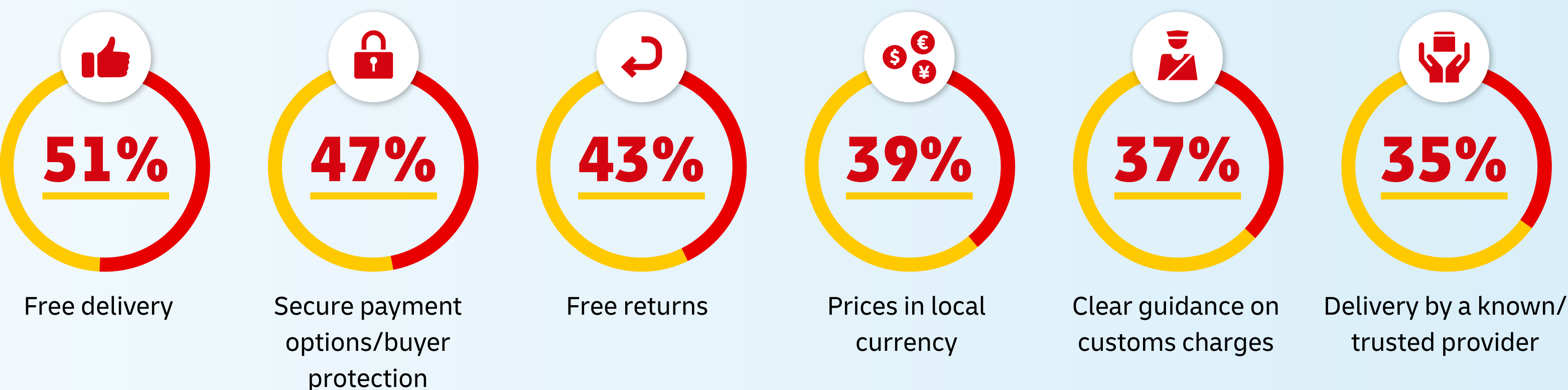
## Why do shoppers in Europe buy from other countries?



## Why don't shoppers in Europe buy from other countries?



## What would encourage shoppers to buy from abroad?





## Delivery & returns

The delivery and returns experience plays a huge role in whether customers complete their purchases.

Shoppers want speed, affordability and flexibility. If they encounter slow shipping, high costs or tricky return processes, they're likely to abandon their carts. On the flip side, getting it right can boost the chances of a sale and encourage them to come back.

Even though returns might feel like the end of the shopping journey, they actually influence many customers' decisions to buy.

**8 in 10**

shoppers won't buy from an online retailer if they don't trust the delivery or returns provider

## 'Free' is the word shoppers want to see (or you risk losing the sale)

When it comes to delivery and returns, cost is a dealbreaker. Shoppers increasingly expect free options as standard – and many will walk away if they're not offered. To create a perception of free shipping and boost sales, integrate delivery and return costs into your product pricing.

### Delivery



**1 in 2**

shoppers mainly buy from online retailers that offer free delivery

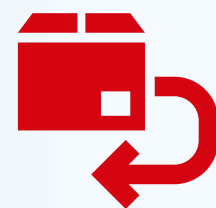


of shoppers say free delivery would improve their online shopping experience



European shoppers say they've abandoned their cart because of delivery fees

### Returns



of global shoppers mainly buy from online retailers that offer free returns



OVER  
**1 in 2**

shoppers say free returns is the improvement they want to see from retailers



**25%**

of European shoppers say they've abandoned their cart because of returns fees

# The demand for out-of-home keeps rising

35% of European shoppers choose to have their items delivered to an out-of-home location. When it comes to returns, even more opt for flexibility and convenience – 79% of European shoppers returned unwanted items via a parcel locker or parcel shop.

While home delivery remains the default for most online purchases, on-the-go returns are quickly becoming the new norm in Europe, with Europe at 21%. Out-of-home returns have surged even further, rising by 32% across Europe.



|               | Delivery * |      |      | Returns |      |      |
|---------------|------------|------|------|---------|------|------|
| Europe        | 2024       | 2025 | +/-  | 2024    | 2025 | +/-  |
| Home          | 66%        | 54%  | -18% | 40%     | 21%  | -48% |
| Parcel locker | 17%        | 18%  | 6%   | 23%     | 26%  | 13%  |
| Parcel shop   | 12%        | 17%  | 42%  | 37%     | 53%  | 43%  |

\*Delivery doesn't include 'leave in safe place' or 'leave with neighbor' responses

8 in 10

Gen Z shoppers return items via a parcel locker

32%

of Gen Z prefer label-free returns using a QR code at the drop-off point

54%

of Baby Boomers return items via a parcel shop

23%

of Millennials would switch to collection or drop-off for a more sustainable delivery

2 in 5

Gen X shoppers return items via a parcel shop

# Delivery flexibility is an expectation

Shoppers want flexibility when it comes to tracking and redirecting their parcels – whether it’s changing the delivery day or choosing a new drop-off point. Make it easy for your customers to manage, and you’ll create a delivery experience that meets their expectations.

## Where do shoppers prefer to redirect their parcels to – and where in Europe is this most popular?



23%

Parcel shop



23%

Change the delivery day



22%

Safe place



18%

Parcel locker



14%

A neighbor

2 in 5

European shoppers prefer to redirect their parcel to an out-of-home pick-up point



## How do shoppers track and redirect their parcels – and where in Europe is this most popular?

37%

Within the delivery provider’s app

28%

On the delivery provider’s website

16%

On the retailer’s website

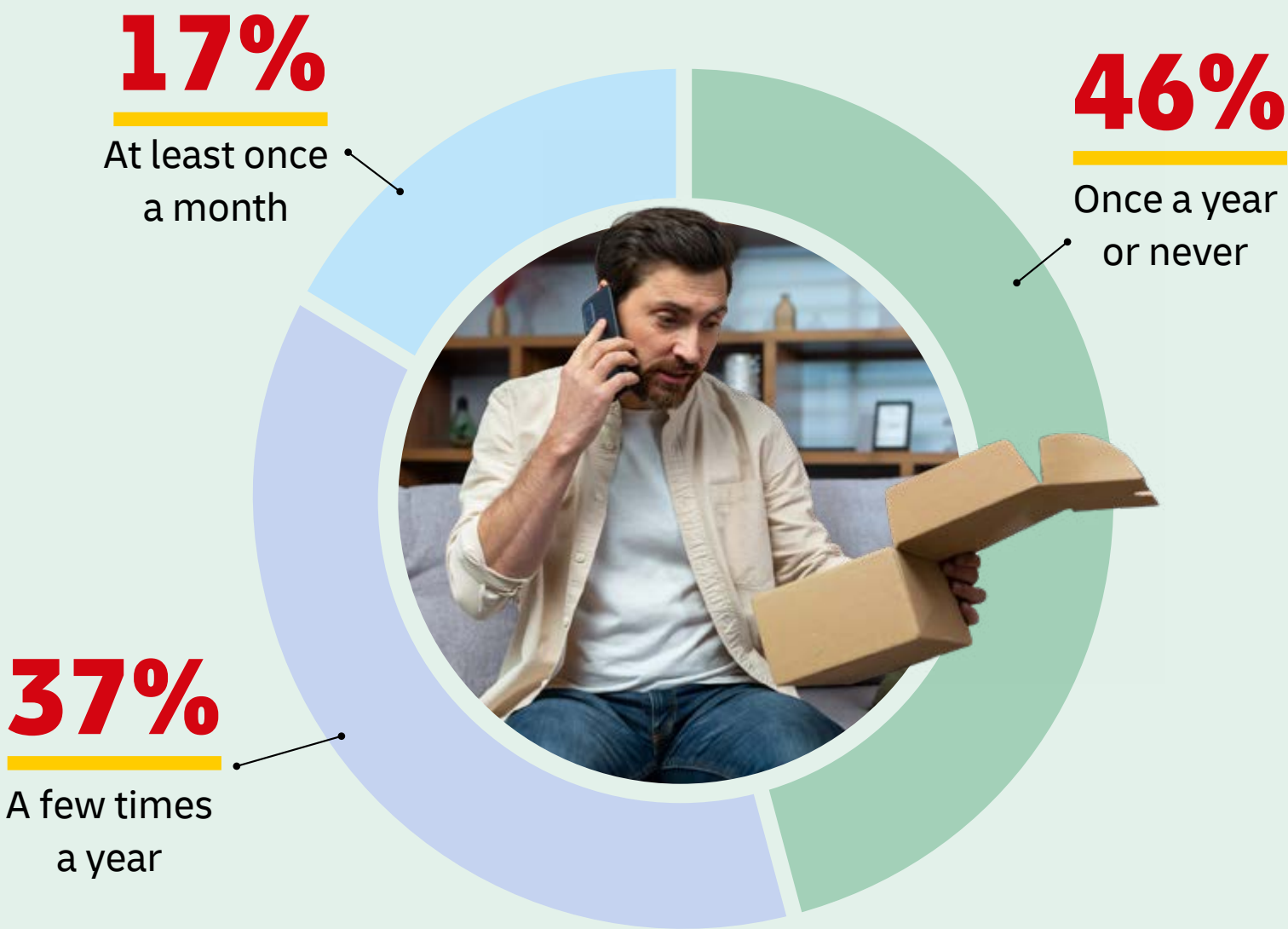
11%

Within the retailer’s app

# Returns come as standard

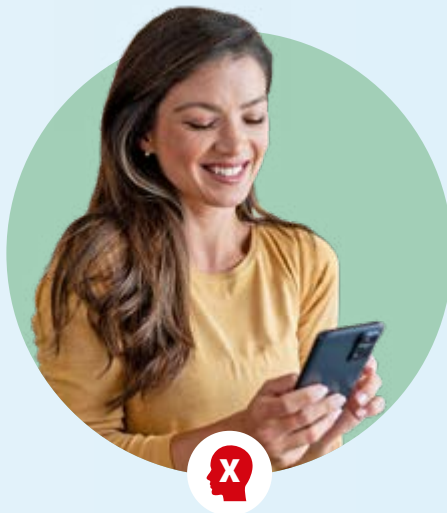
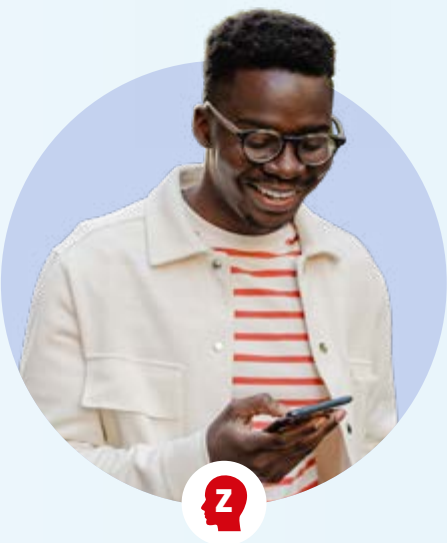
93% of European shoppers return up to 30% of their online purchases. The demand for ‘free’ and easy returns matters – and so does the provider – or shoppers are likely to abandon their cart.

## How often do shoppers typically return purchases in Europe?



## Shoppers’ returns behavior

|              | Have ever returned an online purchase | Return up to 30% of their online purchases | Won't shop with a brand if they don't trust the returns provider |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Europe       | 68%                                   | 93%                                        | 78%                                                              |
| Gen Z        | 64%                                   | 87%                                        | 70%                                                              |
| Millennials  | 68%                                   | 90%                                        | 72%                                                              |
| Gen X        | 64%                                   | 94%                                        | 77%                                                              |
| Baby Boomers | 59%                                   | 96%                                        | 82%                                                              |



# What if most returns could be avoided?

Understanding why shoppers in Europe send back orders is the first step to reducing return rates.

Reducing returns remains a challenge for online retailers. Without the chance to see, touch or try a product before buying, shoppers rely on accurate sizing, clear imagery and detailed product information.

But there's also a clear opportunity. With 77% of shoppers open to interactive online experiences could help customers get a better feel for what they're buying and therefore, return less.



**48%**

of shoppers have spent more online to get free delivery – then returned the extra items. This jumps to **48%** for Gen Z shoppers.

## Why do shoppers in Europe typically return unwanted items?



**54%**

Wrong size



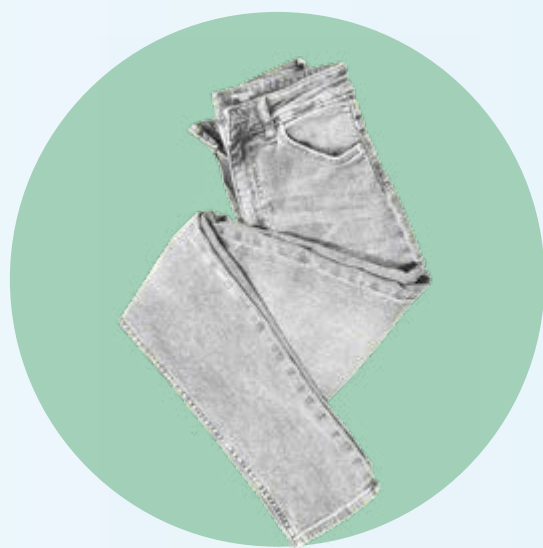
**53%**

Item was poor quality or faulty



**41%**

Damaged during transit



**35%**

Didn't look like the image



**37%**

Didn't suit them



**16%**

Ordered more than one size or color

# The return label is going digital

Receiving a return label in the parcel is still the top choice for over half of shoppers – but the shift toward paperless returns is gaining momentum.

With 66% of shoppers preferring to return items via a parcel locker or shop, scanning a QR code is quickly becoming the new norm. It offers a more convenient, flexible alternative to printed labels.

For retailers, the benefits are clear. Paperless returns cut the cost of unused printed materials – while also supporting sustainability by reducing paper waste. If you don’t already offer digital return options, it’s a simple switch that can enhance the customer experience and reduce unnecessary spend.



**32%**

of Gen Z shoppers prefer a paperless return



**28%**

of Millennials shoppers prefer a paperless return



**62%**

of Gen X prefer to receive a return label in their parcel



**66%**

of Baby Boomers prefer to receive a return label in their parcel

# Online retailers need to get delivery and returns right

81% of shoppers in Europe abandon their cart if their preferred delivery option is not offered, and 79% if their preferred returns option is not offered.



## Free and fast delivery

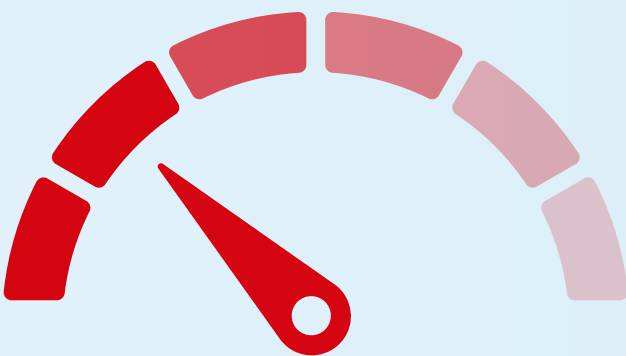
are the top two ways to build trust when selling on social media



say free delivery would encourage them to buy from online retailers in other countries



won't shop with an online retailer if they don't trust the delivery & returns providers offered at the checkout



## Slow delivery

is the number one reason shoppers have abandoned their cart



# Extra insights

## They are social-first shoppers

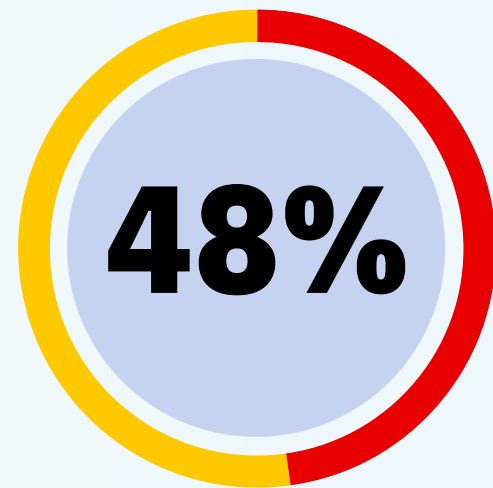
Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are powerful purchase drivers for this generation. They're not only more likely to have shopped via social media – 85% expect these platforms to potentially become their main shopping destination by 2030.

## They go global to get what they want

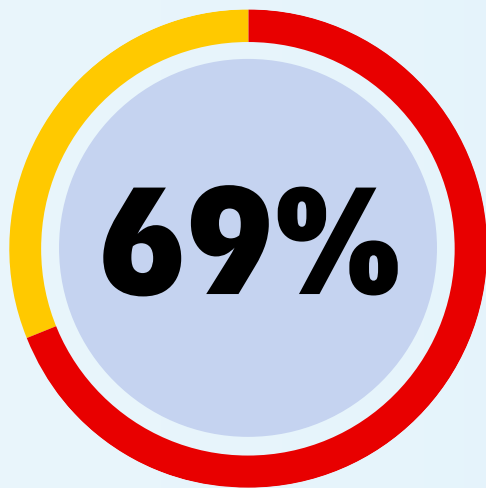
Two-thirds of Gen Z shoppers buy from other countries – mainly to buy products they can't find locally. This generation is motivated by variety and higher-quality products, and they're happy to look overseas to find this.



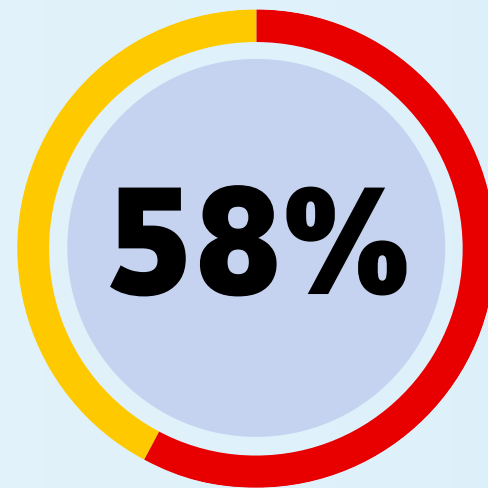
# The buying behaviors of Gen Z



make purchases on TikTok



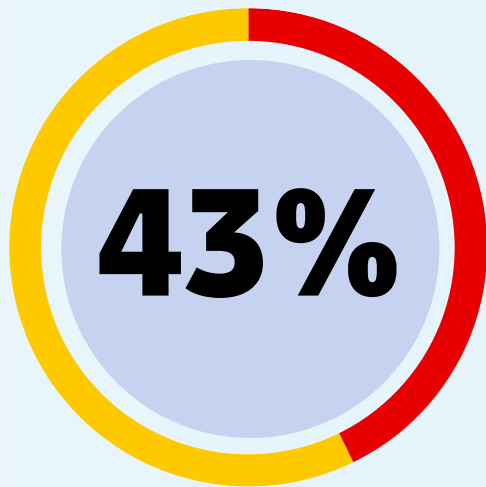
expect to shop more or the same amount on Instagram in the next five years



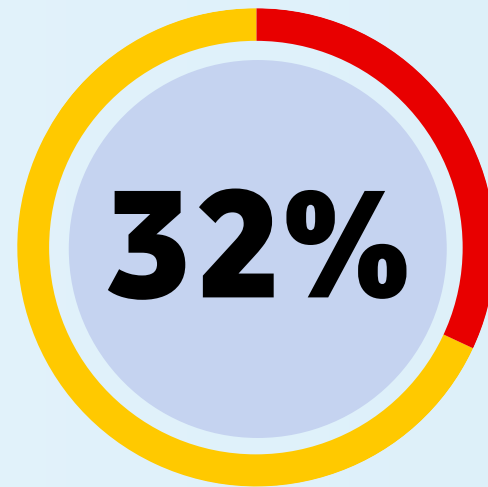
expect to shop more or the same amount on TikTok in the next five years

**1 in 3**

buy from other countries to find better quality products



buy from other countries at least once a month



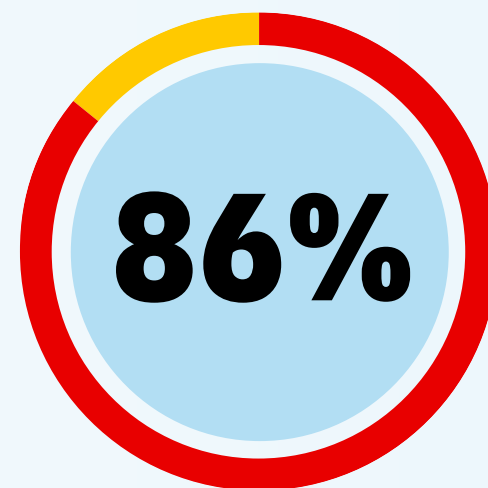
buy clothing from online retailers in other countries



# The buying behaviors of Millennials

## They're frequent browsers and buyers

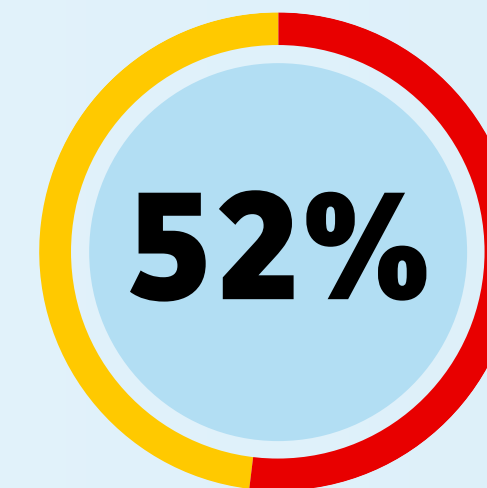
Millennials are frequent online shoppers. They've embraced the convenience of shopping online, regularly buying across different product categories – making them a valuable generation to sell to.



browse online at least once a week

**3 in 5**

make a purchase online at least once a week



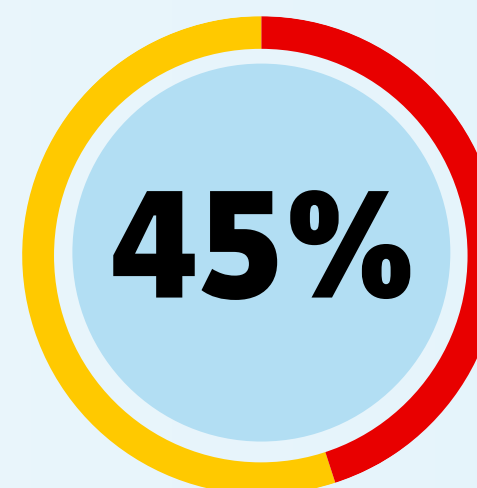
shop more when they receive offers or discounts from an online retailer

## They're not afraid to return

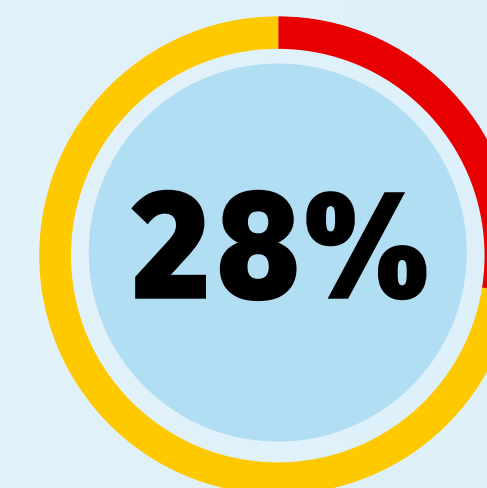
Millennials are more likely than most to return items, especially when return policies are free and easy. They expect flexible, transparent options, so retailers offering hassle-free returns will appeal to this generation.

**1 in 5**

return an item to an online retailer at least once a month



have spent more to get free delivery (then returned the extra items)



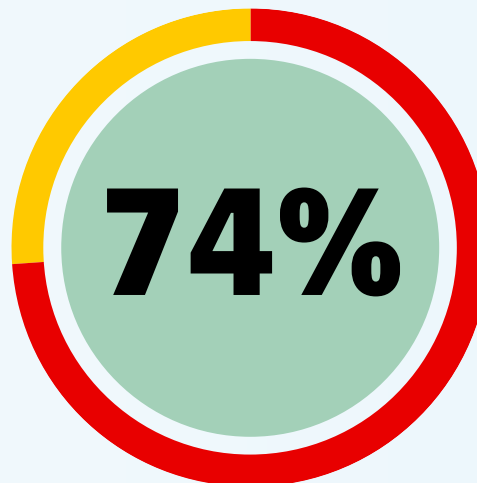
prefer paperless returns (scan a QR code at the drop-off point)



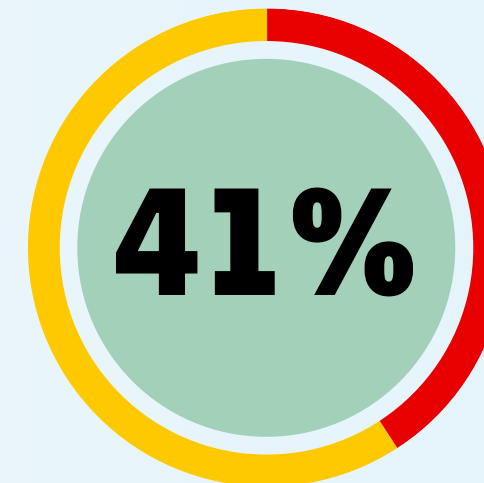
# The buying behaviors of **Gen X**

## They expect transparency

Gen X want clear information about delivery charges and return options. High costs frustrate them, and a lack of trust puts them off. Retailers that offer free, reliable shipping and returns are far more likely to win their business.



say free delivery would improve their online shopping experience



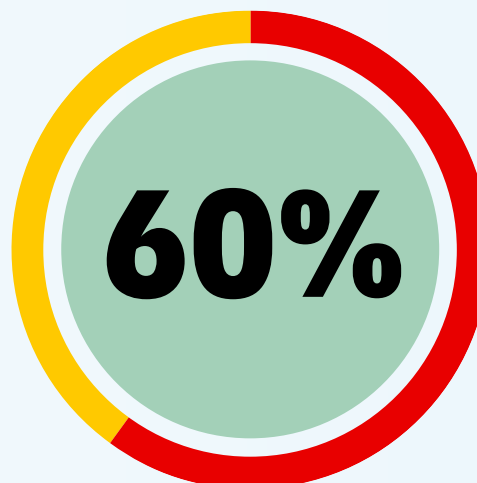
feel frustrated if they have to pay for returns

**3 in 4**

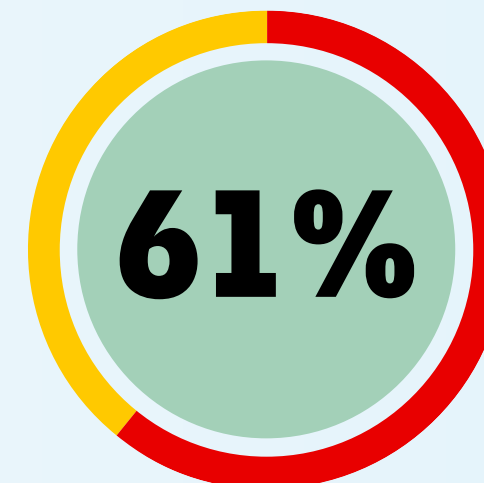
would not buy from an online retailer if they didn't trust the delivery provider

## They are cautious social shoppers

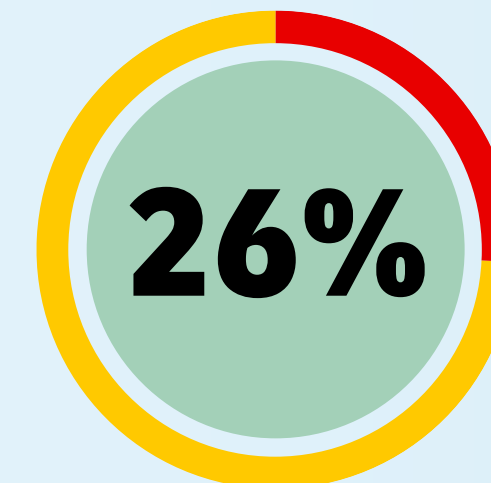
Unlike younger generations, Gen X are slower to adopt social media as an e-commerce channel. While 1 in 2 do use Facebook to shop, they're less likely to see these platforms as a primary retail destination.



use social media to keep up to date with new products or services



say free delivery and returns would increase their confidence to buy on social media



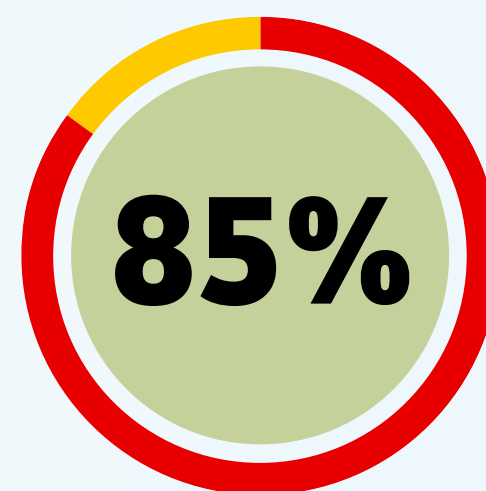
plan to browse and buy more on Facebook within the next five years



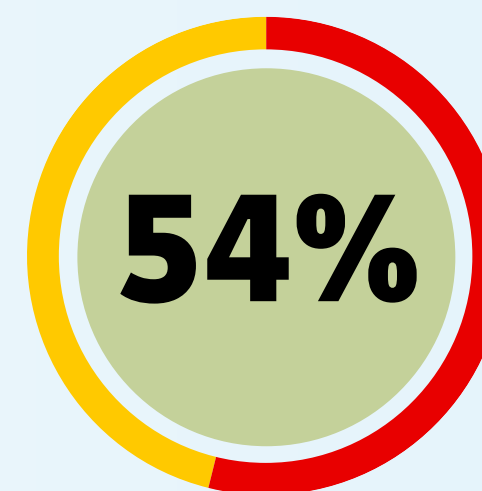
# The buying behaviors of **Baby Boomers**

## Trust gets them to hit 'buy now'

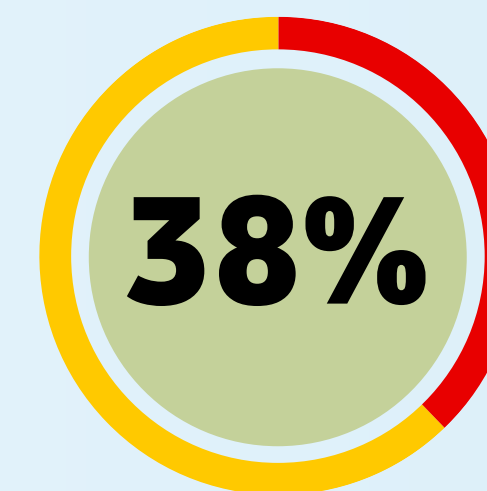
Baby Boomers value clear, dependable delivery and returns from a provider they trust. Hassle-free returns, clear delivery information and familiar providers all help secure a sale with this generation.



would not shop with a retailer if they didn't trust the delivery or returns provider



prefer to return items via a parcel shop



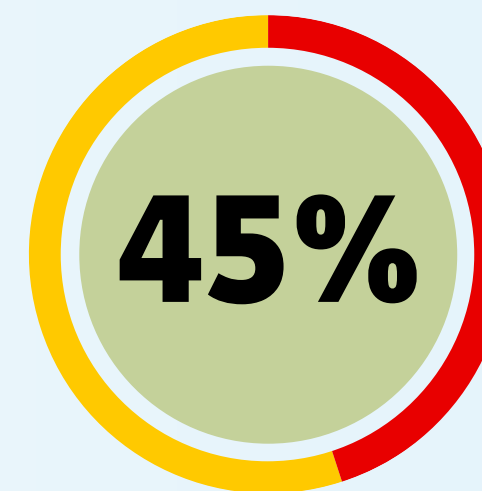
would feel more confident buying on social media if sellers named their delivery and returns providers

## They want the full picture before they buy

This generation doesn't like uncertainty when shopping online. They want detailed, trustworthy product descriptions and the ability to ask questions if needed, otherwise they might not complete the sale.

**1 in 4**

feel frustrated if they are unable to ask a retailer for advice



say retailers responding to reviews makes them trust them



say prices in their local currency would encourage them to buy cross-border



## In conclusion

With the insights from this report, you can better anticipate the needs of different generations. Start testing and see how these strategies impact your conversion rates. We hope these findings help you take the next step toward growth.

### Ready to grow your business?

At DHL eCommerce, we are happy to help you reach more customers, both within the Netherlands and beyond. Go to [dhlecommerce.nl/trendreport](https://dhlecommerce.nl/trendreport) and we will call you back.

## Quick insights

### Generational differences

Shopping behaviors and preferences vary greatly across generations. Social media can help attract Gen Z and Millennials, while detailed product information is more effective in convincing Gen X and Baby Boomers.

### Trust and reliability

Gen X and Baby Boomers value reliable delivery and hassle-free returns, whereas Gen Z and Millennials rely more on customer reviews and secure payment options when making purchase decisions.

### Social media

Social media platforms are becoming increasingly important, especially among Gen Z and Millennials. For example, use live demos and make sure your social media content includes customer reviews.

### Customer expectations

Today's shoppers expect speed, affordability, and flexibility when it comes to shipping and returns. Millennials and Gen Z prefer QR code-based return options, while Gen X and Baby Boomers still favor physical return labels.

