Geo-blocking of consumers online

Results of mystery shopping carried out by the European Commission

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The European Commission checked 10 537 e-commerce websites to have a full picture of the geo-blocking practices in the EU. The mystery shopping looked into 143 country pairs and 8 sectors of goods and services that are most commonly purchased online in the EU, such as electronics and computer hardware. The main findings are summarised below.

The majority of websites do not let consumers buy from another EU country

> Geo-blocking practices were identified in 63 % of all websites assessed.

Only about 1 in 3 websites allow consumers to buy from another EU country

> Only in 37 % of all websites assessed were shoppers allowed to reach the last stage of the online shopping process, where they successfully entered their payment card details.

Consumers are geo-blocked at different stages of online shopping

> When accessing the website: shoppers were re-routed to another website, directly blocked or offered different products in 5 % of the websites overall, and most frequently in flight bookings (13 %) and car rental (11 %).

> When registering on the website in order to place an order: shoppers were blocked in 27 % of the cases. The three most commonly requested types of personal information during registration were e-mail address (93 %), physical address (88 %) and telephone number (76 %).

> When selecting delivery options: shoppers were blocked in 32 % of the cases. This was more common with websites in EU13 Member States [1] (48 % of websites restricted delivery to their own country) compared to EU15 Member States (28 % of websites restricted delivery to their own country).

> When choosing payment options: shoppers were blocked in 26 % of the cases. Practically speaking, this was done either through not accepting the payment method (credit card, 15 % of cases) or by preventing shoppers from successfully entering their payment card details.

Geo-blocking more prevalent in the EU13

> EU13 online retailers (84 %) were more likely to block cross-border online shoppers compared to those based in the EU15 (66 %) [2].

> EU13 shoppers (74 %) were more likely to be geo-blocked compared to those based in the EU15 (64 %).

Geo-blocking is more frequent for physical goods than for services

> For tangible goods, geo-blocking was highest for Electrical household appliances such as microwave ovens (86 %) and lowest for Books (60 %).

> For services, geo-blocking was highest for Online reservations of offline leisure sector such as sports event tickets (40 %) and lowest for Travel services such as hotel bookings (33 %).

How will these findings be used?

The results of the study have informed the Commission's legislative proposal on geo-blocking, adopted in May 2016.

More information:

> Final Report:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/consumer_evidence/market_studies/geo-blocking/index_en.htm

> Preview of key findings, March 2016:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/consumer_evidence/market_studies/docs/geoblocking-exec-summary_en.pdf

> Geo-blocking proposal:
http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/16742

(1)   'EU13' refers to the 13 countries that have joined the EU since 2004, whereas 'EU15' refers to the 15 countries that became members of the EU prior to 2004.

(2)   Figures in the survey were weighted based on the relative level of cross-border e-commerce between each country pair surveyed. When it comes to comparisons between EU regions or specific Member States, figures are reported on unweighted data, in order to keep the sample as balanced as possible. The original sampling reflected mostly consumers' cross-border shopping from the larger EU15 Member States, like Germany or UK, and further weighing the data would have skewed results towards the EU15.