



June 2026


GCVA
Consumer Report

Vol.
70



The GCVA is partnering with GlobalData to deliver a monthly snapshot of consumer behaviour and attitudes when it comes to gift cards. This report covers the 73rd wave of monthly research, since GlobalData began tracking back in May 2020, with the initial research covering the period from the beginning of the lockdown (March 2020) to the end of May 2020.

The May fieldwork went to field on June 1st, 2026 and was designed to explore habits during the previous month, across a UK nationally representative sample of 2,000 shoppers.

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Topline Takeaways

- Giftling penetration declined in May, amid a lack major seasonal gifting occasions
- 9.1% of UK consumers said that they purchased gift cards for self-use over May, which represented an increase on May 2025 (8.4%)
- 60.8% of consumers said that they expect all gift cards to be cross-channel
- Multistore cards have the potential to overcome lingering consumers concerns around the lack of flexibility that gift cards provide compared to other payment options
- Leisure gift cards– which encompass travel, theatre tickets, spa, dining etc. – benefitted for more focussed gifting demand as shopper sought thoughtful gifting occasions

Retail spend set to rise 2.9% in 2026, driven by food as consumers prioritise essentials



Due to the Middle East conflict, our forecasts have been adjusted down slightly for 2026 as we now expect higher inflation will lead to UK consumers focusing on essential spending, namely food and health & beauty, as other costs such as fuel and mortgage payments rise. Total retail spend is set to rise 2.9% to reach £478.3m, driven by inflation but with volumes in positive territory for the first time since 2021.

The food sector will drive total retail spend this year, accounting for 43.9% of the market, as demand for non-essential, non-food sectors slows. Alongside food, health & beauty will remain resilient and continue to stand out among the non-food sectors partly due to the essential nature of many items like toiletries but also as consumers continue to invest in their own wellbeing.

Online Channels

The online channel will continue to outperform the growth of physical stores as retailers improve their propositions and focus on providing convenience for time-poor shoppers. In 2026 we forecast online spend will rise 3.6% to bring total online penetration to 28.1%. However, online penetration in non-food will be much higher reaching 41.3% driven by electricals and clothing & footwear where the online channel is well developed. There is opportunity for strong growth in food online, forecast to be the fastest growing sector online in 2026 as the channel still only accounts for a small proportion of spend, estimated to be 11.4% this year. Grocers' investment into rapid delivery channels, such as Tesco's Whoosh will support growth this year as shoppers seek flexible options.

Grocery Outlook

The food & grocery market is expected to grow 4.6% in 2026. The ongoing conflict with Iran is expected to drive up food inflation into the second half of the year, as a result of heightened agriculture and logistics costs. Though grocers intend to protect consumers from price rises we expect inflation to rise to 4.3% for the full year, hindering volume growth.

Clothing & Footwear Outlook

After a strong start of the year, the impact of the Iran conflict and the general macroeconomic uncertainty is expected to tone down growth in the clothing & footwear for the rest of the year, with 2026 sales expected to rise only 0.3% to £64.0bn. Volumes are expected to continue declining (-0.3%), as prices are set to rise due to the impact of the war in the Middle East on operating costs for fashion retailers.

Gift-giving penetration declined in May, amid a lack of major seasonal gifting occasions



The 31.4% of consumers that bought physical gifts, gift cards or made self-use gift card purchases over May 2026 represented a decline both on April 2026 and May 2025. This decline was consistent across both physical gifts and gift cards

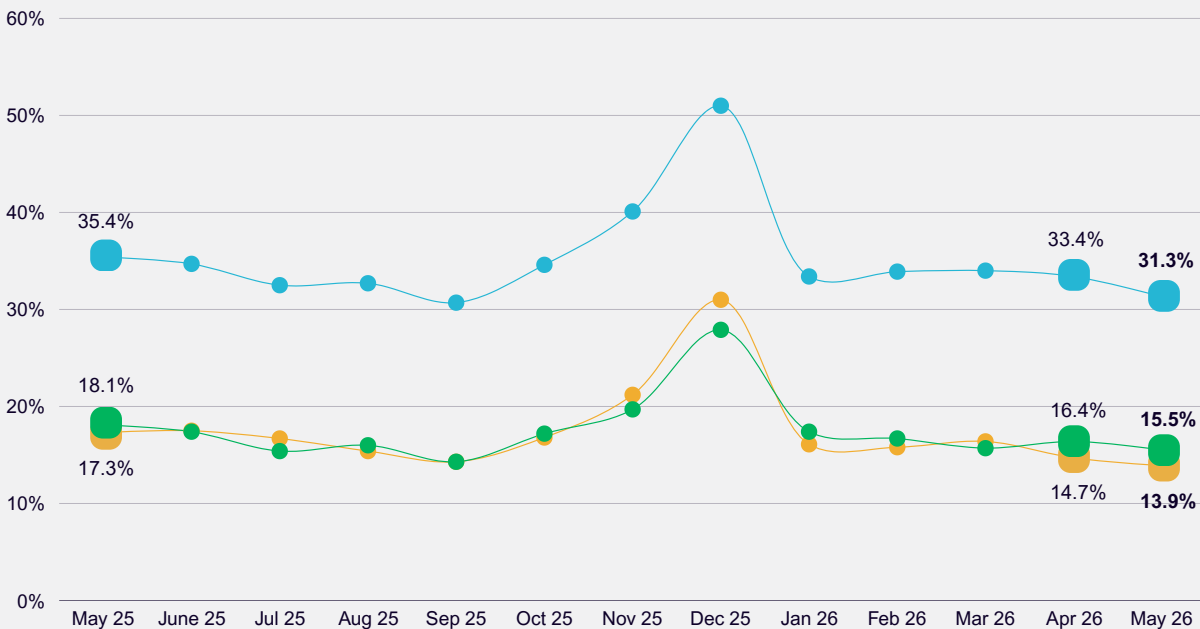
This decline was consistent across both physical gifts and gift cards purchased for someone else and reflected a lack of major seasonal occasions during the month

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Figure 1:

Did you purchase any of the following:

- Gifts in any form (physical gifts or gift cards for any use)
- A physical gift for somebody else
- A gift card for somebody else



Robust self-use purchasing over May



9.1% of UK consumers said that they purchased gift cards for self-use over May, which represented an increase on May 2025 (8.4%). Continued robust demand here points to a greater degree of financial flexibility among UK consumers, amid improving household finances.

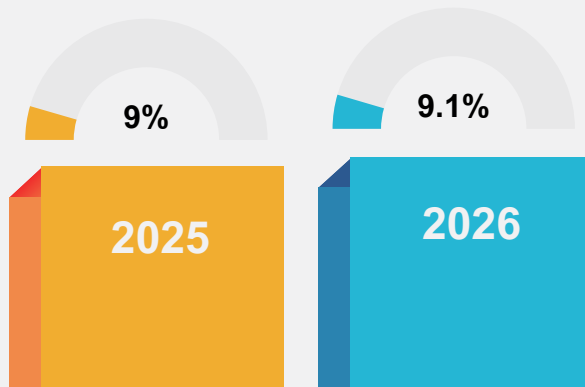
Gift cards have both the potential to support consumers during or after periods of higher outgoings and, increasingly, in supporting shoppers looking for levers to help with saving and budgeting. Indeed, the proportion of those purchasing self-use cards that cited “to help with saving money” was at 45.9% over May 2026.

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Figure 2:

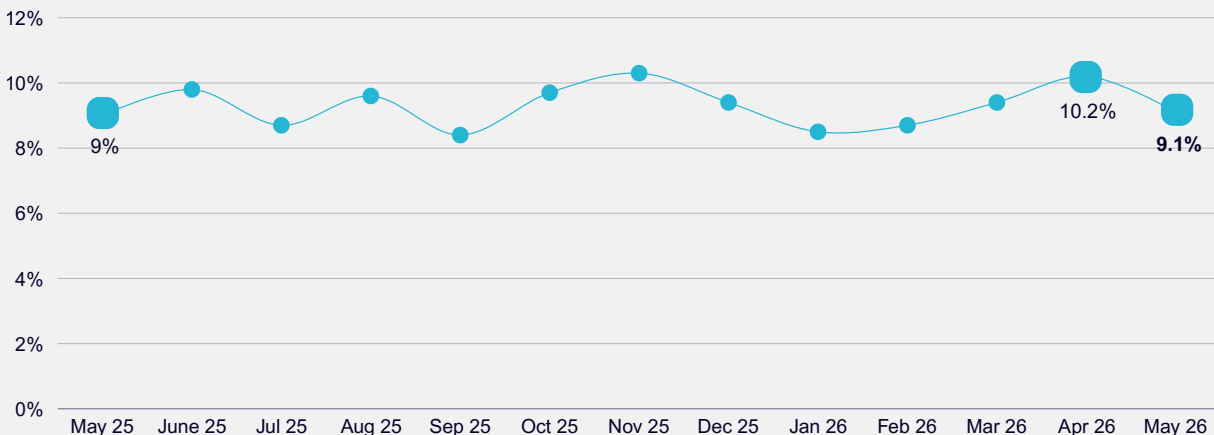
Purchasing a gift card for yourself - May 2025 vs May 2026:

- May 2025
- May 2026



Did you purchase any of the following:

- A gift card for yourself



Online purchases favoured over May



There was a year-on-year increase both in the proportion purchasing physical gift cards online and purchasing digital gift cards. Stronger demand for online and digital options aligns with evolving consumer expectations – 60.8% of consumers said that they expect all gift cards to be cross-channel (compared to 58.3% in May 2025).

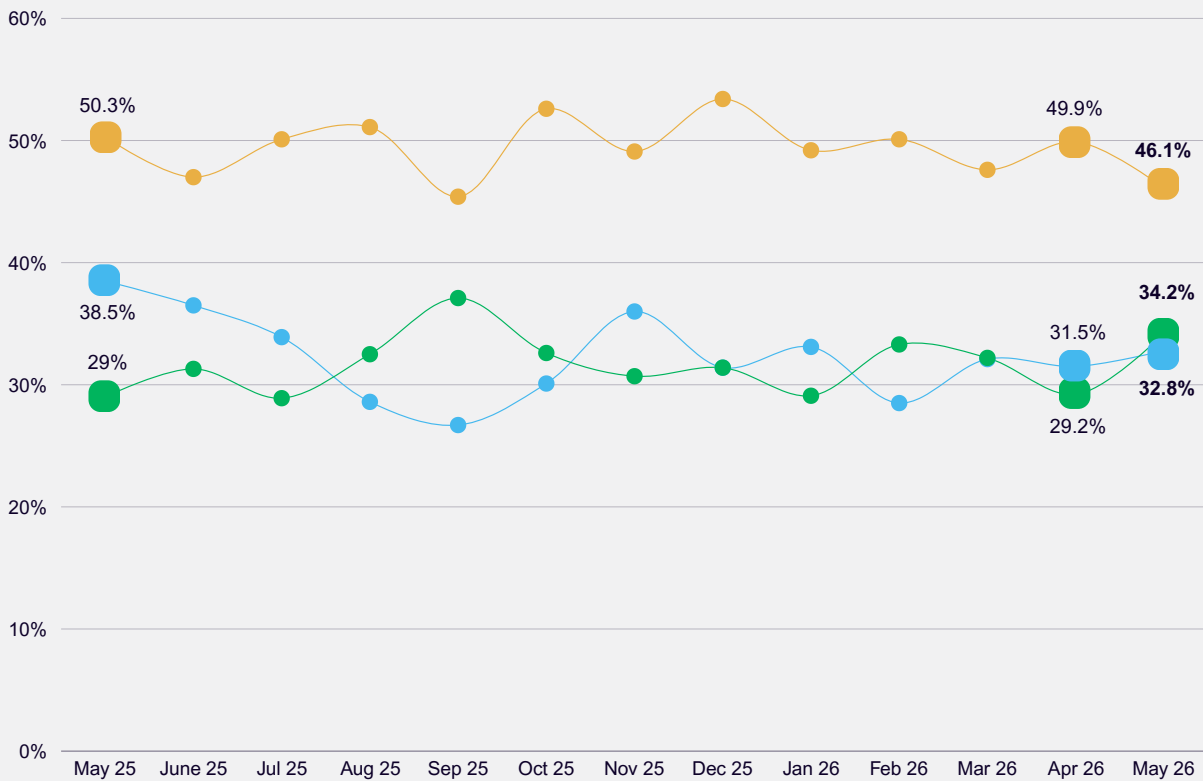
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Figure 3:

Which type of gift cards did you purchase?

- A physical gift card from a retailer/gift card issuer instore
- A physical gift card from a retailer/gift card issuer online
- A digital gift card from a retailer/gift card issuer online



Single-brand retail gift cards outperformed



The proportion of gift card shoppers purchasing single brand gift cards (46.1%) increased compared to May 2025 (44.3%). With gift card purchasing over May being more focussed towards occasions such as birthdays and weddings, these cards benefitted from being viewed as more thoughtful gifting options.

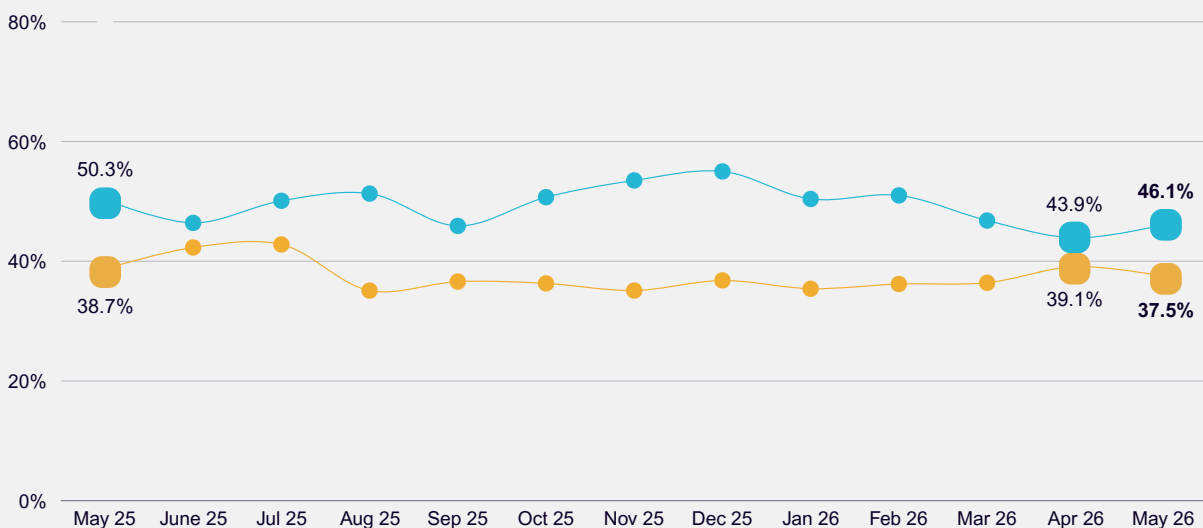
There was a year-on-year dip in purchasing of multistore gift cards (37.5% vs. 39.8%). Multistore cards have the potential to overcome lingering consumers concerns around the lack of flexibility that gift cards provide compared to other payment options. The challenge for these gift card types continues to be balancing the factors of not being too generic that it is considered unthoughtful of the gift-giver, with granting the recipient the freedom of spend within a range of retailers.

Multistore cards have the potential to overcome lingering consumers concerns around the lack of flexibility that gift cards provide compared to other payment options

Figure 4:

When purchasing gift cards (digital or physical), which types of gift cards did you purchase, either for yourself or someone else?

- A retail gift card – a gift card for a specific high street retailer or a store branded gift card
- A multi-store gift card – a single gift card which can be spend in multiple retailers, brands, outlets or businesses



Leisure gift cards enjoyed a strong May



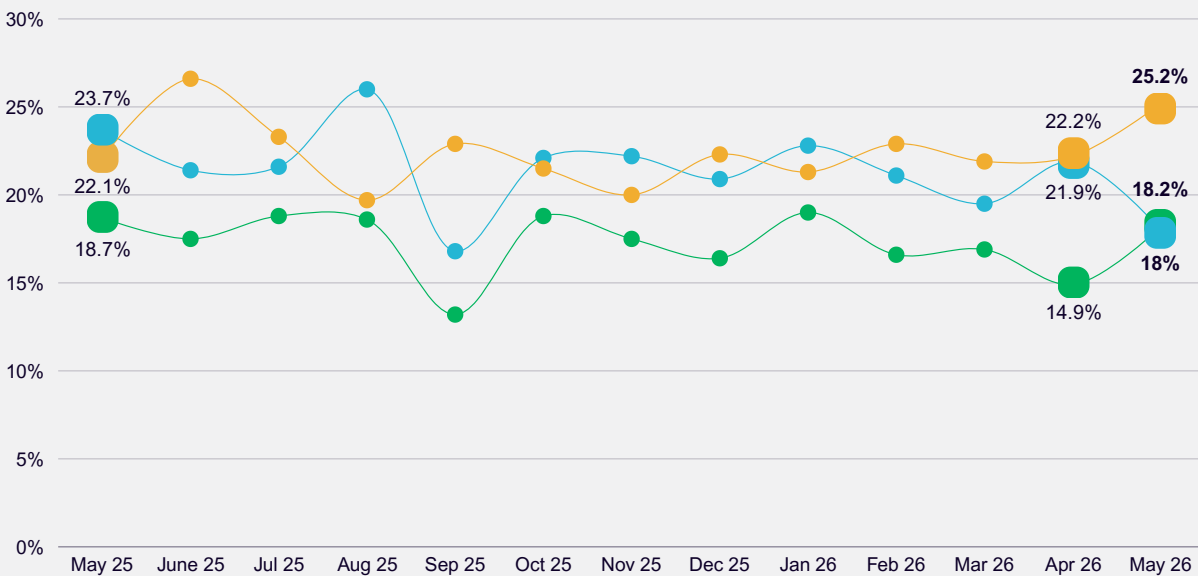
The proportion of gift card buyers purchasing leisure gift cards increased over May 2026 vs. May 2025. Leisure gift cards– which encompass travel, theatre tickets, spa, dining etc. – benefitted for more focussed gifting demand as shopper sought thoughtful gifting occasions. Demand was also boosted by an increase in supply, with many national, regional, and local leisure and experience businesses introducing options. Elsewhere, it was a more difficult month for experience gift cards, which saw a dip against tough year-on-year comparatives.

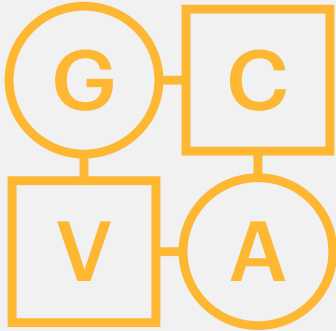
Leisure gift cards– which encompass travel, theatre tickets, spa, dining etc. – benefitted for more focussed gifting demand as shopper sought thoughtful gifting occasions

Figure 5:

When purchasing gift cards (digital or physical), which types of gift cards did you purchase, either for yourself or someone else?

- An experience e.g. hot air balloon ride, helicopter ride, hotel stay
- Leisure e.g. Travel, theatre tickets, spa, dining
- Gaming e.g. online gaming credit and in app purchases





The GCVA is the trade body and membership organisation for gift cards and vouchers. The association represents the key players in the industry and promotes best practice for the benefit of gift card issuers, services and consumers.

On the time-period comparisons, this month's report covers May 2026, with comparisons made between May 2026 and May 2025. Where relevant, comparisons have also been made to the wider tracking period.

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