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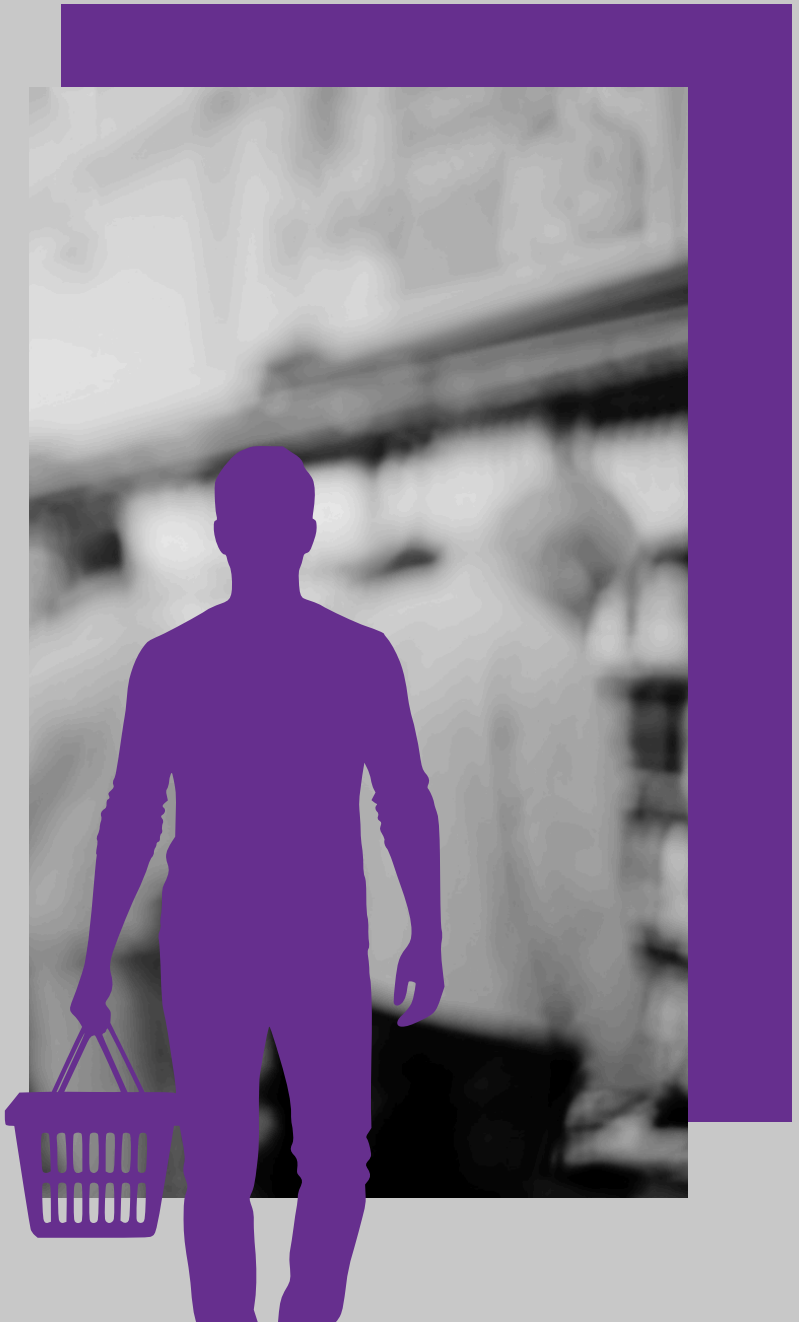
The Omnichannel Grocery Journey :

Understanding the Modern Path to Purchase*



*Based on findings from Acosta Group Europe's The Why? Behind The Buy™ UK Edition.

About this report:



The Omnichannel Grocery Journey is the second white paper in **'The Future of UK Grocery Shopping' series**. It draws on selected findings from the wider 'Why? Behind the Buy™' research to explore how shoppers move interchangeably between digital and physical retail throughout the grocery journey.

About the Research:
The Why? Behind the Buy™ UK Edition is based on a custom survey of 946 UK shoppers, fielded in August 2026. The research explored the grocery and household shopping journey, including channel choice, affordability, promotional behaviour, digital shopping, brand and private-label decisions, and food-away-from-home trends.

Analysis and reporting were completed by the Acosta Group Shopper Insights US team, working in collaboration with Acosta Group Europe, with the UK sample sourced externally.

About Acosta Group Europe:
Acosta Group Europe is a leading sales and marketing agency empowering brands and retailers to win in the modern marketplace. With a deep understanding of the retail landscape across the UK and Europe, Acosta Group Europe offers comprehensive solutions designed to drive growth, enhance efficiency, and connect consumers with the brands they love.

Executive Summary:

Physical and digital shopping are increasingly interconnected:
Shoppers are moving interchangeably between online and in-store touchpoints, using each to meet different needs throughout the grocery journey.

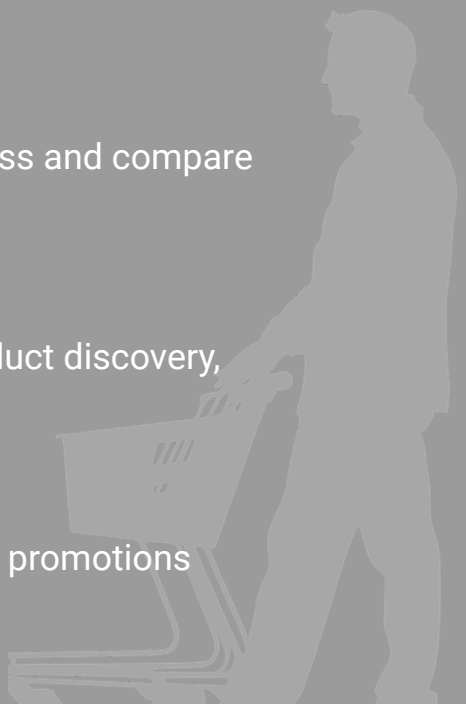
The grocery trip increasingly starts before the store:
Lists, retailer apps, vouchers and online price comparisons are helping shoppers plan and shape decisions before the physical or digital shop begins.

Retailer apps are becoming shopping companions:
Digital tools now support shoppers before and during physical trips, providing access to rewards, deals, vouchers, availability and product information.

Online shoppers want information and control:
Search, filtering, detailed product content and saved lists are making it easier for shoppers to find, assess and compare products digitally.

Discovery happens across multiple touchpoints:
Retailer websites and apps, recommendations, social media and physical displays all contribute to product discovery, making the path to purchase increasingly fluid.

Seamless journeys require physical and digital to work together:
For brands and retailers, omnichannel success depends on connecting product information, availability, promotions and execution across every stage of the journey.



The Myth of Online Replacing Stores

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The modern grocery journey is no longer defined by a choice between online and offline. Shoppers move interchangeably between the two, using digital and physical touchpoints in combination as they plan, browse and buy.

Physical stores continue to play a central role in UK grocery shopping, while online channels provide additional convenience, efficiency and choice. The result is a more fluid path to purchase, where a shopper might research digitally, buy physically, and reorder online after finding the best price at a different retailer.

96%
of shoppers shop grocery multiples (major supermarket chains)

40%
shop through grocery retailers' online websites or apps.

33%
use online-only retailers.

The online shopper story:

Among the 517 online shoppers in our research...

- **45% regularly shop online but still do most shopping in stores.**
- **25% shop online occasionally.**
- **Only 3% said they had bought online once or twice and would not do so again.**

The role each channel plays:

Online/ecommerce is preferred for:

- Convenience
- Easier comparisons
- Time saving
- Home delivery
- Avoiding crowds

Physical retail remains stronger for:

- Browsing
- Personally inspecting products
- Discovery
- Asessing freshness
- Inspiration

32%
of online shoppers enjoy shopping online more than physical stores.

44%
prefer physical stores

The store has not lost its role. Its role is evolving. Digital wins when shoppers prioritise speed, convenience and information; physical retail remains particularly valuable when shoppers want to browse, discover and assess the product for themselves.

The Trip Begins Before the Store

The omnichannel journey often starts before the shopper enters a store or retailer website. Lists are written, vouchers checked, apps opened and prices compared while the basket is still being planned. For brands and retailers, this creates an important shift in influence. The battle for consideration can begin before the shopper encounters either the physical shelf or digital product page.

Before a physical trip:



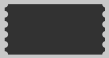
62%
make a paper shopping list.



39%
check online vouchers



39%
check store app



31%
check paper vouchers



27%
compare prices online



27%
make a digital shopping list.

Before an online order:



56%
check online vouchers



51%
check the store app



50%
compare prices online



37%
make a digital list



27%
make a paper list

The preparation differs according to the type of trip, but digital influence is present across both. Even a journey that ends in a physical supermarket is increasingly supported by digital information beforehand.

Retailer Apps Become Shopping Companions

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The retailer app increasingly bridges the gap between digital and physical shopping. It may begin as a planning tool at home, but for many shoppers its role continues once they cross the store threshold.

54%
access a retailer grocery app as a digital planning tool before a brick-and-mortar trip.

62%
access one before online ordering.

What happens inside the store?

Among the **805 respondents** with a retailer app downloaded, usage while shopping is frequent:

58% access a retailer app on most or every physical-store trip.

25% access a retailer app on every physical-store trip.
33% use one on most trips.
27% on some trips.
10% rarely.
5% never.



What are shoppers doing in the app?

43% check loyalty rewards.
30% check product availability.
24% compare product prices across stores or websites.
21% look up product reviews.
20% check additional product information.

The smartphone creates a digital layer over the physical store. A shopper standing in an aisle can simultaneously assess loyalty rewards, promotional offers, stock availability, competing prices and product information.

The physical shelf is therefore no longer competing only with the product next to it. It exists alongside a digital information environment that can change the decision in real time.

What makes a great online experience?

Online grocery shopping removes some of the physical cues shoppers rely on in store. The quality of the digital experience must therefore compensate by making products easy to find, evaluate, compare and repurchase.

Our research suggests that shoppers place greatest value on features that provide information and control, rather than those that simply automate the decision.

Most helpful features among online shoppers:

88% find detailed product descriptions and images extremely or somewhat helpful.

83% find price/brand filtering helpful.

77% find loyalty programme integration helpful.

76% find product reviews helpful.

74% find alerts on usual purchases helpful.

66% find side-by-side product comparison helpful.

The highest-performing tools help shoppers:

- See detailed product information
- Compare price and brand filters
- Save through loyalty integration and alerts
- Find through Search and filtering
- Remember saved lists and reordering

> **Shoppers don't necessarily want the platform to make their decisions. They want it to make decisions easier.**

Search Is the New Digital Aisle

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Online shoppers know where to go.
When they begin an order...

34% go straight to the website search bar.

19% use dropdown menus for departments, categories or brands.

15% look at specials, promotions or deals on the homepage first.

9% navigate through occasions or mealtimes.

9% check their account for previous orders, deals or alerts.

7% start by reordering previous items

One-third of shoppers begin online grocery trips through direct search, suggesting that digital visibility increasingly depends on being easy to find when the shopper already has an item, category or brand in mind.

However, the homepage still matters. Promotions, deals, account information and product navigation can intercept shoppers before the basket starts to form.



Where Discovery Happens Today...

Shopping may be increasingly planned, but discovery has not disappeared. Instead, shoppers encounter new products through a mix of retailer-owned media, recommendations, physical retail and external channels.



41% retailer website or app.



41% friends or family recommendations.



39% promotional shelves.



30% displays or aisle ends.



25% retailer emails.



22% social media.

Digital discovery

- Retailer sites/apps
- Retailer email
- Brand websites
- Social media

Physical discovery

- Promotional shelves
- Gondola ends/displays
- Signage
- Store leaflets

Human discovery

- Friends and family

There is no single discovery channel.

A shopper might hear about a product through a friend, investigate it through a retailer app and finally encounter it on a promotional display in store.
That is true omnichannel behaviour.

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Fulfilment Is Part of the Experience

Convenience is not one thing. For some shoppers it means reliable home delivery; for others it is collection, immediacy or the predictability of a subscription.

The final mile therefore forms part of the omnichannel experience rather than simply representing the last operational step.

Among online shoppers:

79% have used store home delivery.

42% have used postal/carrier home delivery.

35% have picked up an order from a store or other location.

28% have used an on-demand service such as Deliveroo or Uber Eats.

21% have used speedy delivery.

16% have used scheduled subscription delivery.

There's an interesting generational / customer story too:

- Store pickup rises to 54% among higher-income shoppers and 45% among Gen Z.
- On-demand delivery reaches 52% among Gen Z and 50% in London.
- Scheduled subscription reaches 36% among higher-income shoppers

Convenience is not one thing. For some shoppers it means reliable home delivery; for others it is collection, immediacy or the predictability of a subscription.

Stock Visibility Connects Digital and Physical

60%

have checked product availability online or through a retailer app before going to the store.

57%

say they can be put off an item or brand when it is consistently unavailable.

Solutions shoppers say would reduce frustration include:

- Real-time stock updates
- Back-in-stock notifications
- Suggested substitutes
- Discounts or vouchers for substitutes
- Discounts or vouchers when products become available again.

Stock visibility demonstrates why omnichannel cannot be treated as separate physical and digital experiences. Digital information creates an expectation about the physical store. When that expectation is not met, the failure is experienced as one broken journey.



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What brands must do next

1. Win before the trip starts:

Product visibility, promotions, availability and retailer-app presence can influence the purchase before the shopper reaches the shelf.

2. Treat the app as part of the physical store:

Apps are increasingly used in the aisle for rewards, deals, vouchers, availability, comparisons and product information. The digital and physical experience should therefore reinforce one another.

3. Make the digital shelf work harder

Detailed product information, imagery, filters and saved lists rank among the most useful online-shopping tools. Product content therefore needs to help shoppers make confident decisions when physical inspection is unavailable.

4. Be discoverable when intent is highest

With 34% of online shoppers going straight to search, brands need to consider how easily products appear when shoppers search by product, category or brand.

5. Connect discovery across environments

Retailer apps, recommendations, promotional shelves and displays all contribute to discovery. Campaign planning should connect digital media with physical retail activation rather than treating them independently.

6. Make availability visible and trustworthy

Digital stock information can influence whether shoppers make a physical trip. Accurate availability and strong store execution are therefore part of the same shopper promise.

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Contact:

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