

Exploring SA's international shopping: Consumer insights and unique product appeals

In an informal online shopping survey conducted by PayPal among South African residents, 74.5% of respondents indicated that their reason for shopping from international online stores, is to obtain unique products that are unavailable in South Africa.



Mark Mwongela Ngungi, sales development director of PayPal Africa. Image supplied

Some of the most commonly purchased items fall into the categories of books and media (25%), electronics (20%) and beauty and skincare (14.7%). Clothing and fashion items, however, is a clear frontrunner with over two thirds of respondents (76%) indicating that they purchase these items, several times a year, from international online stores.

“Given the rise in sites such as Etsy and Shein, it comes as no surprise that clothing and fashion is ranked as the most popular category for international online shopping in South Africa” says Mark Mwongela Ngungi, sales development director of PayPal Africa.

“Consumers have become less apprehensive about purchasing physical items from abroad and the process of paying for an audio book subscription or unlocking content in an App has become so seamless that consumers hardly realise that they are making an international payment.”

As consumers get more comfortable shopping on international sites, security should always be the buyers' number one consideration. Certain payment methods also offer buyers' protection in the form of assistance with reimbursement should items not arrive or if they show up different than described.

With PayPal, users can even track their purchases, or block, decline and report illegitimate payment requests in one click from the App, giving the user end-to-end control over their purchases.

For those who have been reluctant to shop on international sites due to product quality or hidden costs, Ngungi suggests a quick checklist for final decision making:

- Check whether tax is included or excluded
- Make sure you are comfortable with the return policy
- Investigate delivery timelines to ensure time sensitive items arrive on time
- Read reviews from other shoppers

Additional research results were aligned to international trends in as far as the majority of those who shop online being women (82.8%) within the age range of 30-39 years old (40.7%).

Interestingly, despite the expected increase in shopping during the recent Black Friday and Cyber Monday, South Africans intend to keep their festive season shopping mostly local with only 20% noting that they will look for deals on international websites, and 43% saying they will consider looking internationally.

As for the future of international shopping by South Africans, Ngungi notes that trends such as circularity will continue to bolster the interest in the clothing re-sale market, further strengthening the clothing and fashion shopping category.

"If large international re-sale retailers open their store fronts to the South African market, we are expecting to see shifts in consumer spending within the fashion and clothing landscape resulting in more purchases being made within the category and ultimately making fashion, especially luxury brands, more accessible to everyone."

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