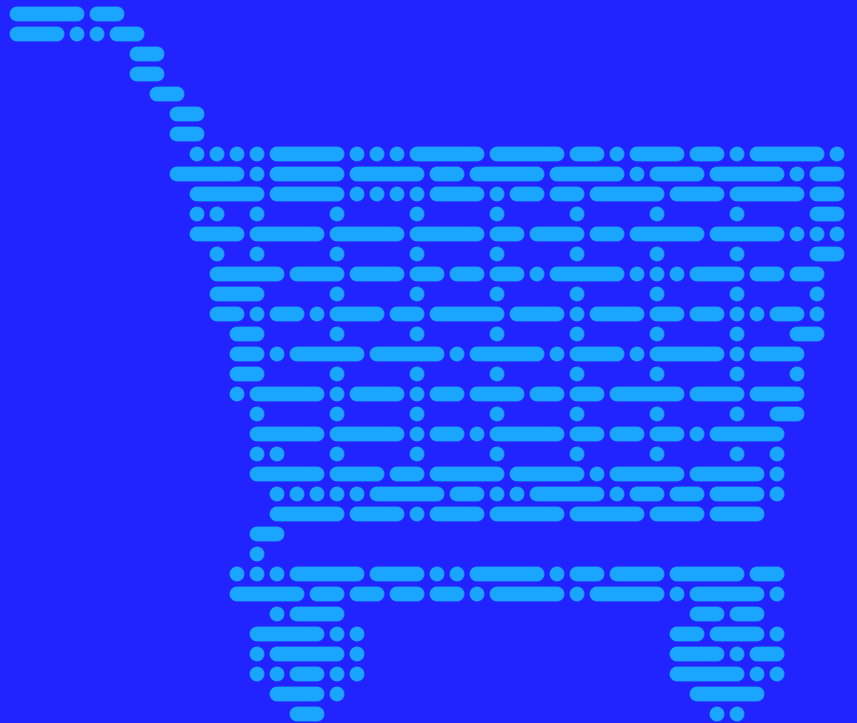


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Trends in Retail

Fall Holiday Season 2026

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Inside this briefing

A Morning Consult read on how U.S. adults are shopping this fall, from price pressure and holiday budgets to store habits, returns, buy now, pay later, and AI. Each section opens with the headline finding, followed by the data behind it.



Price pressure

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Study at a glance

1,301

U.S. adults surveyed

Sept. 25–27

Fielded in 2026

±3 pts

Margin of error for the full sample

21

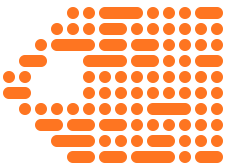
Questions reported in this briefing

Published 2026-09-27. This poll was conducted Sept. 25–27, 2026, among a sample of 1,301 U.S. adults, with data weighted to approximate a target sample of U.S. adults. The margin of error is ±3 percentage points for the full sample; subgroups carry wider margins. Nets are calculated from unrounded data, so figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



01 Prices and blame

Three in four Americans say prices are still rising, led by gas and groceries



74% of U.S. adults say the goods they buy cost more than they did three months ago, and 45% say prices are rising a lot. The sense of pressure grows with age, from 56% of Gen Z to 84% of Baby Boomers. Half (51%) blame the Trump administration and its policies.

Prices feel higher than three months ago

Q3 Compared to three months ago, do you think prices for the goods you buy are...

74%
say prices are rising

Rising a lot	45%
Rising slightly	29%
Staying about the same	16%

Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.

Half blame the Trump administration and its policies

Q5 Who or what do you blame most for rising prices?

51%
blame the administration

Trump administration/its policies (e.g., tariffs)	51%
Global economic conditions/inflation	25%
Companies raising prices to boost profits	14%
Something else	5%
Don't think prices are rising	5%

Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.

Gas and groceries lead perceived price increases

Q4 For each of the following categories, do you think prices have been rising, falling, or staying about the same over the past few months?

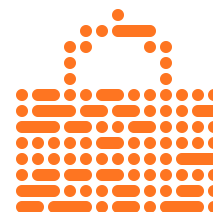
Gas and fuel		80%
Groceries		76%
Cars and auto parts		66%
Electronics		62%
Clothing and apparel		60%
Furniture and home goods		58%

Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Share saying prices have been rising over the past few months. Each dot represents 2% of adults.



01 Cutbacks and trade-downs

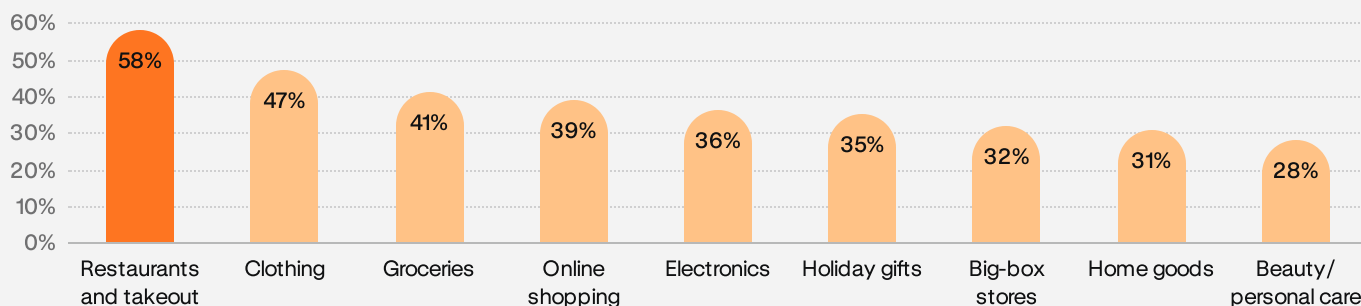
Dining out is the most common cutback as shoppers buy less and trade down



86% of adults have cut back on at least one category because of rising prices. Restaurants and takeout (58%) lead, ahead of clothing (47%) and groceries (41%). The most common coping strategy is simply buying fewer items (46%), and few (9%) almost always buy brand names, while 42% lean toward store or discount brands.

Restaurants and takeout are the most common cutback

Q6 Which of the following have you cut back on in the past few months because of rising prices?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. 14% have not cut back on anything. Labels shortened; "Online shopping" is discretionary online shopping (e.g., Amazon); "Big-box stores" includes department stores.

Buying less is the most common way to cope

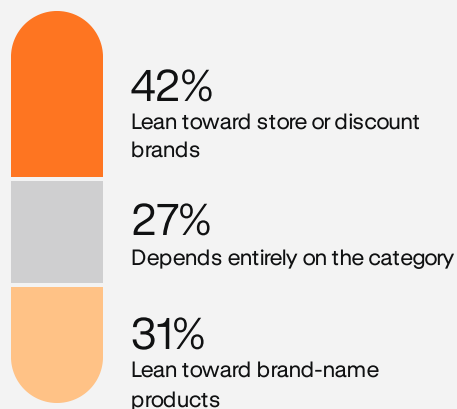
Q11 Have you done any of the following in the past few months?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.

More lean to store brands than to brand names

Q10 When shopping, which best describes your typical approach?

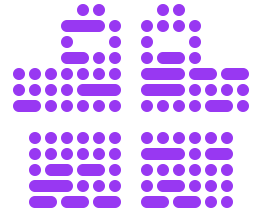


Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.



02 Holiday spending and timing

Holiday budgets are tightening: 38% plan to spend less than last year

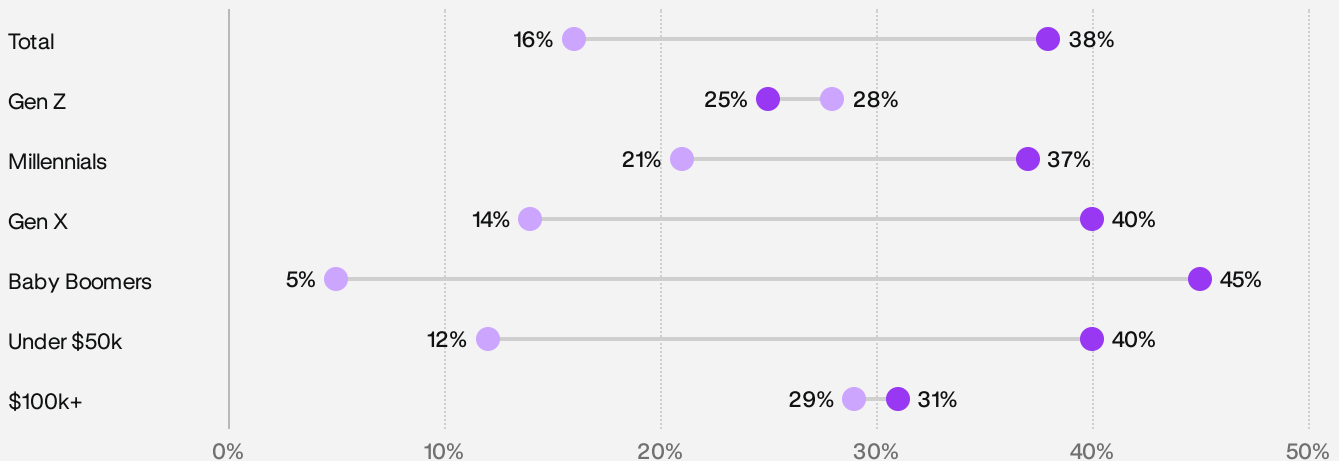


Only 16% plan to spend more on the holidays than last year, and 37% expect to spend about the same. Plans to cut back are highest among Baby Boomers (45%), with Gen X and households under \$50k at 40%, while Gen Z and \$100k+ households are split.

Plans to spend less outweigh plans to spend more in most groups

Q8 Compared to last year, do you plan to spend more, less, or about the same for the holidays this year?

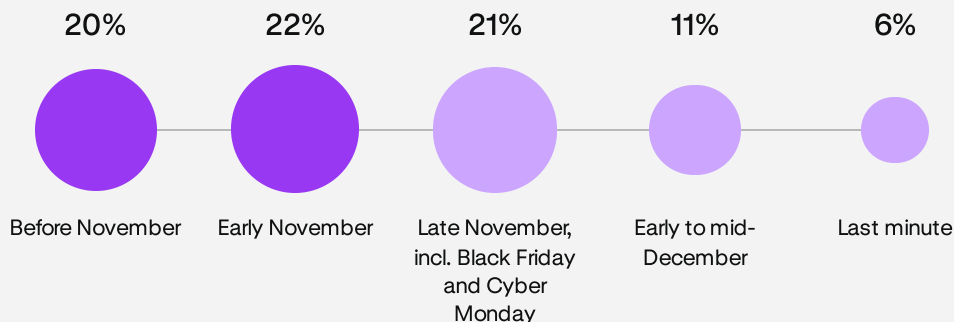
● Spend more ● Spend less



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. "More" and "less" combine "significantly" and "somewhat." Gen Z n=191; \$100k+ n=187; the gaps in those two groups are within the margin of error.

Four in 10 will start holiday shopping before late November

Q7 When do you plan to start (or did you start) shopping for the holidays this year?



22%

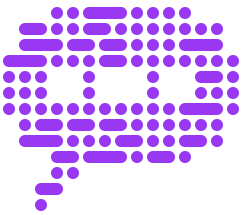
don't plan to shop for the holidays at all, rising to 30% among households under \$50k

Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. 41% start before late November, computed from unrounded data.



02 What sways holiday purchases

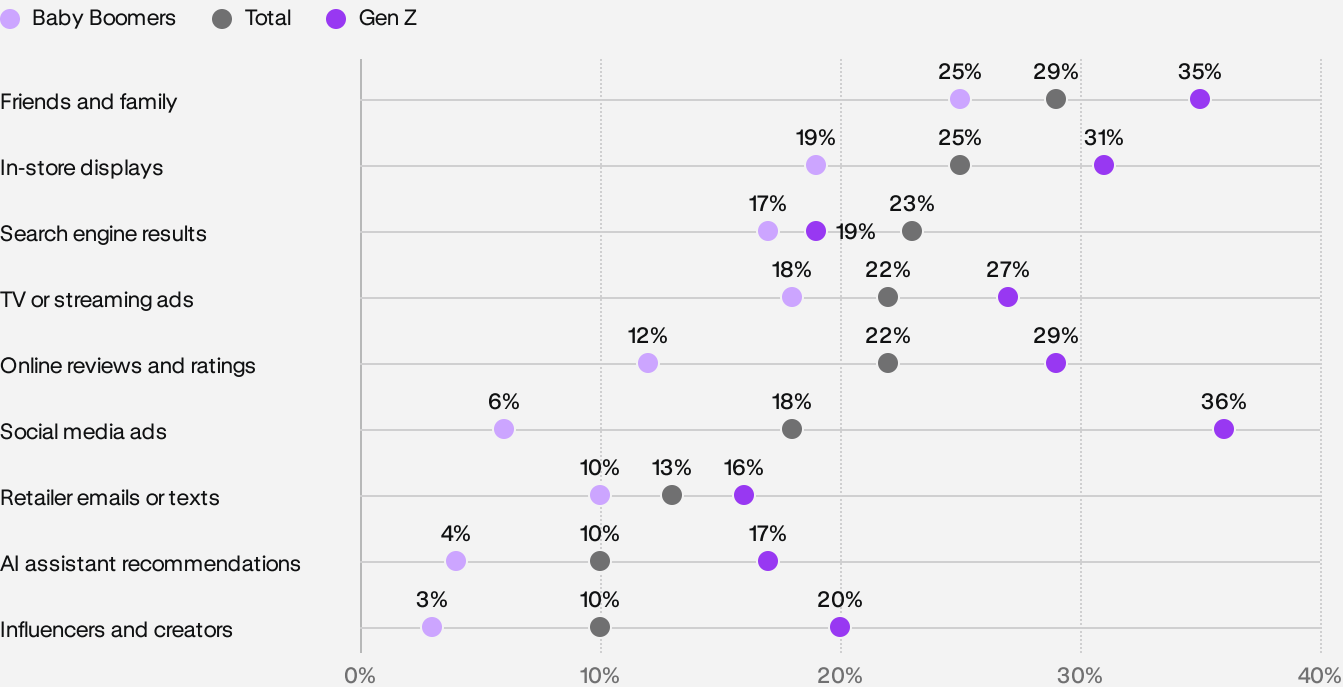
Friends, family, and the store shelf lead holiday influence



Recommendations from friends and family (29%) and in-store displays (25%) are the top influences on holiday purchases, ahead of search results (23%) and TV or streaming ads (22%). Generational gaps are wide: 36% of Gen Z cite social media ads, versus 6% of Baby Boomers. As many (29%) say none of these influence them.

Gen Z is more open to nearly every influence

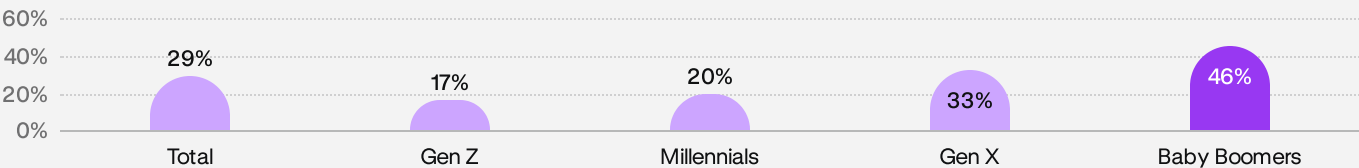
Q9 Which of the following most influences your holiday purchase decisions this year?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Gen Z n=191; Baby Boomers n=330.

Nearly half of Baby Boomers say nothing on the list influences them

Q9 Which of the following most influences your holiday purchase decisions this year?

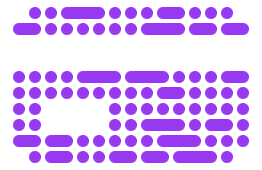


Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Share selecting "None of these influence me."



02 Buy now, pay later

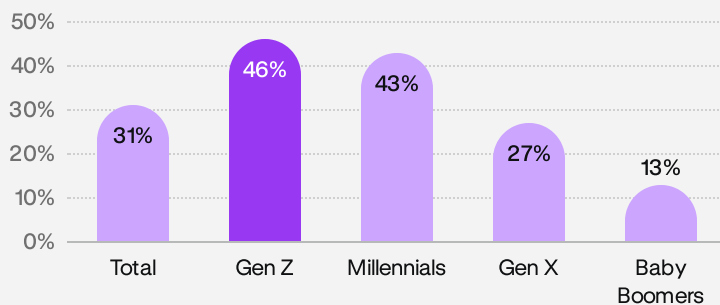
A third plan to use BNPL for gifts, and half of users worry about repaying



31% plan to use a buy now, pay later service for holiday gifts: 17% already use one regularly and 14% plan to for the first time or occasionally. Intent is highest among Gen Z (46%) and Millennials (43%). Among current, planned, or past users, 51% worry about repaying on time.

Younger shoppers are the most likely to use it

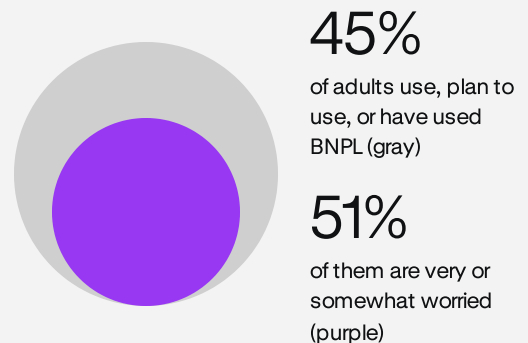
Q19 Do you plan to use a "buy now, pay later" service (splitting a purchase into installments) for any holiday gift purchases this year?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Share who use BNPL regularly or plan to for holiday gifts.

Half of users worry about repaying

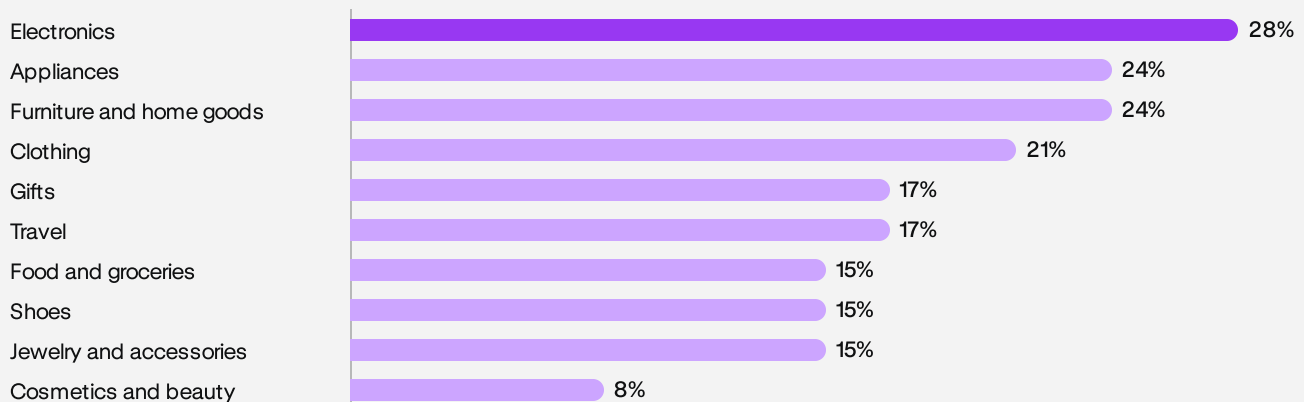
Q20 How worried, if at all, are you about being able to pay back a "buy now, pay later" purchase on time?



Source: Morning Consult Research. Current, planned, or past BNPL users, n=602. Circle areas are proportional.

Electronics tops the categories where shoppers would consider BNPL

Q21 In which of the following categories, if any, would you consider using a "buy now, pay later" service?

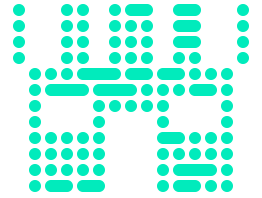


Source: Morning Consult Research. Those familiar with BNPL, n=1,209. 39% would not use BNPL for any category.



03 Why shoppers still go to stores

Stores still win on touch and immediacy, and shoppers lean in store

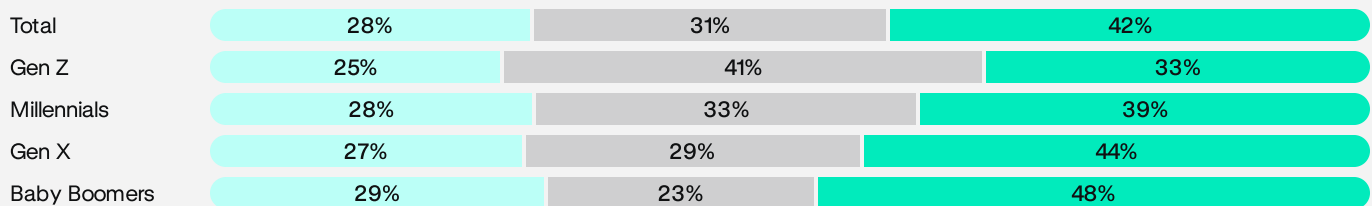


42% of adults lean toward shopping in stores, compared with 28% who lean online, and the in-store lean grows with age. Seeing, touching, or trying products is both the top reason people still visit stores (50%) and the biggest single lever to bring them in more often (23%).

Every generation leans in store more than online

Q16 Overall, do you prefer to shop...

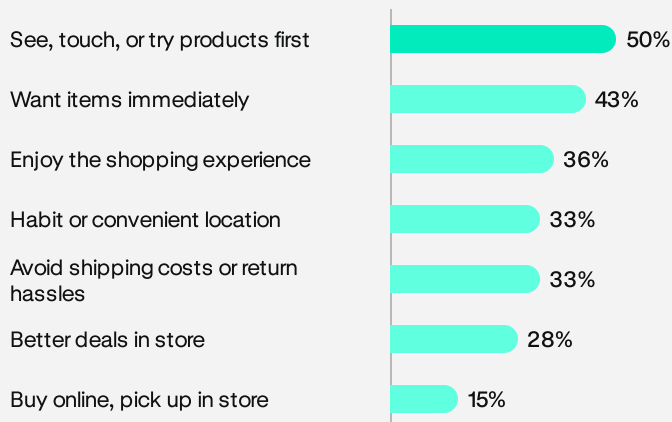
Mostly or almost entirely online About equally Mostly or almost entirely in store



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.

Touch and immediacy keep stores relevant

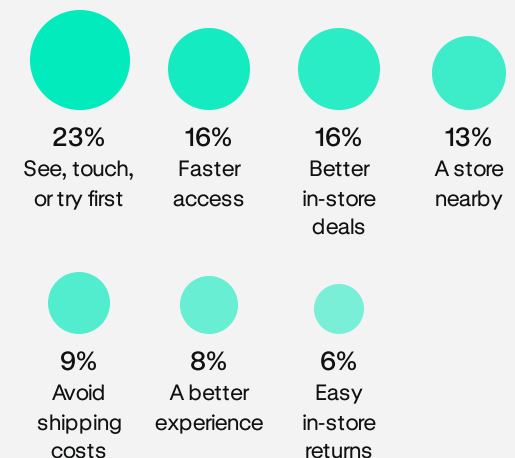
Q17 Which of the following are reasons you still shop in physical stores?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Buy online, pick up in store: 22% of Gen Z, 5% of Baby Boomers.

Trying first is the biggest lever

Q18 What is the #1 thing that could get you to shop in-store versus shopping online?

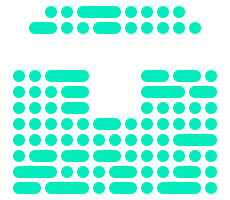


Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Circle areas are proportional. 8% say nothing would.



03 Returns

Three in four call return fees unreasonable, as younger shoppers buy to return

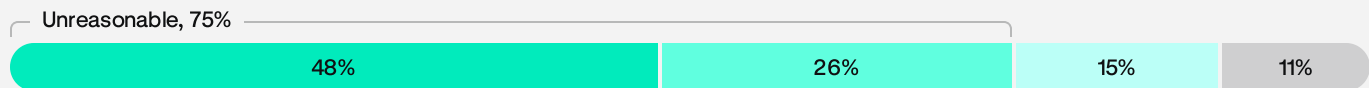


75% call return fees unreasonable, including 48% who say they are completely unreasonable. Bracketing, or ordering several versions of an item planning to send some back, is concentrated among younger shoppers: 50% of Gen Z do it often, versus 7% of Baby Boomers. When they do return items, 45% prefer to do it in store.

75% say return fees are unreasonable

Q12 How do you feel about retailers charging a fee to return items?

■ Completely unreasonable
 ■ Unreasonable but understandable
 ■ A fair business practice
 ■ No strong feelings

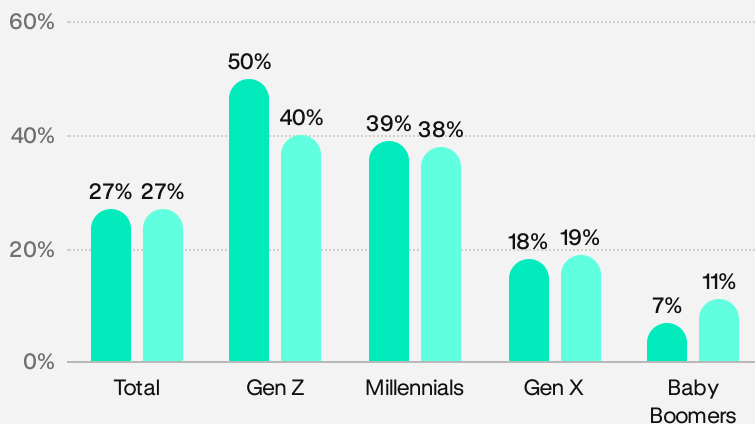


Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301.

Younger shoppers bracket and return far more often

Q13 When shopping online, how often do you order multiple sizes, colors, or versions of an item, intending to keep only some and return the rest?

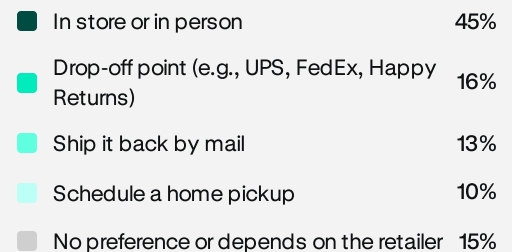
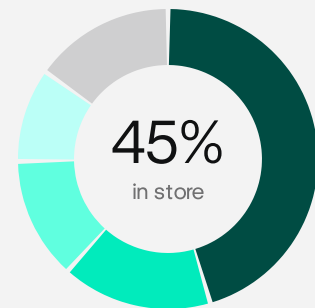
■ Bracket purchases often
 ■ Return items often



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. "Often" combines "very" and "somewhat" often. Return frequency is Q14: How often do you return items you've purchased, whether online or in-store? Gen Z n=191.

Stores are the top return channel

Q15 What is your preferred method for returning items?

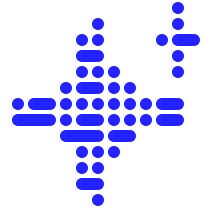


Source: Morning Consult Research. Those who return items, n=1,117.



04 AI as a shopping assistant

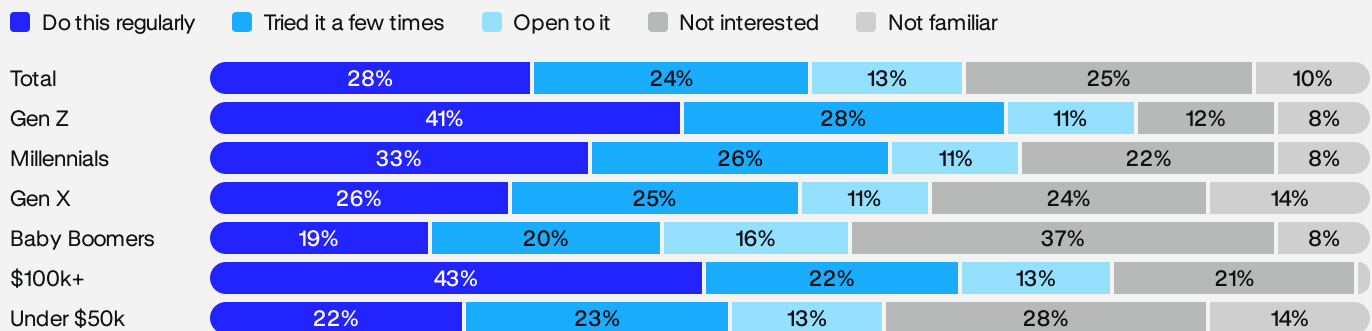
Half of shoppers have used AI to shop, but only one in four would hand it their card



53% of adults have used an AI assistant to search for products, compare prices, or make purchases, including 28% who do so regularly. Use is highest among Gen Z (69%) and \$100k+ households (65%). Letting AI buy on its own is a harder sell: no more than 31% are comfortable with it in any category tested, and 25% would share payment card details.

AI shopping use is highest among Gen Z and \$100k+ households

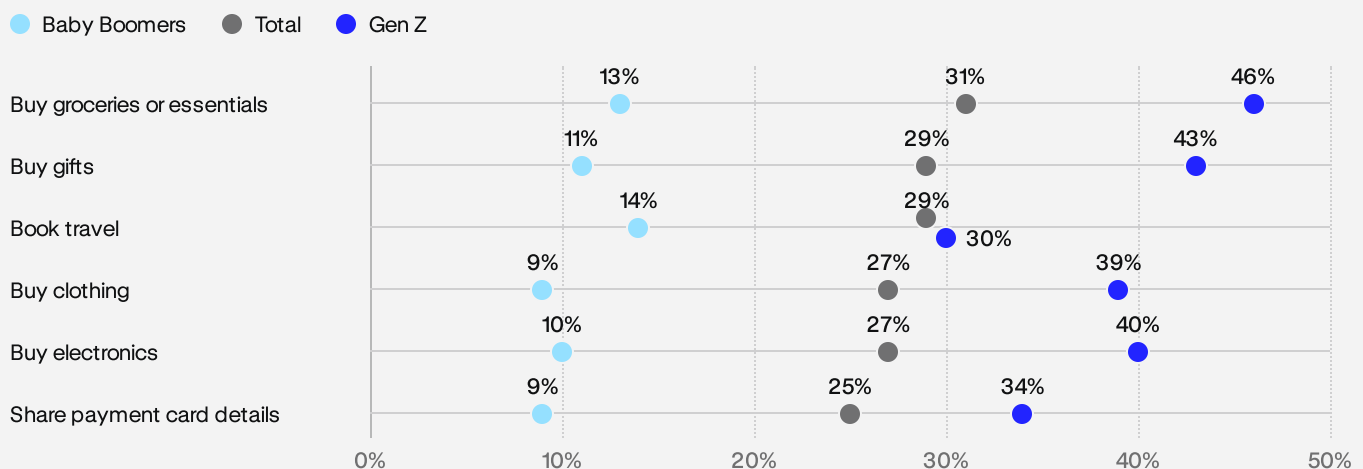
Q1 Which of the following best describes how likely you are to use an AI assistant (like a chatbot or shopping app) to search for products, compare prices, or make purchases on your behalf?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Gen Z n=191; \$100k+ n=187; under \$50k n=745.

Comfort with AI buying on your behalf stays below one in three

Q2 Thinking about an AI shopping assistant that could purchase items for you automatically, how comfortable would you be with each of the following?



Source: Morning Consult Research. U.S. adults, n=1,301. Share very or somewhat comfortable. Gen Z n=191; Baby Boomers n=330.



A Appendix: question index

Every question in this study

All 21 questions, listed by question number with the page where results appear. Every question was asked of all 1,301 U.S. adults unless a smaller base is noted.

Q1	Which of the following best describes how likely you are to use an AI assistant (like a chatbot or shopping app) to search for products, compare prices, or make purchases on your behalf?	p. 10	Q12	How do you feel about retailers charging a fee to return items?	p. 9
Q2	Thinking about an AI shopping assistant that could purchase items for you automatically, how comfortable would you be with each of the following?	p. 10	Q13	When shopping online, how often do you order multiple sizes, colors, or versions of an item, intending to keep only some and return the rest?	p. 9
Q3	Compared to three months ago, do you think prices for the goods you buy are...	p. 3	Q14	How often do you return items you've purchased, whether online or in-store?	p. 9
Q4	For each of the following categories, do you think prices have been rising, falling, or staying about the same over the past few months?	p. 3	Q15	What is your preferred method for returning items? Asked of those who return items (n=1,117).	p. 9
Q5	Who or what do you blame most for rising prices?	p. 3	Q16	Overall, do you prefer to shop...	p. 8
Q6	Which of the following have you cut back on in the past few months because of rising prices?	p. 4	Q17	Which of the following are reasons you still shop in physical stores?	p. 8
Q7	When do you plan to start (or did you start) shopping for the holidays this year?	p. 5	Q18	What is the #1 thing that could get you to shop in-store versus shopping online?	p. 8
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Q9	Which of the following most influences your holiday purchase decisions this year?	p. 6	Q20	How worried, if at all, are you about being able to pay back a "buy now, pay later" purchase on time? Asked of those who use, plan to use, or have used BNPL (n=602).	p. 7
Q10	When shopping, which best describes your typical approach?	p. 4	Q21	In which of the following categories, if any, would you consider using a "buy now, pay later" service? Asked of those familiar with BNPL (n=1,209).	p. 7
Q11	Have you done any of the following in the past few months?	p. 4			