



Marketplace Shopping Behavior Report 2026

Okay! We have a great selection of wireless noise cancelling headphones. Here are some options for you:



Smart NC 1000
\$150

Check out



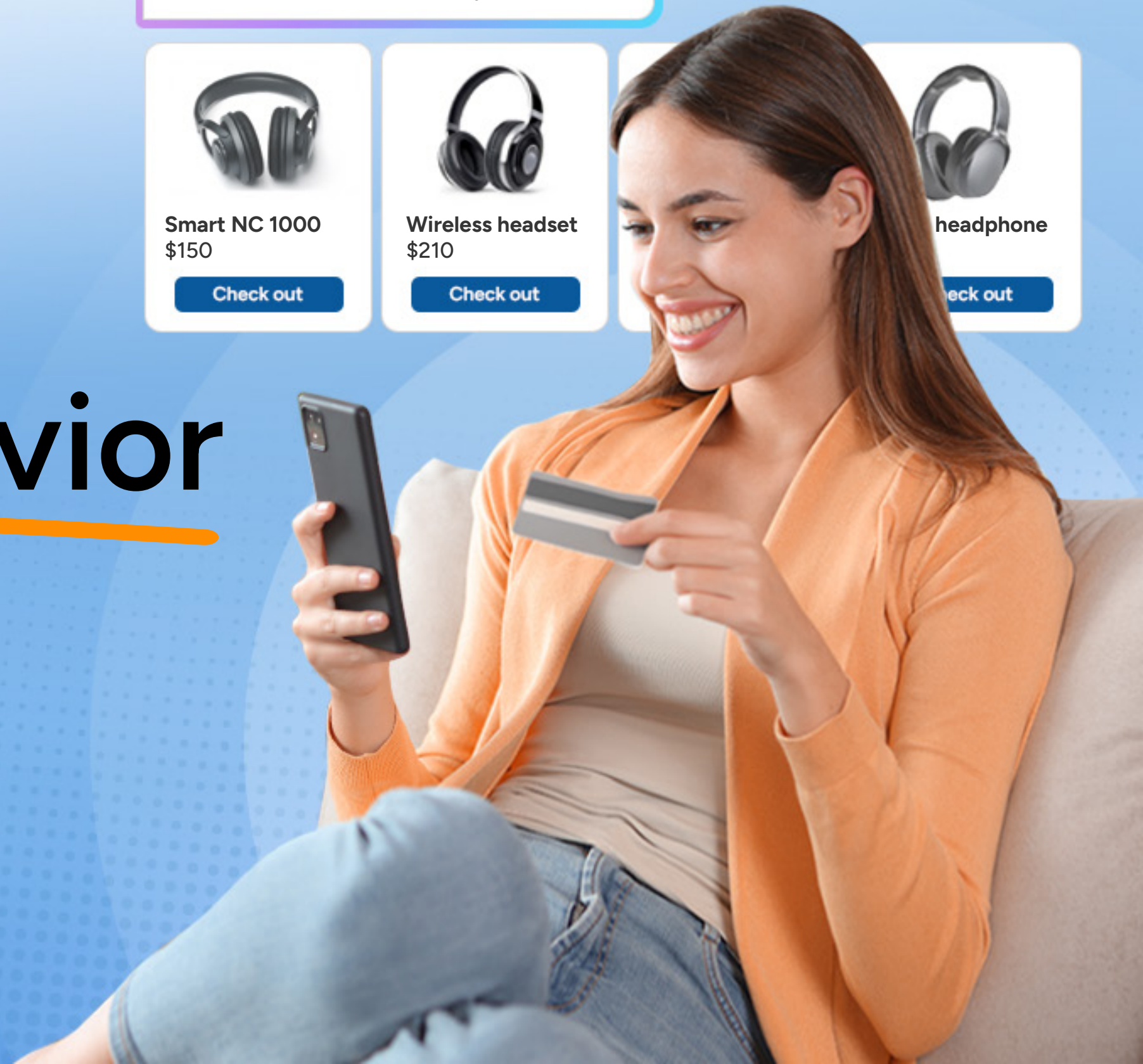
Wireless headset
\$210

Check out



headphone

Check out

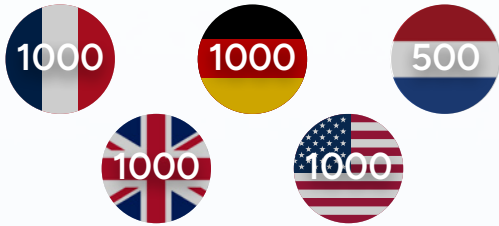


Thousands of shoppers, new insights for 2026

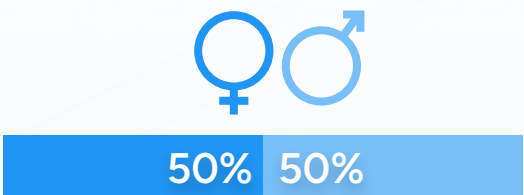
We surveyed 4,500 online marketplace shoppers across the US, UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands to find out the latest trends in consumer behavior on marketplaces - and **what these trends mean for brands and retailers' marketplace strategies**.

After kicking this series off last year, we're continuing the journey with new data for 2026. While [2025's report](#) was about how marketplaces became the starting point for online shopping, 2026 is about how **trust, transparency, and technology** now define that experience. Online surveys were conducted by Sapio Research in October 2025 using an online survey.

Country of residence



Gender



Age

Age group	% of respondents
GenZ, 18 - 27	18%
Millennials, 28 - 34	18%
Older Millennials, 35 - 43	17%
GenX, 44 - 59	17%
Boomers, 60+	16%
Older Boomers, 70+	14%

Top 3 Online marketplaces



Where do online purchases usually start?

Marketplaces have now overtaken search engines in almost every market. While marketplaces continue to lead shopper discovery (37% shoppers starting their journey on marketplaces), consumers are increasingly spreading their attention across **search, social, and emerging AI-driven channels**.

Even though marketplace-led discovery is lower than last year, 39% of shoppers still expect their marketplace use to increase. Over half say their usage will remain stable, showing marketplace shopping is firmly entrenched. With competition rising, **stronger visibility strategies are essential**, especially as **shoppers browse an average of 3 marketplaces before buying**.

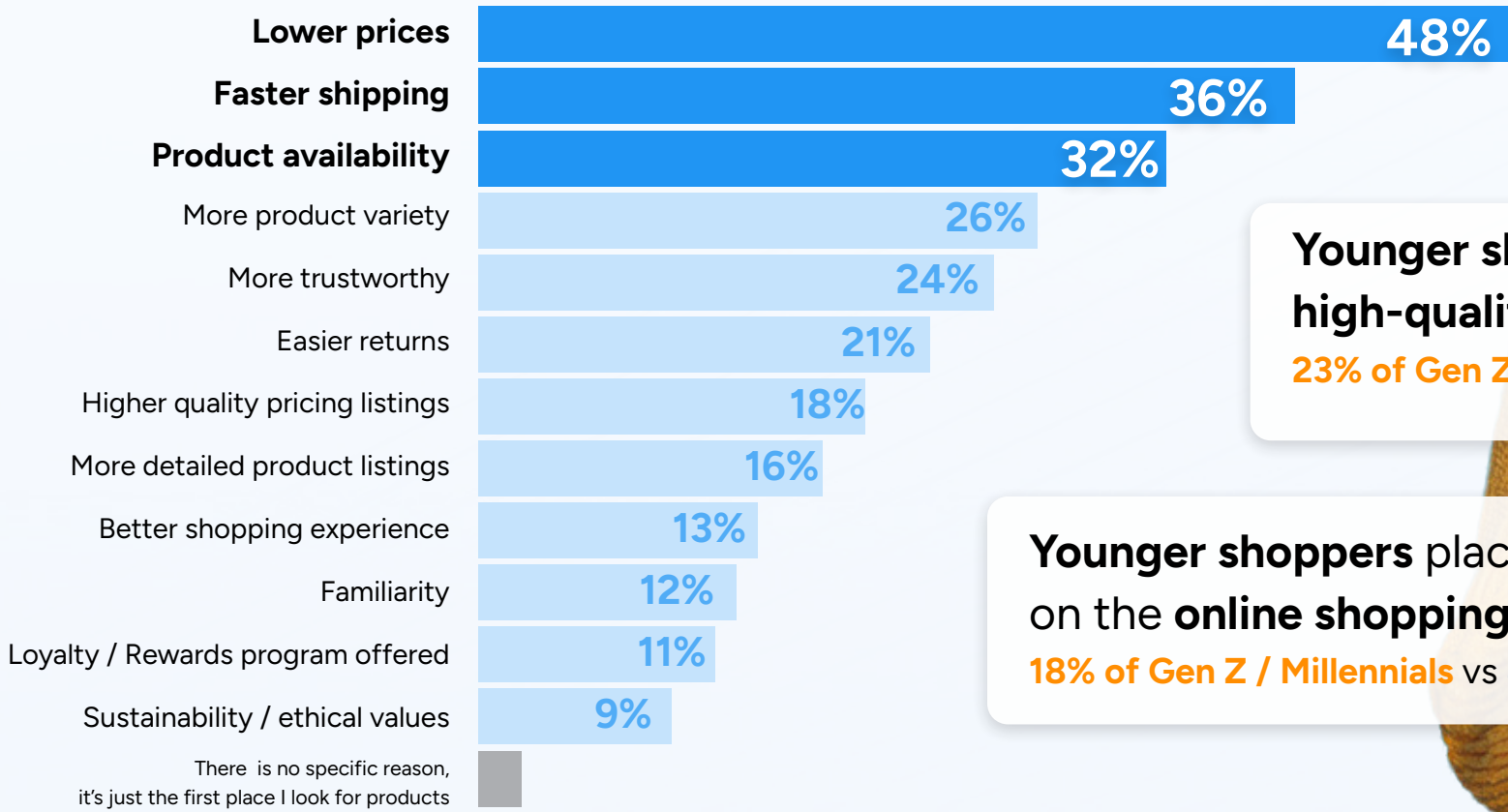


	2025	2026
Main starting point (most markets)	Marketplaces lead	Marketplaces still lead
shoppers starting on marketplaces	47%	37%
Overall shift	Concentrated on marketplaces	More fragmented across channels

What do shoppers find most important when shopping on marketplaces?

Shoppers gravitate toward marketplaces for their convenience and breadth of choice, **yet price remains the strongest motivator**. Lower prices (48%), faster shipping (36%), product availability (32%), and product variety (26%) are the top factors influencing what shoppers choose to buy on a marketplace.

Q. What is most important to you when shopping on online marketplaces? Select up to three

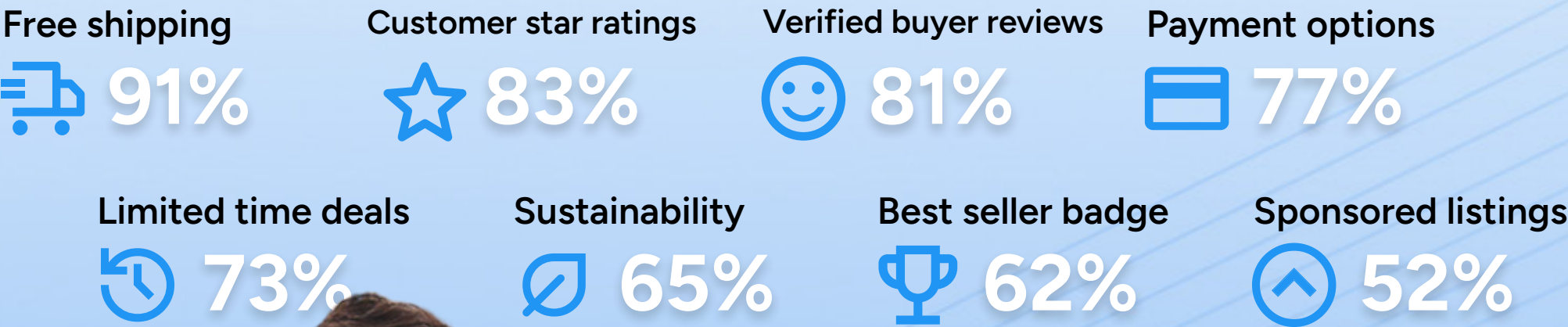


Younger shoppers focus more on **high-quality product listings**
23% of Gen Z / Millennials vs 14% of Boomers

Younger shoppers place more importance on the **online shopping experience**
18% of Gen Z / Millennials vs 8% of Boomers

Older shoppers prioritize **price** as their top decision factor
37% of Gen Z / Millennials vs 55% of Boomers

What drives consumers' decisions while shopping on a marketplace?



Trust signals, like ratings and reviews, matter even more to younger shoppers, who rely heavily on **social proof when evaluating products and sellers.**

Shoppers often say sustainability matters, but it appears to play a smaller role when it comes to actual purchase decisions.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

Shoppers aren't only looking for lower prices. They evaluate the total value package, including shipping costs, delivery speed, and reliability. A key finding is that free shipping strongly influences purchase decisions for 91% of shoppers.

Additional survey results show that 95% notice price differences across marketplaces, reinforcing the need for price alignment and value clarity.

As a marketplace seller, **you must combine competitive and consistent pricing with clear fulfilment benefits and trust markers,** or risk shoppers shifting to competitors.



How do sponsored listings influence discovery?

Sponsored listings are becoming a noticeable driver of product discovery, with many shoppers saying ads help them find new items and sometimes even lead directly to a purchase.

The impact is strongest among **younger shoppers, those with higher levels of marketplace interaction**, and those who already shop across **multiple marketplaces**.

For sellers on marketplaces, this means that sponsored ads are not just about getting an immediate click or sale. You should also think about how your ads can help you make it onto a shopper's shortlist while they are still weighing their options. Since shoppers compare more marketplaces before making a decision, showing up early in their discovery process has become a key part of winning the final purchase.

Sponsored placements do more than drive clicks. They shape how shoppers shortlist products, which is the part of the journey brands often underestimate.

How much do shoppers compare before they buy?

Most shoppers now treat marketplaces as comparison engines, not just shop fronts: **53% say they always or often compare the same product across multiple platforms** before purchasing, and browse **an average of three** marketplaces before deciding.

For brands or marketplace sellers, this means that **consistency across marketplaces is a prerequisite**. Price differences across marketplaces weaken trust immediately, while missing or incomplete product details introduce doubt, making shoppers question accuracy and slowing down conversion.



SECTION SUMMARY

Marketplaces are the starting point, but the purchase path is intentional

Consumers still begin their online shopping journey on marketplaces, consistent with last year's findings. What's changing is what happens next. Shoppers are more confident, selective, and value-driven, knowing how to compare, validate, and navigate marketplaces before committing.

Transparency and consistency now matter more than presence alone. Pricing, complete product content, credible reviews, and strong placement determine whether a product makes the shortlist—especially for younger shoppers, who actively use discovery tools and compare across multiple marketplaces.

For brands and retailers, **success depends on delivering clarity, accuracy, and competitive value at every touchpoint.** In a multi-marketplace journey, consistency is what builds trust and drives conversion.



How does transparency drive trust and decision-making?

Shoppers today want clarity at every step: who they're buying from, what they're getting, and what protections are in place.

As price sensitivity rises and shoppers compare more than ever, transparent information and consistent value signals have become essential. Trust is no longer built on brand reputation alone, but on the clarity and credibility of what shoppers see in the moment they are deciding.

TRENDS TO WATCH

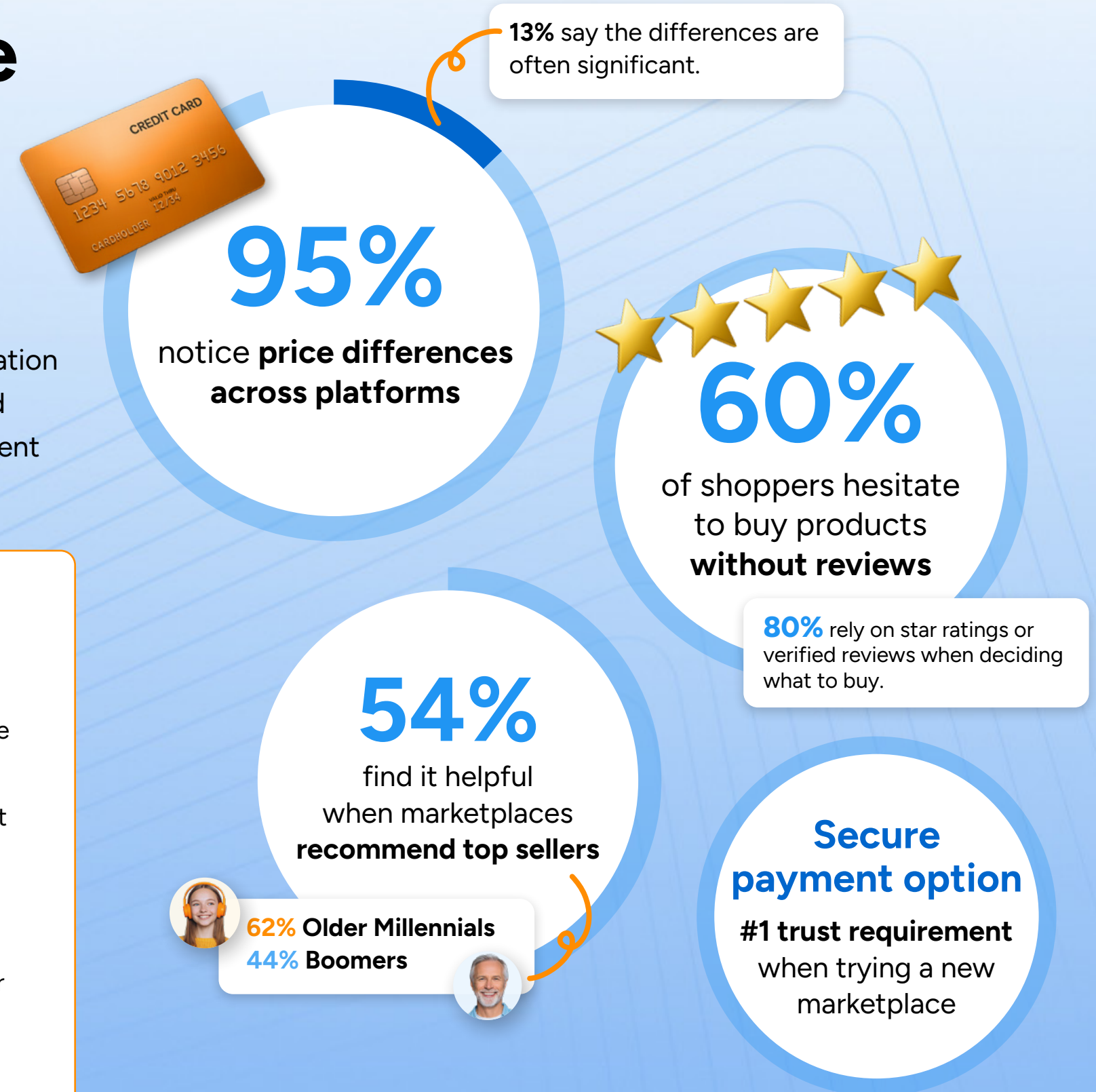
Social proof is becoming a conversion requirement.

Shoppers have become more selective and more dependent on validation. In 2025, reviews influenced decisions, but only a third of shoppers fully trusted them. In 2026, shoppers have become more decisive. 3 in 5 now hesitate to buy if reviews are missing.

This shift comes at a time when 51% of shoppers struggle to choose between products that look too similar in search results.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

Similarity creates uncertainty. When shoppers cannot easily identify which product or seller is credible, they fall back on proof from other customers for strong reviews, real images, and clear signs of authenticity. Brands without this social proof are quickly filtered out in crowded categories.



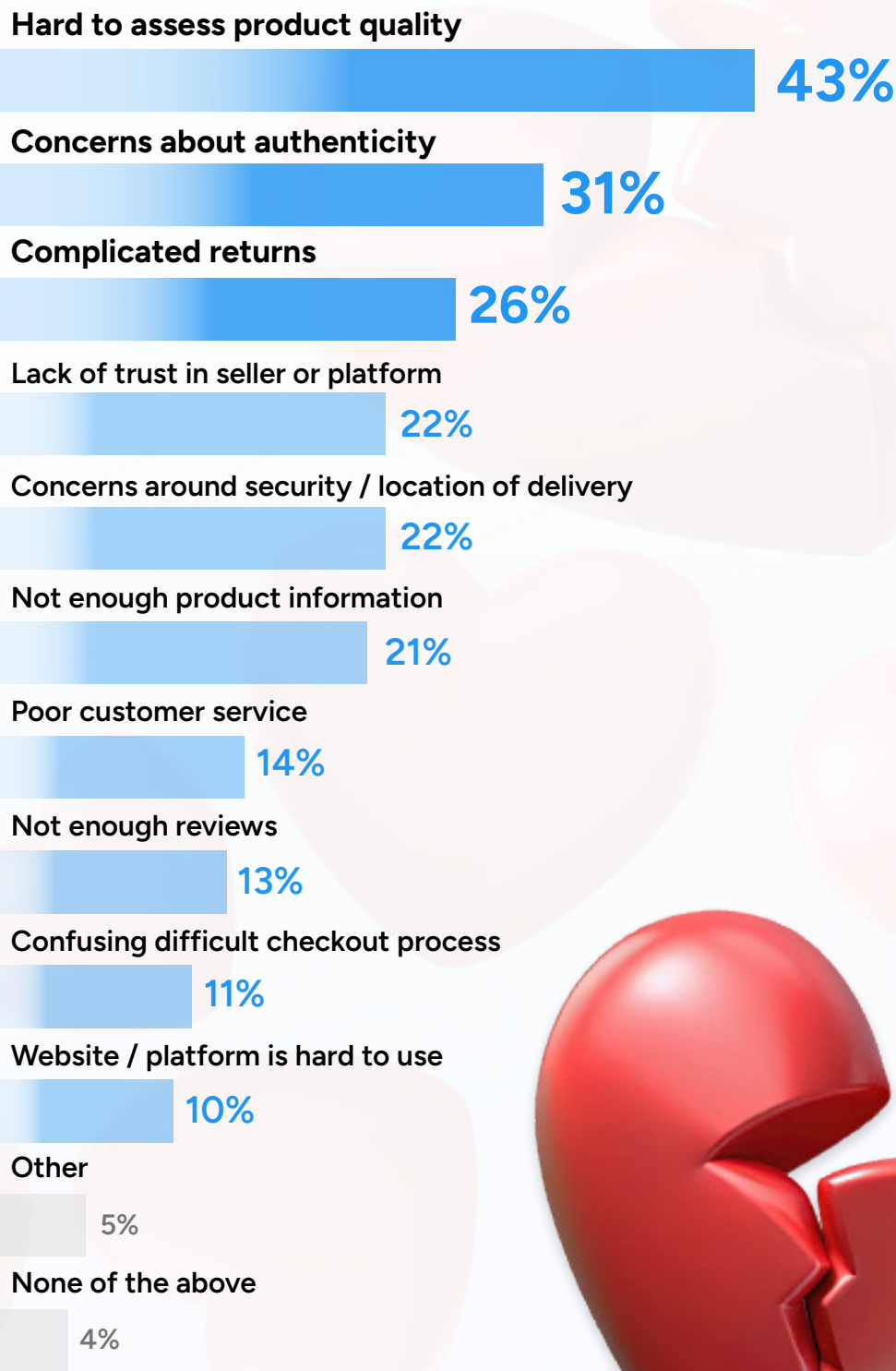
What damages trust?

Conversely, unclear or incomplete information can erode trust just as quickly.

In fact, **concerns about product quality (43%)** and **authenticity (31%)**, along with uncertainty around **seller identity (22%)**, are the leading reasons shoppers avoid certain categories on marketplaces, especially for higher-value purchases. **Returns and refund friction (26%)** is also a common trigger for distrust.

Across categories and age groups, the message is consistent: When shoppers cannot easily assess quality, authenticity, or seller identity, hesitation rises and conversion stalls. High cost or higher risk categories, such as luxury or technology, amplify this effect even further.

Q. What are the main reasons you would not buy this type / these types of products on an online marketplace? Select top three

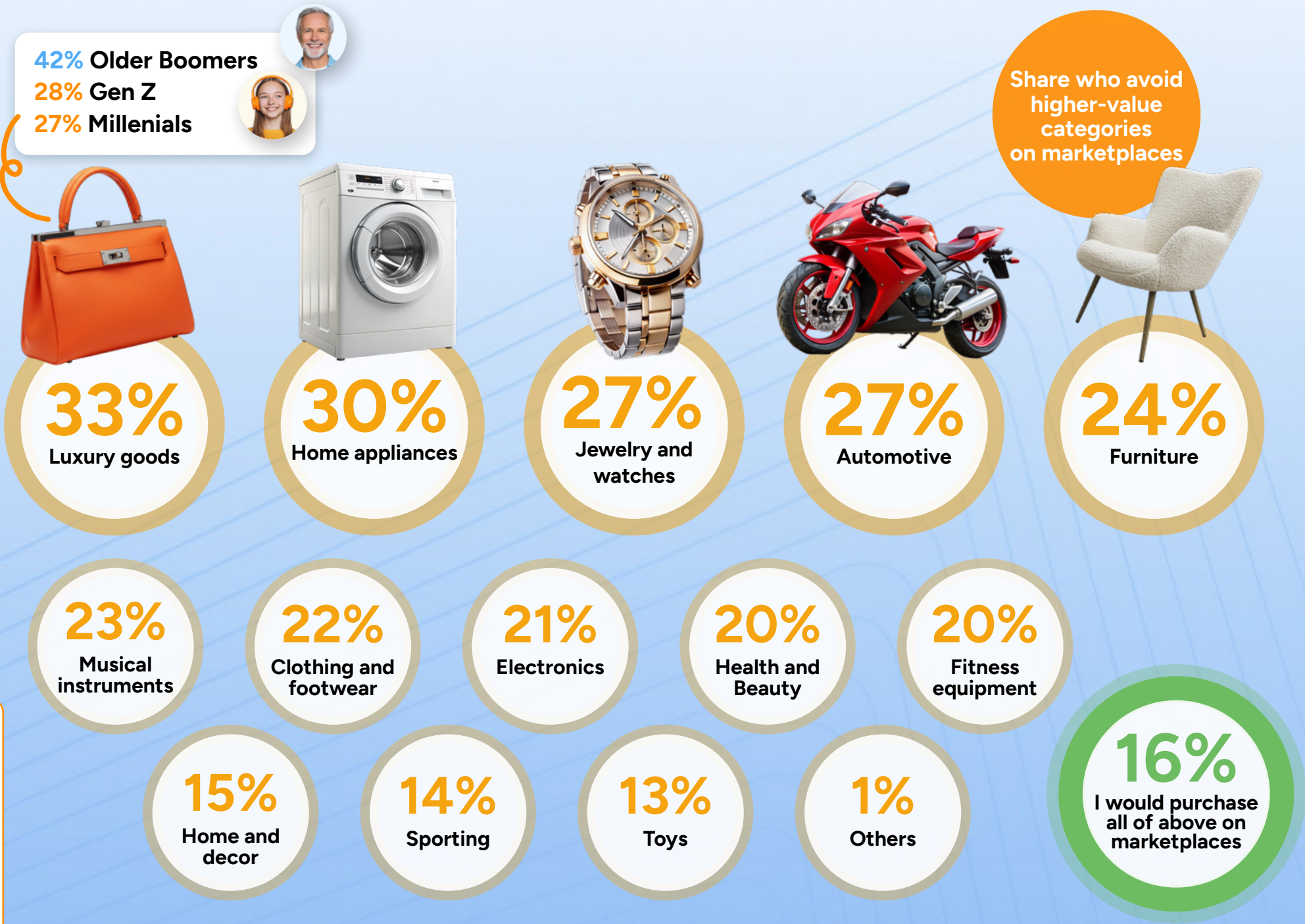


How do trust needs vary by category?

Some categories still need stronger proof of authenticity or quality, but hesitation is lower than expected. Luxury goods, jewelry, watches, and large appliances see the most caution, yet only about one in three shoppers avoid buying them on marketplaces. Most consumers are now comfortable purchasing higher-value items online when trust signals are clear. Boomers show the most caution in these categories, while Gen Z are more open to buying them online.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

What shoppers need to feel confident varies by product and audience. Higher-priced items require stronger proof of quality, authenticity, and who the seller is. And if you're selling to different demographics, your trust signals need to flex with them so each group gets the level of reassurance they expect.



Q. In general, which of the following categories, if any, would you avoid buying on an online marketplace? Select all that apply

How do shoppers engage with loyalty programs?

Loyalty programs like Amazon Prime are widely adopted, but participation is driven by practical value rather than brand attachment.

Only 22% say they regularly take full advantage of their loyalty program, while 15% say loyalty programs do not influence where they shop, suggesting that loyalty alone is not a decisive factor for many shoppers.

The implication is straightforward. Loyalty does not eliminate comparison behavior. Shoppers still check prices, scan reviews, and validate information across platforms. **Loyalty programs can reduce friction and increase engagement, but they do not outweigh inconsistent pricing or weak trust signals.**

Loyalty functions as a value signal, not a brand signal.
Programs that deliver tangible economic benefit keep shoppers engaged;
programs based on affinity alone do not.



SECTION SUMMARY

Trust is increasingly the deciding factor in competitive marketplace environments

While price awareness remains high, shoppers are equally influenced by whether they can verify quality, authenticity, and seller credibility. They compare prices, sellers, and product information across platforms to feel confident before committing.

When transparency is evident, through consistent pricing, secure payment, and validated reviews, trust forms quickly. When it is not, hesitation rises, especially for higher value categories where risk perception is stronger. Loyalty programs help reduce friction, but shoppers use them pragmatically. They do not replace the need for clarity and reassurance at the moment of decision.

Across the value economy, it is trust, not presence or loyalty alone, that determines where the final click happens.



How do shoppers feel when browsing marketplaces?

Marketplaces deliver breadth, discovery, and competitive value, and these strengths shape how shoppers feel when they browse. **Almost half of consumers report positive emotions** while searching on marketplaces.

At the same time, choice can create friction. Nearly one in five shoppers say they feel overwhelmed by the volume of similar products or cluttered layouts. Negative feelings are especially common among Gen Z, who are more likely than older generations to **report being overwhelmed (21%)**.

The paradox is clear. Marketplaces excel at offering variety and value, but without enough clarity or differentiation, the same abundance that excites shoppers can also make decision-making harder.



46% Excited
discovering new products or deals



45% Inspired
getting ideas or discovering unexpected finds

Filters and sort tools help me narrow down choices effectively and save time when making purchases



Q. Which of the following best describes how you feel when browsing products on online marketplaces? Select top two.

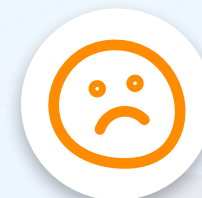
What challenges do shoppers face when comparing products?

Shoppers compare products to feel confident in their decisions, but comparison becomes stressful when listings lack clear differentiation. Frustrations spike when products look identical, layouts feel cluttered, or essential details are missing.

Consumers want simplicity in a sea of choice. When marketplaces help them identify **what truly matters, better information, clearer distinctions, and smarter organization**, decision making becomes easier, and the browsing experience remains positive.



17% Overwhelmed
too many similar products or cluttered layouts



9% Irritated
difficulty finding specific items or features



9% Confused
unclear product information or navigation



7% Underwhelmed
uninspiring selection or low-quality listings

Q. Which of the following best describes how you feel when browsing products on online marketplaces? Select top two.



67% say they only buy products they are **sure they will keep**

72% say **better sizing or fit information** would reduce likelihood of returning items

51% of shoppers primarily **shop on mobile**

64% Gen Z
66% Millennials



Does better product information reduce uncertainty and returns?

As choice keeps expanding, clear product content is becoming a major driver of shopper confidence. Consumers want to know exactly what they are getting and feel sure it will **meet their expectations** both when they hit “buy” and when the product arrives.

Sizing and product accuracy remain the biggest friction points, and wrong sizing is still the leading reason for returns. That’s why **strong fit guidance and precise, detailed listings are essential** as shoppers grow more cautious about buying items they may send back.

Mobile use raises the bar further. With more shopping happening on smaller screens, content must be quick to scan. Clean imagery, clear structure, and concise details reduce hesitation, while cluttered layouts or hard-to-find specs create uncertainty more quickly on mobile.

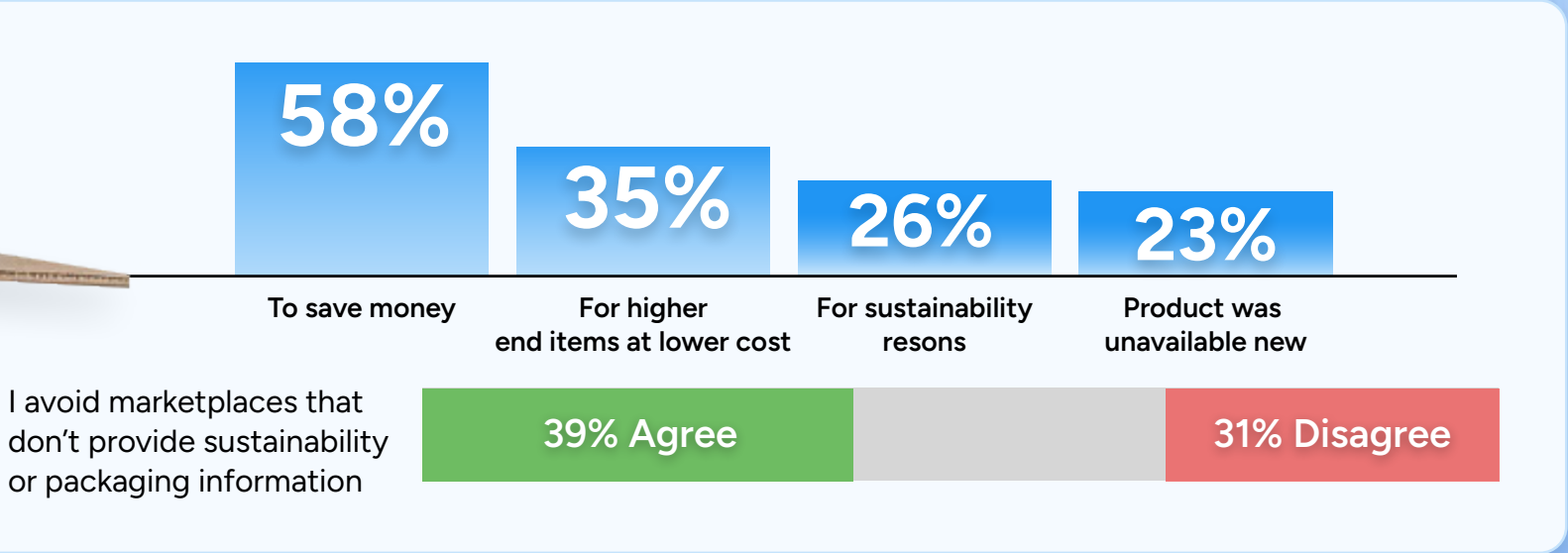


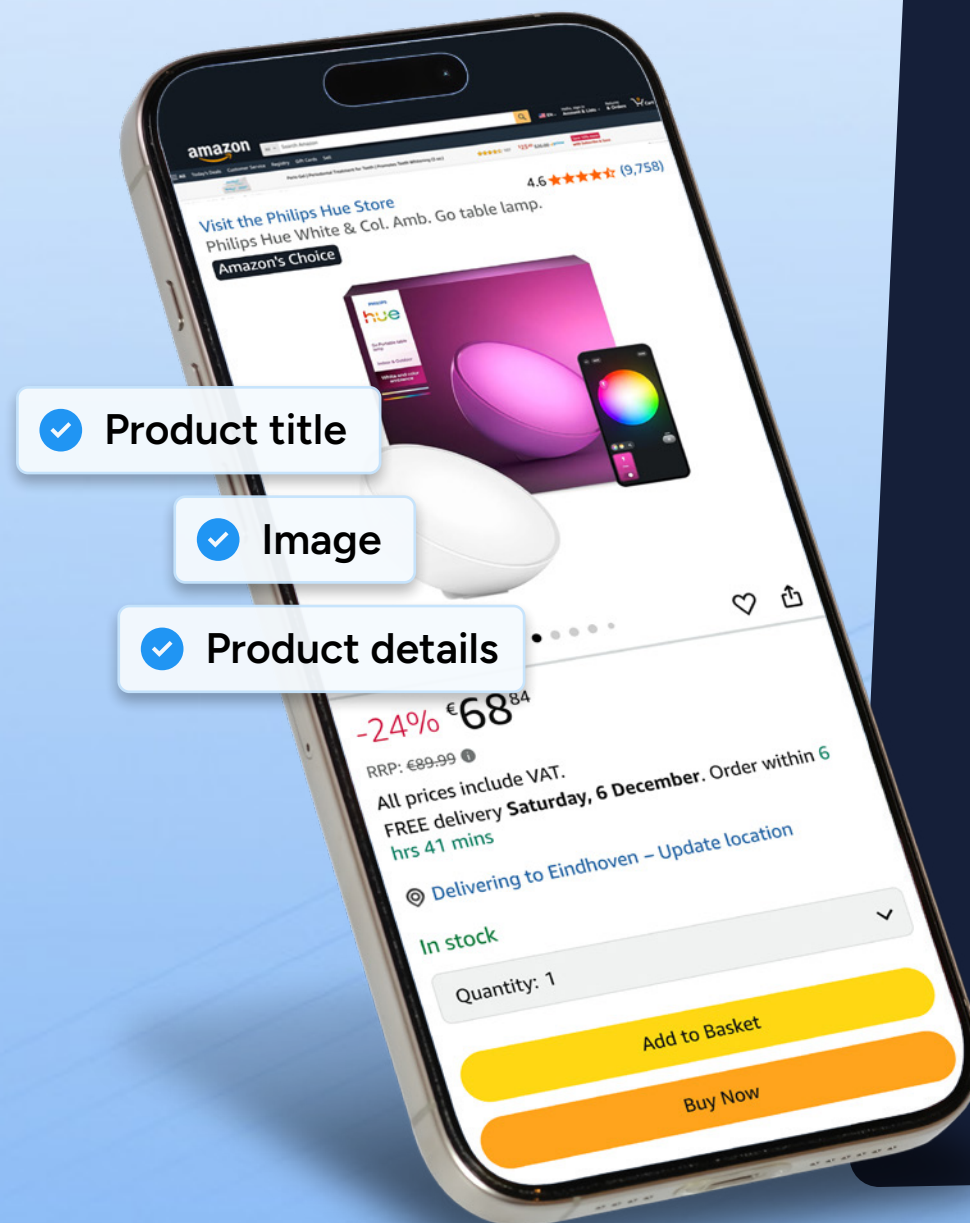
What drives shoppers to choose refurbished or second-hand items on marketplaces?

54%
of shoppers bought
refurbished or second-hand items
on marketplaces

54% of shoppers have bought refurbished or second-hand items on marketplaces. Saving money and accessing higher-end products at a lower cost are the top motivations.

These choices reflect how value expectations are evolving. Shoppers are increasingly comfortable considering alternatives to new products when the price is right and the condition is clearly communicated. Refurbished options allow them to stretch their budgets, access premium items, and align purchases with their personal values.





SECTION SUMMARY

Clear product content helps shoppers feel confident in choices

In an environment where shoppers face endless choice, it is the clarity and completeness of product information that determines which listings break through. **Clear titles, accurate sizing, strong imagery, and well-structured features** make comparison easier and reduce the overwhelm that comes from too many similar options.

Mobile behavior amplifies this need. With half of shoppers browsing primarily on mobile, product information must be easy to scan on smaller screens. **Clean layouts, vertical imagery, and concise details reduce hesitation and support quick, confident decision-making.**

High-quality content not only helps shoppers choose the right product, but it also reduces post-purchase friction by ensuring expectations are met once the item arrives.

How willing are shoppers to try new or unfamiliar marketplaces?

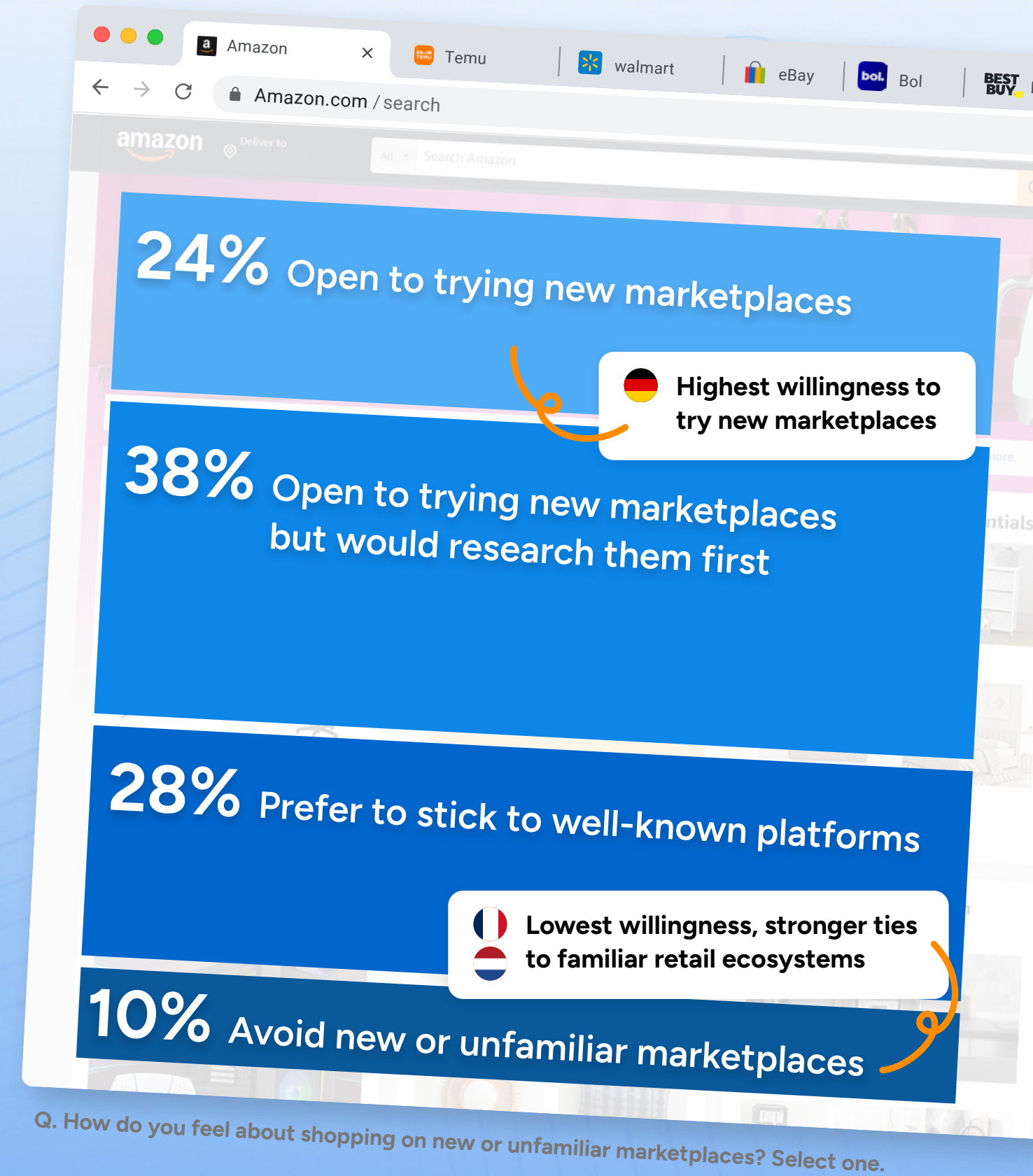
62% of shoppers are open to exploring new or unfamiliar marketplaces.

Younger shoppers (Gen Z and Millennials) are most open to trying new platforms. Older Boomers are the least willing to change where they shop.

This suggests there may not be much loyalty to any single marketplace. People browse widely and are comfortable looking beyond their usual platforms, but they still think carefully about where they choose to buy. Exploration is high, but commitment still relies on trust, clarity, and reassurance.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

Shoppers move freely between platforms, so being present on one big marketplace is no longer enough. In the [Marketplace Seller Trends Report 2025](#), we found that the average seller is now active on 6 marketplaces, and more than one-third have already expanded to 7 or more. **Being present across multiple marketplaces, with consistent product data and strong trust signals, is becoming a core advantage for capturing shoppers** who are willing to explore anywhere to find what they want.



How often do shoppers buy from marketplaces outside their country?

Shoppers are increasingly willing to go beyond domestic platforms, but only when confidence is high. That confidence comes from localized information, transparent payment options, and clear delivery and returns expectations.



58% have purchased from a marketplace outside their home country, showing cross-border buying is now part of mainstream behavior

46% avoid overseas marketplaces due to trust concerns, especially around returns, delivery reliability, and product authenticity



Gen Z / Millennials

- **Most likely** to buy cross-border (67% / 68%)
- Primary driver: product availability



Older Boomers

- **Least likely** to buy cross-border (42%)
- Primary barriers: local currency payment options and returns complexity



US shoppers

- More cautious than other markets (54% avoid foreign marketplaces)
- Primary barriers: currency, returns, and longer shipping times

TRENDS TO WATCH

57% of shoppers will buy from an international marketplace if the website is **in their local language (or English)**, and half say they don't care where a marketplace is based as long as they can get the product they want.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

Cross-border purchasing is no longer limited by geography, but by clarity and familiarity. Strong localization makes foreign marketplaces feel trustworthy, and as consumers become marketplace-agnostic and prioritize availability, brands that localize while maintaining a consistent global assortment will capture this borderless demand.



How do shoppers use social platforms?

Social commerce continues to grow as a discovery and purchasing channel, especially in categories where visual demonstration, fit, and inspiration matter most. Platforms like TikTok Shop, Instagram, and Facebook are shaping how shoppers find and evaluate products, and people are increasingly open to buying through these channels. Adoption still varies widely by demographic, but the shift toward social-led purchasing is clearly becoming strong.

However, **39% of shoppers would not consider purchasing through social commerce at all**, underscoring the channel’s selective nature.

Overall, social commerce is growing, but it is not universal. It performs best where inspiration drives discovery and where visual proof reduces uncertainty. For brands, success on social depends on matching the right product categories with the right audiences and leveraging the credibility of creator-led content.



SECTION SUMMARY

Shoppers explore everywhere, but buy where they have trust

Shoppers are exploring more marketplaces, more channels, and more cross-border options than ever. Discovery is broad and increasingly influenced by social platforms, new marketplace launches, and international listings. But exploration does not equal conversion.

The final purchase happens where confidence is highest. Transparent product information, reliable returns, clear seller identity, and secure delivery expectations still determine where the order is placed. In other words, shoppers browse widely, but they buy where they trust.

For brands and retailers, expansion must be confident, not generic. Presence across channels matters, but trust signals determine where the sale completes.





How are consumers using AI in their shopping journey?

Over half (58%) of shoppers have used AI tools to research products. ChatGPT is the preferred tool, used by one-third of consumers. AI sometimes replaces early marketplace browsing, but not the checkout. ChatGPT is the preferred tool, used by one-third of shoppers, followed by Google’s AI tools (18%) and Gemini (15%). A smaller group of shoppers also use AI assistants within marketplace platforms (11%), Amazon Rufus (10%), and virtual try-on or stylist apps (8%).

EMERGING SHIFT

AI is entering the shopping journey, but not the checkout... yet.

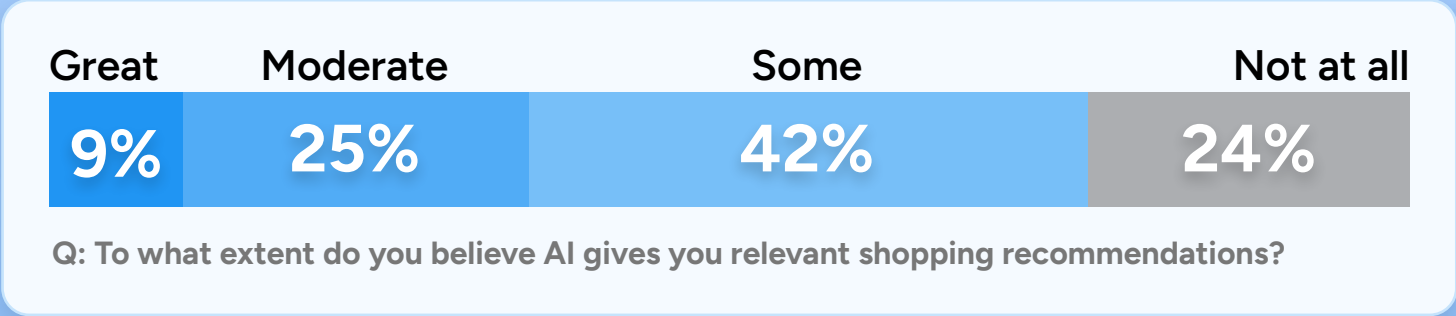
When this research was conducted, instant AI checkout had been available for just a month (and only in the US), so adoption remains at an early stage. Shoppers trust AI for research and comparison, but not yet for completing purchases—they still want control over the final click, clearer personalization, and reassurance around fulfilment.

Q. Which AI assistants, if any, have you used in the past 6 months when looking to purchase a product online? Select all that apply.

How comfortable are shoppers letting AI decide their purchases?

While AI is already helping with shopping discovery, it hasn't fully earned trust as a decision-maker. The largest share of respondents (42%) say AI gives them some relevant shopping recommendations, suggesting it's primarily used to surface and explore options rather than drive final purchase decisions.

That hesitation shows up at checkout: nearly half (49%) would buy or consider buying through an AI assistant (17% Yes + 32% Maybe), signaling real potential for AI-led commerce, but 43% say no, indicating that factors like trust, control, and confidence in outcomes may still be holding many shoppers back.



Conclusion

The confidence economy: what comes next

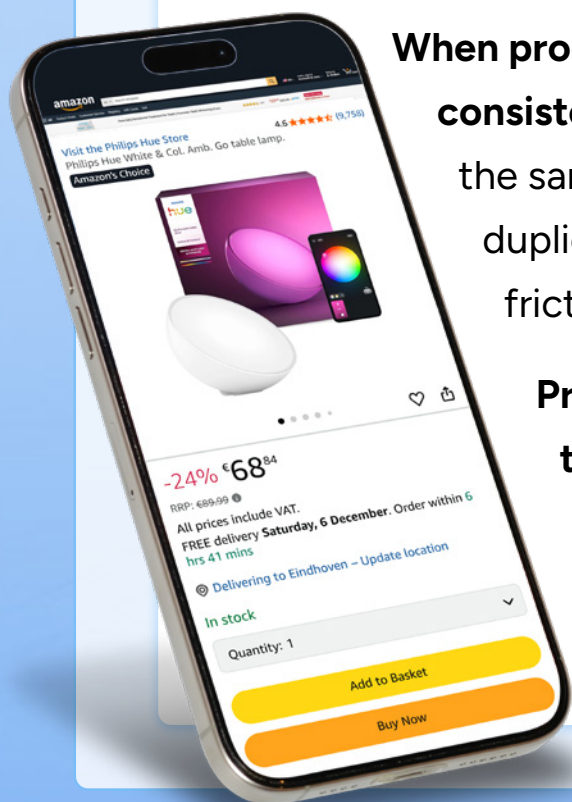
Marketplaces are no longer just for discovery. Shoppers use them to learn, compare, evaluate, and decide, and **they demand clarity, credibility, and confidence.**

Marketplace success is an information strategy

As AI becomes a companion in product research and filtering, the quality of product data becomes the quality of the customer experience.

When product content is structured, complete, and consistent, marketplaces, search, and AI tools all reinforce the same clear message. When content is fragmented, duplicated, or incomplete, every channel introduces friction - and friction disperses trust.

Product data has become the connective tissue of the new ecommerce era; the layer through which shoppers understand value, evaluate suitability, and gain confidence in what will arrive.



Winning brands build confidence at scale

Consumers are not loyal to channels; they are **loyal to the experience that feels certain.**

The future marketplace advantage will belong to sellers that:

- Treat product data as a strategic asset
- Maintain pricing and messaging consistency across platforms
- Show clear seller identity and accountability to strengthen credibility
- Localize experiences for different regions and demographics
- Build trust through authentic reviews and real-world validation
- Set clear fulfilment and return expectations to reduce post-purchase friction



Ready to expand to more marketplaces?

This report shows that marketplaces continue to dominate the buyer journey, not just as a place to purchase, but as where shoppers discover, compare, and build confidence. Shoppers are exploring more channels, including social platforms and AI tools.

The takeaway is clear. Brands that rely on their own site or a single marketplace risk falling out of the consideration set, missing both awareness and revenue.

But how do you handle the potential effort and complexity that comes with channel expansion?

[Learn more about ChannelEngine](#)

1 Identify marketplaces aligned with your brand values and goals

The number of marketplaces can feel overwhelming, but by setting clear criteria around your objectives, you can focus on the best platforms for your brand. For instance, are you looking to expand internationally, increase brand awareness, or shift overstocked products?

If you're a ChannelEngine customer, your Customer Success Manager can advise on which marketplaces could help you meet your brand and revenue objectives.

2 Set up for success with ChannelEngine

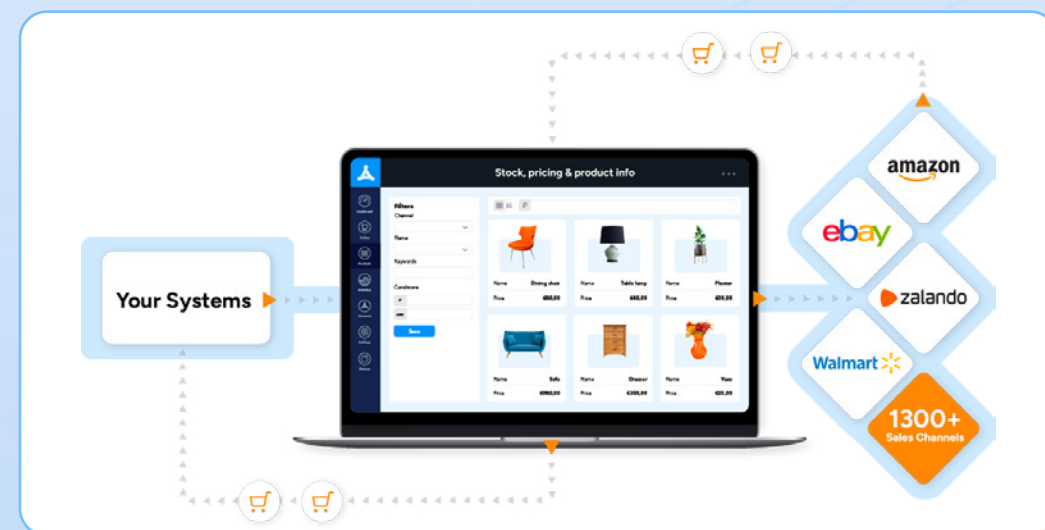
Shoppers are discovering and buying in more places than ever, from traditional marketplaces to AI commerce channels like ChatGPT. Each has different setup requirements, listing rules, and fee structures.

ChannelEngine provides access to 1300+ sales channels through a single connection, so you can expand your business while keeping admin and resource requirements to a minimum. As a platform purpose-built to simplify multichannel operations, we make it easy to manage all the different requirements.

Marketplace Shopping Behavior Report 2026

About ChannelEngine

ChannelEngine connects brands and retailers to over 1300 marketplaces worldwide, offering a single platform to manage your product data, inventory, orders, and pricing across all online channels. With smart automation and seamless integration, we enable you to sell more, grow faster, and stay in control. Our scalable and reliable platform keeps your operations running smoothly, ensuring long-term success as your business grows. Headquartered in Leiden, Netherlands, with global offices in New York, Toronto, Berlin, Paris, Dubai, and Singapore, we guide leading brands like Unilever, Sanofi, Philips, and Sonos on their marketplace expansion.



About Sapio Research

Sapio research is a full-service B2B and tech market research agency that helps businesses grow thanks to high quality, efficient, and honest research solutions. We are an enthusiastic and purpose-driven team of expert market researchers and we're passionate about supporting brands and PR & communications agencies in all areas of quantitative and qualitative research.

Marketplace shoppers in 2026: New expectations, new behavior

You've read the report. Now get the insights behind the data. Join us **live on March 5** to unpack what the findings really mean for your marketplace strategy — and what to do next.

Join us on March 5, 10am ET, 4pm CET →

