

A satellite night map of Europe, showing city lights and road networks in yellow and white against a dark blue background. Two semi-transparent circles are overlaid on the map: a larger blue circle centered over France and a smaller green circle centered over Spain.

# European E-Commerce Report 2021

nexi

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# Introduction

With much of the world reopening after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, trends in online shopping are slowly starting to normalise again. But several of the seismic shifts we saw across online spaces during this period are still hanging around – and many might be here to stay.

Overall, European e-commerce is still experiencing strong growth in 2021. The fastest regional growth is in Germany with 18%, followed by Denmark (11%), Sweden (10%), and Norway (3%). Only Austria is showing negative growth with -0.3%.

Welcome to the 2021 e-commerce report. This is now the 15th edition of our report that looks at several key markets in Europe to identify trends in the world of online shopping. This year, we're looking at Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

As in previous years, our goal is to dive deep into issues of importance to the e-commerce world to produce relevant, interesting, and actionable insights. In the report, we will publish more than 200 pages of e-commerce facts, based on over 11,000 consumer interviews, across eight European countries. Representing over 150 million people and over 300 billion euros of e-commerce spending, you'll find our high-level insights on the pages that follow. And if you would like deeper insights into specific markets, our local country reports explore the concepts here in greater regional detail.

Last year's report offered insights into how the online shopping world was shifting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, we're looking at which of these trends are normalising and which might be here to stay. By comparing online spending on products, travel, and services, we can tell that many were still comfortable shopping for goods online – but were delaying long-haul travel for leisure and business. And the service sector saw a universal win for streaming platforms, with insurance making a strong showing in some markets.

Many of these trends are evident across all destinations, with some outliers that make for interesting reading. It's these country-wide trends that are often the most interesting to examine – what reasons are driving the sustained drive towards online shopping, what are the most important factors when it comes to online payments, which goods and services are consumers buying online, and why are people abandoning shopping carts.

Of course, each country is unique, which is why we produce detailed reports on specific markets. And over the years, we've found that some factors

like preferred payment methods are surprisingly regional. All markets place the same emphasis on security, speed, and simplicity – yet many place their trust in different products, from brand-name payment gateways to cards, bank transfers, and invoicing.

The data is more than just for interest's sake, of course. It offers e-commerce businesses deep insights into clients and the products that they demand. Understanding what makes your client abandon a cart, for example, is critical to improving sales. And with the data and physical solutions that we provide, we hope you find this helpful as we navigate the ever-changing e-commerce world.



“Our goal is to dive deep into issues of importance to the e-commerce world to produce relevant, interesting, and actionable insights.”

**Omar Haque,**  
Head of Group E-commerce  
Nexi Group

<sup>01</sup>  
**The Market**

# The E-commerce market in 2021

Following what was perhaps one of the biggest shifts to online shopping in many markets around the world in 2020, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 was always going to be interesting. Would the previously unimaginable, almost overnight shift in online consumer behaviour stick around? Or would consumers return to old habits and cause the industry to normalise?

To gain some insight into the value of online shopping in 2021, it's useful to take a look at the year's numbers. Our survey shows that Finland spent €8.7 billion; Denmark €14 billion; Norway €15.7 billion; Sweden €22.5 billion; Austria €23.2 billion; and Switzerland €31.4 billion. The real outliers for online spending were Italy with €186.7 billion and Germany with €190.8 billion.

In many markets, the acceleration in e-commerce seen during 2020 has been sustained or increased in 2021, although some segments have seen a normalisation of numbers since the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## It's still good to sell goods

Physical product purchases remain the main share of the online market in 2021. 2020 peaks saw online spending going towards goods approach 75% in some European markets. In 2021, consumer spending on physical goods ranged from 65% of total spending in Germany to 49% in Norway. For all countries, roughly half to two-thirds of their total spending went to the purchase of physical goods.

Within the physical goods category, the most-purchased item in all countries was clothing. The rest of consumer spending on physical goods is more scattered now

than it was when lockdowns made it hard for shoppers to visit grocery stores and pharmacies for supplies in 2020.

## Travel is, kind of, making a comeback

The travel category has historically been one of the most mature in the online shopping market. But now, thanks to COVID-19, it has some way to go before catching up to physical goods. Our survey shows that not everyone is ready to travel again – or, at least, to purchase travel services online. Consumer spending on travel ranged from a high of 28% of total spending in Norway to a low of 17% of total spending for Swedish consumers.

Spending in the travel industry will continue to recover as the world opens up and people become more comfortable moving around. Still, the most dominant category across most countries in the travel segment was parking and train tickets, which indicates the appetite for long-haul trips and holidays is still recovering somewhat. However, some countries like Italy, Norway, and Switzerland are seeing solid spending on flights and hotels.

## The online world still not quite at your service

There's also not too great a country-by-

country distinction in online consumer spending on services. Most spent between 13% and 25% on this category during 2021, with Italy showing more likelihood to purchase services online, compared to the lowest-percentage country in this category, Germany.

Streaming TV and movies accounted for the largest category within the services segment in all countries. Although in some countries spending is at a low of 35% in Switzerland, many regions are comfortably over 50% – with Norway the highest at 59%.

Summing up the market tendencies in 2021, it appears clear that some markets are still normalising after a year of grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise in spending on physical goods and the decline in traveling spending may still take some time to level out. But it's also likely that consumers now have greater trust in purchasing products online than before – and so it's possible many of the new trends thought to be temporary during COVID-19 in 2020 have, in fact, done something to democratise online purchases across all categories in Europe.

“For all countries, roughly half to two-thirds of their total spend went on the purchase of physical goods.”

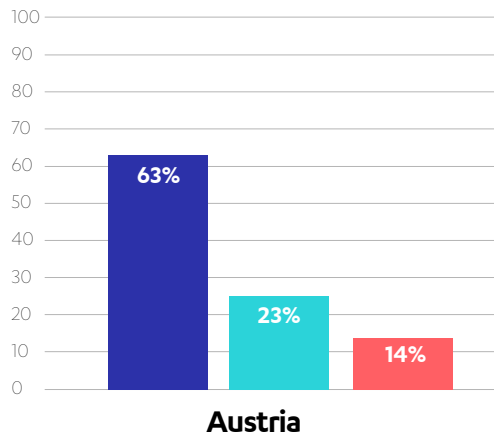
# Estimated spending in 2021

The following pages outline country-by-country insights on the spending patterns of consumers between the travel, physical goods, and online services segments. We asked consumers what they bought and how much they spent.

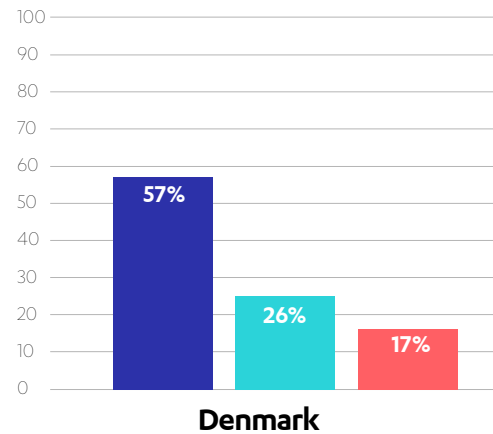


# Distribution of spending per country

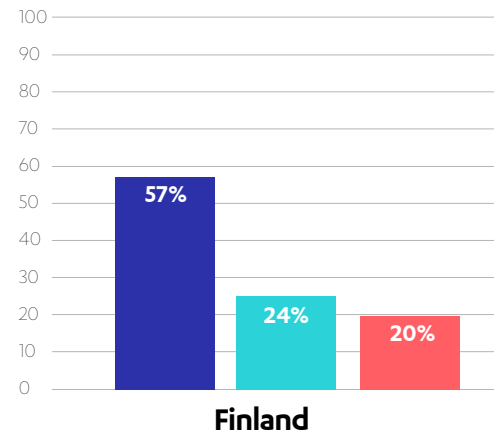
- Physical goods
- Travel
- Services



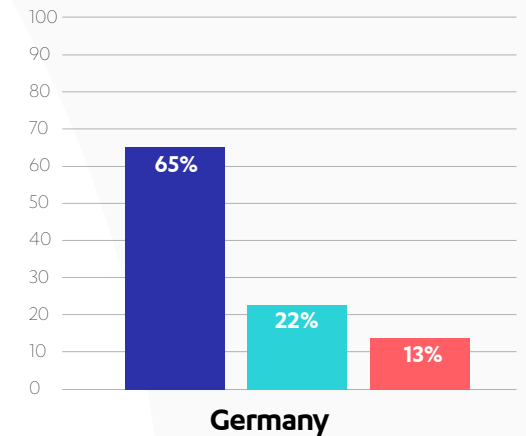
Of all the money spent online in Austria, 63% was spent on physical goods – down 5% from 2020. This category accounted for a total spending of €14.7 billion by Austrian consumers, which is €1 billion less than the year before. Within that category, clothes were purchased the most, followed by pharmacy items. Travel and services were the next largest categories. As a proportion of total spending, travel is up to 23% after slipping to 16% during the height of the pandemic, while services has dropped slightly to 14%. It's not all thrilling trips, though – within these categories, parking was still the most travel-related purchase and streaming the most-purchased digital service.



In 2019, the travel segment made up 50% of Danish online spending. This took a hit in 2020, dropping to 23%. And by 2021, it had recovered by just 3% to a total of 26% for the period. In 2021, just 5% bought flights online during the last 28 days. And the largest travel-related expense was still parking – far from a thrilling trip. Online shopping instead concentrated on physical goods, making up 57% of online spending. Within this category, Danes were particularly keen on clothes, pharmacy items, and provisions.



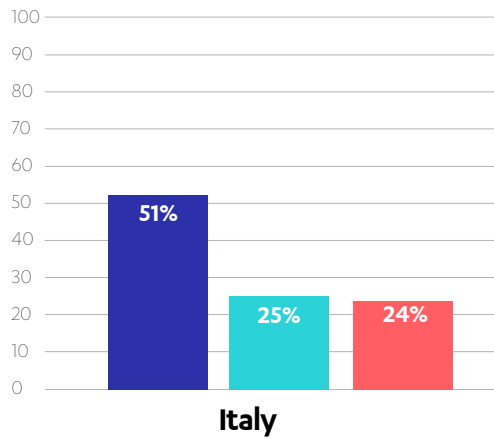
Finland kept in line with other European countries, with 57% of online spending in Finland in 2021 being on physical goods. This is just 1% lower than in 2020. Finnish consumers primarily bought clothes, takeaway, and provisions. Online spending on travel was substantially down throughout 2020, and by 2021 this gained only a few percentage points to reach 20% of total online spending in Finland. As far as online services go, Finland was still primarily spending on streaming services, which made up 38% of total services spending online. And with a proportion of total spending of 21%, the Finns seem to have found the easiest way to get through the long winters was to take to online betting – with the highest online spending in this category across all countries surveyed.



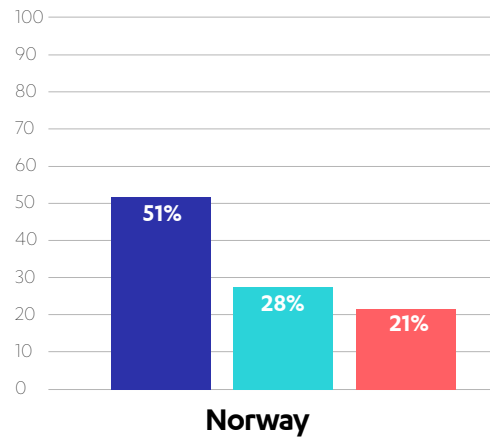
Two-thirds of the total online spending in Germany in 2021 was for physical goods, down slightly from its peak in 2020. The country that spends the most online of all those in our study spent €124.1 billion on physical goods – and most of it was on clothes. The services sector made up 13% of online spending, unchanged from 2020, with streaming services as the dominant category. Travel-related services jumped by 7% for 2021 to a 22% share of online purchases in Germany, but not on anything particularly exciting. Most of this online travel spending went toward parking, train tickets, and monthly transport cards – only after spending on these categories did the Germans decide to treat themselves to hotels and flights.

# Distribution of spending per country

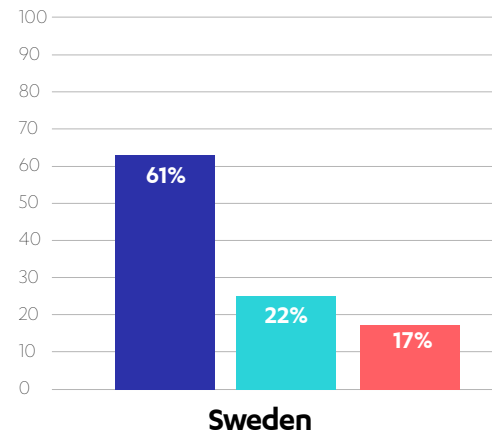
- Physical goods
- Travel
- Services



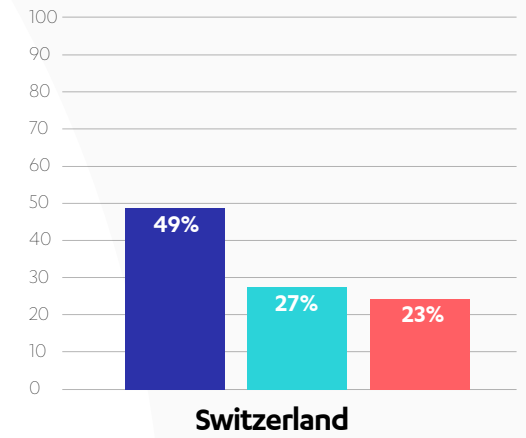
A fairly standard 51% of online spending in Italy went to physical goods. Of these, Italians lived up to their reputation of looking and feeling good – clothes and shoes together with beauty products were bought the most, followed by an even spread across other physical products. The remaining total spending was split fairly evenly between travel and digital services, at 24% and 25% respectively. Of those surveyed, Italians show the greatest appetite to return to travel. Although most spending was on train tickets and parking at 20%, flights (18%) and hotels (19%) were very close behind.



In Norway, 51% of the total e-commerce market was spent on physical products. In terms of physical goods, Norwegians mostly bought clothes, beauty products, and takeaway food. Norway's services segment captured 21% of online market spending, up slightly from 2020, with 59% of consumers buying streaming services. Online travel purchases were effectively halved in Norway in 2020, and by 2021 they'd recovered just 2% to account for a total of 28% – still 23% off its 2019 mark.



Sweden had one of the highest percentages of spending on physical goods in 2021 of all countries surveyed. This sector of the market accounted for 61% of online spending, with most people buying pharmacy items and clothes, followed by beauty products and provisions. Travel, however, was the lowest among all countries surveyed, accounting for just 17% of online spending for the period. Perhaps it's not necessary to pay for the lavish summerhouse you already own? And when it came to services, the 22% was made up mainly by streaming services, followed by insurance and online betting.



Switzerland was the only country to slip below 50% on online physical goods spending in 2021. At 49%, it represents a drop of 9% from the previous year. 46% of this spending went to clothes, with shoes (27%) and provisions (26%) the next most popular items bought online. The services segment remained unchanged at 23% of Swiss online spending, with the most-purchased online service being streaming. Travel increased to 27% of Swiss online spending. Most of this went to train tickets – which may not be all that surprising, given the cost of Swiss train travel – and parking. Spending on hotels and flights indicates something of a return to longer-haul travel.

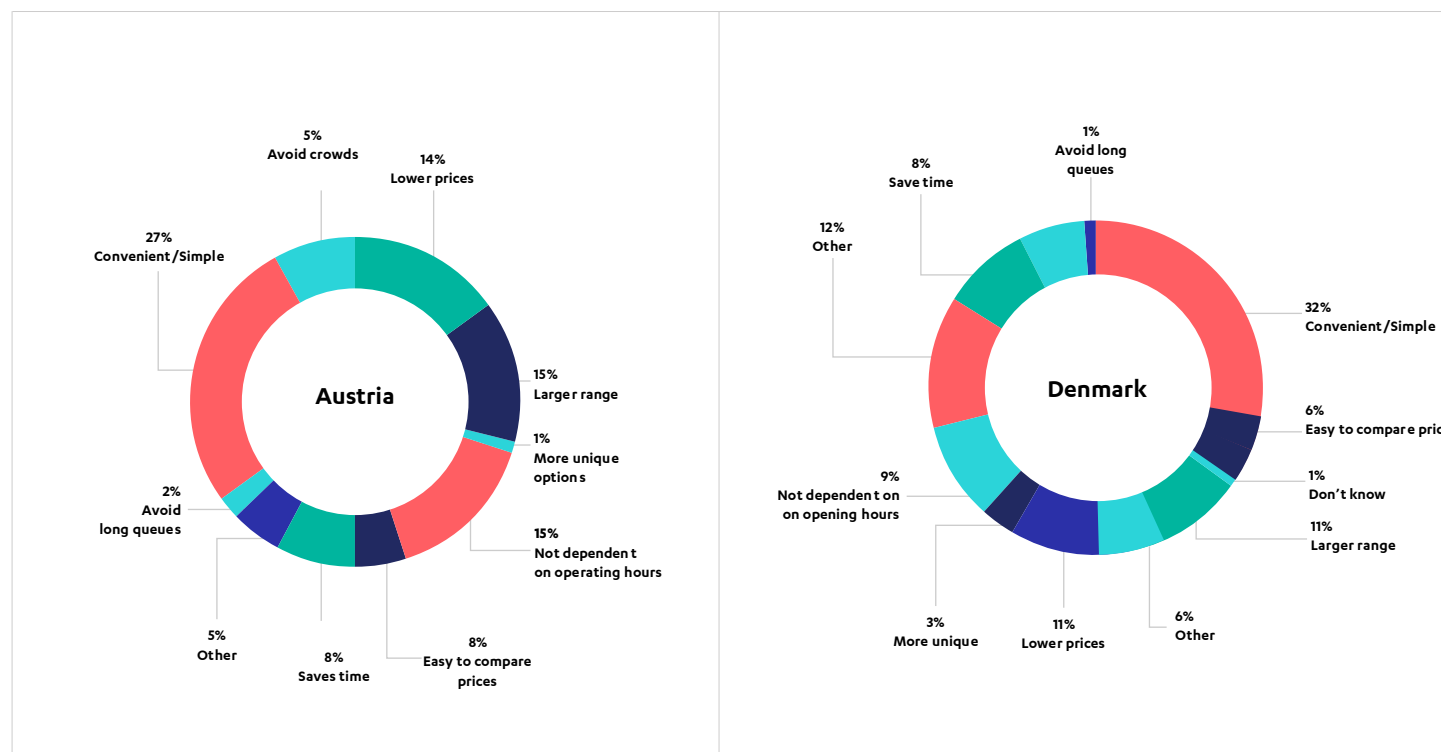
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Consumer Insights

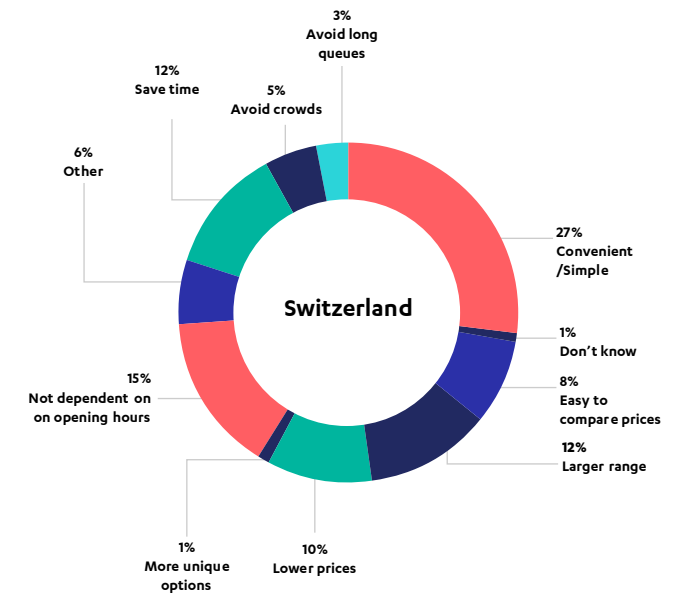
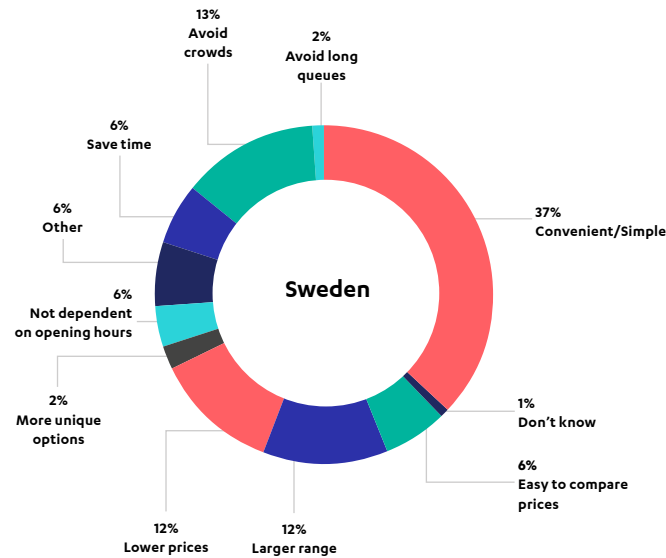
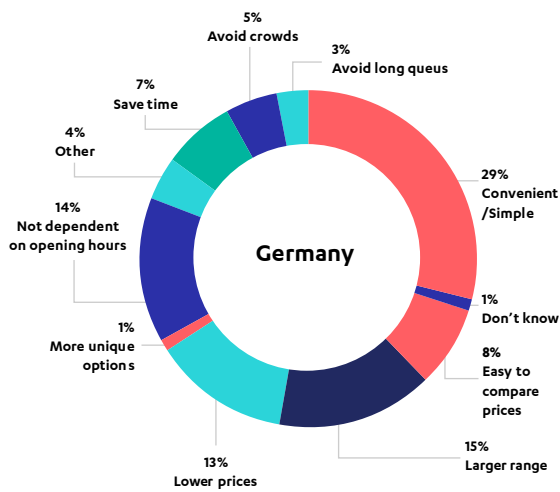
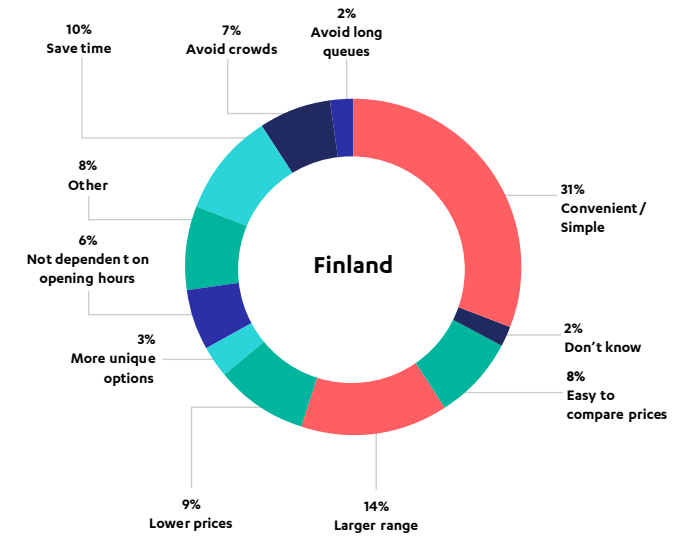
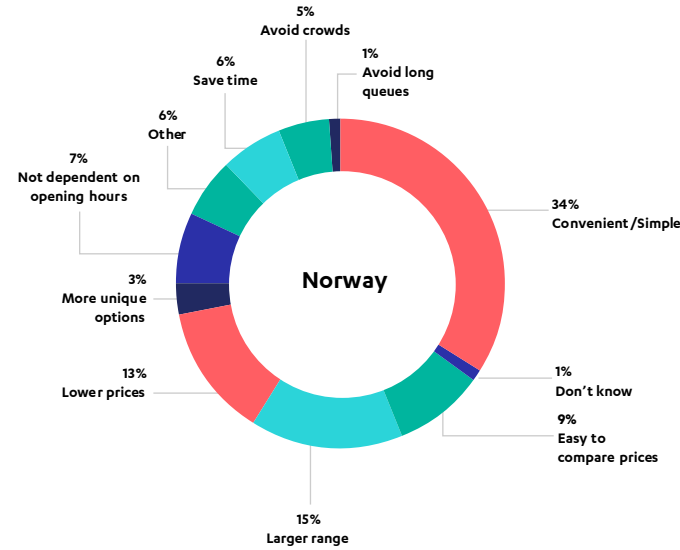
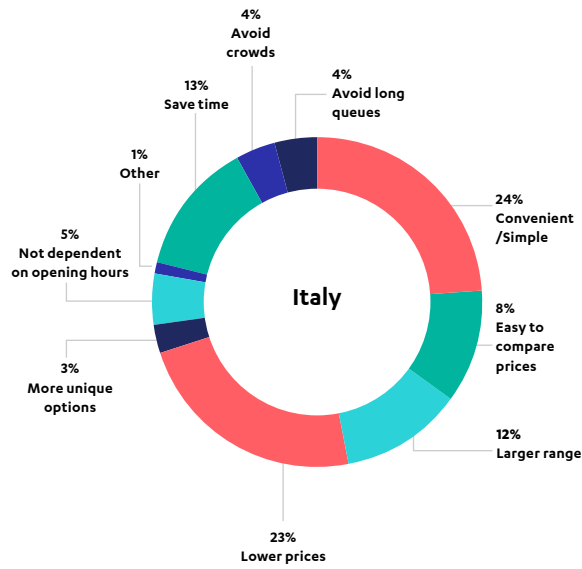
# Why are we shopping online?

There are many reasons to shop online versus visiting stores in person, and several of these reasons have become more apparent in the past two years. For consumers in Europe, the dominant reason for shopping online in 2021 remained that of convenience. As online players continue to work on streamlining their shopping experiences, more are turning to it – and even products like clothing, once thought to be the sole domain of in-person shopping, are now among the most popular products bought online.

But what do shoppers care about apart from convenience? There's no single answer that holds true for all countries surveyed, but shoppers did report a near-universal appreciation for the greater selection and lower prices often associated with online shopping. Other factors, like not having to work around store opening hours and saving time, ranked high in some countries.

As for less momentous reasons, more unique products, avoiding long queues, and, surprisingly in a post-COVID world, avoiding crowds were not major reasons to shop online in Europe.



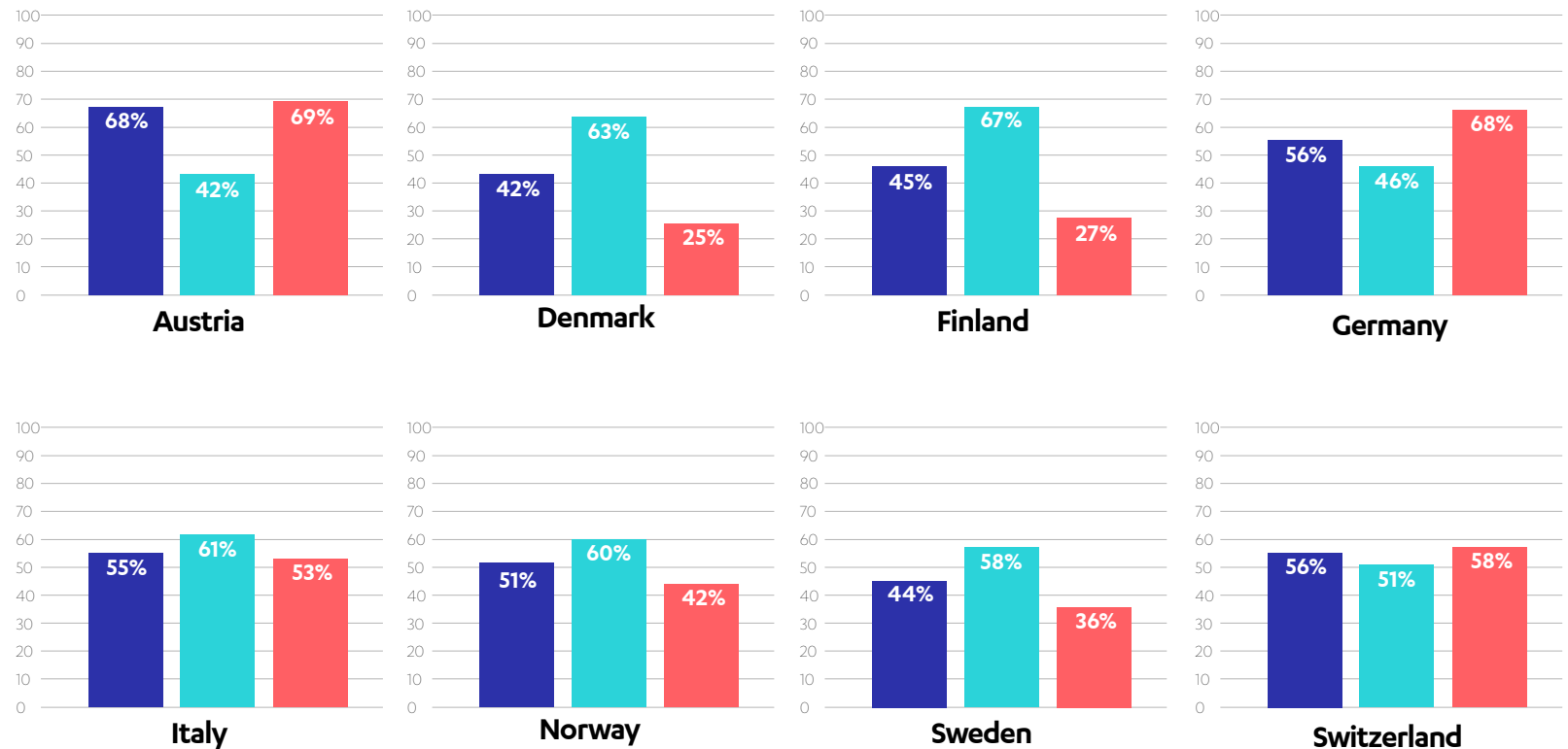


# How are we using cards online?

Bank cards are the conventional way to pay for goods online – and yet, in many markets today, they have a surprisingly low usage and preference rate. We already know that shoppers want to use payment solutions that are fast, simple, and secure – and saving credit card details on web shops meets at least two of these criteria.

- I have saved my card details at least once at a web shop
- I don't feel safe storing my card details with an online store
- I prefer that my card details are saved when I shop at web shops

Yet, in most markets, only around 50% of shoppers have saved their credit card details at least once in a web shop. Many say they don't feel safe storing details with an online store, with a minority in most markets say they prefer storing credit card details with online stores. Of the markets surveyed, only Austria is the clear outlier where users trust stores with online credit card details. Most other countries agree they'd rather play it safe.



# What we learned from online shoppers in 2021

Few would have predicted the impact that the coronavirus pandemic would have on online shopping in 2020 – and it seems as if its impact on the sector isn't through yet. COVID-19 accelerated the digitisation of consumer behaviour, a trend that only continued in 2021.

It now seems likely that many of the changes introduced by the pandemic to online shopping will be here to stay for some time. And it's the e-commerce merchants who identify these and respond accordingly who stand to benefit the most from the seismic shifts within the industry.

These are the key factors we believe merchants should keep an eye on:

## Resilience is key

Travel was a particularly mature market prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It pulled in billions of euros per year and often had dominance of up to 50% of total online spending in some markets. Almost overnight, this came to an end – and this spending was rerouted into other products like clothing, food, and streaming services. Travel will return – it's already showing signs of doing so in some online markets in Europe – so in many cases, it's a question of weathering the storm and showing resilience. But diversity, innovation, and removing all the pain points can help ease unpredictable turns like this.

## Convenience is (still) king

The primary reason consumers were

shopping online in 2021 is because it's simple and convenient – and stores that can enhance this aspect of the experience stand to win the most. Our survey showed that shoppers don't necessarily mind queuing and crowds – but at the same time, they value online stores that take the hassle out of shopping. A seamless shopping experience, from product selection to payment, shipping, and returns, will likely stand any merchant in good stead among competitors. Any sticking points and shoppers will be quick to go elsewhere.

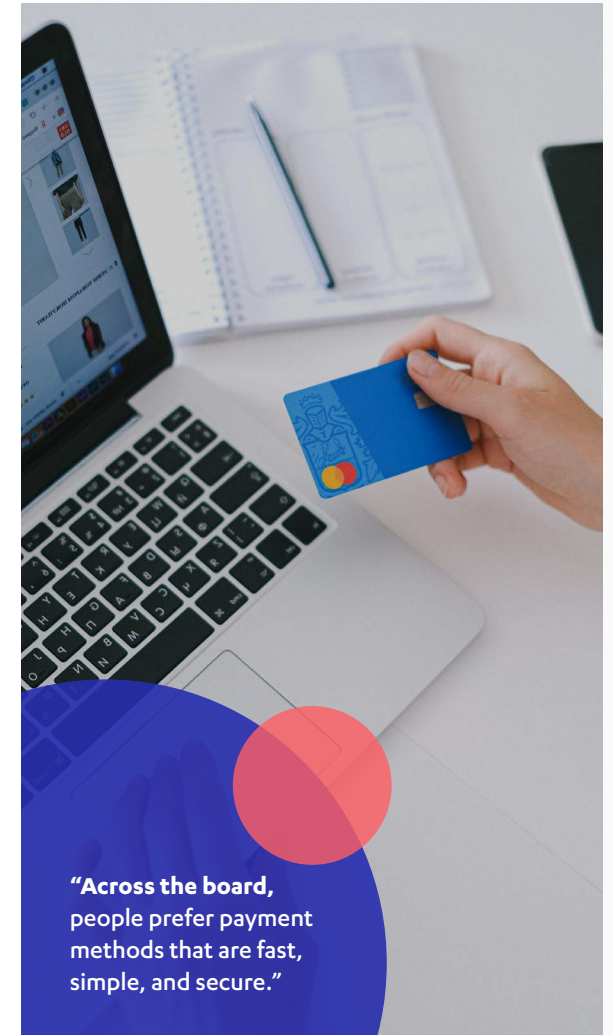
## Shipping costs and transparency matter

Merchants will know the frustration of abandoned carts. In many cases, abandoned carts will leave you scratching your head as to why a shopper will go to all the trouble of lining up their items only to drop them all at the last minute. Fortunately, our survey revealed that many of the primary reasons why shoppers abandoned carts in the past are fairly easy to fix. Most critically: online shoppers value convenience and transparency, which means if you charge too much for shipping and attempt to hide this until the final step of the process, there's a good chance you'll lose them as customers. Nordic countries are the least tolerant of this, with 33% of Norwegians

citing this as a reason for the last purchase they abandoned online. But Finland (28%), Denmark (26%), and Sweden (25%) weren't all that far behind.

## Payment preferences are surprisingly regional

Across the board, people prefer payment methods that are fast, simple, and secure. Yet, despite the inherently universal nature of online shopping and payments, it's clear that there's still not necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution for the industry, particularly when it comes to processing payments. Many European countries show preferences for different methods – with some embracing new technology and others sticking to what's worked for them previously. And given how big of an impact our payment methods have on abandoned carts – up to 17% in Germany and 15% in Switzerland – merchants who neglect this aspect of their online business do so at their own peril. Ultimately, payment methods must add to the convenience factor. Offering as many payment methods as possible while focusing specific attention on those most prevalent in the regional market appears to be a good approach.



**“Across the board, people prefer payment methods that are fast, simple, and secure.”**



03  
**Preferred Payments**



# Preferred Payments - Austria

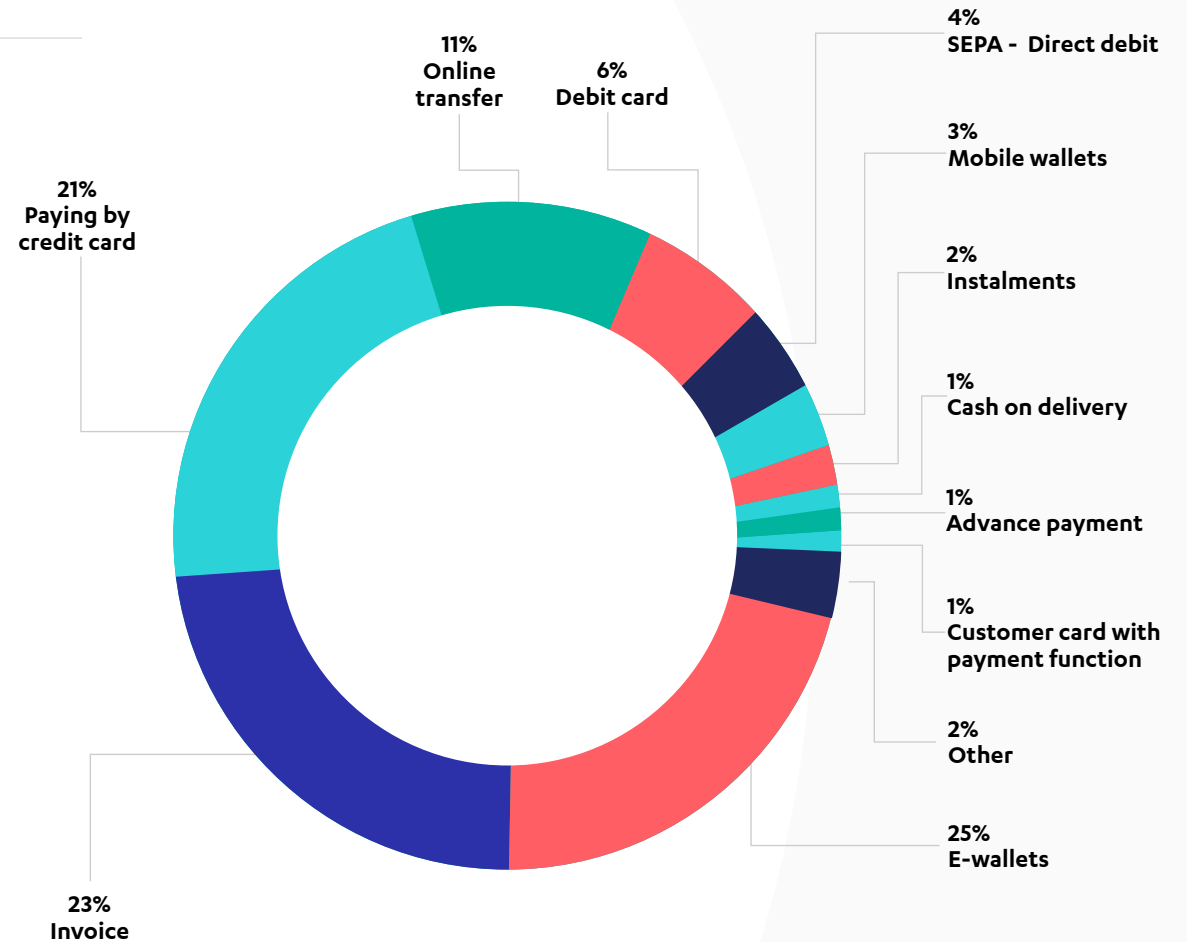
It's almost a dead heat for preferred online payment methods in Austria. E-wallets, credit cards, and invoice payments were dominant in 2020, and they remained as such in 2021.

Online transfers come in a distant fourth place, and everything else barely registers. The reasons Austrians pick the payment methods they do primarily comes down to simplicity and security, with speed also factoring highly.

In Austria, the top three preferred online payment methods are as close as they were last year. 25% prefer to use e-wallets, which is up against invoices (23%) and credit cards (21%).

Austrian shoppers choose these methods due to three factors: simplicity (50%), security (48%), and speed (40%).

In practice, credit cards are still dominant in the marketplace at 44% usage. Invoices (37%), e-wallets (36%), and online transactions (33%) make up the bulk of usage.



# Preferred Payments - Denmark

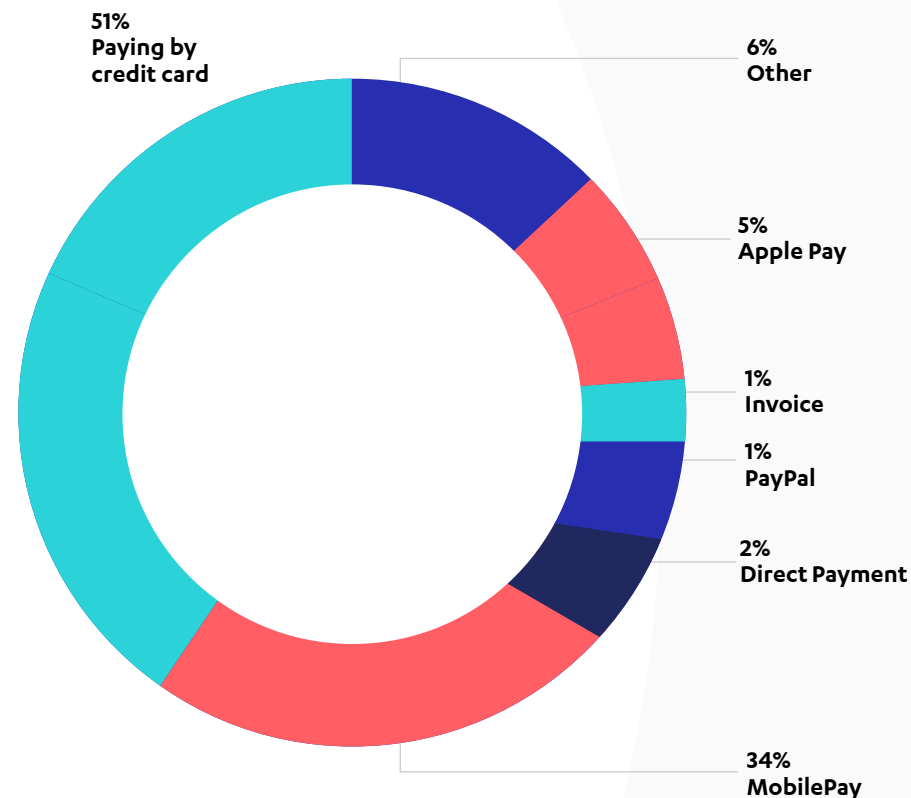
Denmark is still a nation of dedicated card users, with one of the strongest leads for this payment type across Europe. Behind the humble card is MobilePay, with no other method even reaching double figures after that. The reason behind this popularity? In first place, simplicity, followed by security and speed.

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2021 in Denmark was still the year of the card, at least when it came to online payments. 51% of Danes prefer cards over any other online payment method. Only MobilePay comes close, at 34%, and everything else is left floundering in single figures.

The reason behind this choice? Simplicity – for the most part. 58% said simple is best when it comes to online payment in Denmark. Security (48%) and speed (40%) came in second and third.

These figures are mirrored in real-world usage, too. 85% of Danes use cards, followed by 60% using MobilePay. PayPal is the only other payment method that reaches double figures, and only just, at 11%.



# Preferred Payments - Finland

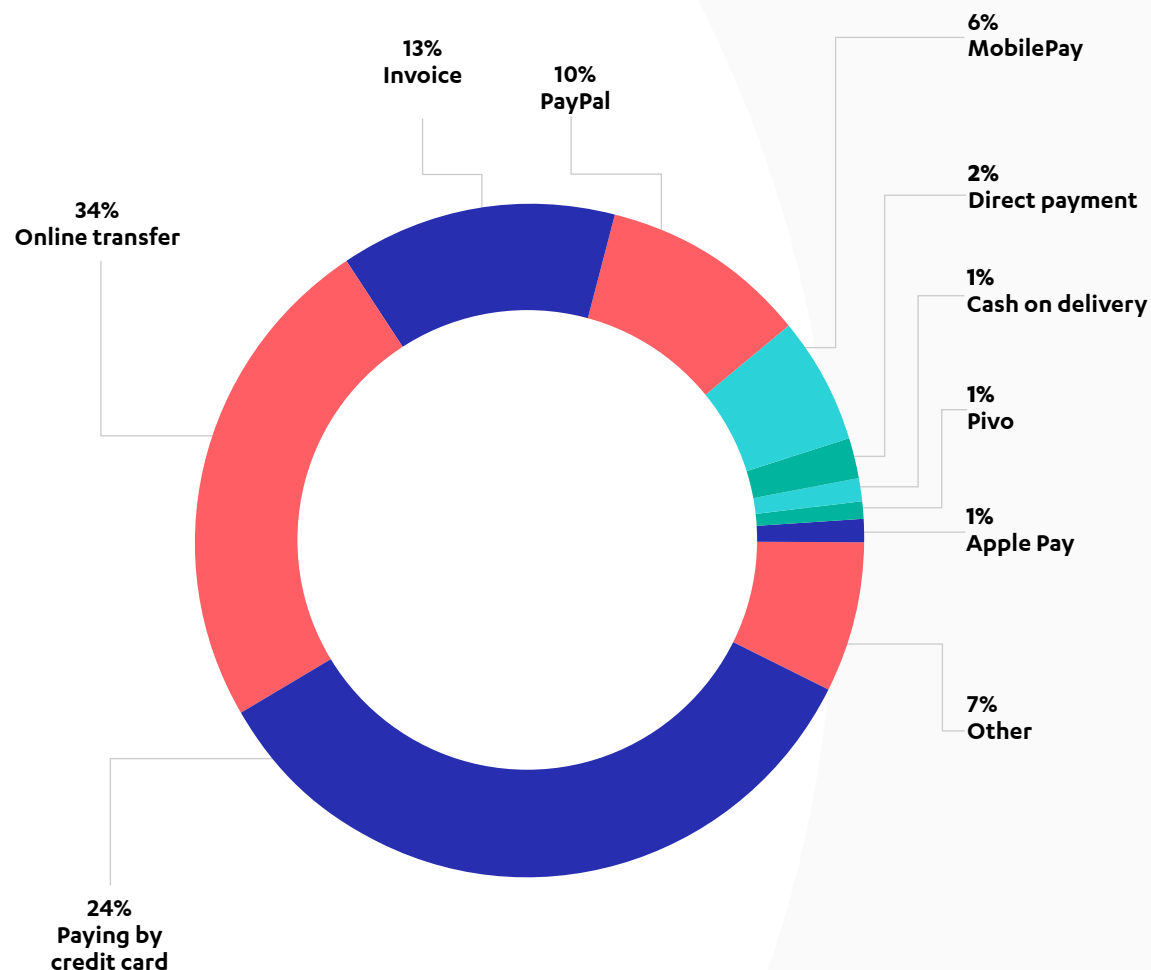
When it comes to online shopping, Finns still appreciate traditional transaction technology in the form of online banking payments. Cards aren't all that far behind, but other newer payment methods like invoices, PayPal, and MobilePay still have a lot of ground to make up.

When it comes to online shopping, Finns still appreciate traditional transaction technology in the form of online banking payments. Cards aren't all that far behind, but other newer payment methods like invoices, PayPal, and MobilePay still have a lot of ground to make up. Finnish shoppers place security and simplicity as the most important factors behind online payment preferences, with speed and force of habit bringing up the rear.

Online banking is the dominant payment method in Finland. 34% of Finns prefer this method over anything else, with cards (25%) and invoices (13%) not far behind. PayPal is still hanging around, with 10% saying it's their preference.

Security is the deciding factor when it comes to online payment methods in Finland – 46% said this was their reason for picking a specific payment method. 41% choose based on simplicity, followed by 26% who put speed first.

In practice, online banking also reigns supreme with 60% usage. 48% use cards and 24% use the good old invoice method.



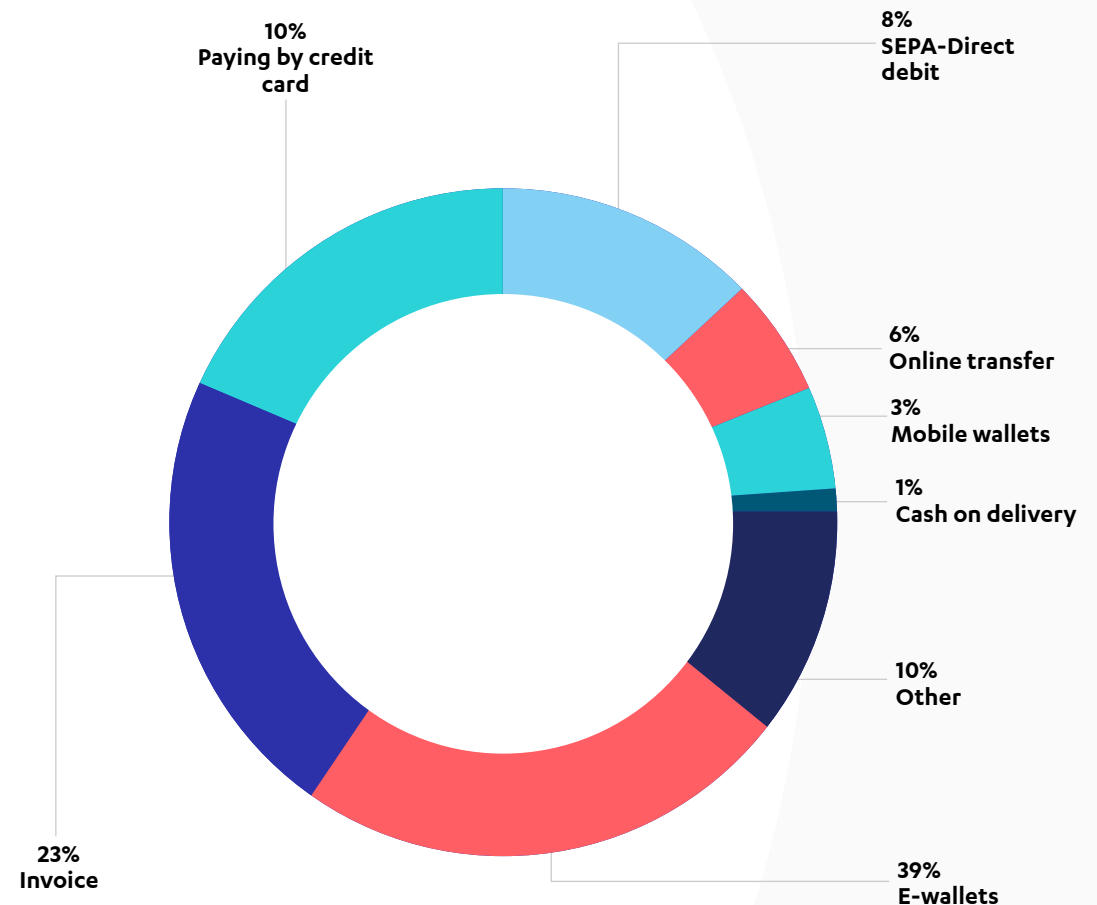
# Preferred Payments - Germany

When given a choice, Germans will almost always opt for e-wallets. This relatively new payment method trumps invoices, and even credit cards, by a good deal. And they do it because they believe it's secure, simple, and fast.

E-wallets are comfortably the most-preferred payment method in Germany. 39% said this was their preferred way to pay for goods and services online. Invoice (23%) and credit card (10%) lag some way behind on the preference scale.

And the primary reasons? Germans believe e-wallets to be both the simplest and the most secure method – at 52% each. In comparison, speed (44%) came in a close third.

When it comes to actual payments, e-wallets also dominate, with 48% usage. Apart from e-wallets, 37% use invoices, 27% SEPA direct debits, 27% credit cards, and 23% online transfers.



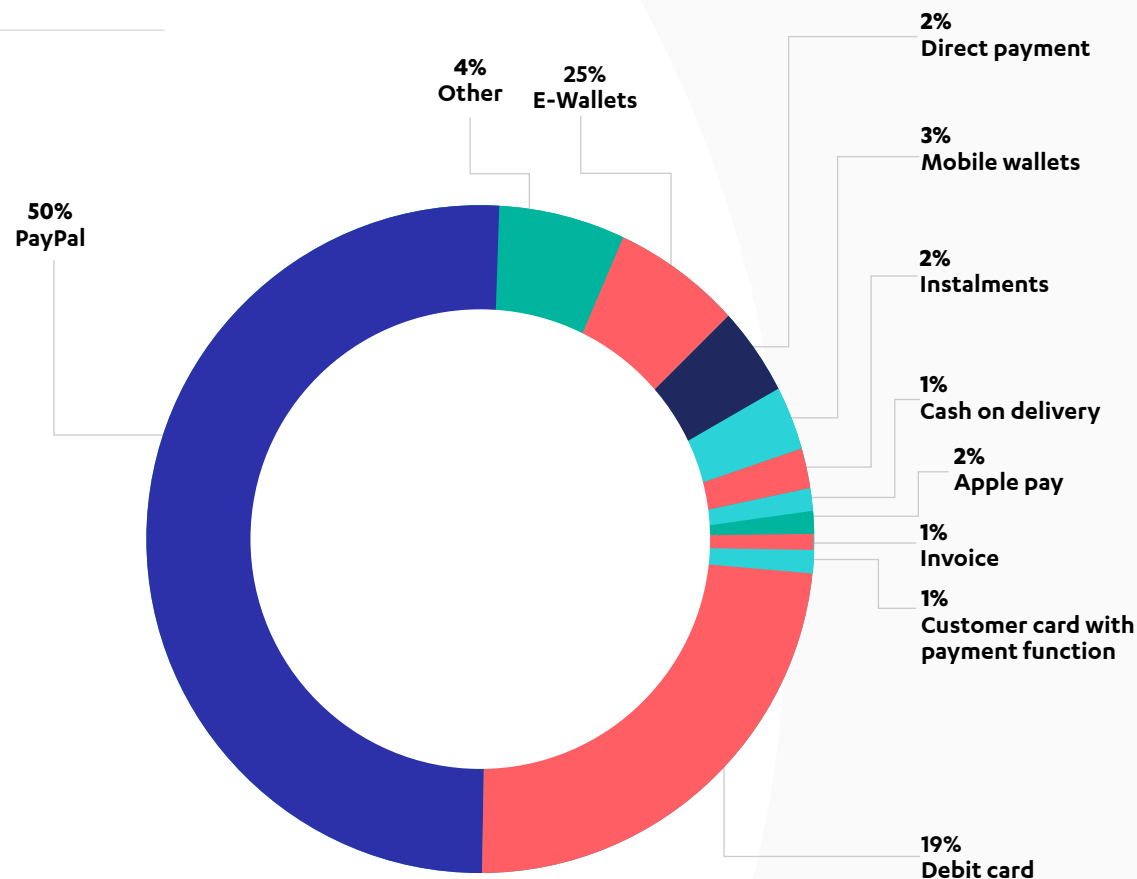
# Preferred Payments - Italy

Italy has a curious love for PayPal when it comes to online payment methods, with only debit cards making any real play for the lead. Everything else languishes behind in the single figures. The reason, it appears, is a lot of faith put in the payment gateway's security, while speed and simplicity factor much lower.

Italians have a marked preference for one of the internet's earliest payment gateways, PayPal. 50% say this is their preferred method over debit cards (19%). Nothing else – from e-wallets to MobilePay – even comes close to featuring.

The reason for this payment method's popularity is its security, with 58% citing this as a critical factor. More than 10% behind are the next most important factors, speed (45%) and simplicity (44%).

These figures check out in practice, too. PayPal in Italy sees 55% usage, followed by debit cards at 37%, with cash on delivery (11%) and e-wallets (10%), the next-strongest competitors. Interestingly, cash on delivery is a method not even considered in the survey for other markets – but it appears as if some Italians prefer to keep it old school.



# Preferred Payments - Norway

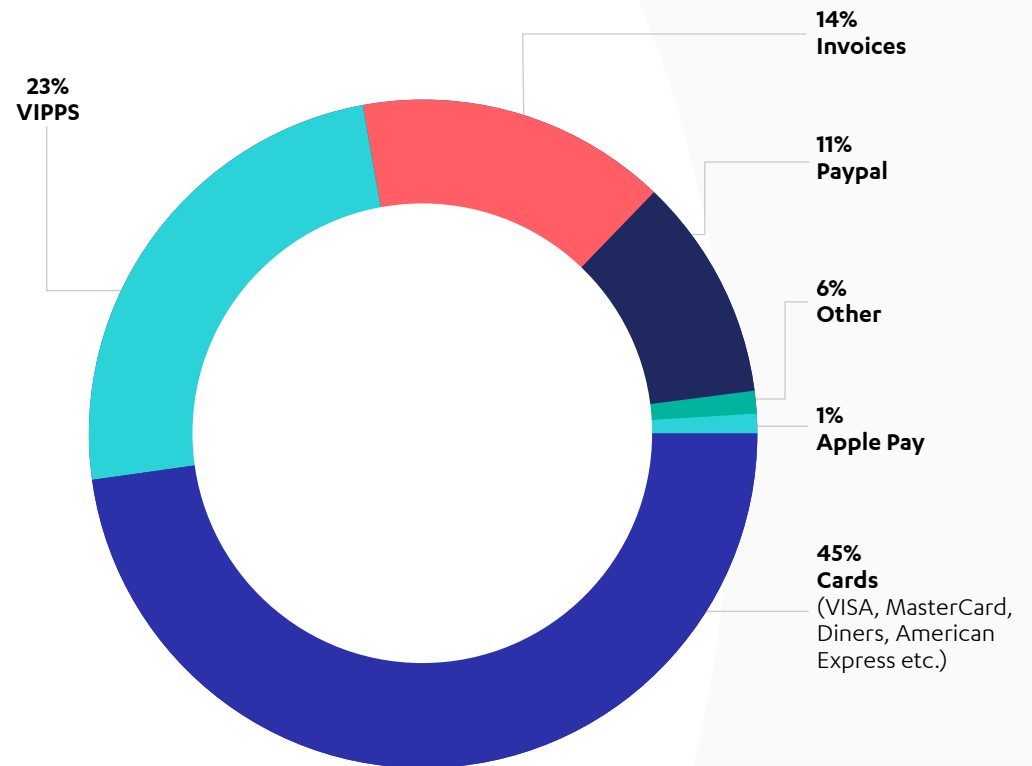
Norwegians still prefer to keep it simple and secure with traditional card payments. Anything else is still lagging a long way behind. Speed is also not a huge factor in Norway – far more important are security and simplicity.

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45% of Norwegians prefer to keep it traditional with card payments. Vipps comes in second, with 23% preferring this method. Invoice (14%) has slipped a few points ahead of PayPal (11%) as the next most popular.

The most crucial factors in choosing a payment method in Norway are security (53%) and simplicity (48%). Speed is only a factor for 32% of shoppers.

When it comes to actual usage, cards dominate by a significant margin at 80%. Vipps still has a wide reach at 56%, while invoice (28%) and PayPal (23%) are far behind in online payment reach in Norway.



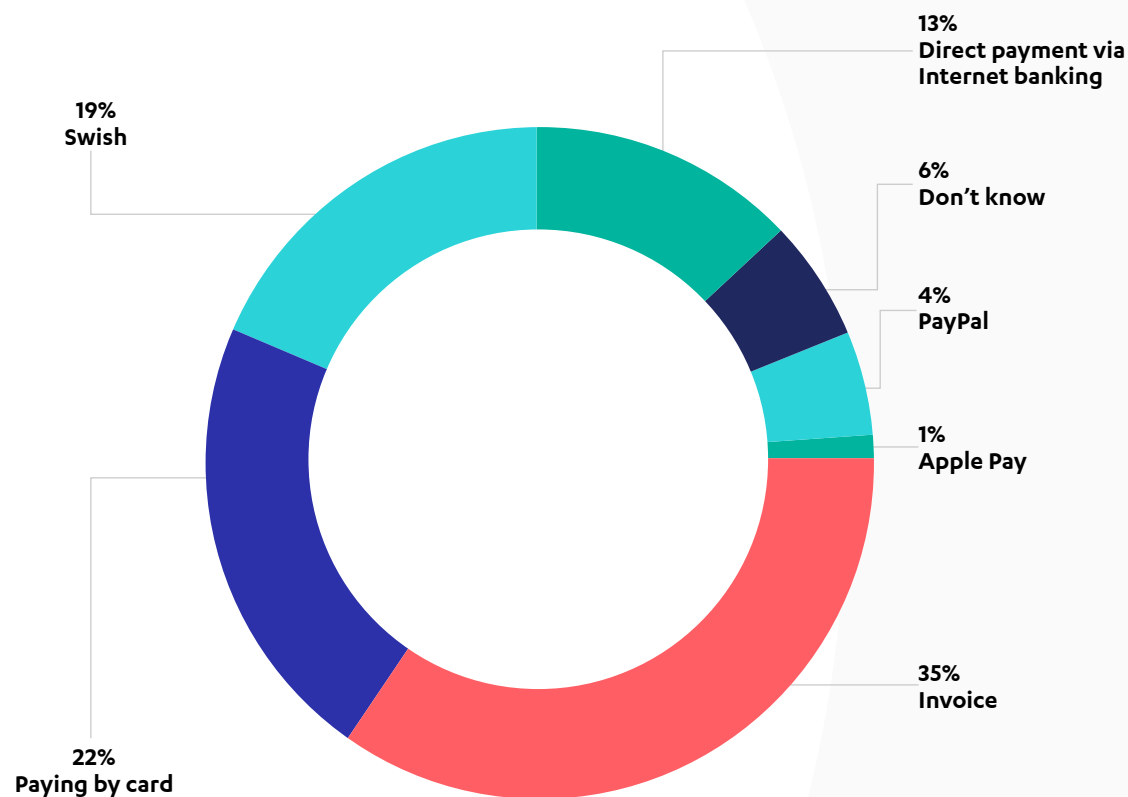
# Preferred Payments - Sweden

The Swedes appear to be broadly content with their existing payment methods and have fairly low preference rates, though with a clear winner in invoicing and a close race between card and Swish for second place. Simplicity is the primary reason behind online payment choices, with security not far behind. Speed, however, is not an issue when it comes to paying online in Sweden.

Just over one-third of Swedes prefer invoicing when it comes to online payments, while 22% will opt for a debit or credit card. Not far behind is the app-based Swish, with 19%.

As for reasons why, it's neck-and-neck between simplicity (47%) and security (46%), while speed is the next biggest factor at 30%.

When it comes to actual usage, cards still dominate in Sweden, at 57%. Swish isn't far behind with 52%, and invoice is still in the running with 46%.



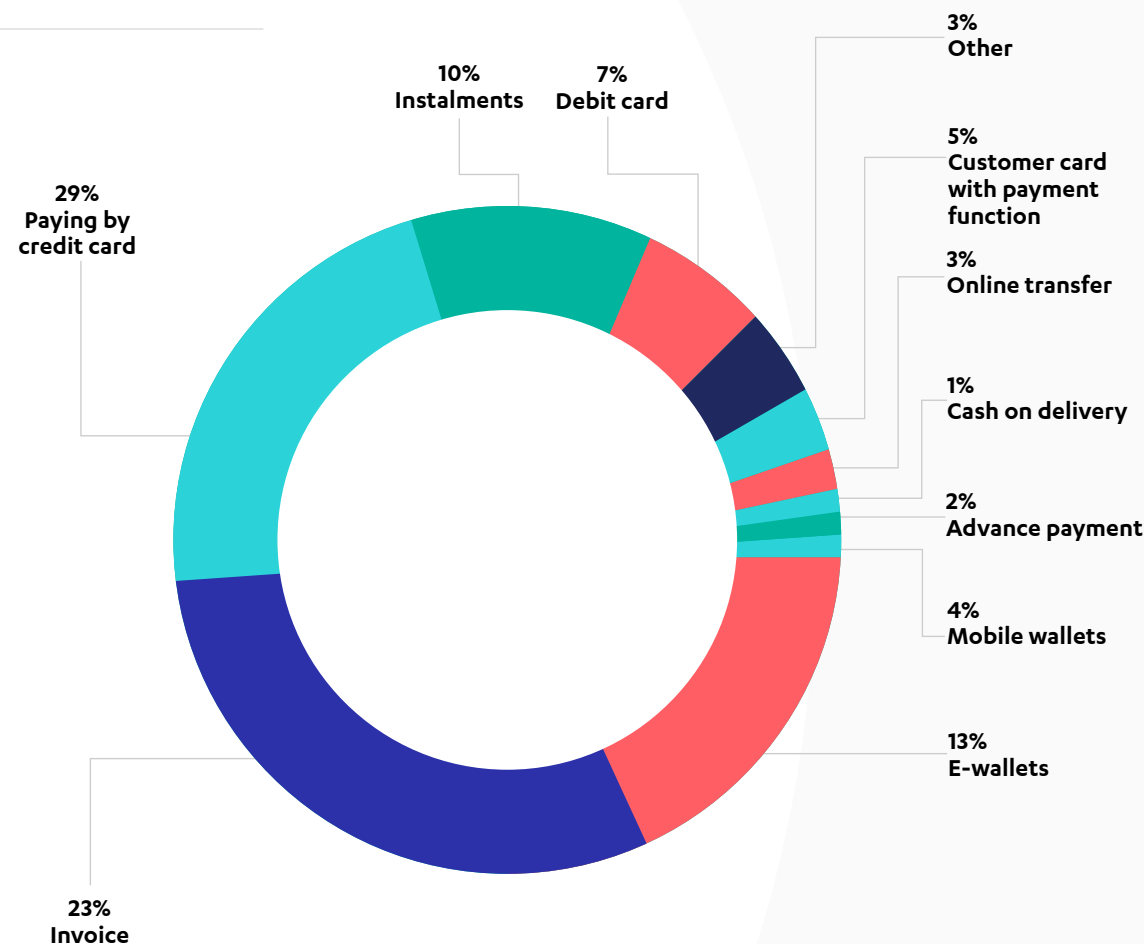
# Preferred Payments - Switzerland

The Swiss are still all about credit cards and a fair bit of invoicing, too. Although e-wallets feature in the top three, there's still little competition at the top. Switzerland is also less concerned with a payment method being fast and secure – instead, simplicity is one of the key deciding factors.

30% of the Swiss prefer to use credit cards over any other form of online payment. In second place is invoice, with 23%. And only just making it into double figures, and the top three, are e-wallets with 13%.

The reasons the Swiss prefer these methods are intriguing, too. A payment method that is fast (37%) is less important than one that is secure (39%). But the most important factor in online payment preference is one that is simple, at 46%.

These figures are matched in payment type usage in Switzerland. 29% of shoppers use e-wallets, and 44% use invoices. But, far and away, the online payment method with the widest usage in Switzerland is the traditional credit card, with 62%.

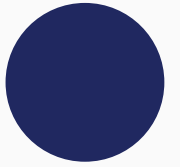




04  
**Methodology**



# Methodology



The Nexi e-commerce report analyses the challenges, conditions and opportunities for e-commerce in 8 European countries. It reveals trends, statistics and buying habits of how various demographics shop online and demonstrate their preferences.

The report is based on results from surveys conducted by Kantar / Sifo on behalf of Nets, part of Nexi Group in the form of 50 weekly interviews among 15 000 internet users. Respondents throughout Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy participated in the research.

Estimates of total online consumption are based on the median value times the number of people shopping online in each category. The advantage of this method is that the median is less sensitive to extreme fluctuations as to provide a more accurate picture of typical consumer behaviour.

Respondents were taken from each region's local population, in the age group of 18 -79 year-olds who have internet access.

These respondents were compared to the same age groups based on data taken from

internetworldstats.com from June 2021. Each response was weighted by age, gender and region, and takes into account accumulated composition. Habits of each user were based on their activity over the previous 28 days.

The data contained in this report cannot be directly compared with data collected using another method.

# nexi

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Learn more about the local markets in the country reports.



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