



September 2025

GCVA
Consumer Report

Vol.
62



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 64th 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 August fieldwork went to field on September 1st and was designed to explore habits during the previous month, across a UK nationally representative sample of 2,000 shoppers.

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📌 Gift Card Voucher Association (GCVA)

Topline Takeaways

- ➔ Retail spending growth set to improve to 2.9% in 2025, boosted by inflation but also by positive volumes
- ➔ Year-on-year rise in gift purchasing over August
- ➔ Strong self-use purchasing over August, despite Summer financial commitments
- ➔ Both physical and digital gift cards were popular options over August
- ➔ Multistore and single retail gift cards saw slight year-on-year dip
- ➔ Experience and Leisure saw a particularly strong performance
- ➔ UK consumers see gift cards as a medium for supporting local businesses

Retail spending growth set to improve to 2.9% in 2025, boosted by inflation but also by positive volumes



Following growth of 1.5% to £453.2bn in 2024, retail spending growth is forecast to accelerate to 2.9% in 2025. We expect inflation to come through higher in 2025, at 2.5%, as retailers, particularly grocers, increase their prices to cope with higher wage costs. Volumes are forecast to rise by just 0.4% in 2025, though this will be the first positive volume growth since 2021 as shoppers feel more comfortable given strong wage growth in 2024 and inflation being more stable in comparison to the peaks we've seen in recent years. Recovery is uneven though – while some low-income households feel the benefit of increased minimum wages, many on benefits will be squeezed and in the middle-income brackets, average real wages are increasing but many mortgage owners are being dragged into higher interest rates upon expiry of fixed deals made when rates were much lower.

Online Channels

The online channel will see improved growth of 4.2% in 2025 following a rise of 2.7% in 2024 and 2.0% in 2023, after the heights of the pandemic when online penetration reached over 30%. Online penetration will rise marginally in 2025 to 27.9% and gradually increase to 2029 with more rapid growth coming from the online food market as retailers' proposition improvements entice shoppers.

Grocery Outlook

The food & grocery market is expected to grow by 4.0% to £202.2bn in 2025. Food inflation is expected to peak in the second half of the year dampening volume growth. Despite rising inflation and weak volumes (dropping back 0.1%), we expect minimal trading down to discounters in comparison to 2024, as the mainline grocers have done a good job of offering a wide price architecture and the ability for shoppers to trade up and down whilst also providing compelling loyalty schemes.

Clothing & Footwear Outlook

The clothing & footwear market has had a rocky H1, with sales falling in all months so far, except March, when it was bolstered by unseasonably good weather. The market's performance is expected to improve slightly as the year progresses, as consumer confidence and finances improve, with spend forecast to rise 0.1% in H2 versus a decline of 1.8% in H1. As a result, 2025 overall is anticipated to fall 0.7% to £63.1bn, with volumes also dropping for the third consecutive year, by 1.2%, as consumers prioritise spending on other areas, such as leisure.

The online channel is expected to continue outperforming, rising 0.9% to £26.0bn, with online penetration growing 0.7ppts to 41.2%, as its convenience, wide product offering and price comparison abilities continue to appeal to shoppers.

Year-on-year rise in gift purchasing over August



The 32.7% of consumers that bought physical gifts, gift cards or made self-use gift card purchases over August 2025 was notably higher than August 2024 (30.3%). Both gift cards and physical gifts experienced higher purchasing penetration over August; 16.0% of UK consumer purchased gift cards for somebody else, compared to 13.6% during August 2024.

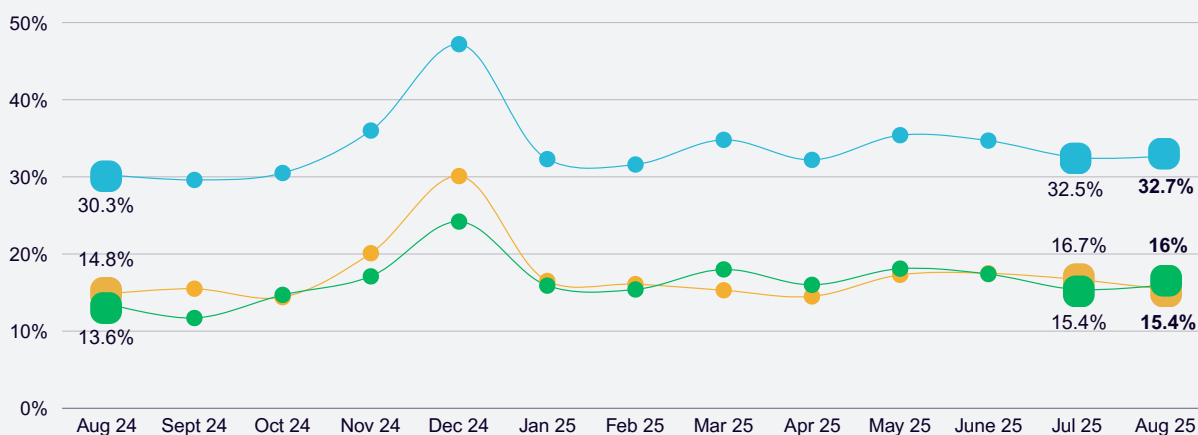
This uptick is reflective of a broader recovery in household finances, which is finally feeding through to a tangible parallel improvement in consumer sentiment. However, it is important to note that this improvement is not being felt evenly across UK households. Of those that didn't purchase gifts cards over August, 17.5% said they didn't because they have cut back significantly on non-essential spending, which was markedly higher than those citing this same reason in August 2024 (10.5%).

Both gift cards and physical gifts experienced higher purchasing penetration over August

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



Strong self-use purchasing over August, despite Summer financial commitments



9.6% of UK consumers said that they purchased gift cards for self-use over August 2025. This represented an increase both on July 2025 (8.7%), and on

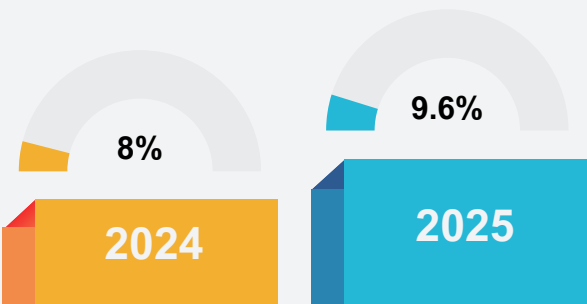
August 2024 (8.0%). This points to a greater degree of financial flexibility among UK consumers, amid improving household finances. Gift cards have both the potential to support consumers during or after periods of higher outgoings and, increasingly, in supporting shoppers looking for levers to help with saving and budgeting. Indeed, the proportion of those purchasing self-use cards that cited “to help with saving money” was at 50.8% over August 2025.

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Figure 2:

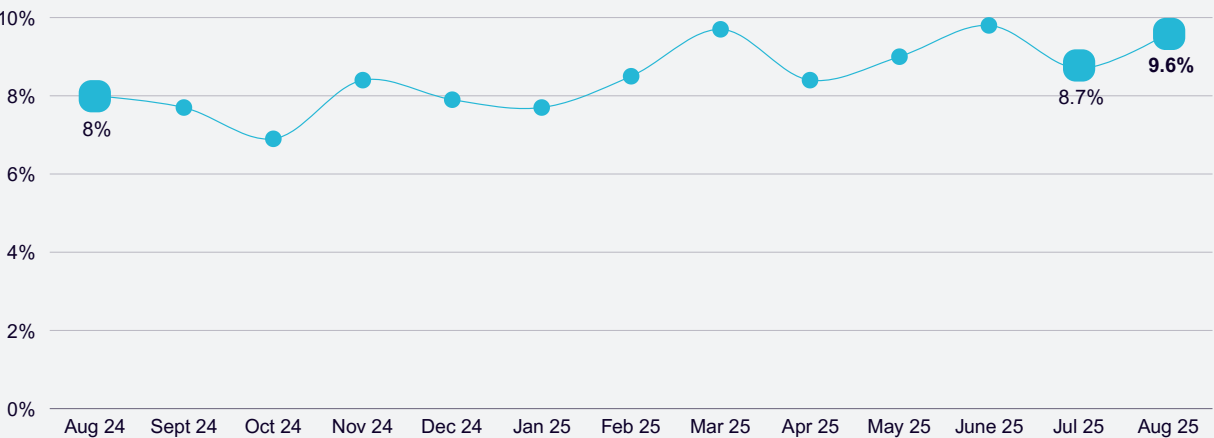
Purchasing a gift card for yourself - August 2024 vs August 2025:

- August 2024
- August 2025



Did you purchase any of the following:

- A gift card for yourself



Both physical and digital gift cards were popular options over August



Physical gift cards purchased instore saw another strong performance over August, benefitting from the good weather encouraging physical gatherings. More generally, in addition to physical cards continuing to be viewed as more thoughtful gifting options, physical formats have benefitted from greater choice within physical stores, and the growing array of options in gift card categories such as entertainment, leisure, and gaming.

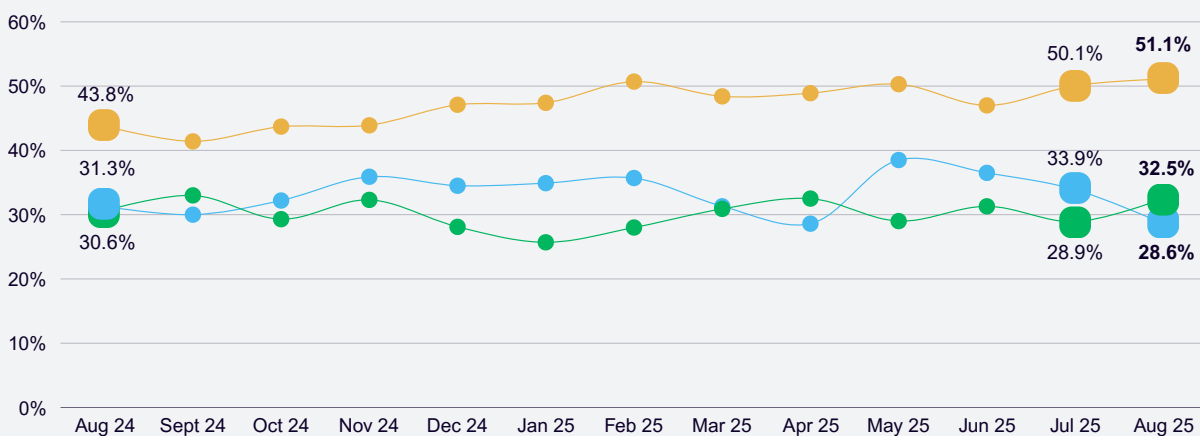
Digital options provided greater convenience

When it came to online purchasing, a rising proportion opted for digital gift cards compared to last year, with physical cards purchased online experiencing a slight dip in comparison. At a time when a higher proportion of UK households are holidaying, digital options provided greater convenience; 35.1% said they purchased gift cards due to it being an easier option compared to buying physical gifts.

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

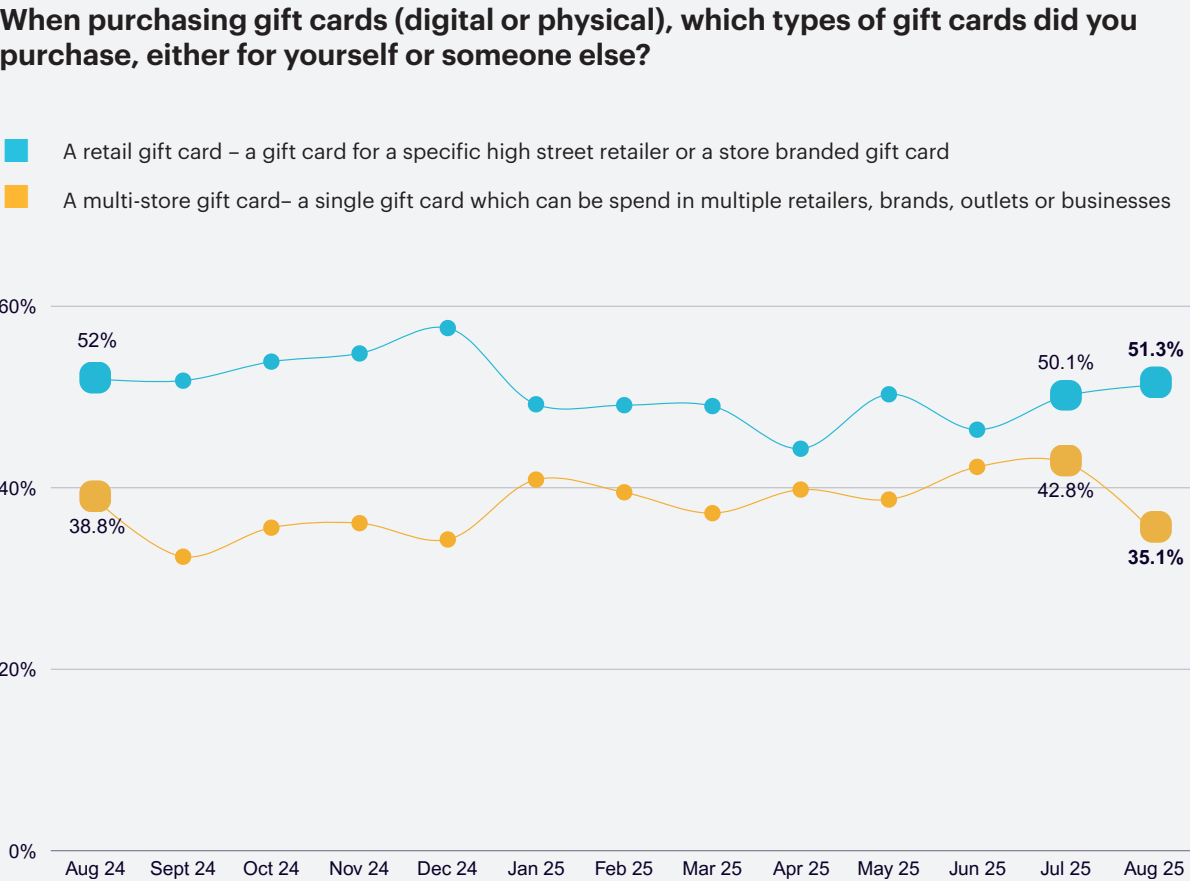


Multistore and single retail gift cards saw slight year-on-year dip



The proportion of gift card buyers purchasing multistore and single brand retail gift cards both declined compared to August 2024. This was perhaps a reflection of spending priorities being elsewhere over the summer period, with Experience, Leisure, and Gaming gift cards all experiencing an uplift in purchasing penetration, in contrast.

Figure 4:



Experience and Leisure saw a particularly strong performance



The proportion of gift card buyers purchasing experience and leisure gifts cards – for activities such as hotel stays, spa breaks, and restaurants – increased compared to August 2024. In addition to coinciding with the peak time of year for use of these cards, demand has been boosted by an increase in supply, with many national, regional, and local leisure and experience businesses introducing options.

There is a growing role for gift cards and digital wallets to facilitate spending in areas such as media subscription and in-game purchases

Elsewhere, both Gaming and Music gift cards saw strong year-on-year purchasing. The popularity of these options is helping to drive self-use gift card purchasing. The second most cited reason for self-use purchasing was 'to make it easier to shop online' highlighting that there is a growing role for gift cards and digital wallets to facilitate spending in areas such as media subscription and in-game purchases.

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
- Music e.g. downloads or subscription

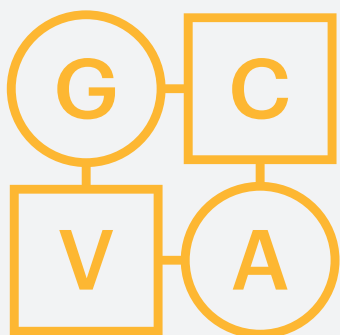


UK consumers see gift cards as a medium for supporting local businesses



There continues to be evidence that many are being proactive in purchasing gift cards to funnel support to local companies. Over August 2025, 32.4% of UK consumers agreed with the statement “I have/will purchase gift cards with the intent of supporting companies that I like”. This is more than double the 15.5% who expressed this sentiment in August 2024.

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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 the August calendar month, with comparisons made between August 2025 and August 2024. Where relevant, comparisons have also been made to the wider tracking period.

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