

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a yellow and white striped button-down shirt, is shown in profile in a grocery store aisle. She is holding a clear plastic bottle in her right hand and a red object, possibly a shopping list or a small device, in her left hand. The background shows shelves stocked with various products, including bottled water and other beverages. The lighting is soft and focused on the woman.

EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey

Wave 3 findings

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Overview

The EY-Parthenon bimonthly survey of US consumers is a window into consumer beliefs and behaviors in response to fast-evolving macroeconomic and geopolitical events

Initiative overview

Bimonthly consumer survey to assess how consumers' priorities – and the trade-offs that they are willing to make – are impacted by current economic and (geo)political developments.

Objectives

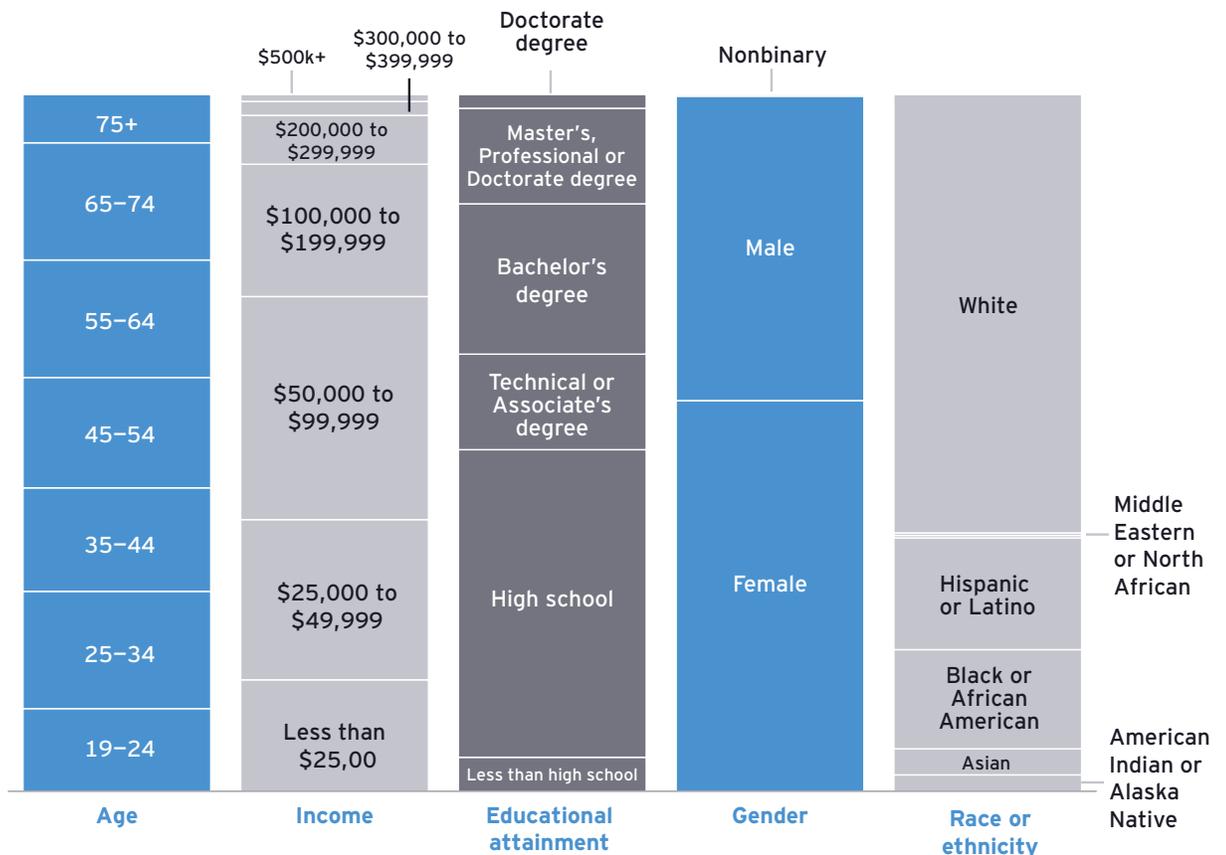
- Define proprietary, universal consumer segments that allow clients to zero in on the sentiments relevant to their target consumers
- Describe the psychological state and headline priorities of each consumer segment
- Go beyond basic spend data to identify the specific trade-offs that different consumers are making, and the underlying decision drivers
- Identify the brands and retailers that are best positioned to win or lose, with which consumer segments, in the current environment
- Assess opportunities to field deep-dive surveys on emerging trends – e.g., artificial intelligence (AI) in shopping, channel shifts

This analysis draws on over **two thousand survey respondents** that represent a cross section of the US general population

Key question areas

- Personal financial confidence
- Spending vs. savings rate
- Personal financial trajectory
- Macroeconomic outlook
- External stressors
- Category-level spending trends
- Category-level key purchase criteria
- Retailer and restaurant traffic
- Channel preferences
- AI usage
- General demographics and psychographics

Demographic summary (n=2,015)



Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Selected findings

Wave 3

KEY DECEMBER FINDINGS



Americans' confidence in their personal finances has **stabilized**, but remains **low**. **Cost of living concerns** continue to mount.



Households continued to **refine their budgets** to offset the cost of essentials as well as **holiday gift expenses**.



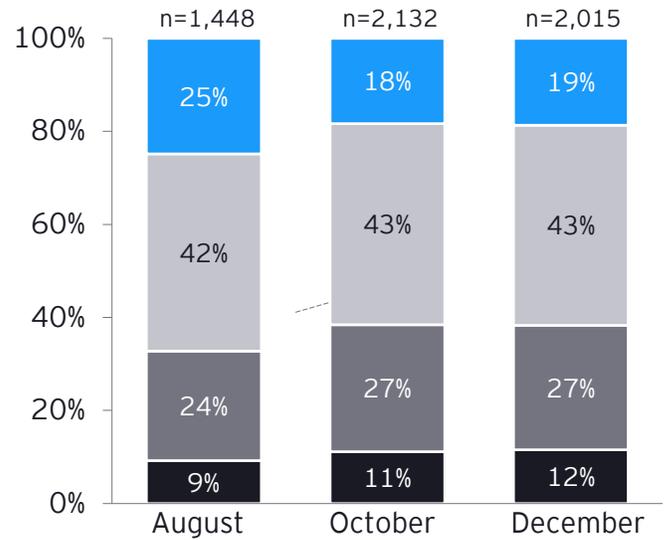
Consumers are **trying new brands and stores to save money**. Everyday-low-price (EDLP) and dollar stores are **attracting new shoppers**, including **higher-income shoppers**.

Personal financial confidence stabilized between October and December, and concerns about specific macroeconomic and geopolitical issues was slightly alleviated

Current personal financial confidence

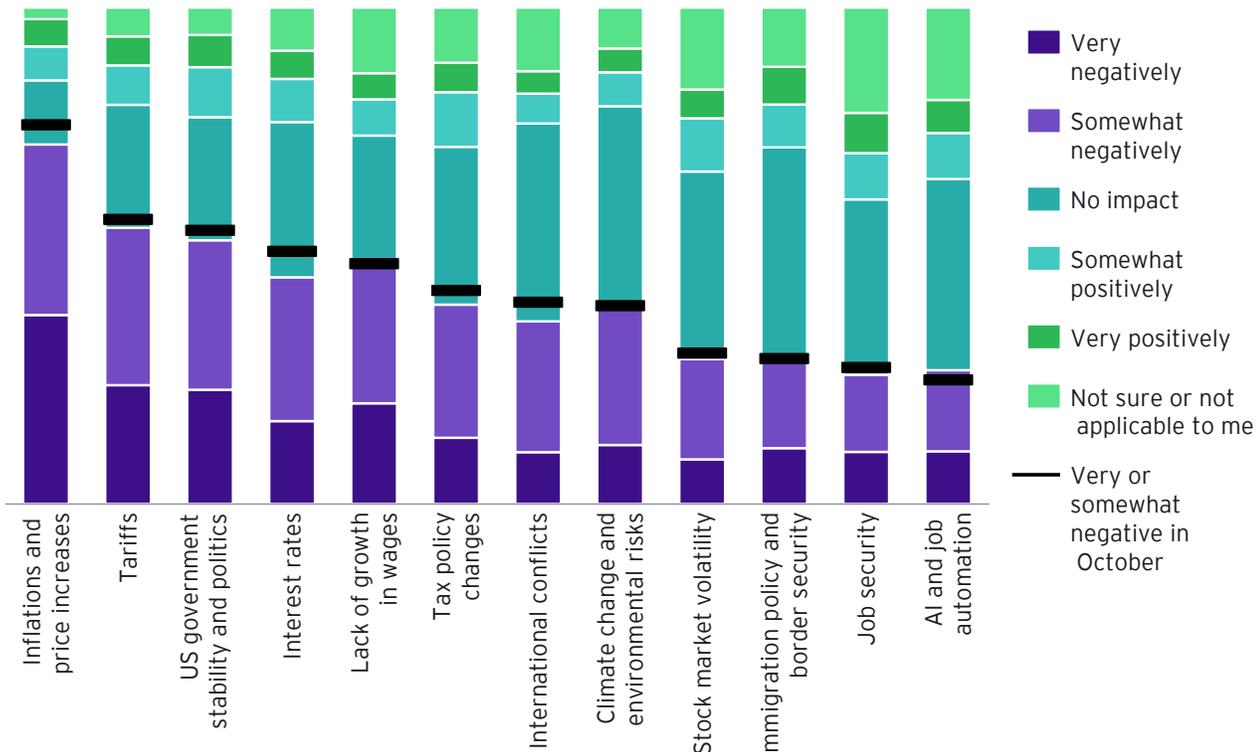
Q: Generally, how confident do you feel about your financial situation right now? (n=2,015)

■ Very confident ■ Not very confident
■ Somewhat confident ■ Not at all confident

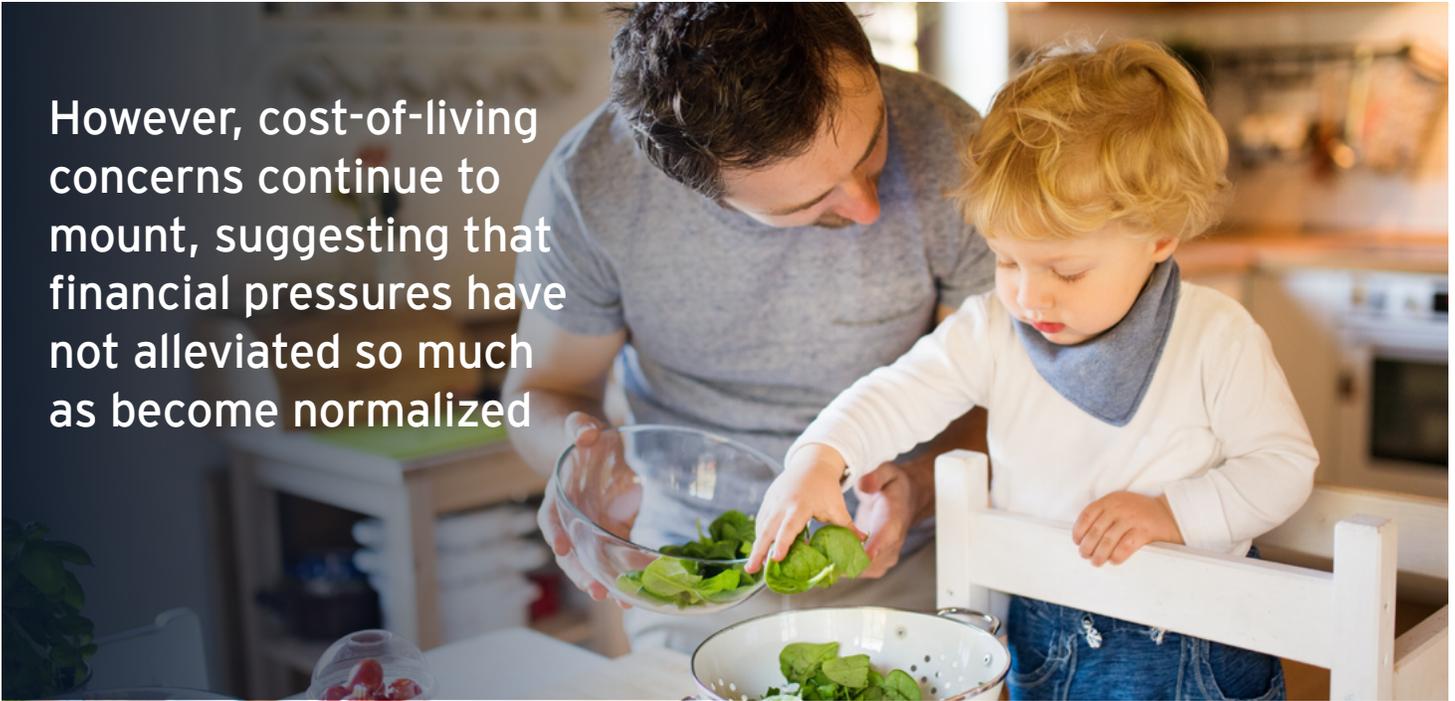


Perceived impacts of macroeconomic and geopolitical topics

Q: How do you think that each of the following is impacting you and your household? (n=2,015)



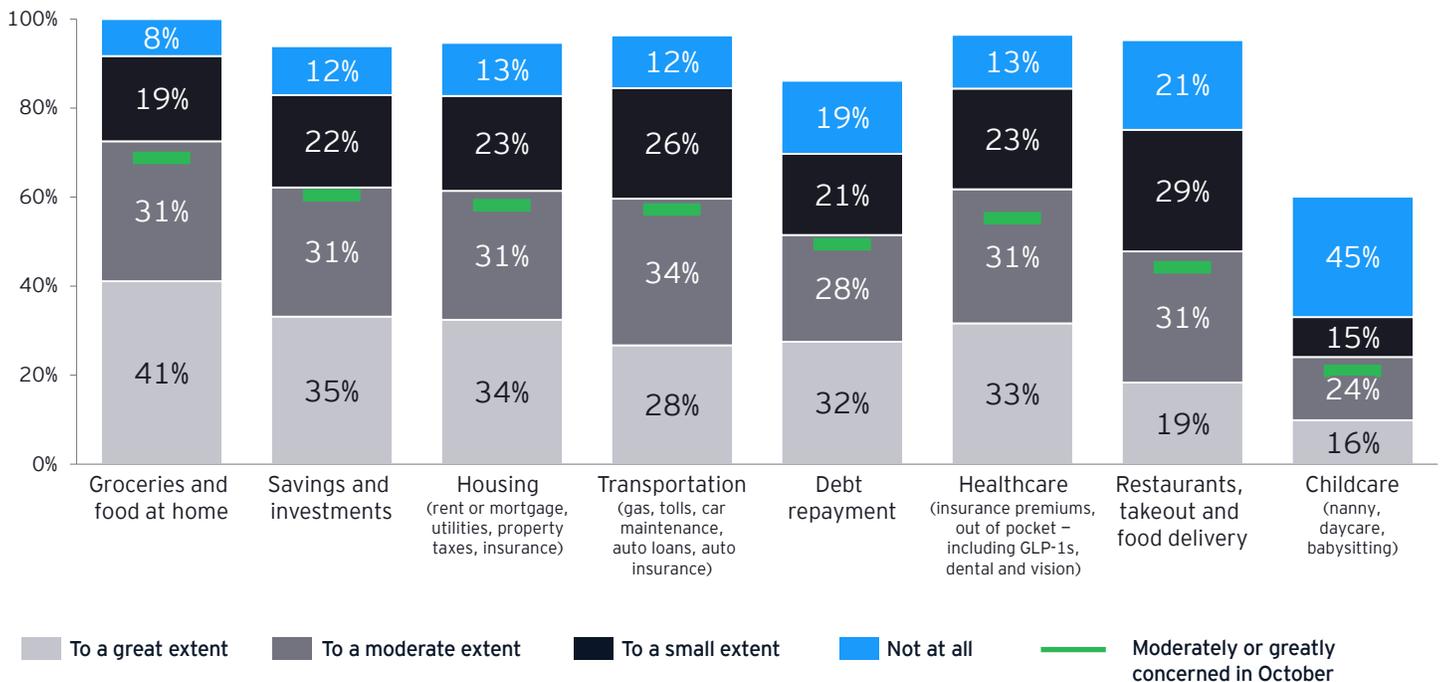
Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



However, cost-of-living concerns continue to mount, suggesting that financial pressures have not alleviated so much as become normalized

Concern with expenses

Q: To what extent are you concerned by your personal expenses in each of the following areas? (n=2,015¹)

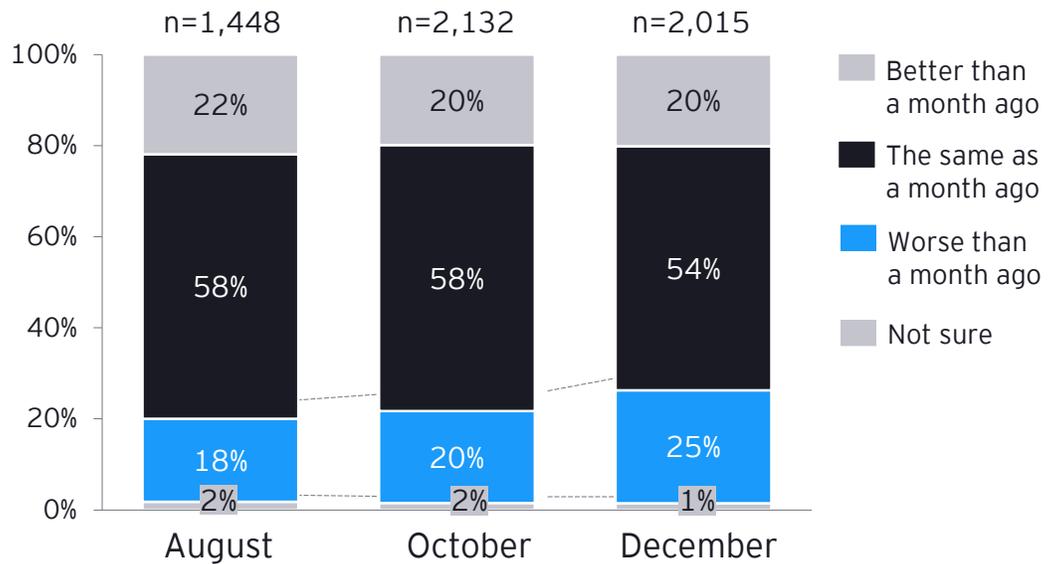


1. Excludes "n/a" responses.
Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Furthermore, consumers recognize that their personal finances are getting worse month over month, and nearly 70% continue to believe that a recession is likely in the next three years

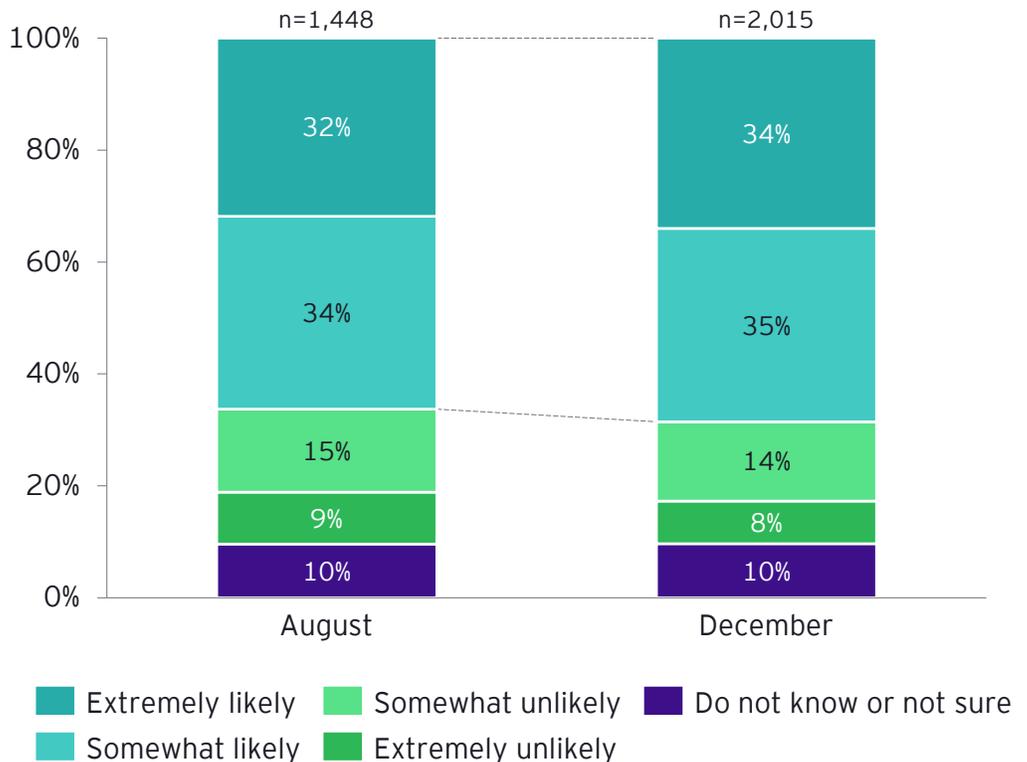
Relative financial position

Q: Would you say that you (and your household) are better off or worse off financially than you were one month ago? (n=2,015)



US recession outlook

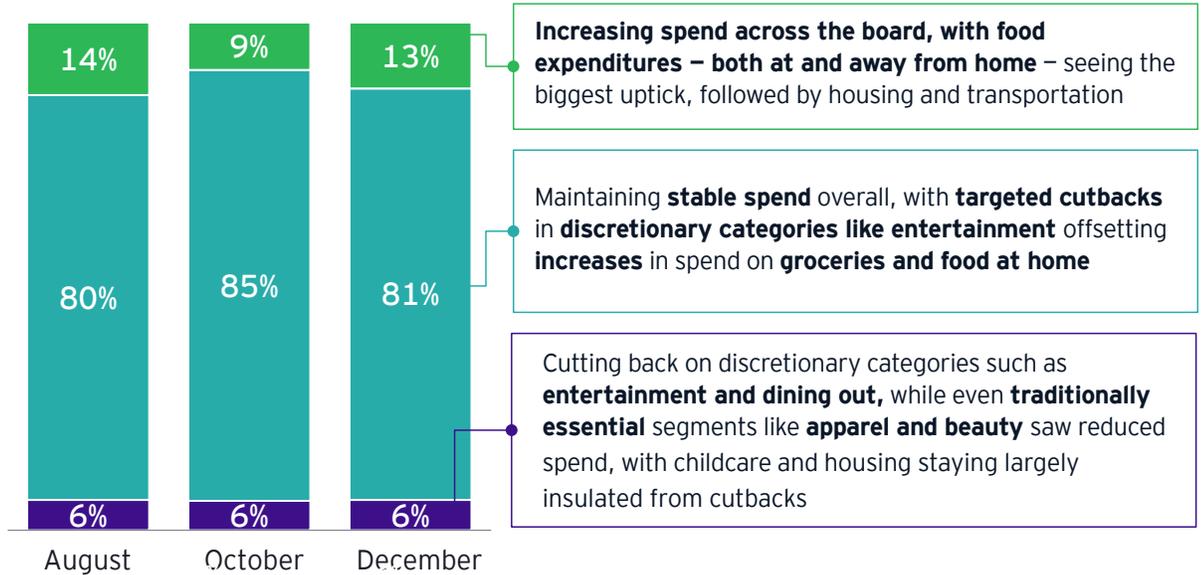
Q: How likely do you think it is that the US will experience a recession within the next 3 years? (n=2,015)



Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

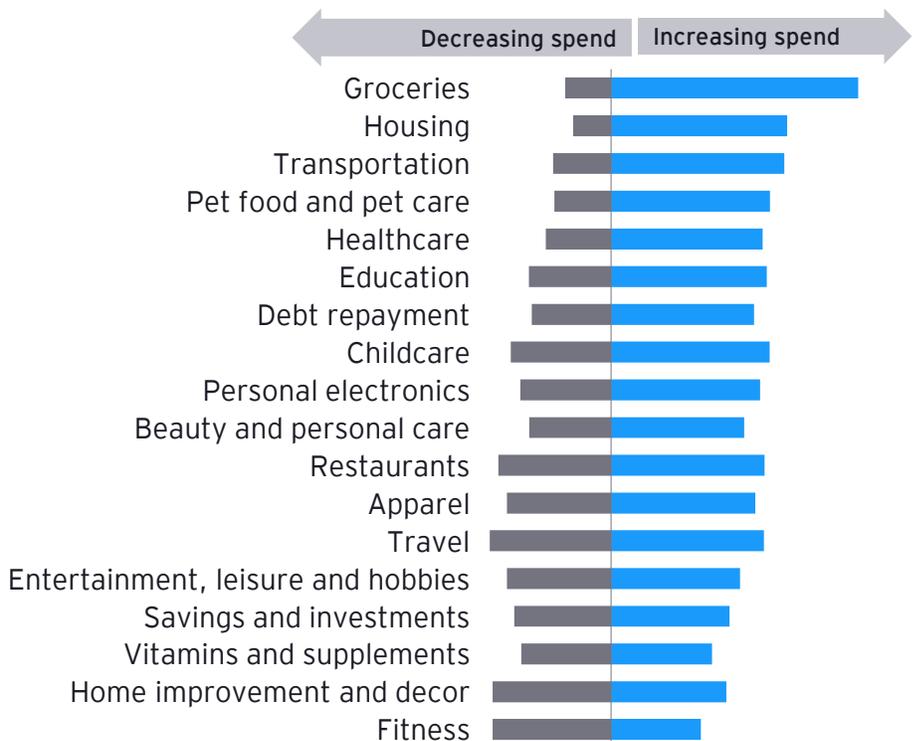
Despite the holiday season, only 13% of households were loosening their purse strings and spending big in November and December, reflecting continued scrutiny toward spending

Consumer spending segmentation



Net spending changes (% of households)¹

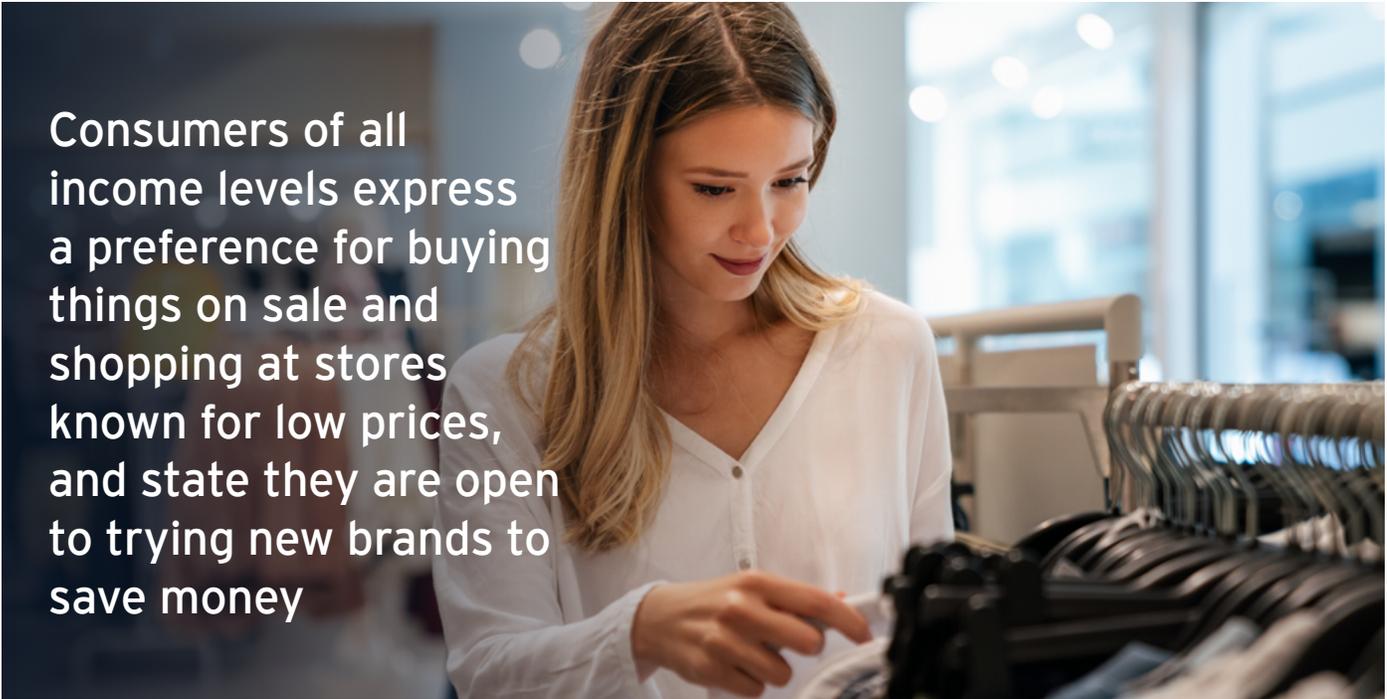
Q: Roughly speaking, did you spend more or less on each of the following goods and services this month compared to last month? (n=2,015²)



1. Represents % of households increasing spend per survey and net of households decreasing spend – does not translate into dollars.

2. Weights "a lot more or less" at 125% of "a little more or less"

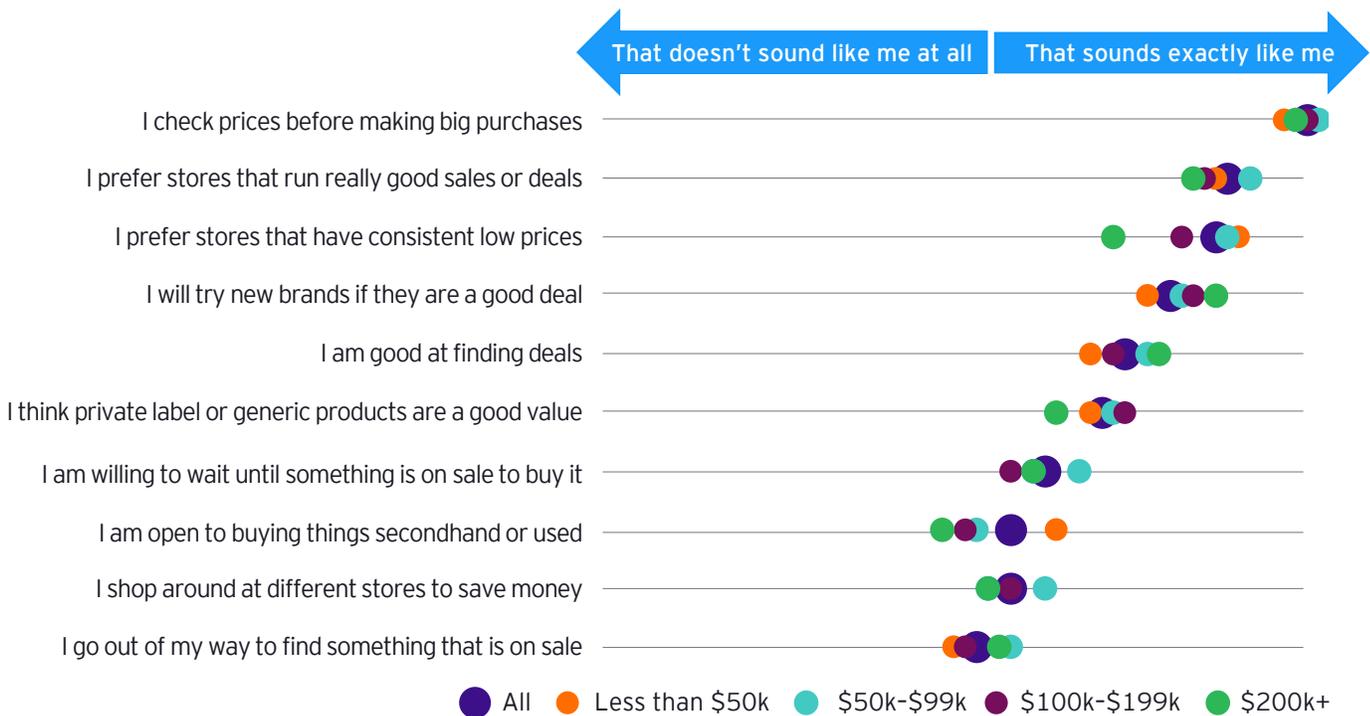
Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



Consumers of all income levels express a preference for buying things on sale and shopping at stores known for low prices, and state they are open to trying new brands to save money

Self-identified views and behavior on saving money

Q: How well does each of the following statements describe you? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = "That doesn't sound like me at all" and 5 = "That sounds exactly like me."? (n=2,015)¹



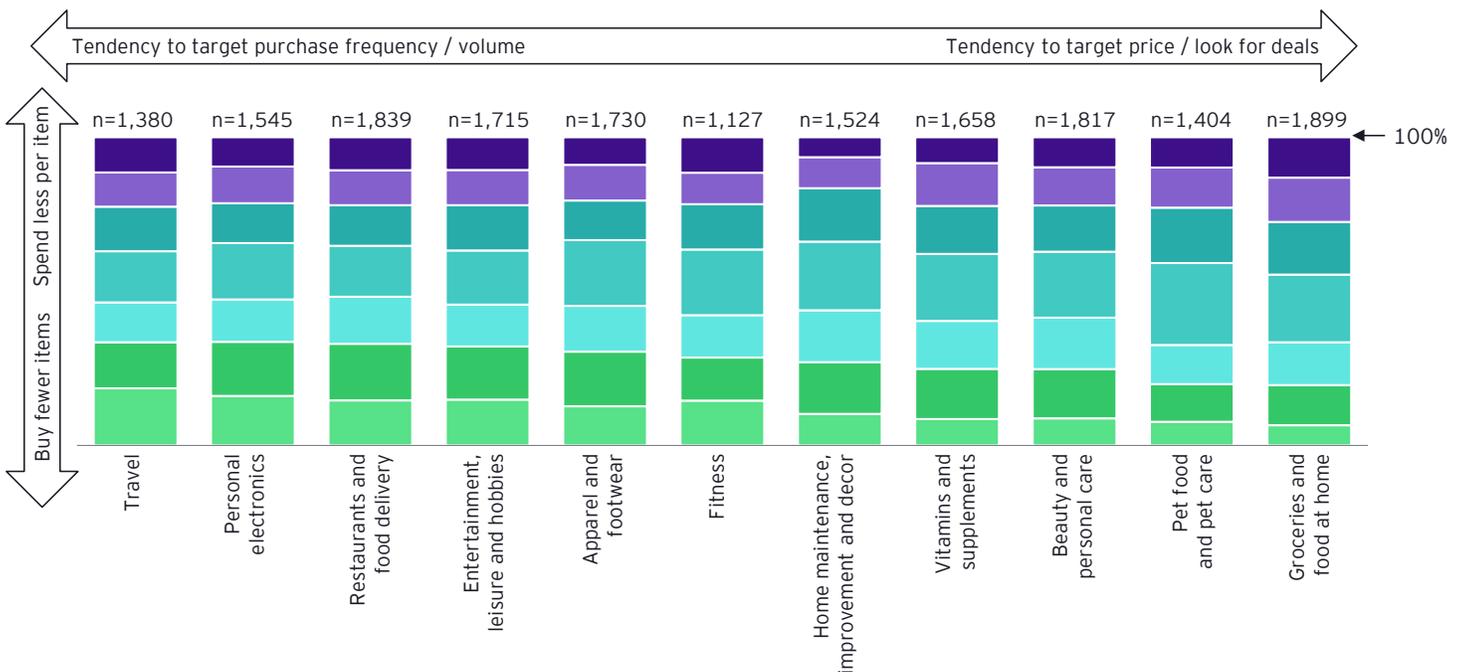
1. Represents %4 or 5 respondents
 Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Discretionary categories such as travel, entertainment, and dining out lend themselves to both reduced purchase frequency or volume and reduced unit expense



Anticipated cost-saving measures

Q: How do you think you could save money for this category, where 1 = Cut down on volume and frequency of purchases; 7 = Cut down on price and expense of purchases?

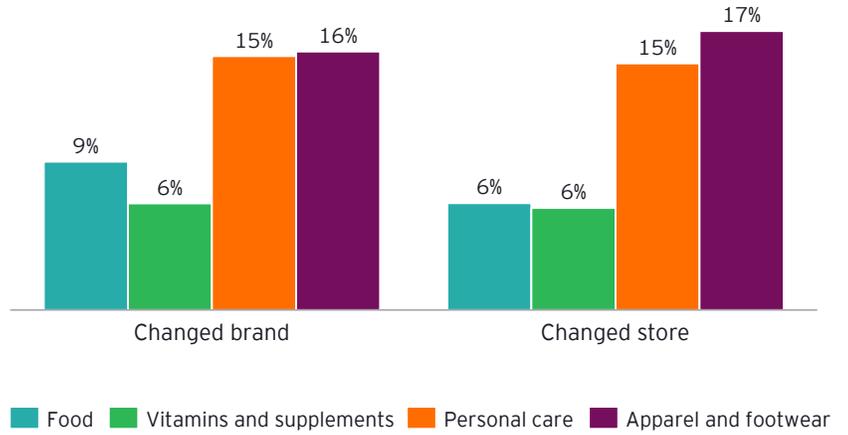


Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

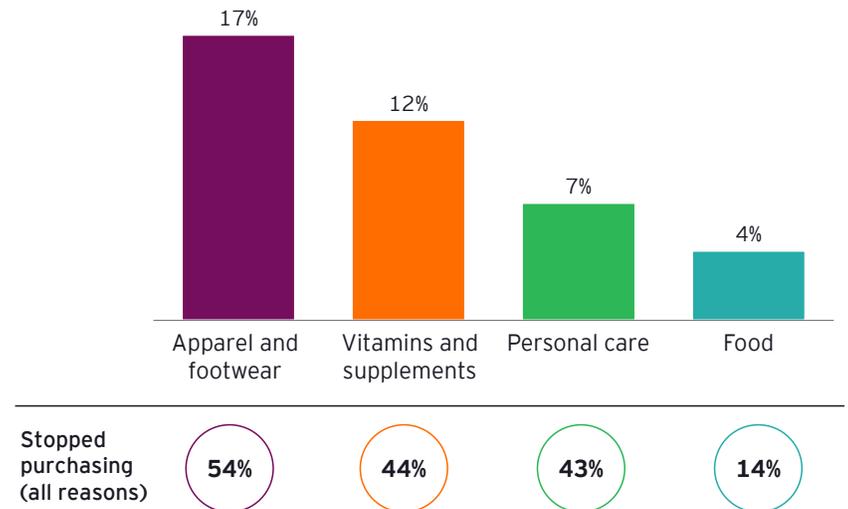
Consumer tactics to save money vary by category; stopping (or deferring) purchasing is more common for discretionary categories



Switched brands or stores to save money on routine purchases¹



Stopped purchasing to save money

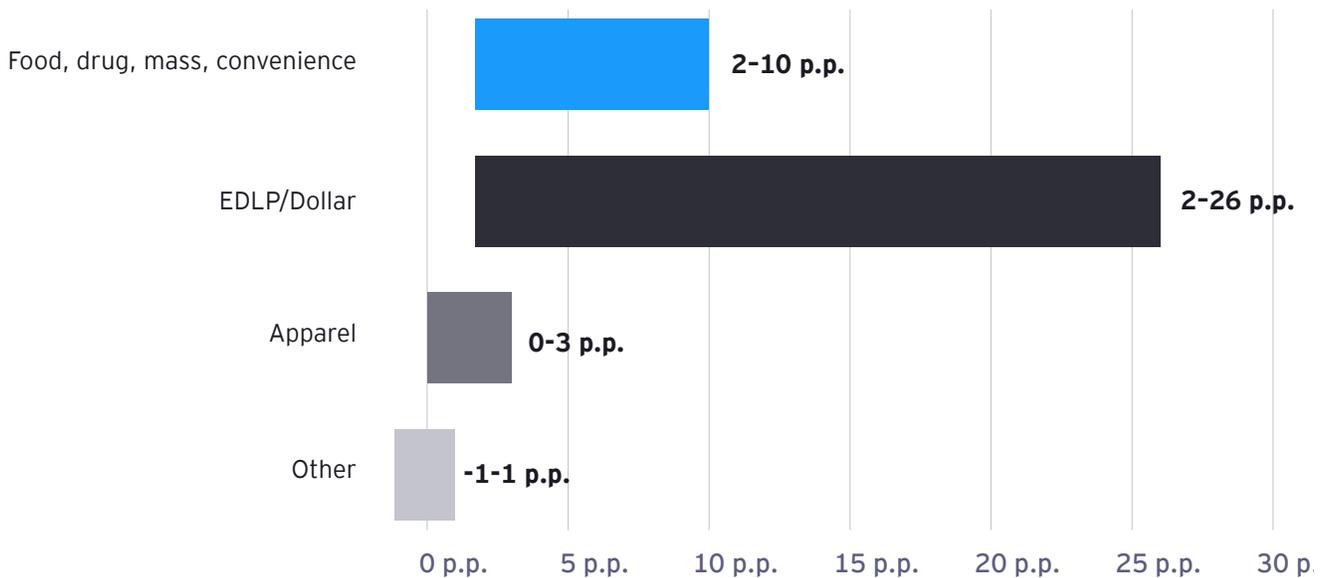


1. Consumers were asked about purchase behavior for representative subcategories (e.g., potato chips and juice) which were rolled up to the category level (e.g., food); subcategories used as proxies for category insight as follows: food (potato chips, juice), vitamins and supplements (protein powder, multivitamins), personal care (face cream, shampoo), apparel and footwear (t-shirts, sneakers, jeans)
 Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



Retailer share of household traffic, December 2025 vs. July 2025

Q: When did you last shop at each of the below stores or restaurants?



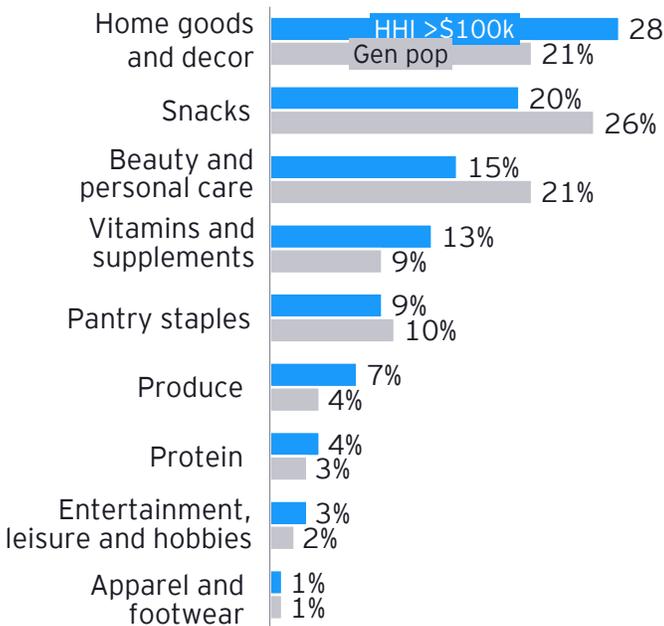
1. Represents who shopped at retailer this month
 Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



Higher-income consumers are entering the EDLP and dollar retail channels, and bringing with them different demand patterns

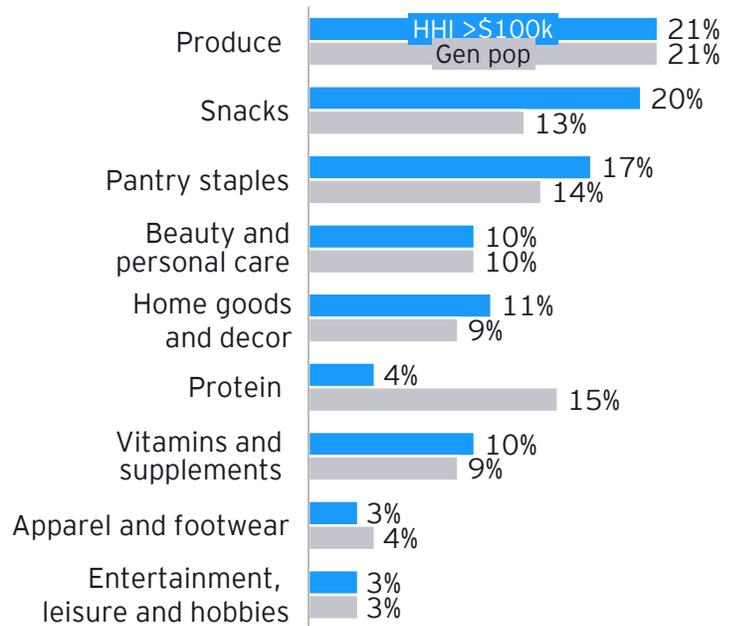
Categories purchased from Dollar stores

Q: What have you purchased from the below store(s) over the last 3 months?



Categories purchased from EDLP stores

Q: What have you purchased from the below store(s) over the last 3 months?



Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Additional findings



Additional comparisons to prior waves



Cross-cuts by income and age

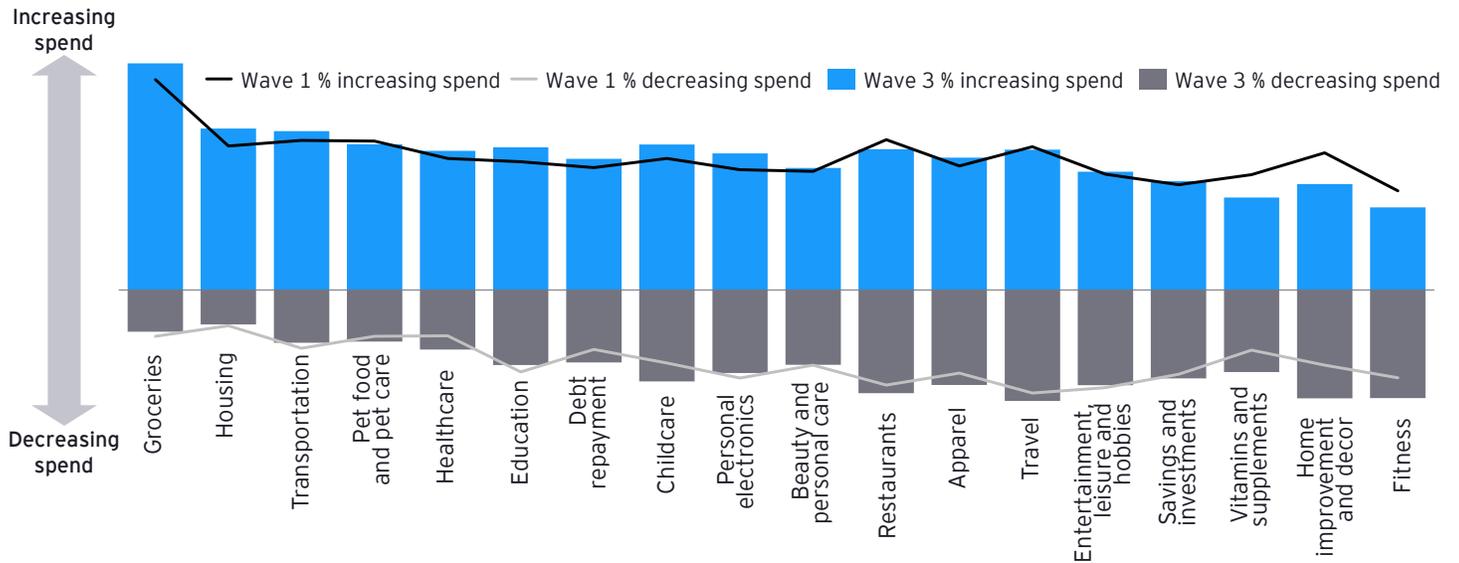


AI and social commerce

Spending patterns this month are relatively consistent with patterns six months ago

Net spending changes (% of households)¹

Q: Roughly speaking, did you spend more or less on each of the following goods and services this month compared to last month? (n=2,015²)

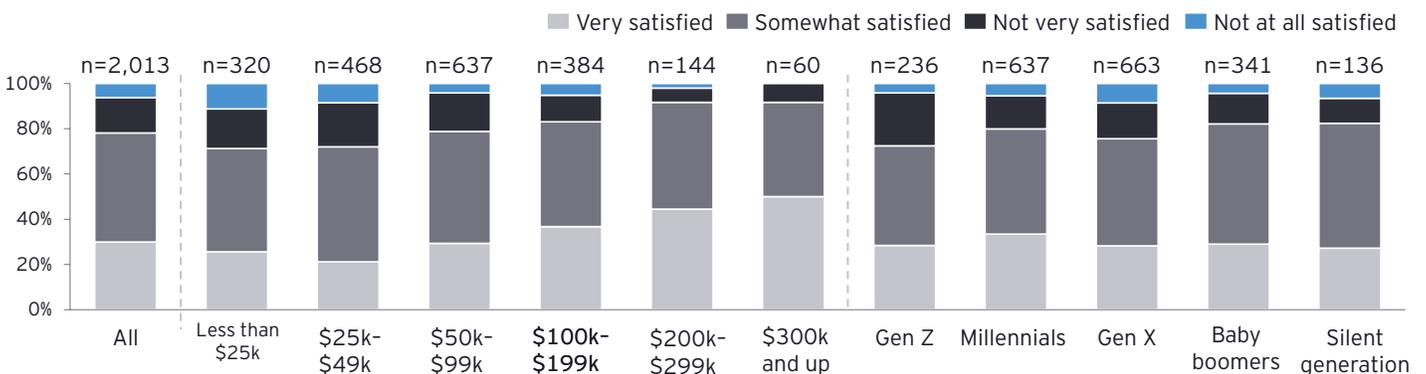


1. Represents % of households increasing spend per survey and net of households decreasing spend – does not translate into dollars.
 2. "N/A = I haven't bought this in the last two months" responses are excluded from the analysis.
 Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Life satisfaction is strongly correlative with income and, to a lesser extent, age, but the majority of Americans are at least somewhat satisfied regardless of income or age

Overall life satisfaction by income level and age group

Q: How satisfied are you with your life overall right now? (n=2,015¹)



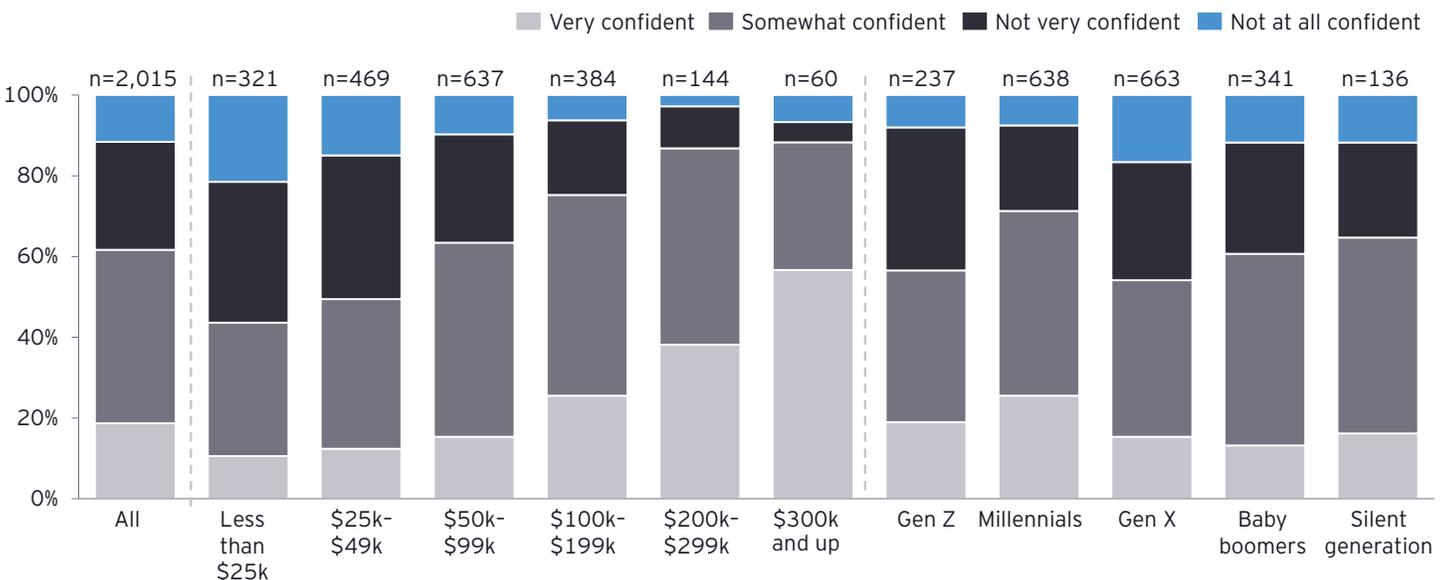
1. "Prefer not to answer" responses are excluded from the analysis.
 Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Financial confidence is highly disparate, with the majority of households earning below the median household wage (\$83k) stating they lack confidence in their finances



Financial confidence by income level and age group

Q: Generally, how confident do you feel about your financial situation right now? (n=2,015)

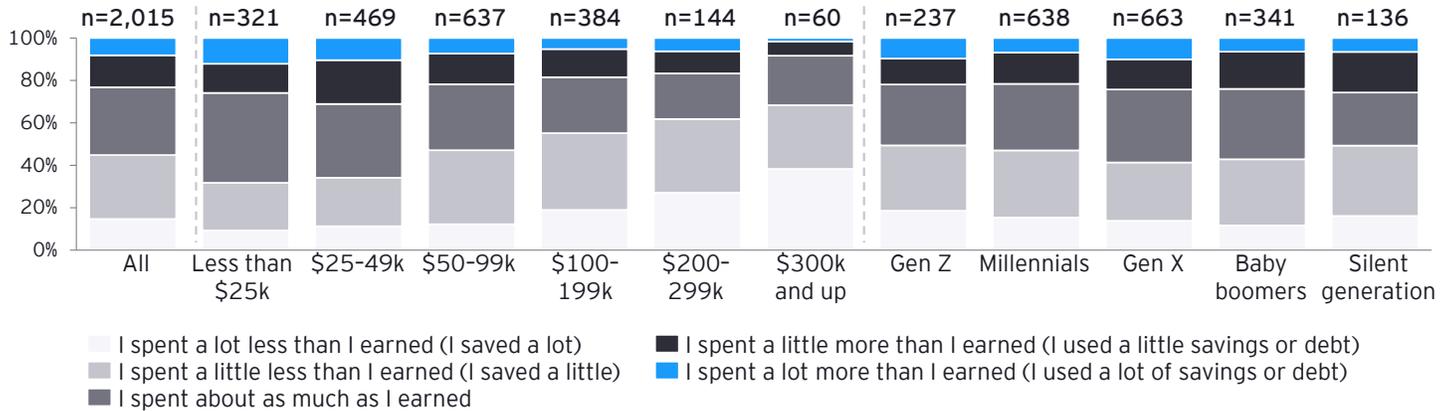


Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Propensity to save increases with income but is largely consistent by age; which is interesting, as propensity to overspend earnings is fairly consistent regardless of income

Income vs. spend

QQ: Which of the following best describes your income and spending over the last month? (n=2,015)

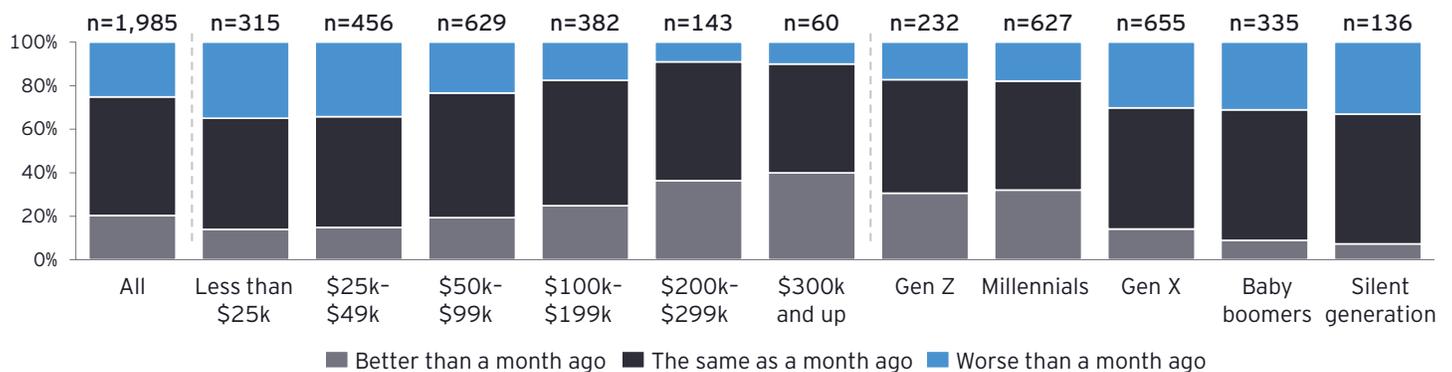


Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Most households, regardless of income or age, feel that their financial position is stable this month, and many high-income households believe their situation is even improving

Relative financial position

Q: Would you say that you (and your household) are better off or worse off financially than you were one month ago? (n=1,985)



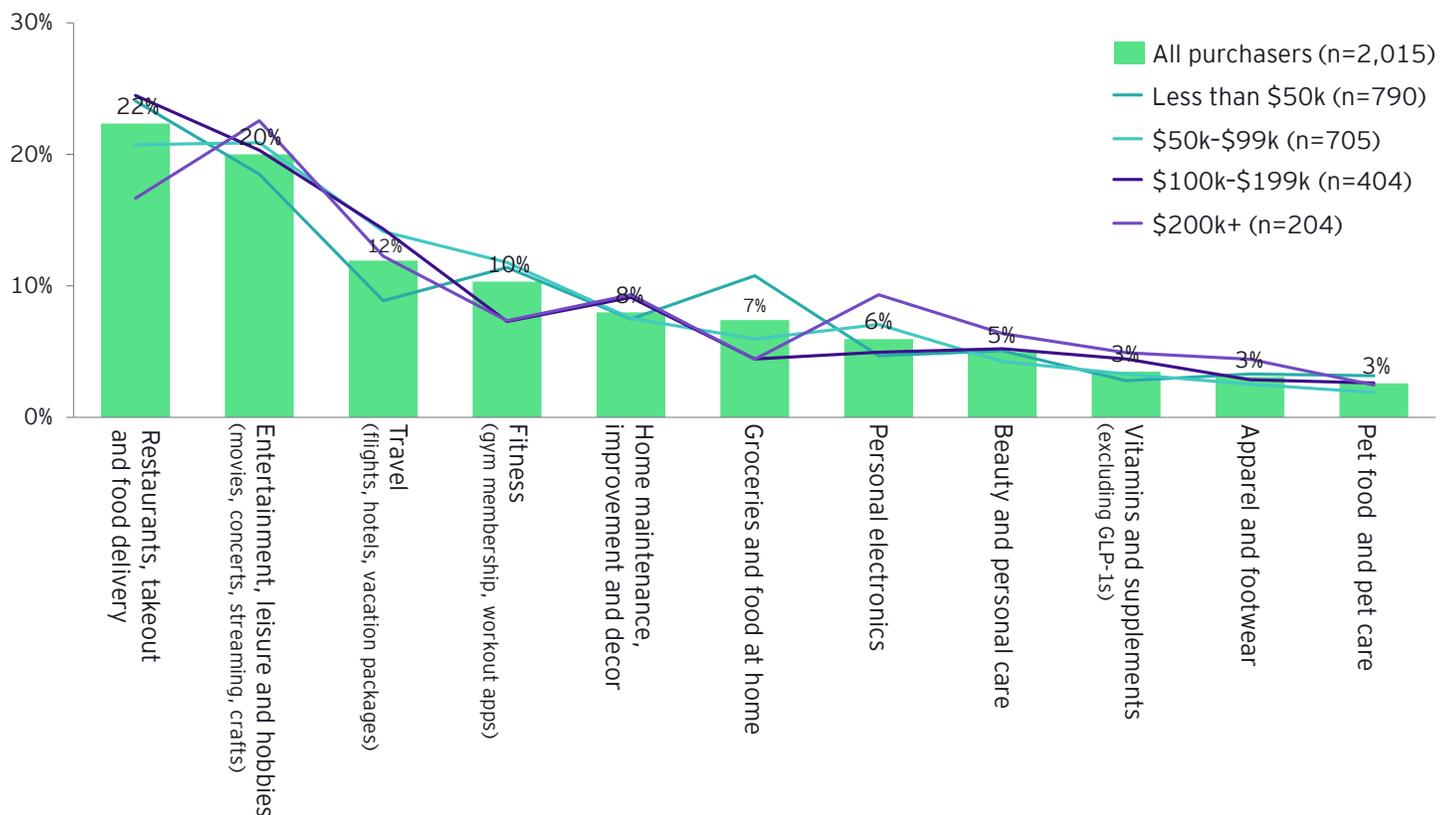
Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



Restaurants remain vulnerable to continued and future spend decreases, and sentiments are generally uniform regardless of consumer income level

Category to cut if facing financial concerns

Q: What is the category that you will first cut spend on if facing financial concerns? (n=2,015)



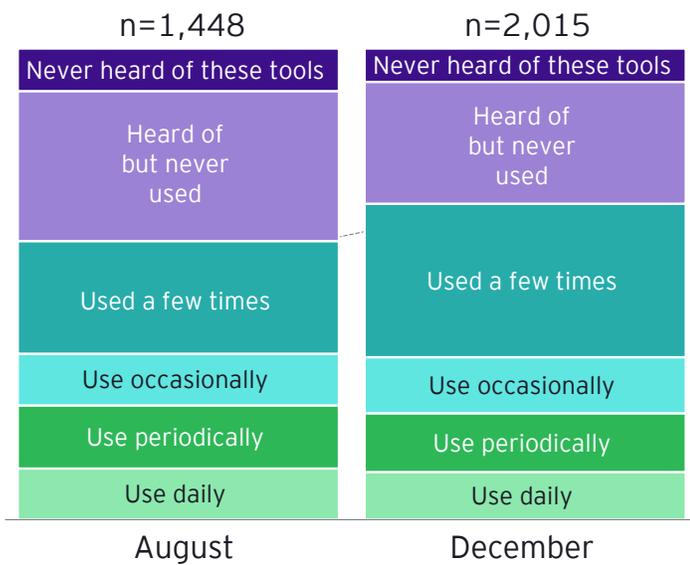
Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

Usage of social and agentic commerce is increasing, further shaping consumer behavior across a variety of emerging channels



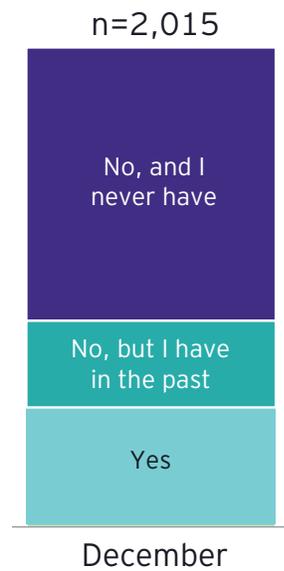
AI usage

Q: How would you describe your familiarity with artificial intelligence?

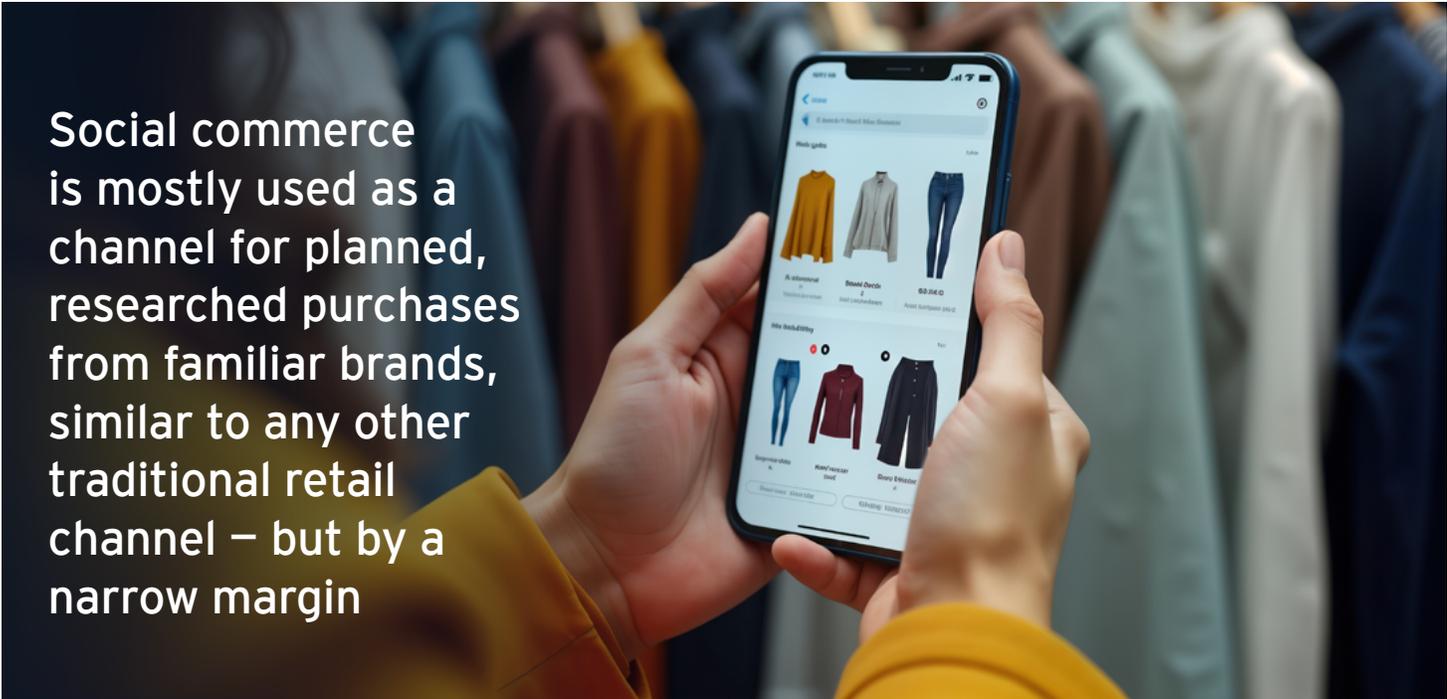


Social commerce shop usage

Q: Did you buy anything on social commerce platforms this month?

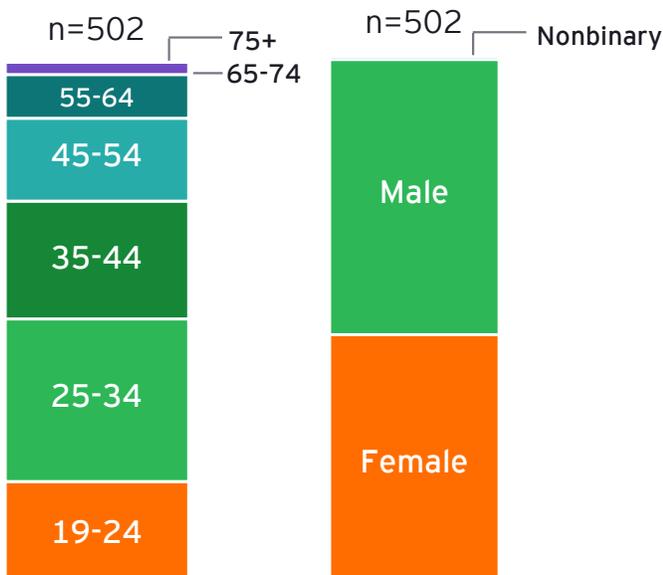


Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.



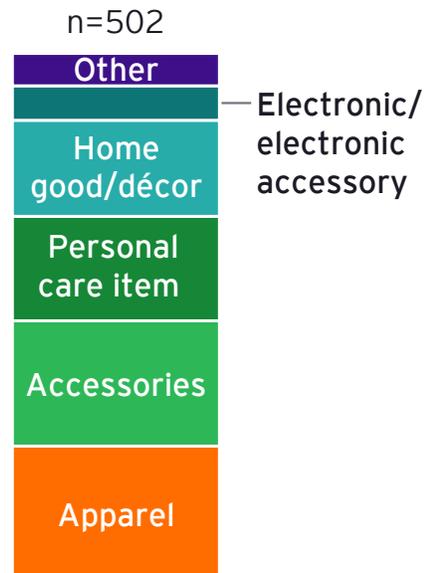
**Demographics:
Social commerce shopper**

Q: Did you buy anything on social commerce this month? (respondents who said "Yes")



Category purchased

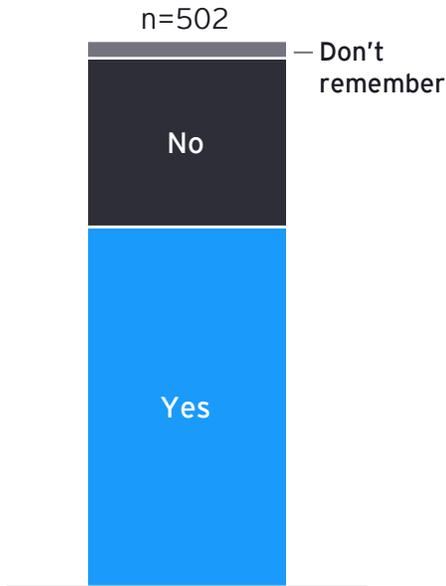
Q: Which of the following best describes what you most recently bought on social commerce?



Source: EY-Parthenon analysis of EY-Parthenon US Consumer Sentiment Survey.

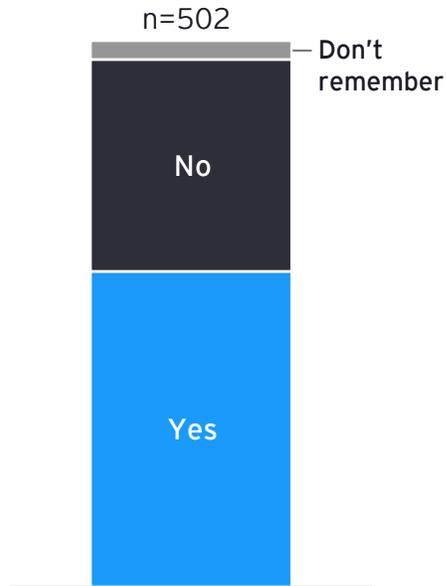
Brand or store familiarity

Q: Was this from a brand and/or store that you already knew and trusted?



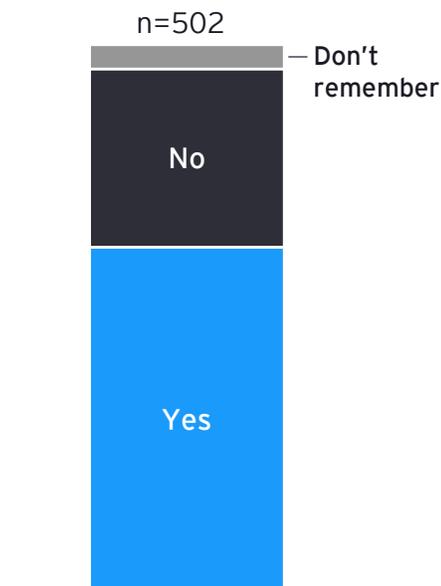
Planned purchase

Q: Was this a planned purchase?



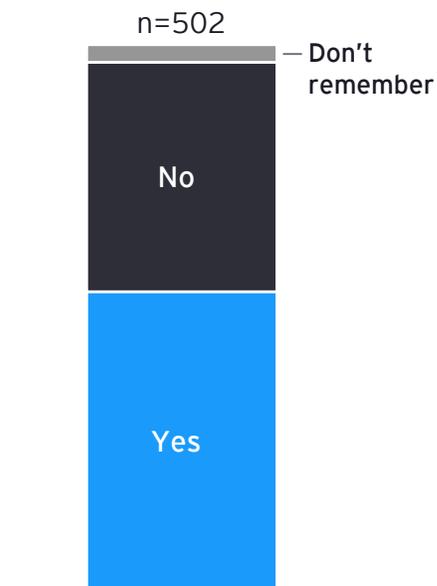
Price comparison

Q: Did you compare prices before making the purchase?



Price research

Q: Did you do any research outside of the app before making the purchase?



Will retailers chase trends or reshape demand?

At the EY organization, we see disruption as opportunities for retailers to transform how they deliver value. We work with retailers to define their relevance in the market. By empowering leaders to invest boldly, implement strategically and innovate meaningfully, we help retailers remain essential in their customers' lives.



Transforming complex journeys into confident outcomes for retailers

Contact the EY-Parthenon consumer insights and analytics team for questions



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2509-10769-CS
ED None.

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