



University at Buffalo
Center for
Marketing Analysis
School of Management

PRICING ERRORS REDUCE TRUST AND SALES

One in four shoppers are overcharged monthly.
Seven in ten would switch because of it.

Survey Period: Fall 2025

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Demographics & survey design

We employed a cross-sectional, quantitative, online study during Fall 2025. We recruited a random sample of respondents from the population of U.S. shoppers.

2,011

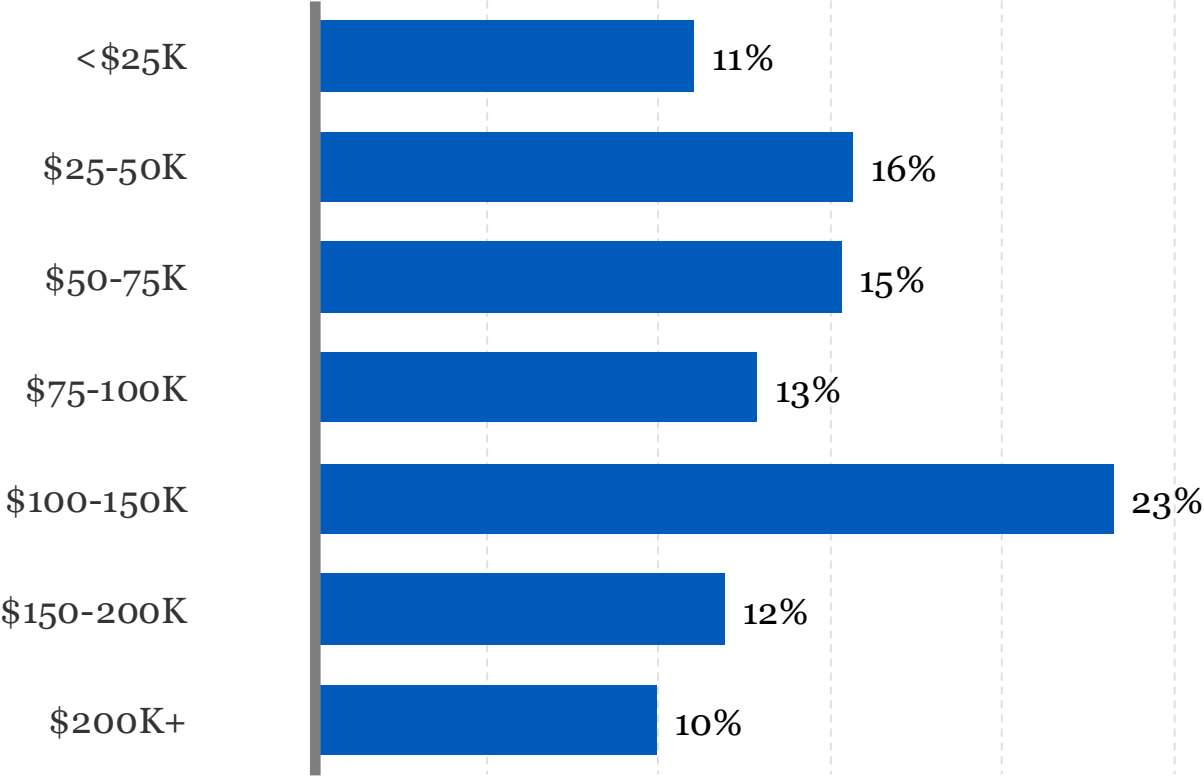
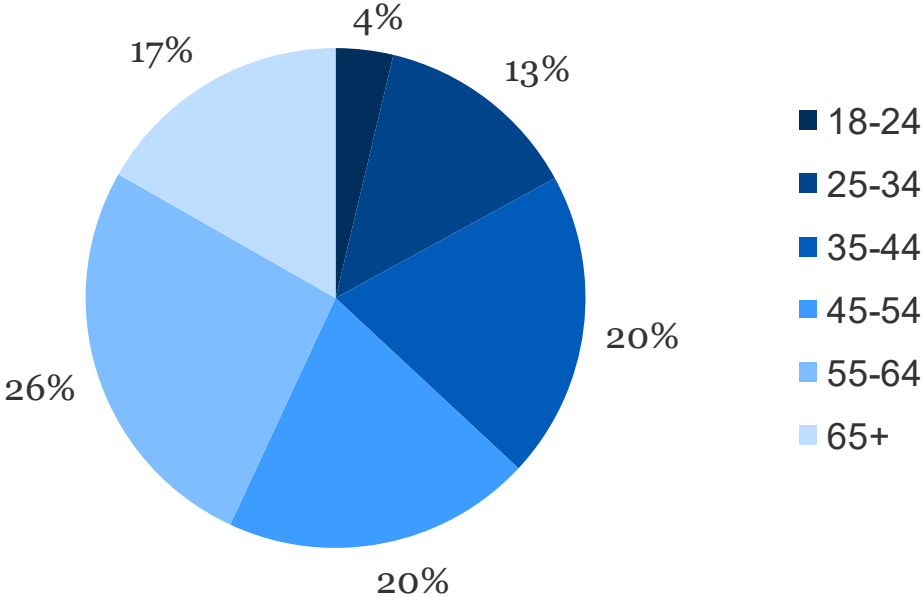
Total Sample (n)

\$608

Avg Total Monthly Spend (GM + Grocery)

36%

Percent with children



Bottom Line: The 2,011-respondent sample represents active retail shoppers spending an average of \$608/month on groceries and general merchandise. The sample is representative of the U.S. population. Roughly one-third (36%) have children, a key driver of household spend.

The background features a complex, abstract pattern of white lines and arrows on a solid blue background. The pattern consists of various geometric shapes, including straight lines, dashed lines, and curved paths, some with arrows indicating direction. The lines are scattered across the frame, creating a sense of movement and complexity.

Section 1

The Problem: Pricing Errors are Pervasive

1. One in four shoppers are overcharged at least monthly.

Parents report overcharges most:



49%

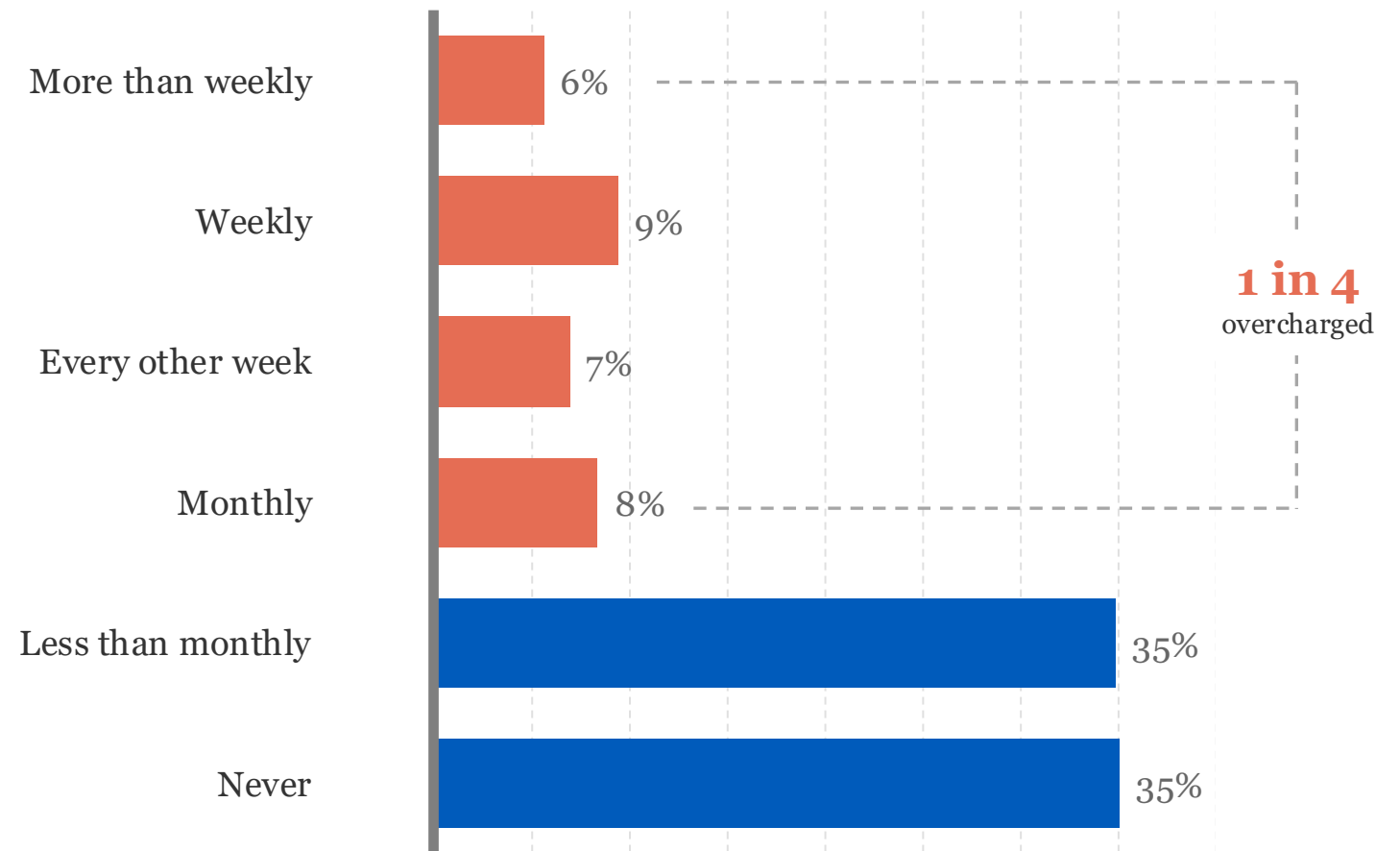
Of parents report monthly+ overcharges



19%

Of non-parents report monthly+ overcharges

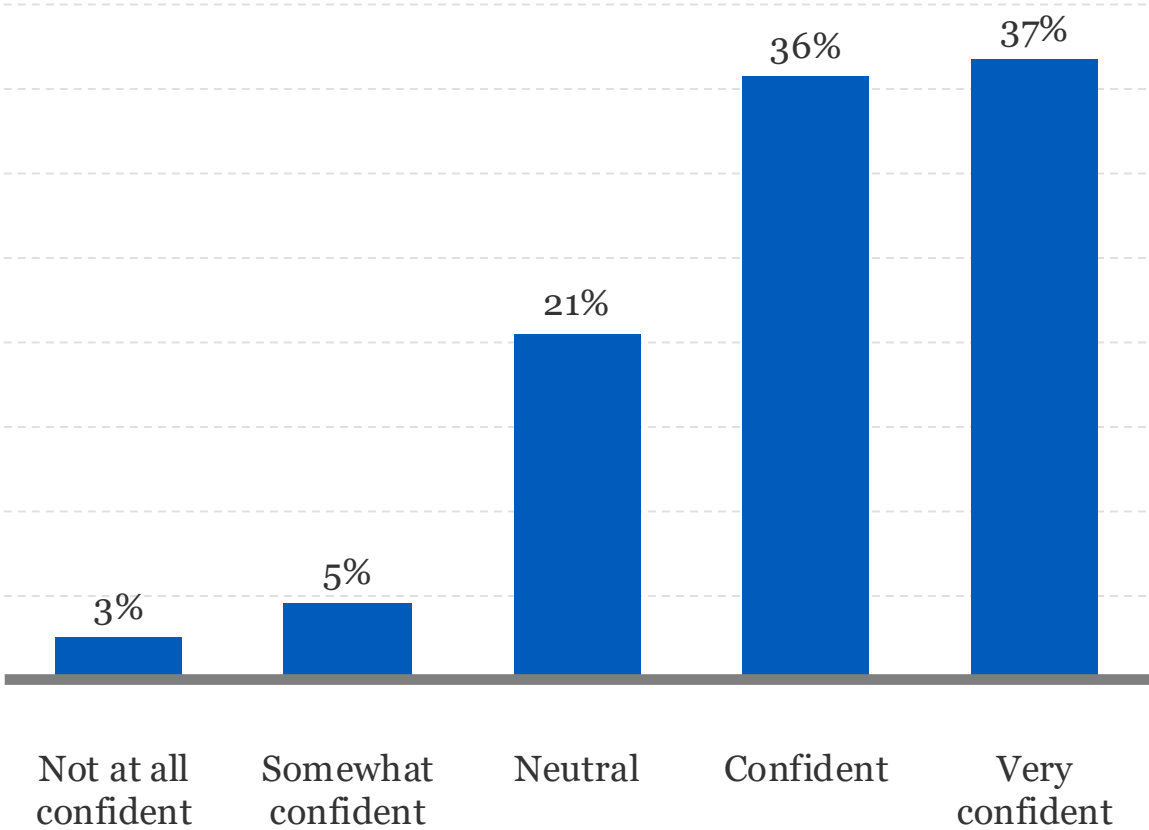
Below: % of shoppers who report being overcharged at checkout (n = 2,011)



Bottom Line: Checkout overcharges are common experiences. One-in-four shoppers have encountered them at least monthly, creating a baseline of skepticism that retailers must overcome with every transaction.

2. Most trust shelf labels, even those overcharged

Below: 'How confident are you that the prices shown on shelf labels match the prices at checkout?' (n = 2,011)



The Paradox

Confidence remains high even among those who frequently encounter errors. These shoppers may expect errors as 'normal.'

72%

Express confidence
(Confident or Very Confident)

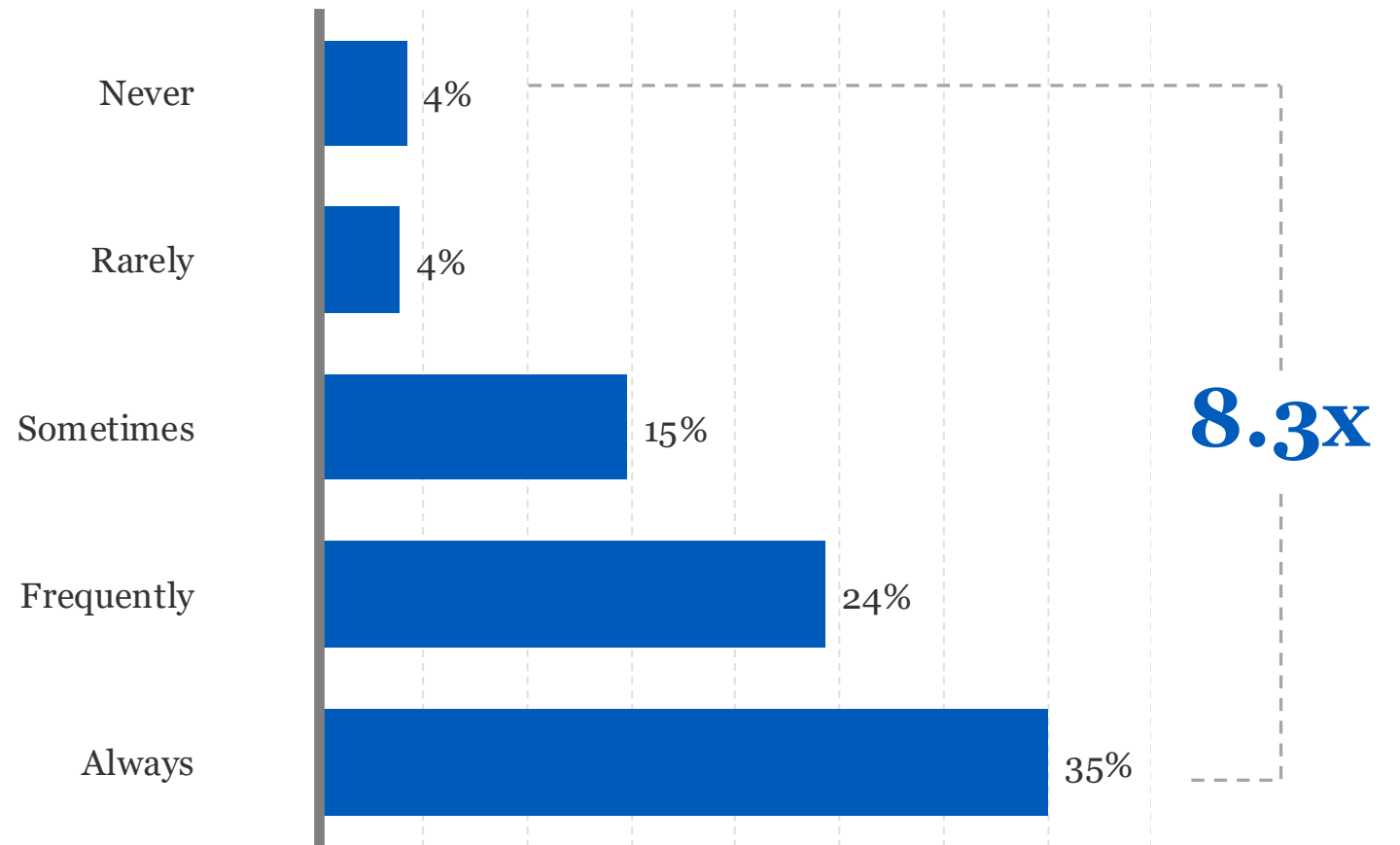
4.0 / 5

Average confidence score

What this means: While most shoppers enter stores with baseline trust in pricing accuracy, nearly **1 in 4 (28%)** express doubt. This segment may already be verifying prices or avoiding certain retailers altogether.

3. Deal-seekers reveal the true level of pricing errors

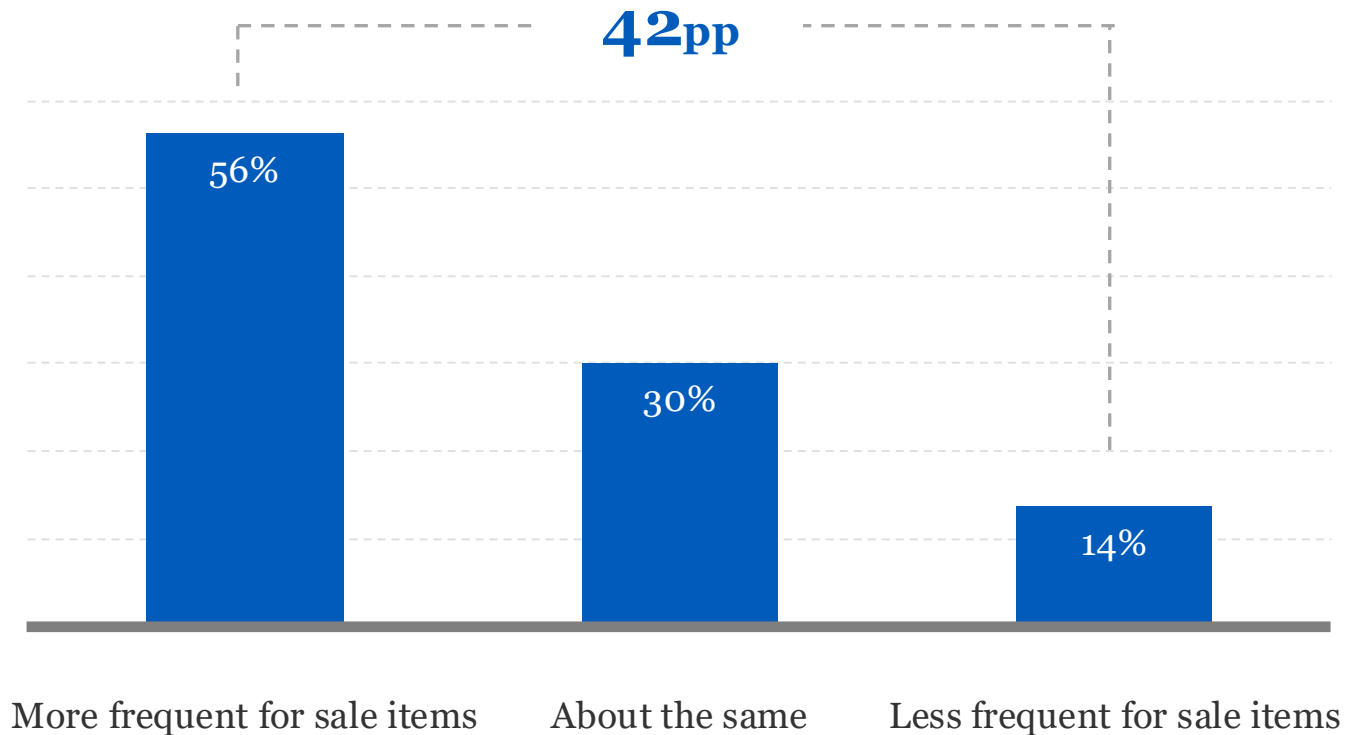
Below: % Encountering Weekly+ Errors, by Deal-Seeking Frequency (n = 2,011)



What this means: More shopping trips = more error exposure. Deal-seekers visit stores frequently, scan shelves carefully, and compare to ads.

4. Promotions breed suspicion. 56% of shoppers expect sale errors

Below: 'Do you think that pricing errors are likely to be more frequent for items on sale or for regularly priced items?' (n = 2,011)



Source: Shopping Survey (2025) | n = 2,011 U.S. consumers

Key insights:

- Deal-seekers think on-sale errors are more common: 61% vs 50% for non-seekers
- 58% of parents believe items on sale have more errors
- Only 14% think on-sale items have fewer errors

What this means:

Shoppers believe your promotions are where errors happen most. This creates a toxic dynamic: the very tactic meant to build goodwill (sales) is seen as the primary source of pricing problems.

Strategic implications: How to get ahead of price inaccuracies

Audit your promotional pricing first

56% of shoppers believe on-sale items have more errors. Your promotions team and pricing systems need to talk to each other before the ad drops.

Your deal-seekers are your toughest auditors

They're 8x more likely to catch errors. They're engaged customers, not complainers. Treat error reports as loyalty signals, not annoyances.

Assume two-thirds have been burned before

65% have experienced overcharges, and 25% are overcharged monthly. Every new customer walks in with baggage from someone else's mistake.

Close the confidence gap

28% already doubt your shelf prices. That's 1 in 4 shoppers verifying before they buy. If they're checking anyway, make sure they find accuracy.

The background features a complex, abstract pattern of white lines and arrows on a solid blue background. The pattern consists of various geometric shapes, including straight lines, dashed lines, and curved paths, all with arrows indicating direction. Some lines are solid, while others are dashed, creating a sense of movement and flow. The overall effect is a dynamic and modern aesthetic.

Section 2

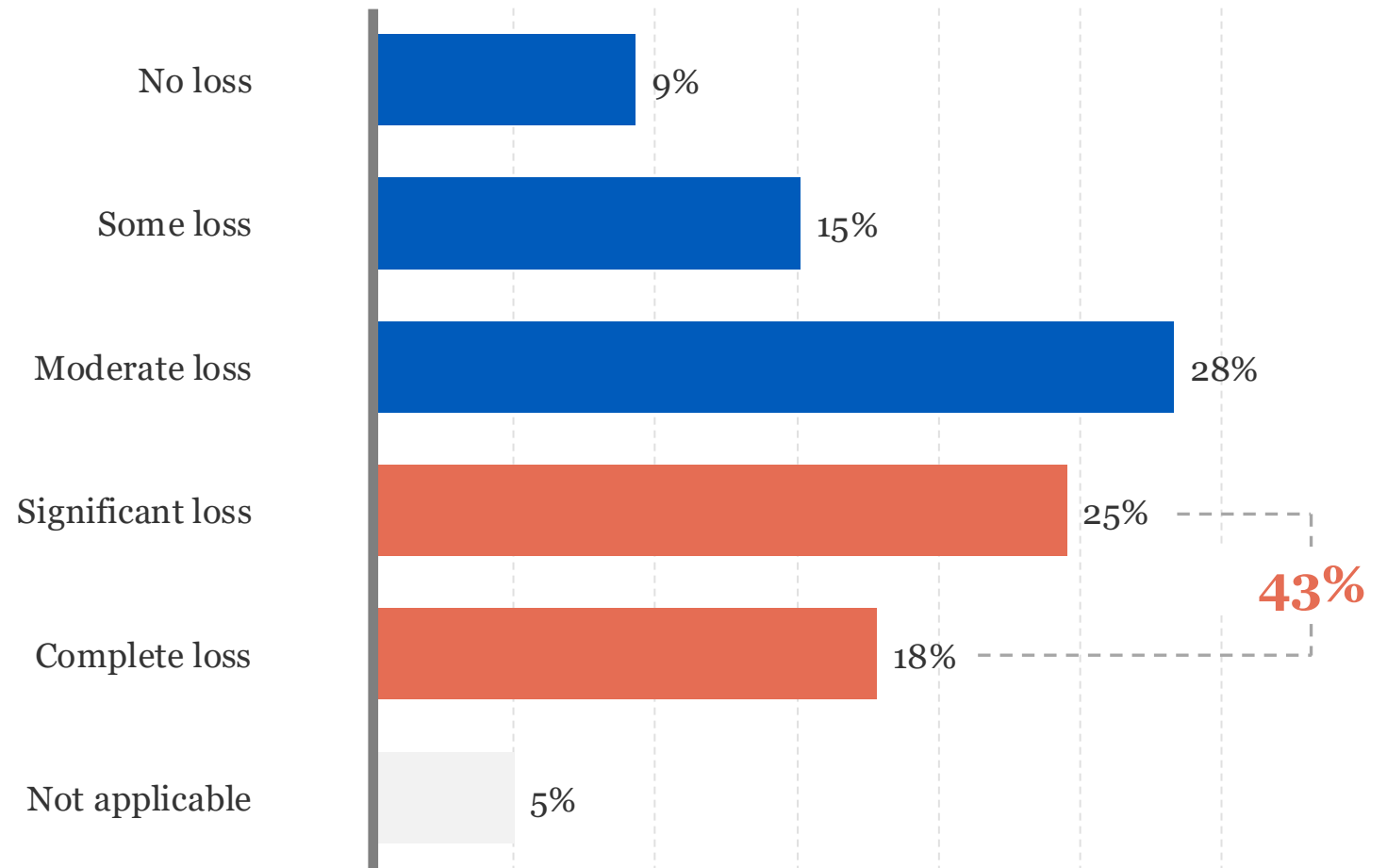
The Damage: Trust Erodes and Shoppers Walk

5. Four in ten shoppers suffer major trust damage from pricing errors

Bottom Line

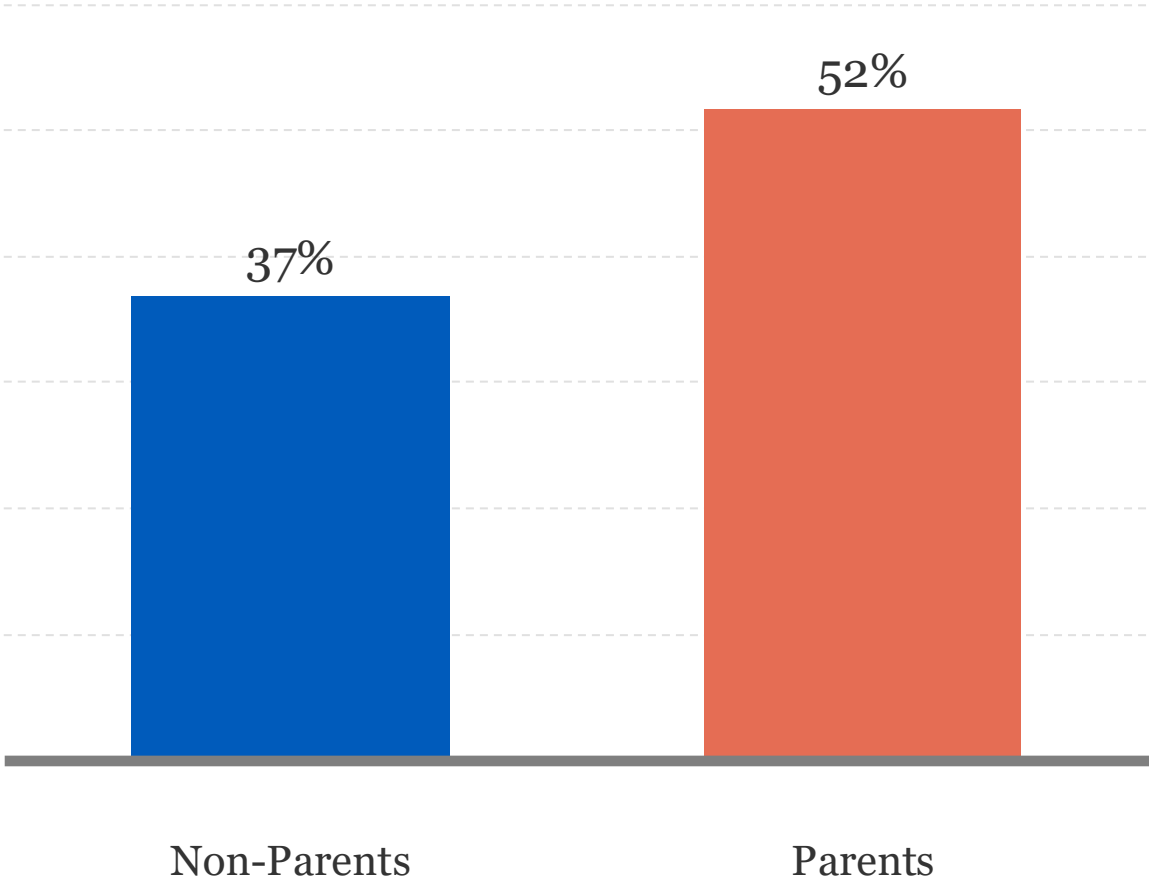
Pricing errors don't just annoy customers, they damage the relationship. Four in ten shoppers report significant trust erosion.

Below: 'Will you lose trust in a store if it has instances of pricing inaccuracies?'
(n = 2,011)



6. Parents lose trust faster: 15pp more sensitive to errors

Below: Percentage of parents and non-parents that would substantially lose trust in a retailer that displayed price errors (n = 2,011)



Opportunity

Family-focused messaging around pricing integrity ('Accurate prices for families') could resonate.

28%

Complete trust loss for parents

12%

Complete trust loss for non-parents

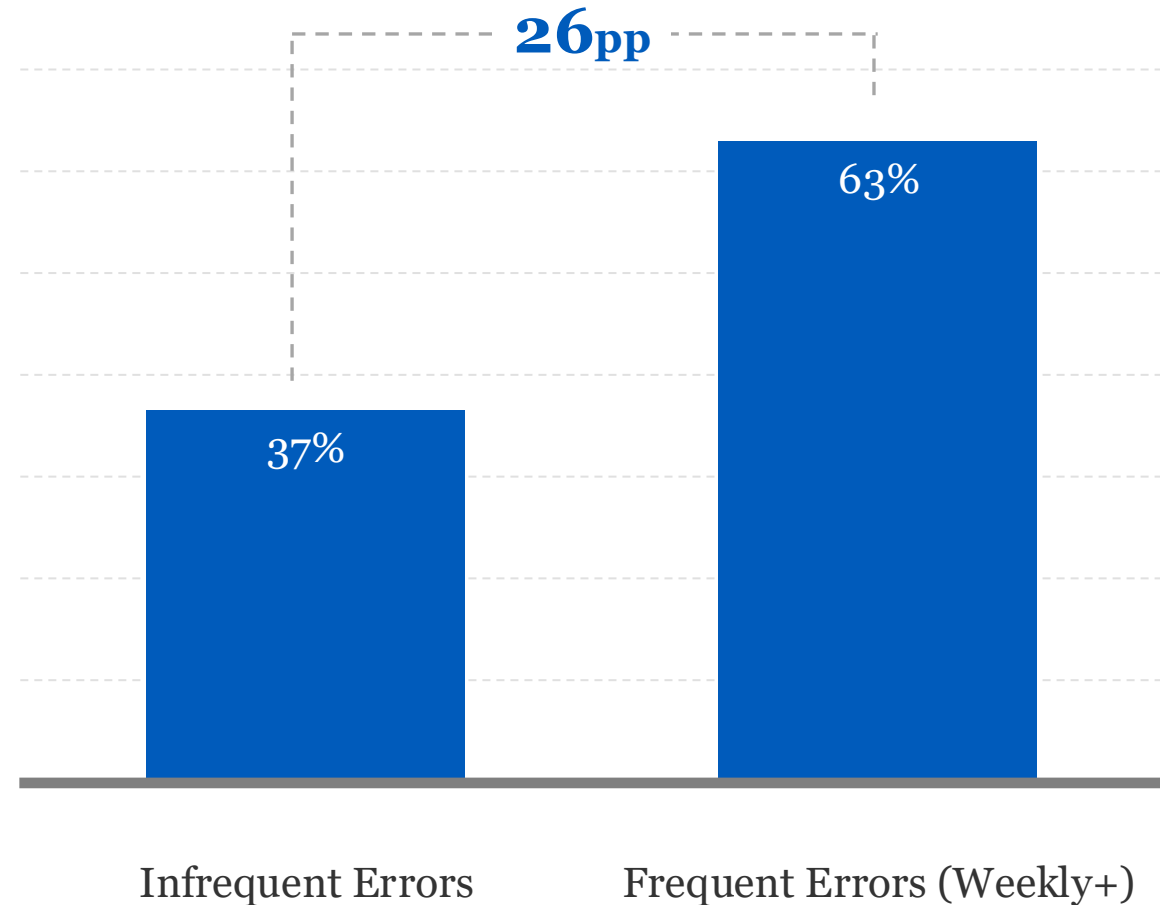
What this means: Parents are managing household budgets under pressure. Every pricing error feels like a betrayal of: 'I trust you with my family's money.' Break that trust, and retailers risk losing the customer.

7. Frequent errors compound the damage: 26pp higher trust loss

Bottom Line

Error frequency is the strongest predictor of trust erosion. Shoppers who encounter weekly errors are nearly twice as likely to report high trust loss. Each error compounds the damage.

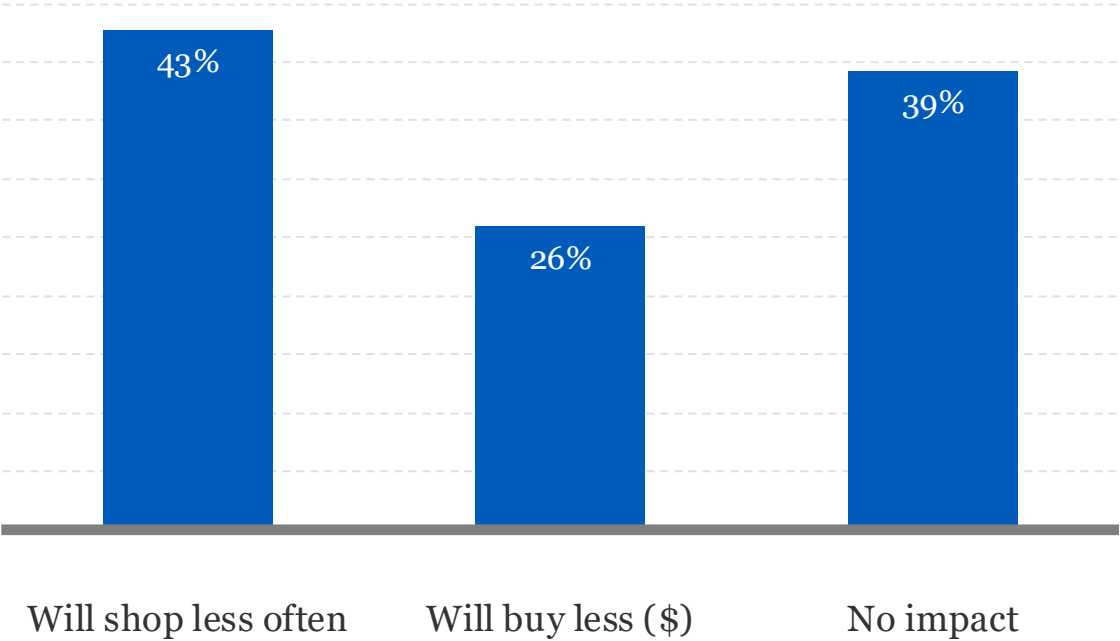
Below: Trust loss by error frequency (n = 2,011). Frequent = weekly, bi-weekly, or more than weekly.



8. Errors change behavior: 43% shop less, 26% spend less

Behavioral Impact of Pricing Errors

Below: 'Will pricing errors impact how often you shop at the store?'
Multi-select recoded to categories.



Shoppers Respond to Errors

Nearly half will reduce visit frequency; a quarter will reduce basket size. The revenue impact compounds.

39%

Claim no behavior change from pricing errors

61%

Will modify their shopping in some way

Bottom line: Pricing errors don't just risk losing customers entirely. They reduce wallet share even among those who stay.

"People should pay the price that is being advertised, that's the law. The issue here is that shoppers can't rely on the shelf price being accurate, and that's a big problem."

Edgar Dworsky, a consumer advocate and the founder of Consumer World, who crafted the first grocery pricing protection law in Massachusetts nearly 40 years ago (Consumer Reports, 2025)

"Now, [with digital shelf labels], associates manage planned price changes through a centralized Walmart system, making it easier to keep shelf prices accurate and aligned with what customers see at checkout."

From a Walmart press release, explaining how digital shelf labels (or DSLs) will decrease price errors and save time for store associates (Walmart press release, 2026)

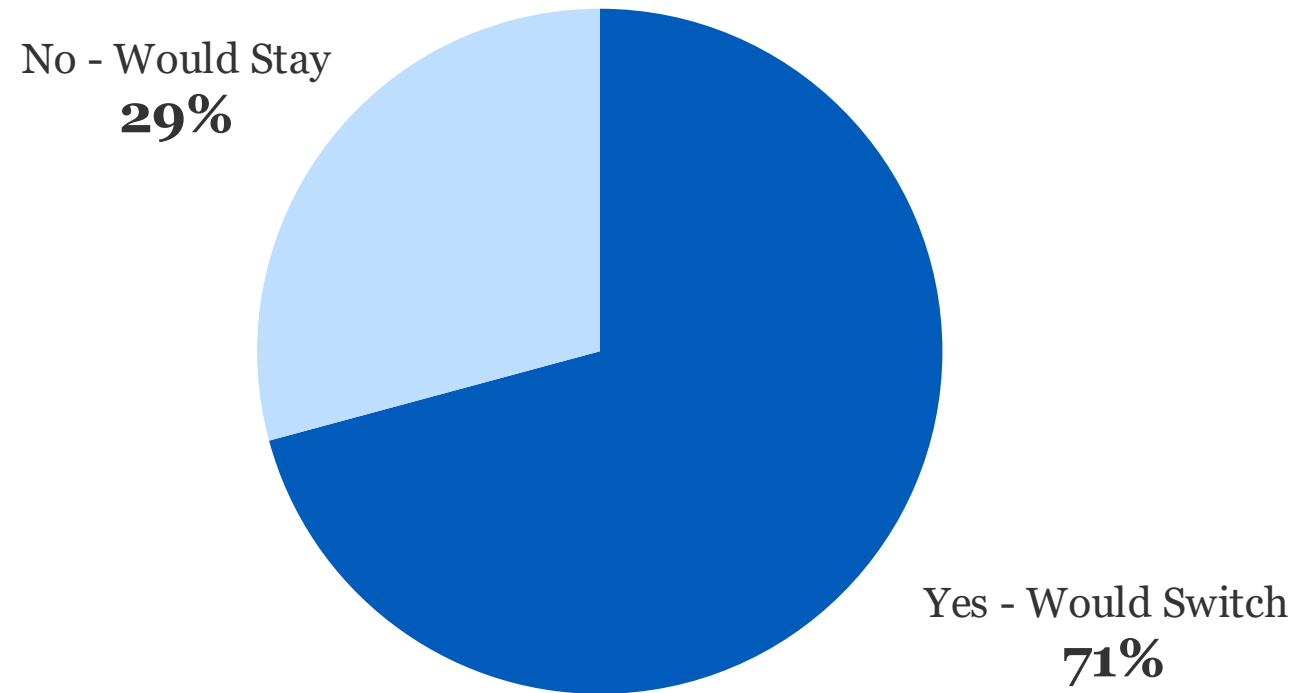
9. Seven in ten shoppers would switch retailers over repeated errors

The same is true across channels

“If I put something in my digital cart, the price should be the same when I come back two days later.”

Jeannie Walters, founder of Experience Investigators (CX Dive, March 2026)

Below: % who would switch due to repeated pricing errors (n = 2,011)

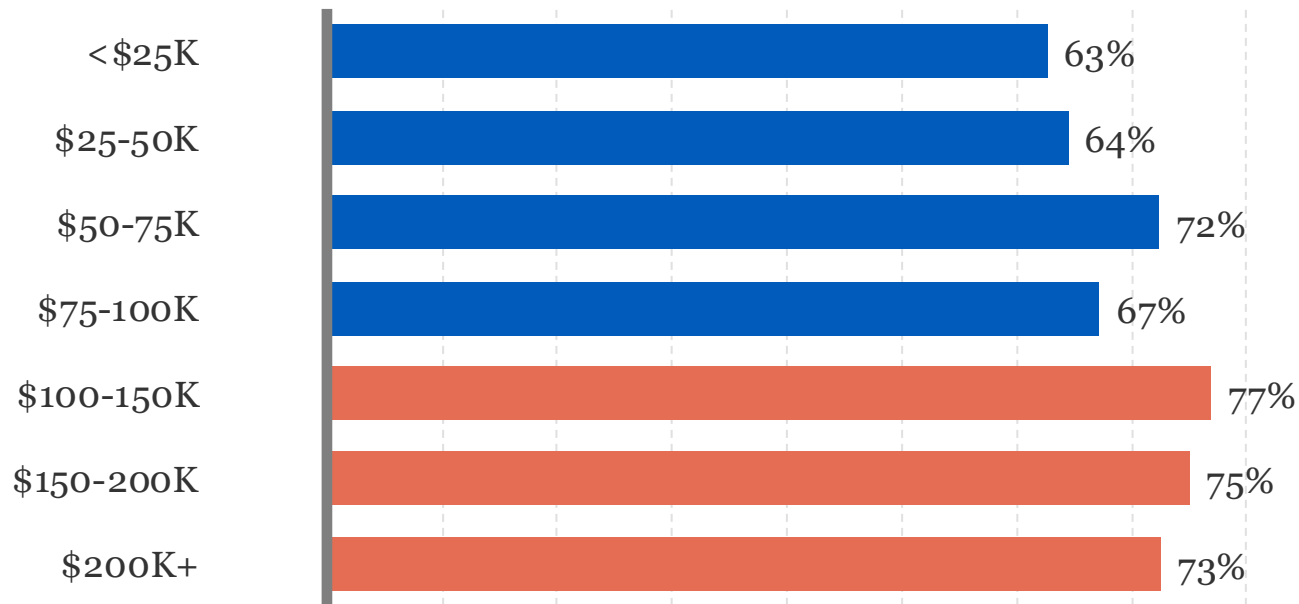


Bottom Line: Repeated pricing errors are an existential threat to customer retention.

10. Affluent shoppers are least tolerant: \$100K+ households switch at highest rates

Key Insight: Higher-income households (your highest-value customers) are the least tolerant of pricing errors. The \$100-150K bracket shows 77% switch rate, the highest of all income groups.

Below: % who would switch retailers due to pricing errors, by household income (n = 2,011)



76%

25–34-year-olds
likelihood to switch

65%

Seniors (65+)
likelihood to switch

Bottom line: Your highest-value customers are your least forgiving. Younger shoppers won't stick around the way their parents did.

Strategic implications: How to reduce the damage of price errors

Treat pricing accuracy as a retention investment

71% will switch over repeated errors. Fix price accuracy or lose customers – the ROI case writes itself.

Prioritize parents and high-income households

Parents show 15pp higher trust loss; 77% of \$100K+ households switch due to errors. Be more diligent in key categories for these valuable shopper groups.

Pricing errors compound

Frequent errors drive 26pp higher trust damage. One mistake is forgivable. A pattern will drive customers away.

Quantify the behavioral cost

43% will shop less often; 26% will spend less per trip. Even the customers who stay are spending less.

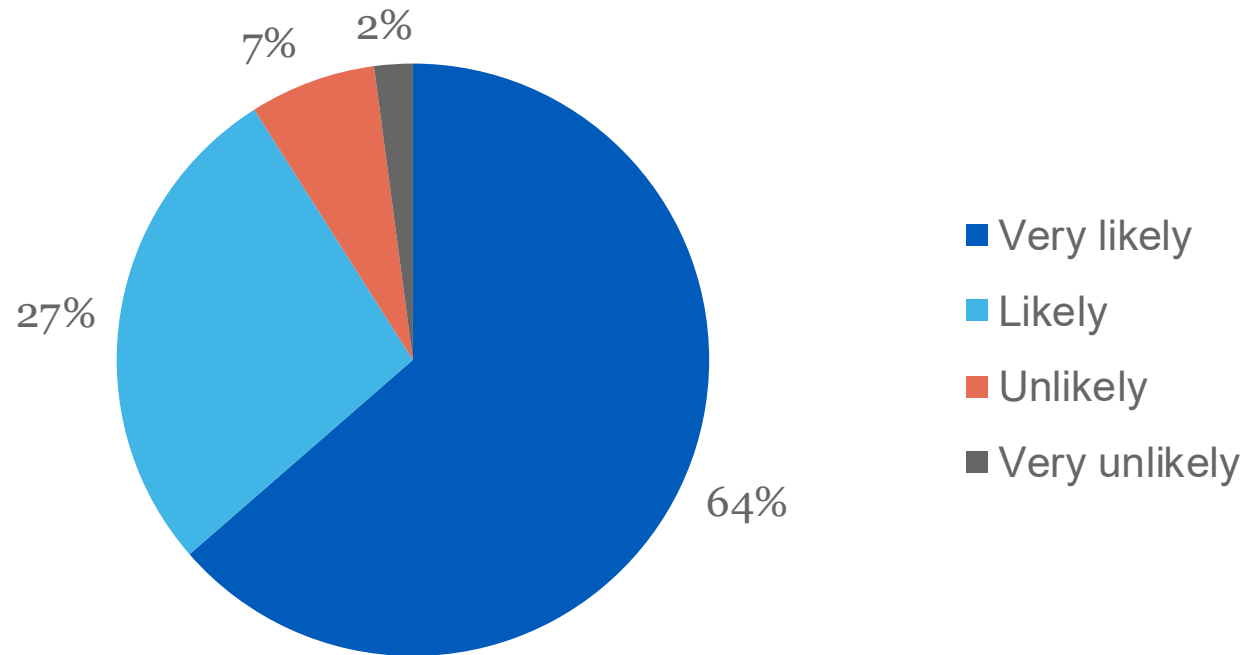
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Section 3

The Response: How Shoppers Fight Back

11. Nine in ten shoppers will call you out on pricing errors

Below: 'If you notice a pricing error, how likely are you to bring it to the attention of someone in the store?' (n = 2,011)



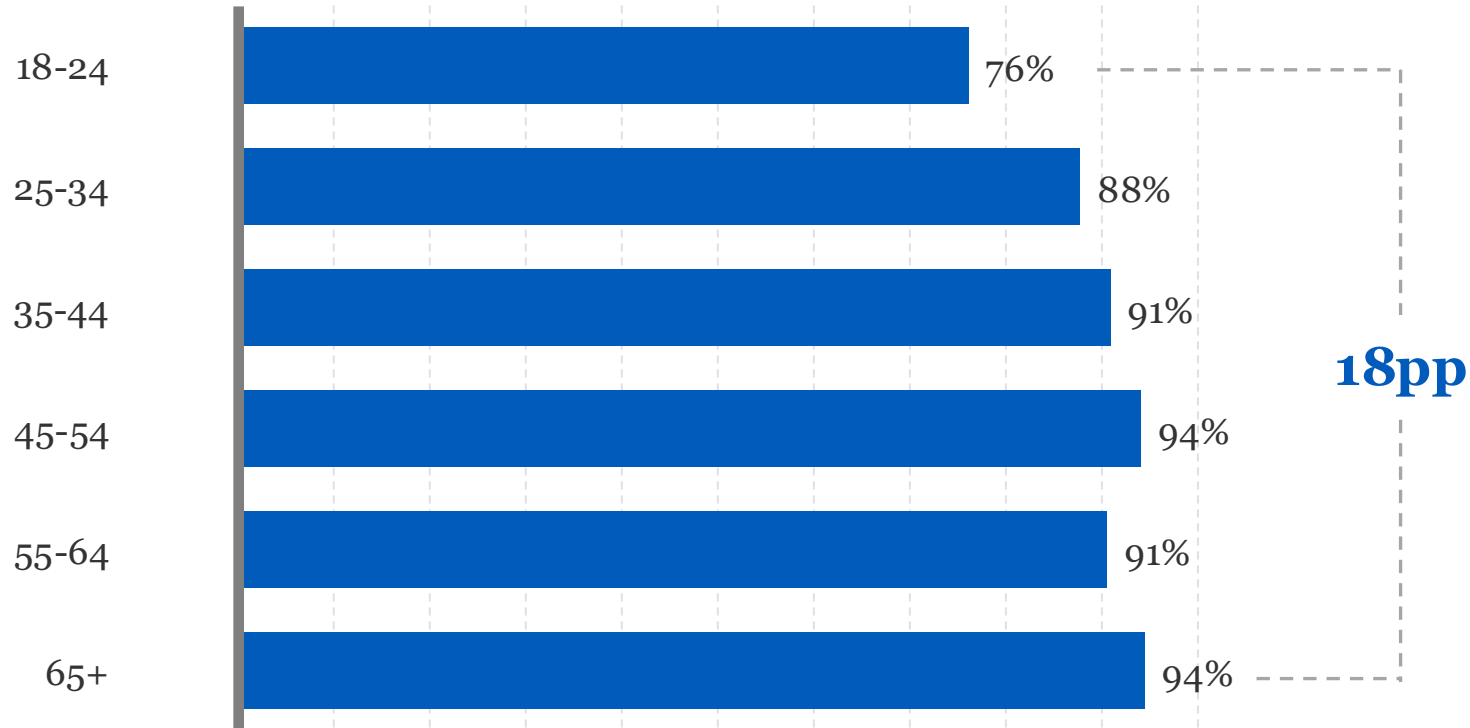
91%

Likely or very likely to report errors

What this means: Customers actively police pricing accuracy. Nine in ten will flag errors when they see them. This is both a risk (they'll notice) and an opportunity (they're giving you a chance to make it right).

12. Gen Z avoids confrontation: 18pp less likely to report errors in-store

Below: % Likely to Report Pricing Errors by Age (n = 2,011)



Key Insight: Gen Z shoppers are least likely to report errors in-store, but that doesn't mean they're not noticing.

They may be posting on social media, leaving reviews, or simply switching retailers silently.

49%

*High trust loss –
Gen Z*

29%

*High trust loss --
Seniors*

13. One-third of shoppers have no idea if stores will compensate for errors

'Don't Know' by Age Group

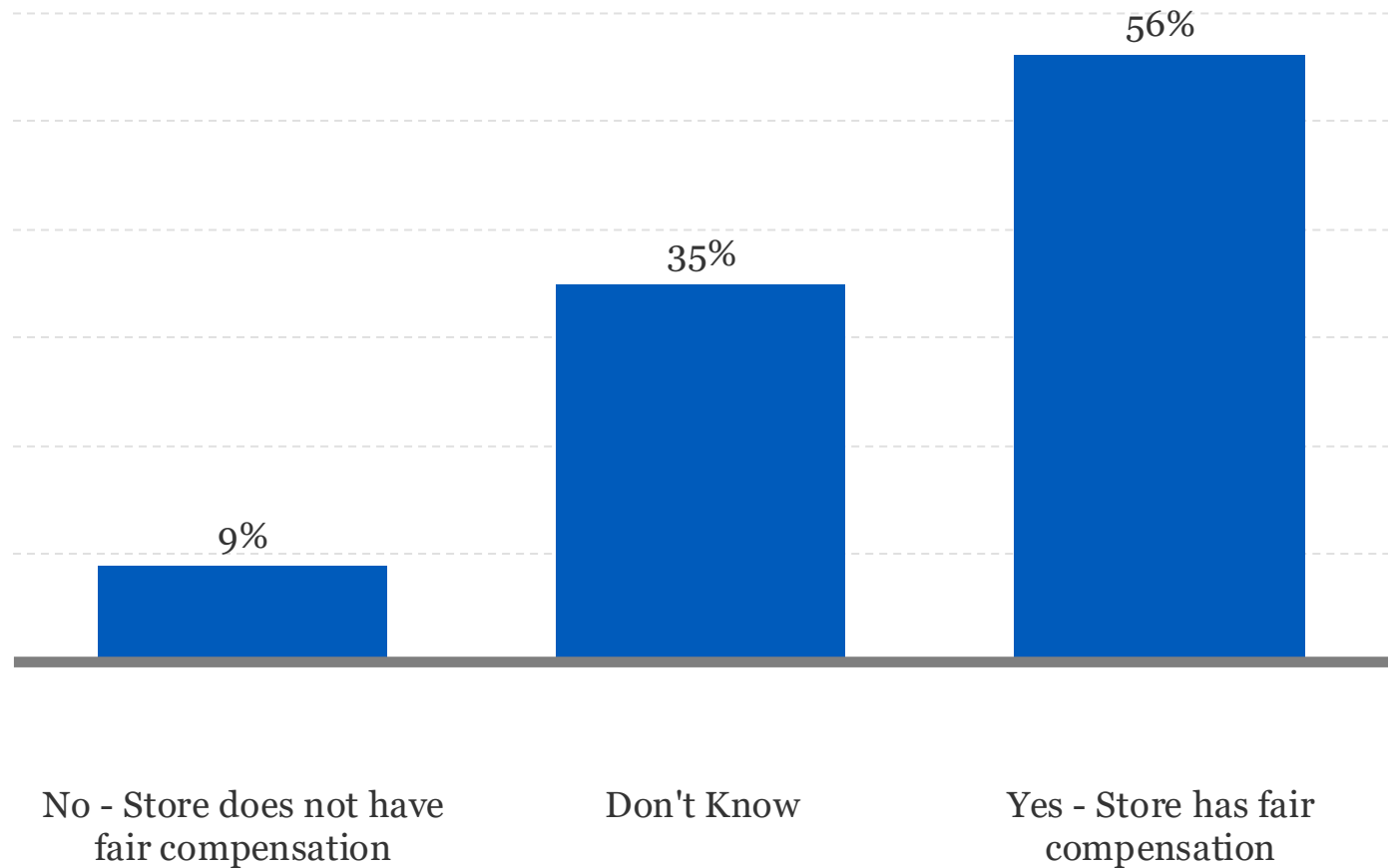
25%

Gen Z

49%

Seniors

Below: 'Does your store have a fair mechanism to compensate customers when pricing errors happen?' (n = 2,011)



“At our core, consumers are people with thoughts and emotions. Even if I'd happily pay four times as much for my favorite chocolate bar at the time of purchase, what if I learn that someone else paid a lot less? To say I'd be angry is an understatement. At that point, I've also lost trust in the retailer or the brand.”

Yuni Baker-Saito, CEO of Chicory (Food Institute, December 2025)

“Be absolutely upfront about it.” *(regarding price changes)*

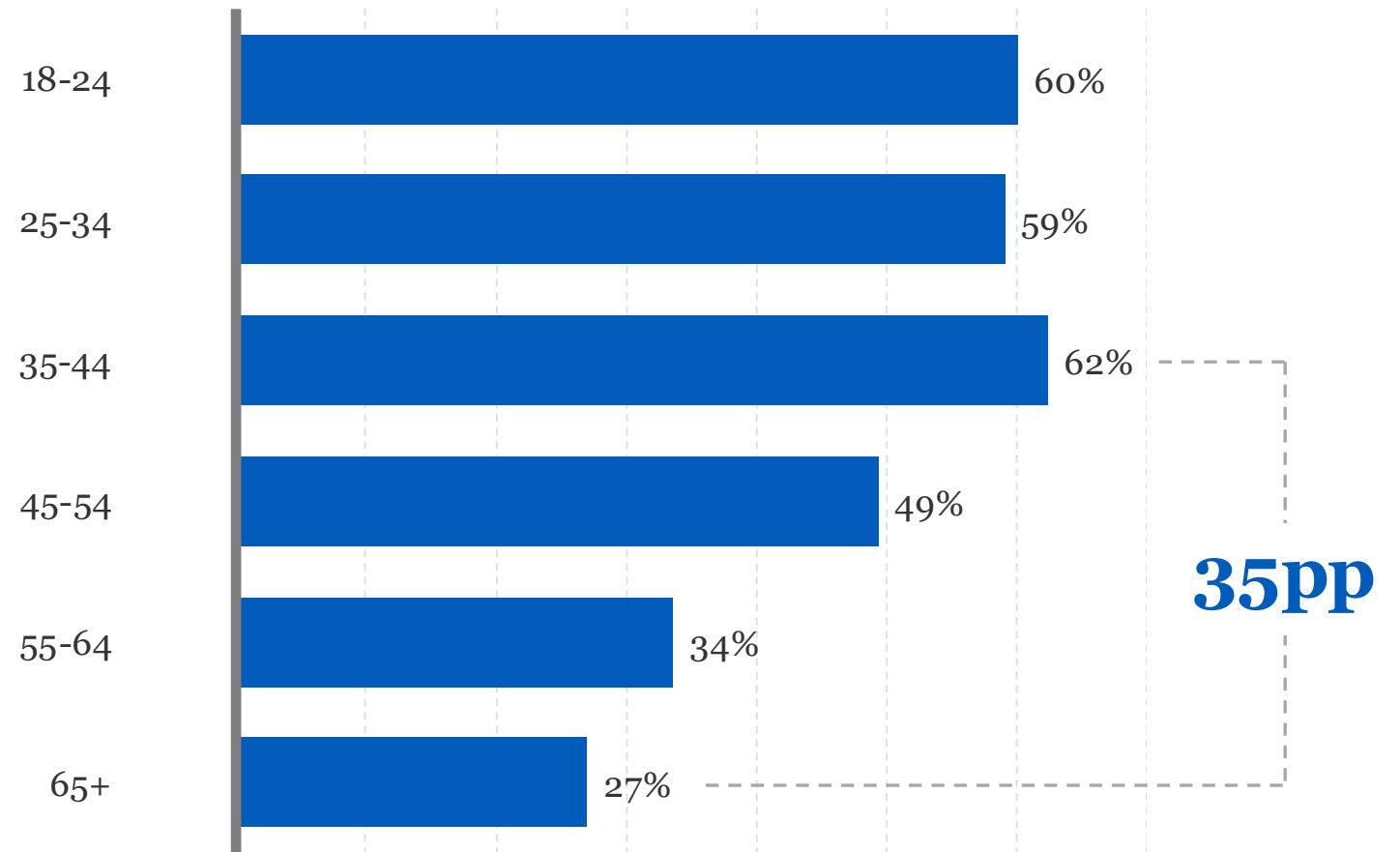
Joseph Turow, Professor Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania (CX Dive, March 2026)

14. Younger shoppers are always comparing: 60% actively check prices

Bottom Line

If your customer base skews young, assume they're checking Amazon in your aisles. Competitive pricing is expected. For older customers, trust the shelf price and don't force comparison.

Below: % Who Frequently Compare Prices (4-5 on scale) by Age (n = 2,011)

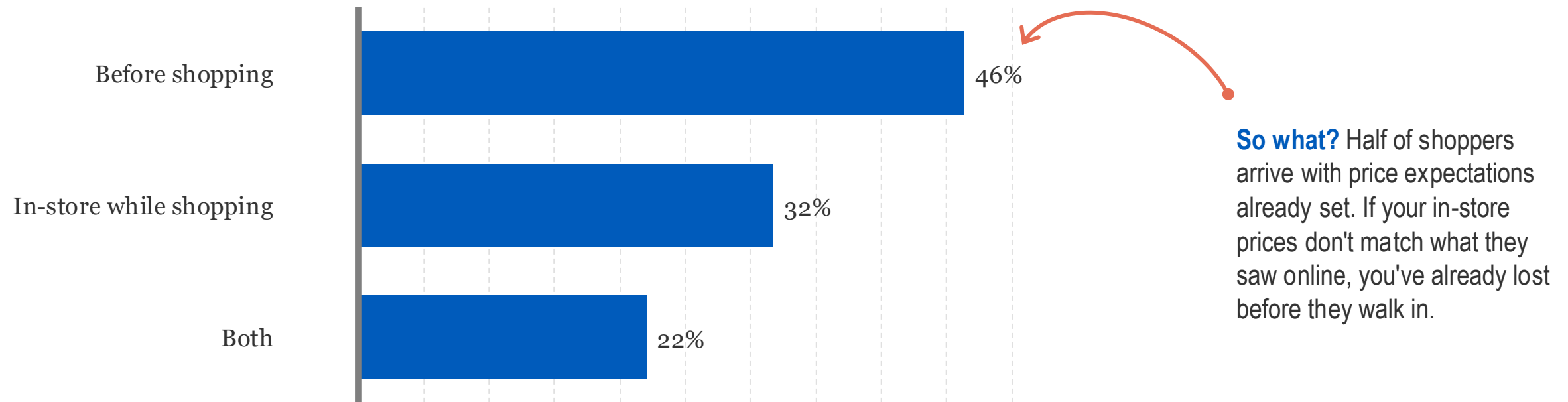


What this means: Younger and middle-aged shoppers are digital natives who compare prices constantly. Older customers trust the shelf price and don't actively price compare. Different segments require different strategies.

15. Half of shoppers arrive with price expectations already set

Key Insight: Half of shoppers arrive with price expectations already set. If your in-store prices don't match what they saw online (yours or competitors'), you've already lost before they walk in.

Below: When Shoppers Compare Prices (n = 2,011)



Strategic implications: How to turn confrontation into loyalty

Train your frontline for error recovery

91% will report errors. Your staff will hear about mistakes constantly. Make resolution seamless.

Watch Gen Z differently

They're 18pp less likely to report in-store, but they're still noticing. Monitor social media, reviews, and silent churn.

Communicate your compensation policy

35% don't know if you'll make it right. Visible price accuracy guarantees differentiate and build trust before problems happen.

Assume younger shoppers arrive informed

60% of shoppers under 45 actively compare prices; 46% do it before they walk in. Your in-store price needs to match what they already saw online.

The background features a complex, abstract pattern of white lines and arrows on a solid blue background. The lines are a mix of solid and dashed, creating a sense of movement and connectivity. Some lines are straight, while others are curved or zig-zagging. Small white circles are scattered throughout, often at the ends of lines or at points where lines intersect. The overall effect is that of a technical or architectural drawing, possibly representing a network or a flow diagram.

Section 4

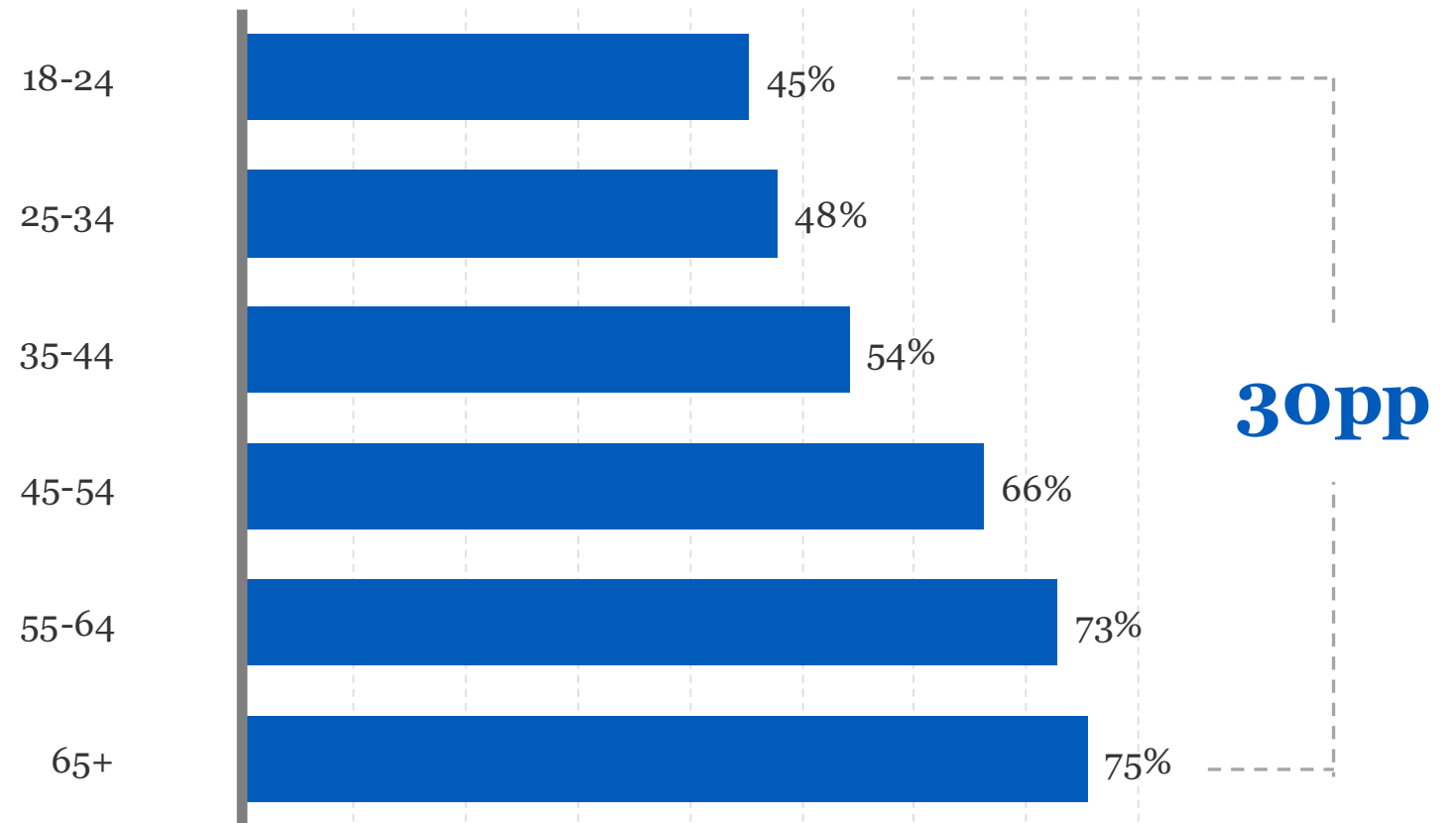
The Opportunity: Price Matching Drives Traffic

16. Older shoppers expect one price: 75% of seniors want channel parity

Bottom Line

If your customer base skews older, channel price discrepancies are a major risk. If younger, you have more flexibility but still need to communicate why prices differ.

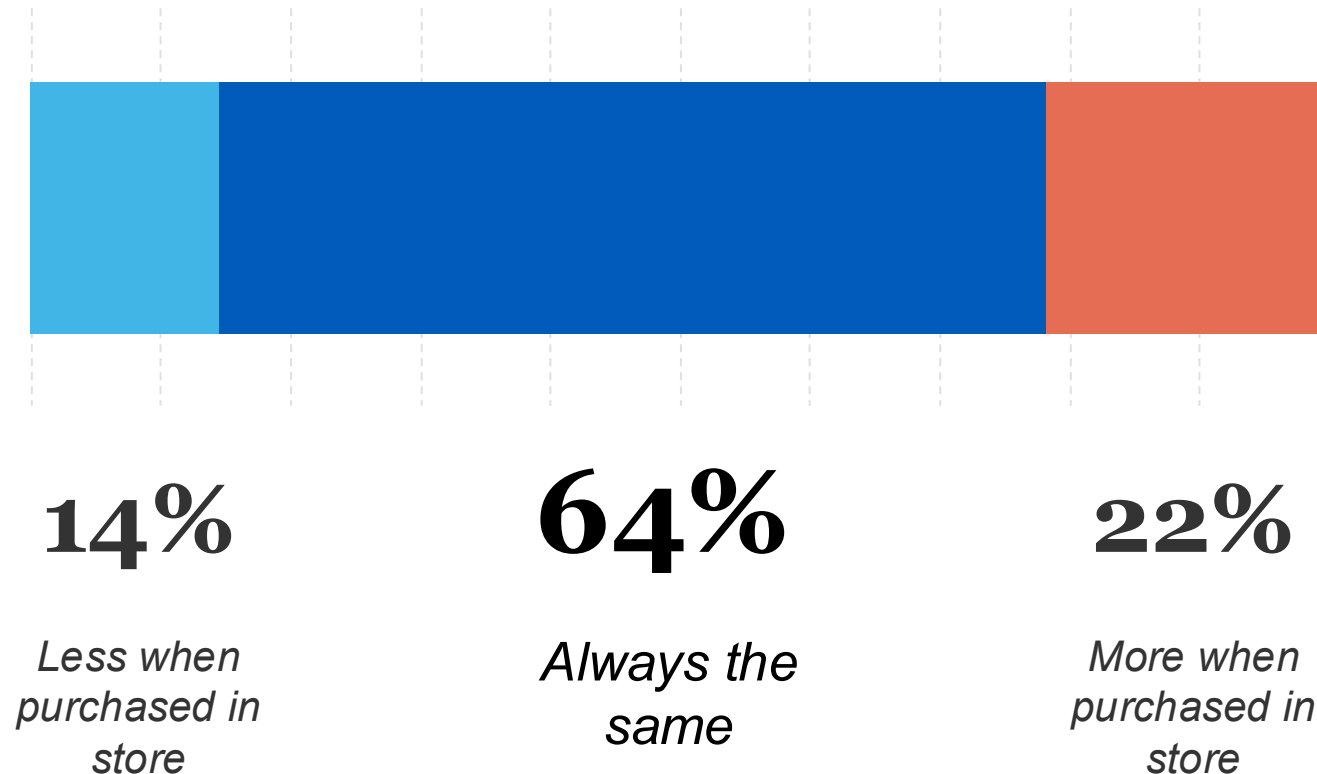
Below: % Who Expect Same Price Online and In-Store by Age (n = 2,011)



What this means: Older shoppers grew up with fixed pricing -- they expect the shelf price to match everywhere. Younger shoppers, raised on dynamic e-commerce pricing, are more accepting of channel-based price differences.

17. Two-thirds of shoppers expect identical prices online and in-store

Below: Online vs In-Store Price Expectations (n = 2,011)



Key insight: Nearly two-thirds of shoppers expect the same price regardless of channel. Parents have slightly lower parity expectations.

52%
Of parents expect identical prices

19pp
Percentage point gap in expectations

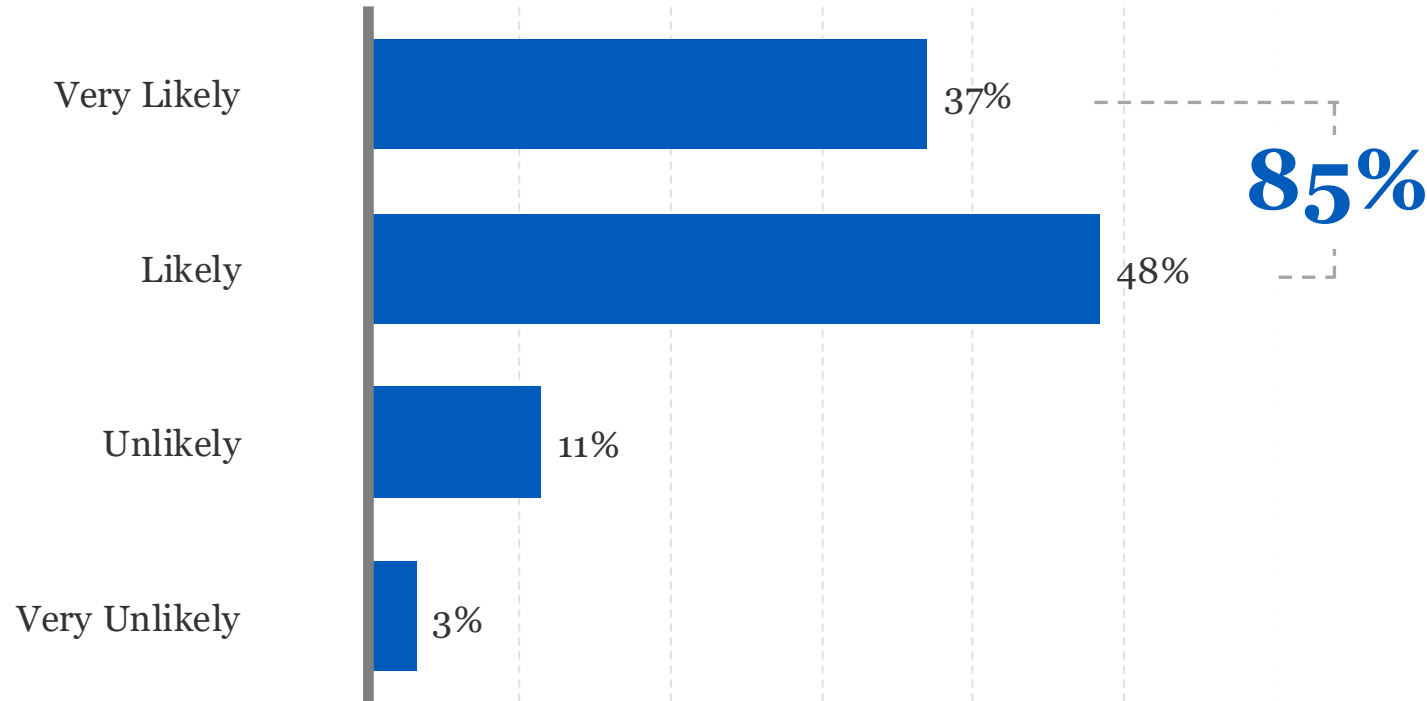
71%
Of non-parents expect identical prices

What This Means:

The 22% who expect higher in-store prices may accept it, but they're also the most likely to see it in-store and buy online. Channel pricing strategy must align with customer expectations.

18. Matching drives traffic: 85% would shop in-store for it

Below: 'How likely will you go and shop in a physical store if you know that they will offer price matching with Amazon?' (n = 2,011)



Opportunity

Price matching with Amazon is a traffic driver. 85% of shoppers say it would bring them into physical stores.

Strategic insight

Consumers want permission to shop in-store without missing lower prices online. Price matching removes the 'Am I getting ripped off?' anxiety.

19. Parents love price matching: 91% would shop in store to get it

Opportunity

Price matching is a parent magnet. Promote it in family-oriented marketing, kid-centric categories, and back-to-school campaigns.

Below: Price Matching Appeal by Parent Status (n = 2,011)

Parents



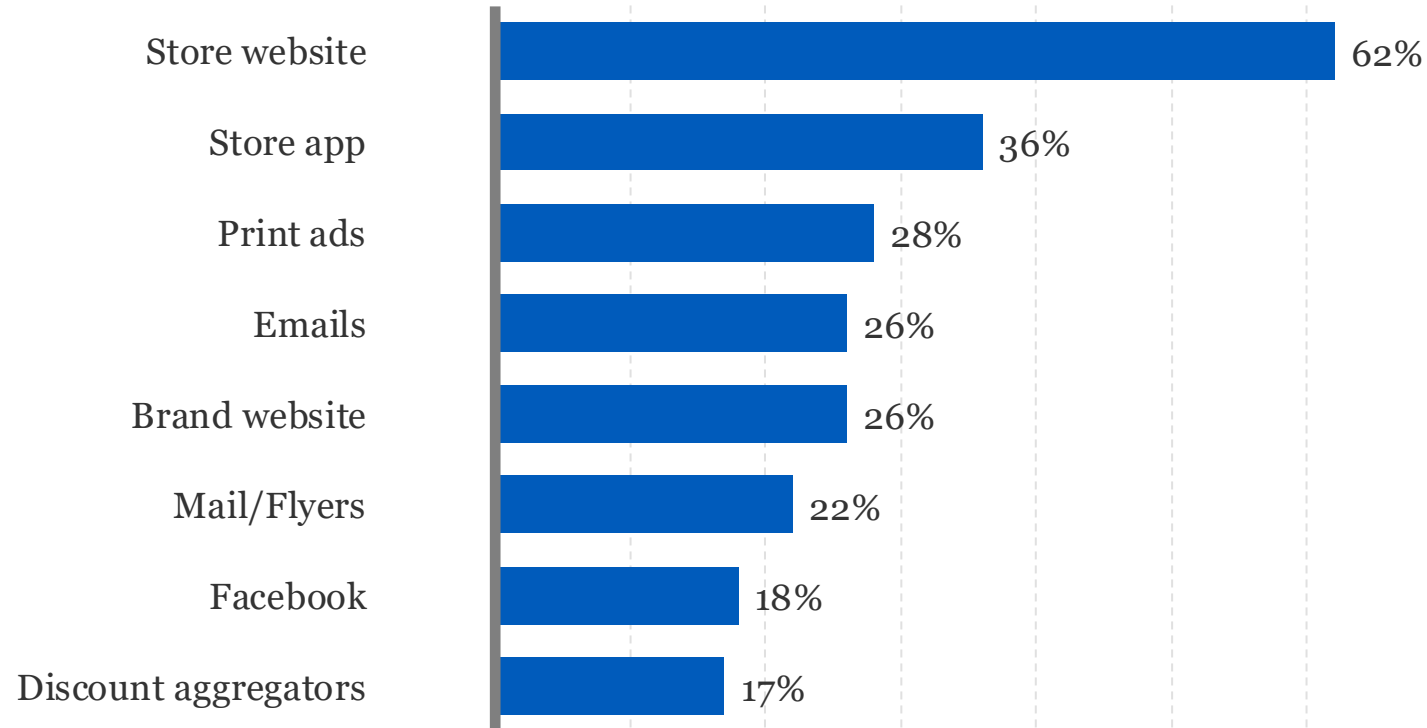
Non-Parents



What this means: Price matching is important to all shoppers. It is a bit more important to parents, as they are managing tight budgets and want assurance they're not overpaying. Give them that assurance.

20. Store websites dominate for deal hunting, but choices are split by age

Below: Where shoppers hunt for deals (n = 2,011)



Source: Shopping Survey (2025) | n = 2,011 U.S. consumers

Under 55

46%

Use Facebook or aggregator sites

32%

Use print ads or mail/flyers

55+

11%

Use Facebook or aggregator sites

48%

Use print ads or mail/flyers

Strategic implications: How to drive traffic with price matching

Lead with price matching to drive traffic

85% of shoppers would shop in-store for it. Leverage this opportunity to drive traffic, and with it, often higher basket sizes.

Price matching resonates, especially among parents

91% appeal among parents vs. 82% for non-parents. Promote in family categories, back-to-school, kid-centric aisles.

Align channel pricing for older shoppers

75% of seniors expect identical prices online and in-store. Channel discrepancies are a major trust risk with this segment.

Give shoppers permission to buy in-store

64% expect the same price regardless of channel. Price matching removes the "Am I getting ripped off?" anxiety.



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Gauri's research and teaching interests are in the areas of retailing, pricing, branding, marketing analytics, store performance measurement, e-commerce and shopper marketing. He has advised or consulted for various companies in these areas, and he is a recognized thought leader in retailing. He was ranked third in the world in the Retailing Journal Influence Index from 2009-15.

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