

Wunderkind

U.S. Tariffs: Consumer Impact Survey Series

**A special report following consumer
purchase intent and behaviors**

September 2025



Tariff Impact:

Consumers Retreat, Recalculate and Seek Value

In September 2025, U.S. consumers remain firmly value-driven as tariffs and inflation continue to reshape the retail landscape. Most are cutting back on non-essentials, shopping less overall, or delaying major purchases, while younger shoppers experiment with AI, coupon apps, and digital deal-seeking tactics to stretch budgets further.

This report examines how economic unease is influencing holiday shopping, car purchases, loyalty behaviors, and preferred communication channels. Findings are segmented by age and gender, highlighting critical demographic differences that reveal shifting consumer priorities and purchase patterns.

This mini-report equips brand marketers with the insights they need to align messaging and promotional strategies to evolving consumer expectations.

It is based on survey data collected September 4-5, 2025, from 346 U.S. consumers, evenly split across genders and adult age groups.

Inside, we outline the new rules of engagement for brands navigating economic turbulence and planning for revenue resilience in the months ahead.

We plan to continue to poll U.S. consumer sentiment and behavior as long as tariffs persist in 2025.

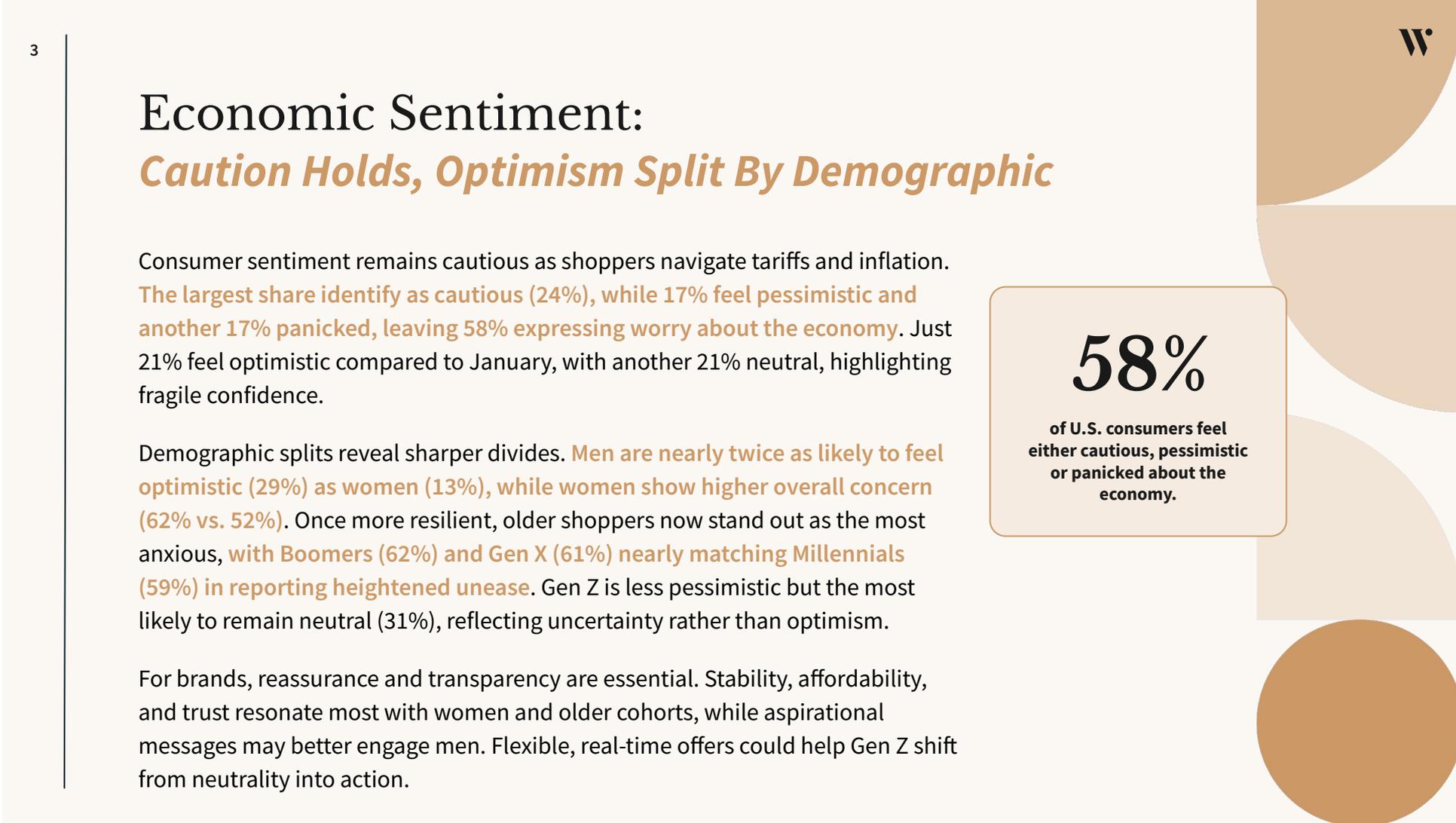
Economic Sentiment:

Caution Holds, Optimism Split By Demographic

Consumer sentiment remains cautious as shoppers navigate tariffs and inflation. **The largest share identify as cautious (24%), while 17% feel pessimistic and another 17% panicked, leaving 58% expressing worry about the economy.** Just 21% feel optimistic compared to January, with another 21% neutral, highlighting fragile confidence.

Demographic splits reveal sharper divides. **Men are nearly twice as likely to feel optimistic (29%) as women (13%), while women show higher overall concern (62% vs. 52%).** Once more resilient, older shoppers now stand out as the most anxious, **with Boomers (62%) and Gen X (61%) nearly matching Millennials (59%) in reporting heightened unease.** Gen Z is less pessimistic but the most likely to remain neutral (31%), reflecting uncertainty rather than optimism.

For brands, reassurance and transparency are essential. Stability, affordability, and trust resonate most with women and older cohorts, while aspirational messages may better engage men. Flexible, real-time offers could help Gen Z shift from neutrality into action.



58%

of U.S. consumers feel
either cautious, pessimistic
or panicked about the
economy.

Price Pressures:

Consumers Cut Back and Seek Value

Shoppers are actively adjusting their behavior in response to tariff-driven price pressures. **The largest group report buying fewer non-essential items (38%), closely followed by seeking deals more often (37%) and shopping less overall (36%).** Together, these three strategies represent the majority of U.S. consumers pulling back on discretionary spending and doubling down on value. **A smaller share (17%) say they have begun shopping with different retailers, highlighting an opening for challenger brands.**

Demographic patterns reveal distinct behaviors. **Women lead in non-essential cutbacks (45% vs. 32% men), while Gen X are most likely to shop less overall (47%),** reflecting their greater sensitivity to rising prices. Gen Z and Millennials stand out for brand-switching (both 21%) showing a willingness to abandon loyalty in favor of price competitiveness and perceived value. By contrast, Boomers are least likely to change retailers (10%), and lead for having purchasing behavior unaffected (26%).

These shifts underscore the urgency for brands to sharpen value propositions. For women and older consumers, reassurance through consistent savings and reliable quality will be critical to retention. For younger demographics, acquisition strategies that emphasize competitive pricing, domestic sourcing and loyalty rewards can win switchers. Across all segments, clear price transparency and prominent deal visibility remain non-negotiable in a market defined by heightened caution and spending restraint.

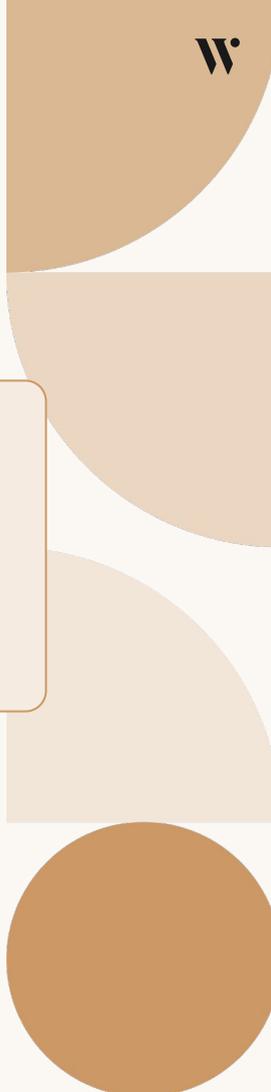
Online Shopping Habits:

Deal-Seeking Dominates

Economic pressures are reshaping how consumers research and shop online. **The largest share of respondents (39%) report visiting more websites to compare prices**, underscoring a marketplace where deal-seeking is now standard. **Notably, one-quarter (24%) of shoppers are reading more comparison blogs and reviews**, reflecting a growing reliance on third-party validation in purchase decisions. **Meanwhile, 20% are turning to browser extensions and coupon apps to automate savings.**

Generational differences are striking. **Predictably, younger consumers lead in visiting multiple websites, with Gen Z (46%) the most aggressive deal-hunters.** Gen Z also lead in using browser extensions and coupon apps (26%), showing their comfort with technology-driven savings tools. By contrast, **Boomers are the least likely to change habits, with a majority (52%) reporting no shift.**

For marketers, the lesson is clear: optimize digital touchpoints. Easy price comparisons, visible discounts, and social proof will capture both shoppers hunting for deals and consumers who depend on peer-driven guidance.



39%

**of U.S. consumers are
visiting brand websites
directly in search of the best
deals.**

Tariff Uncertainty:

Shoppers Delay, Reduce and Shift to Cheaper Options

The recent U.S. court ruling that found certain tariffs unlawful but left them in place pending appeal has fueled consumer unease and shaped purchase decisions. **The largest share of respondents (34%) say they are reducing overall spending to manage uncertainty**, highlighting a broad retreat from discretionary purchases. **Another 23% are shifting toward lower-cost products regardless of origin**, underscoring the primacy of price over brand or sourcing.

Delayed spending is also a key outcome. **One-fifth (20%) are holding off on major purchases such as cars or appliances**, with Gen X most likely to wait (26%). **Meanwhile, 17% say they are shifting specifically toward U.S.-made products**, with Gen X (28%) more than twice as value-driven as any other generation. Acceleration is less common, with just 13% moving faster to avoid potential future price hikes, most noticeable among younger consumers, Millennials (19%) and Gen Z (17%). Boomers are most likely to opt out of big-ticket shopping altogether (21%).

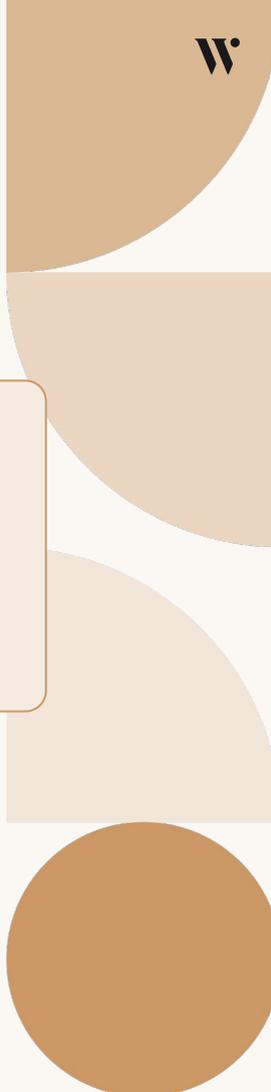
For marketers, this split signals a need for true personalization. Generally that's reassurance through stability, extended warranties, and messaging around affordability for older consumers. For younger cohorts, urgency-driven campaigns tied to tariff timelines, flexible financing, and clear communication of price changes can capture opportunistic buyers.

Tariff Support:

Cost Concerns and Skepticism Shape Views

Consumer sentiment toward tariffs as a tool to protect American jobs and industries remains mixed, with skepticism outweighing strong support. **The largest share of respondents (26%) say they generally support tariffs, but are concerned about costs, while 22% outright don't believe tariffs protect jobs or industries and 15% don't believe they are worth it.** Just 15% fully support the tariffs, with merely 8% lacking an opinion, showing that most Americans have formed a stance.

Demographic splits sharpen the divide. **Men are more far likely to fully support tariffs (22% vs 7% women) while women are more likely to believe they do little to support U.S. industries (25% vs. 18%).** Gen Z (26%) show the greatest share of consumers who understand the intent, but feel torn due to financial impact (3x other generations) pointing to cost sensitivity even among those who see potential benefits. For marketers, this signals a need to address skepticism with transparent messaging. Emphasizing affordability and price relief will resonate most with younger and female audiences, while job-security framing may help maintain support among men and older cohorts.



37%

of U.S. consumers believe the tariffs do not protect American jobs or are worth it.

Who Pays for Tariffs:

Consumers See Themselves Bearing the Burden

When asked who shoulders the financial cost of tariffs, a majority of U.S. shoppers overwhelmingly place the burden squarely on themselves. **Over half of respondents (53%) believe consumers foot the bill, far outpacing all other answers.** This perception is strongest among Boomers (69%) and Gen X (57%), groups that are highly price-sensitive and acutely aware of tariff impacts on everyday expenses.

Other views trail significantly. **Just 14% believe exporting countries absorb most of the costs,** with Gen X (18%) and Millennials (17%) more inclined toward this view. **Another 13% say brands or manufacturers carry the burden,** rising to 24% among Gen Z. Just 7% think retailers are paying the most. Notably, 14% of consumers remain unsure.

This strong consensus that shoppers themselves are paying for tariffs reveals a consumer mindset anchored in price pressure and skepticism about government or corporate relief. Younger consumers' higher belief in manufacturers or foreign exporters absorbing costs may reflect either optimism or misunderstanding of how tariffs function. Marketers can build trust by directly addressing these perceptions. Transparent communication on pricing, paired with loyalty rewards and “tariff relief” promotions, can reassure older cohorts who feel squeezed. For younger demographics, educational messaging that explains sourcing and cost-sharing, while still emphasizing savings, can help bridge understanding and strengthen credibility.

Shopping Concerns:

Rising Prices and Volatility Remain a Core Worry

Price anxiety continues to define the shopping experience. **The overwhelming majority (61%) cite higher prices as their biggest concern**, with older cohorts, Boomers (65%) and Gen X (70%) showing the highest sensitivity. **Close behind, 45% point to unpredictable price increases**, underscoring that volatility, not just high prices, erodes consumer confidence.

Secondary issues also weigh on purchasing behavior. **12% cite out-of-stock products**, with men (14%) slightly more affected than women (9%). **Shipping delays (15%) and return restrictions (8%) are more pressing for younger, online-heavy cohorts, particularly Gen Z, where nearly one in three (31%) express concern over delays**. A lack of promotions resonates with 8% overall, but rises among Millennials and Gen Z, pointing to the importance of visible deals. Only 9% report no major shopping concerns, demonstrating just how widespread cost-related stress has become.

For marketers, the mandate is clear: prioritize price transparency, consistent promotions, and messaging that emphasizes stability. Proactively addressing stock availability and fulfillment will further build trust, especially among older shoppers who crave reliability. Meanwhile, promotional visibility and deal-driven engagement will resonate strongly with younger audiences seeking relief from price volatility. Brands that combine competitive offers with consistency will stand apart in this climate of ongoing unease.

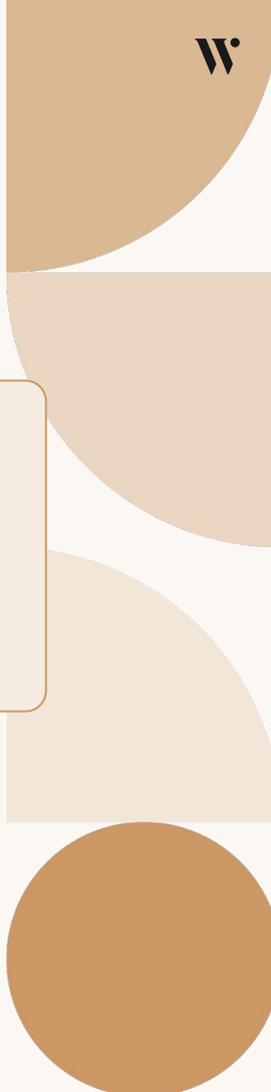
Transparency and Loyalty:

Clear Communication Strengthens Retention

Transparent communication continues to emerge as a powerful driver of brand loyalty in uncertain times. **Almost half of consumers (46%) say they are more likely to stay loyal to brands that provide clear updates on pricing, availability, and exclusive offers.** Another 32% fall into the “maybe, if helpful” category, underscoring that transparency is rarely ignored and often serves as a differentiator in competitive markets.

Demographic differences sharpen the picture. **Gen Z (53%) and Millennials (52%) are the most responsive**, showing that younger shoppers reward openness and accessibility. Men also lean more heavily toward valuing transparency (50%) compared to women (41%). **Just 13% state they shop around regardless, peaking at 21% of Boomers.**

For marketers, the opportunity is clear: lead with transparent updates as a baseline, but pair them with personalized offers and reassurance. Younger shoppers will see openness as proof of trust, while older cohorts will respond to transparency paired with tangible value.



46%

Almost half of U.S. consumers say transparent communication on price rises increases brand loyalty.

Black Friday/Cyber Monday 2025 Forecast:

Spending Pullback and Discounts Define Outlook

With tariffs and inflation shaping consumer plans, shoppers are approaching BFCM with heightened caution. **The largest share (32%) say they expect to spend less than previous years, while another 29% plan to focus more on discounts.** Together, these two behaviors represent a majority of consumers planning to tighten spending or maximize savings during the holiday season.

Other strategies show additional shifts. **One in five (20%) plan to prioritize essentials**, reflecting a practical approach to holiday shopping, **while 17% intend to delay or avoid big-ticket items.** Another 12% will spread costs over several months, signaling growing demand for flexible financing options. **Just 7% expect to spend more, but a sizable 26% say they anticipate no change in their shopping behavior, led by Boomers at 51%.** The data shows holiday shopping will be defined by restraint and value-seeking. Younger groups are most likely to avoid large purchases, while Millennials and Gen X lead in discount-seeking. Older shoppers are more likely to stay the course, though still price-sensitive.

Marketers should prepare for a highly value-driven BFCM. Promotions that emphasize essentials, bundles, and discounts will capture budget-conscious consumers, while flexible financing and early access deals will appeal to Millennials and Gen Z. Clear communication on savings and timing will be critical in winning cautious but still motivated shoppers.

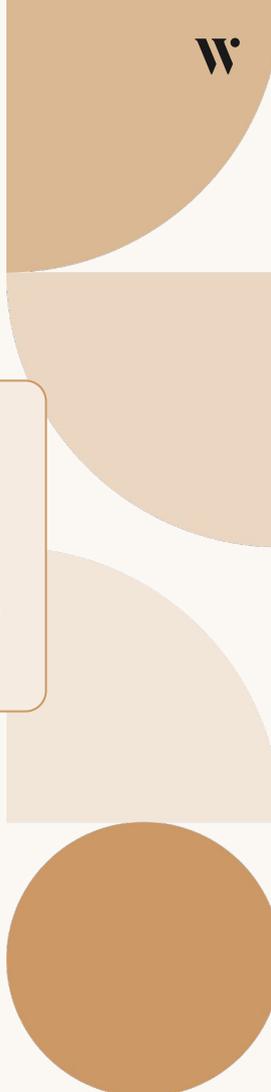
AI in Shopping

Adoption Grows, but Hesitancy Prevails

AI is slowly reshaping how consumers search for value, though adoption remains uneven. **The largest group (44%) say they have never used AI to find better deals**, highlighting that for many shoppers, AI tools are still unfamiliar or unnecessary. **At the same time, 24% have occasionally used AI for savings, showing growing experimentation, while 18% report using AI regularly.** A further 13% say they are interested but not yet engaged.

Demographic differences reveal predictable generational divides. **Millennials (30%) and Gen Z (25%) lead in regular AI use**, demonstrating their comfort with digital tools and algorithm-driven recommendations. **Boomers, however, are strongly resistant, with two-thirds (67%) saying they have never used AI to shop.** Men also show greater willingness to adopt AI than women.

For marketers, the opportunity is to normalize AI-powered tools as part of the value equation. Highlighting simplicity, security, and clear benefits—like personalized recommendations or automated savings, can help move hesitant shoppers toward adoption, especially among women and older consumers.



W

42%

of U.S. consumers regularly,
or occasionally use AI to find
better deals.

Car Shopping 2025:

Shoppers Adapt by Delaying and Shifting Plans

With car shopping season underway, tariffs are weighing heavily on consumer decisions. **The largest share (37%) say they were not planning to purchase or trade in a vehicle this season**, reflecting a broad pullback in auto demand. **Another 20% report no change in plans despite higher costs**, underscoring that for some buyers, tariffs have yet to alter behavior. However, significant portions of the market are making adjustments.

One-fifth (18%) say they have delayed purchases or trade-ins due to tariff-driven price increases, while 11% are turning to used cars to avoid new vehicle markups. Another 8% report changing the type of car under consideration, such as shifting to domestic models, hybrids/EVs, or smaller vehicles to better manage costs. **A smaller but notable 6% have accelerated plans to buy or trade in before tariffs push prices even higher.** Generational splits are striking: Boomers are least likely to be in the market at all (66%), while Gen Z show the high rate of considering used cars (14%) and alternative vehicle types (19%). Men (21%) are more likely than women (14%) to delay purchases, signaling cost sensitivity in higher-ticket categories.

Used car dealers and domestic manufacturers can capture price-sensitive buyers with affordability messaging. Financing and trade-in promotions may appeal to those delaying, while reassurance on pricing stability and long-term value will resonate with Boomers weighing whether to stay out of the market.

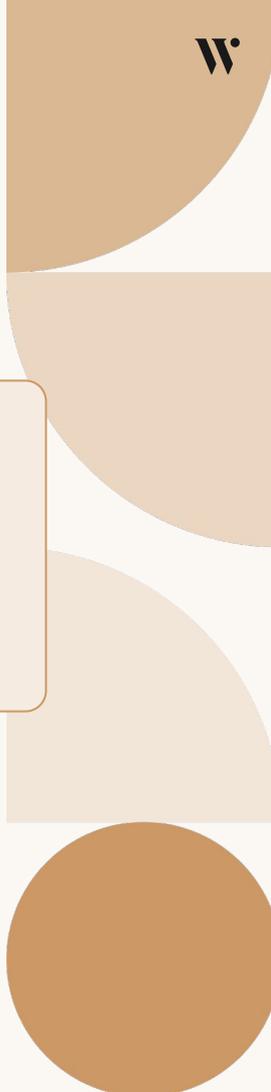
Deal-Seeking Tactics:

Shoppers Experiment to Unlock Savings

A meaningful share of U.S. consumers are experimenting with tactics to secure better deals, actively signaling interest to brands and retailers. **19% add items to their online cart and leave them there in hopes of receiving a follow-up discount**, a behavior most common among Gen X (28%).

Subscriptions are also popular—20% sign up for email or text alerts to unlock promotions, with Millennials (27%) and Gen X (24%) leading adoption. **Another 18% create or sign into accounts to access exclusive offers**, showing a willingness to exchange identity for value. **16% revisit the same product or site multiple times to trigger remarketing campaigns**, while **13% go further by using multiple emails or identities to take advantage of first-time buyer incentives**, peaking at 22% among Millennials.

For marketers, these behaviors highlight an appetite for personalized offers and rewards for engagement. Brands that recognize and incentivize these tactics, through triggered discounts, loyalty perks, and responsive remarketing, can capture attention from shoppers who are actively signaling intent.



20%

of U.S. shoppers subscribe to email and text alerts in exchange for a discount.

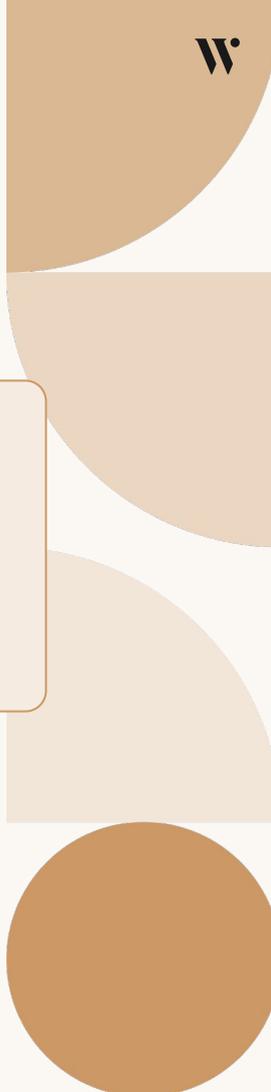
Preferred Channels for Personalized Offers:

Email is King, but Shoppers Lean Mobile

When it comes to receiving personalized offers, **email remains the dominant channel, chosen by nearly half of consumers (48%)**. This preference is especially strong among Gen X (65%), Boomers (50%) and Millennials (48%), who continue to view email as the most reliable and trustworthy way to engage with brands.

Other channels show generational shifts. **Text/SMS ranks second overall at 23%**, led by Gen x (33%), reflecting ubiquitous mobile-first habits. **In-app push notifications (19%) and website pop-ups or banners (14%)** also resonate most with digital-native Millennials and Gen Z. Physical mail retains relevance at 18%, particularly among Boomers (25%), while phone calls or voicemails (10%) have only limited appeal. Notably, 16% of consumers say they don't want marketing offers at all, with Boomers (23%) leading this opt-out group.

For marketers, the takeaway is clear: lead with personalized email to engage core audiences, but pair it with text and in-app tactics to connect with all segments. A multichannel approach ensures both reach and relevance, matching communication style to demographic preference.



48%

Almost half of U.S. consumers prefer to receive personalized offers from brands via email.

Closing Insight:

U.S. shoppers remain strongly value-driven, responding to tariff-related price pressures with caution, strategic cutbacks, and adaptive deal-seeking behaviors. Across demographics, purchasing choices center on affordability, prioritizing essentials, and maximizing perceived value in an uncertain economy.

Price Sensitivity Shapes Every Decision

Rising prices and volatility dominate consumer behavior. Shoppers are cutting back, delaying purchases, and prioritizing essentials while demanding visible value. Brands must deliver affordability, price transparency, and consistent savings to build trust and maintain engagement.

Younger Shoppers Show Adaptive Behaviors

Gen Z and Millennials embrace AI, coupon apps, and creative tactics to stretch budgets. They are more willing to switch brands and retailers, creating opportunities for marketers who offer competitive pricing, innovation, and personalized experiences across digital and mobile-first channels.

Transparency Shapes Brand Loyalty

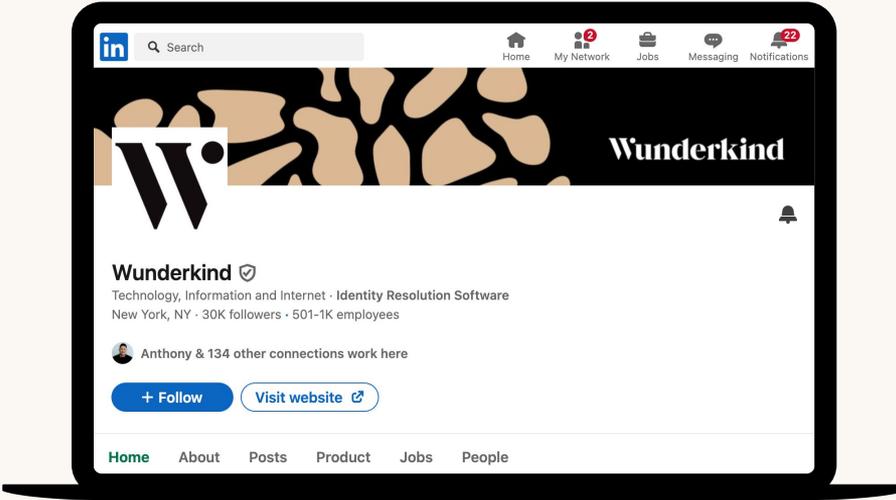
Consumers reward transparency with increased loyalty. Younger cohorts value open communication on pricing and promotions, while older shoppers respond when paired with stability and consistent offers. Brands that prioritize honesty strengthen credibility and long-term relationships.

These findings signal a holiday season defined by restraint, adaptability, and selective optimism. Marketers who combine transparent messaging, compelling discounts, and flexible options across channels will be best positioned to capture cautious yet motivated shoppers.

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