



Holiday shoppers lean on peers for reassurance before checkout

New survey finds consumers are spending more time researching holiday purchases, seeking candid perspectives beyond brand messaging

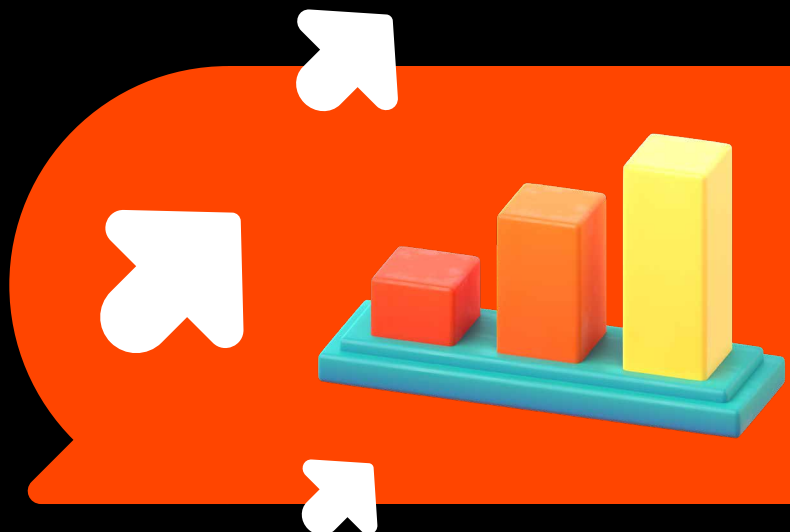


To win over holiday shoppers, marketers must build the peer-to-peer credibility that paid media alone can't buy, according to a new survey by EMARKETER and Reddit of 1,001 US adult consumers.

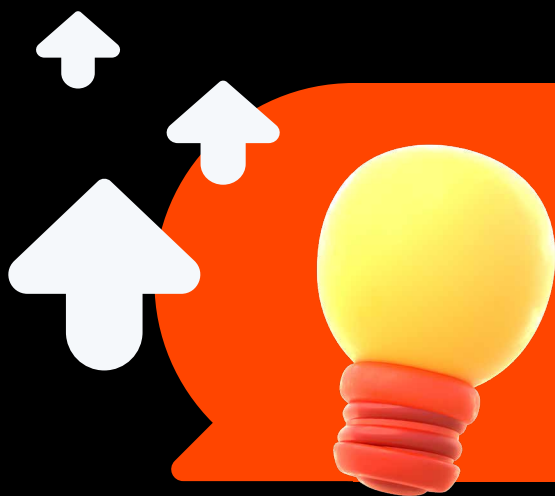
Relatable, candid input carries more weight than polished endorsements. A trusted friend's or family member's recommendation (41.9%) and an honest discussion of the product's downsides alongside its strengths (26.0%) made consumers feel confident in the last purchase they made during the holiday period, ranking above an expert review or publication (18.7%) and a creator or influencer endorsement (12.6%), according to the survey. With no shortage of opinions, consumers prioritize the people they can most relate to.

Reddit users are more active holiday shoppers. Across all product categories, consumers who never use Reddit were less likely to buy gifts for others between Black Friday 2025 and the first week of January 2026 than those who use the platform to some degree.

Consumers increasingly value experience-based perspectives when evaluating purchases. Brands can't rely on messaging and paid influencer endorsements alone. To compete, marketers must build a cross-channel presence that generates enough consumer conversation and advocacy to withstand occasional criticism.



Key survey takeaways



01

Consumers are becoming more thoughtful researchers, and the holiday season is no exception.

→ Shoppers are taking their time parsing recommendations and cross-referencing them across platforms.

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Influencers drive awareness, but confidence is earned elsewhere.

→ Influencer marketing remains an important discovery channel, but shoppers often look for additional perspectives before making a purchase.

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03

Shoppers value specificity, debate, and honesty.

→ Vague endorsements aren't enough. Consumers turn to spaces like Reddit for niche takes from others with parallel experiences and value conversations that contain mixed reviews.

08

04

AI is becoming another step in the shopping journey.

→ AI-assisted shopping is picking up in popularity, but it isn't completely collapsing the shopping journey. Consumers want to validate these recommendations elsewhere.

11

Consumers are becoming more thoughtful researchers

Consumers are lengthening the consideration period, consulting many spaces for product discovery, peer reviews, and influencer recommendations.

43.5%

of consumers say they spend more time researching before buying than they did two years ago,

and 27.9% say they buy more based on recommendations from people with similar situations than they did two years ago, according to the EMARKETER and Reddit survey.

Consumers consult multiple sources while they shop, which stays true during the holiday season. **Consumers are most likely to often or always use Google search when researching holiday purchases (58.3%), followed by Amazon reviews (45.0%), friends and family recommendations (44.7%), and YouTube (39.2%),** according to the survey.

For high-consideration (i.e., important or expensive) purchases during the holiday period, consumers are most likely to say that they make a decision based on a mix of sources (23.3%) and need agreement across several before committing.

Daily Reddit users are most likely to use the platform for early discovery (57.7%) during the holiday period, but they are also most likely to say they always consult sources including Google search (41.2%),

retailer websites and pages (26.5%), and Amazon reviews (28.2%) during the holiday period, signaling their desire to layer Reddit with other research sources.

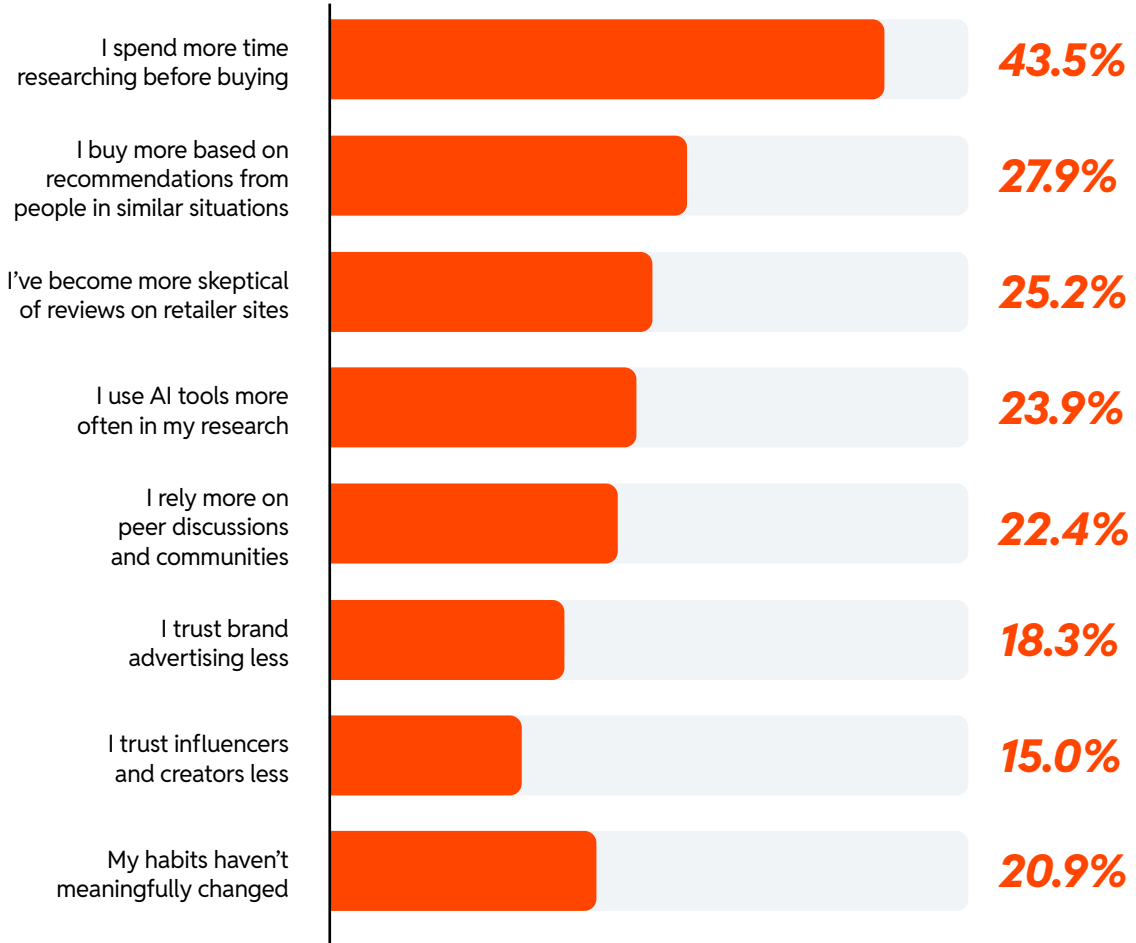
“With Reddit threads more frequently appearing in Google searches, shoppers in the consideration phase might be finding themselves on Reddit more than they used to, spending time parsing through discussions and reviews before making a purchase,” said EMARKETER senior analyst Minda Smiley.

In fact, Reddit was the eighth most searched term on Google in the US and had more than 180 million unique Reddit posts clicked on from Google Searches, according to Google Search Console data from Q1 2026.



Reddit was the **eighth most searched term** on Google in the US in Q1 2026.

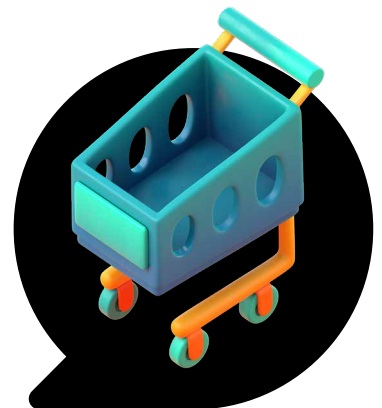
How has the way you research and decide on purchases changed over the past two years?



Note: Respondents could select all that apply. n= 1,001.
Source: EMARKETER and Reddit "Holiday Consumer Survey," May 2026

The wide access to reviews, combined with economic strain, has made consumers more cost-conscious and supports that longer research period. When it comes to important or expensive purchases during the holidays, consumers value price and convenience (18.5%) more than reviews from experts, friends and family, or online communities.

Searching for the best deal often lengthens the consideration phase, said Smiley. That extended research period creates more opportunities for consumers to encounter additional reviews, recommendations, and brand messaging before making a purchase. "The rise of social search has also made it easier for people to research products in a video context, keeping them in the consideration phase for longer periods of time," she said. "Plus, consumers are increasingly looking for discounts when considering a purchase."



Influencer recommendations alone can't close the deal

Endorsements from friends, family, and online communities carry more weight than influencer content during the holiday period.

Consumers are most likely to trust friends and family “a lot” or “completely” (58.3%) when making decisions during the holidays.

Most consumers either agree (42.9%) or strongly agree (21.9%) that a product recommended by the Reddit community feels more credible than one recommended by an influencer.

Social is a top source for holiday shopping and product discovery, making influencer marketing an obvious investment during this time of year. Influencers can offer brands visibility in holiday search queries, compiling gift guides and introducing products early in the consideration process. Still, influencers are only one driver of holiday purchase decisions.

When it comes to holiday shopping, influencer trust has not collapsed but has largely leveled out. Some 51.1% of consumers say they trust them more or about the same as they did a year ago. However, only 12.6% say the last holiday purchase they feel confident about came from a creator or influencer recommendation.

Not surprisingly, brand familiarity and price are what really make consumers feel confident that they bought the right holiday gifts, outperforming friend or family recommendations, according to the survey.

In addition to building brand awareness and keeping price top of mind, marketers can facilitate and encourage organic conversation that turns one-time buyers into repeat customers.

While consumers might trust influencers enough to make an impulse purchase after seeing their content during the holidays, that doesn't mean they rely on those recommendations to the same extent when making non-impulse purchase decisions, said Smiley.

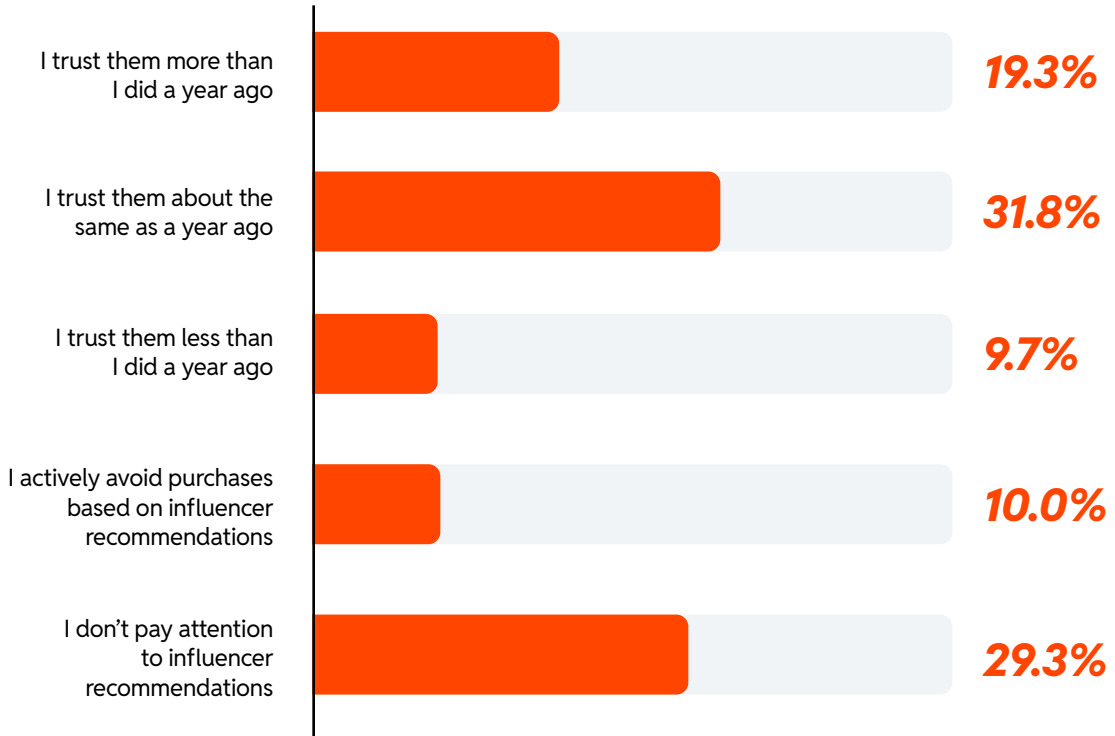
“Recommendations from family and friends, especially in the gifting context, naturally carry more weight,” she said.

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Minda Smiley

Senior analyst, EMARKETER

Which of the following best describes your feelings about influencer or creator recommendations when you're deciding what to buy during the holiday period?

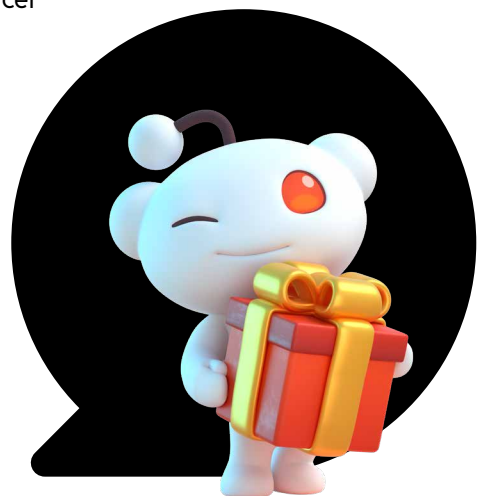


n= 1,001. Source: EMARKETER and Reddit "Holiday Consumer Survey," May 2026

Consumers who trust influencers more than they did a year ago are also most likely to strongly agree that Reddit conversations give them a more honest picture of a product than brand marketing does (36.5%). While these consumers place greater trust in organic recommendations than in brand-approved messaging, that doesn't mean influencer marketing should be neglected.

In fact, those who said they trust influencers more than they did a year ago are also the least likely to need agreement across several sources before committing (13.0%). The finding suggests they may be more comfortable making decisions without extensive corroboration from other sources.

While influencers drive awareness for these consumers who trust influencers more, Reddit is where credibility, validation, and community influence is found.

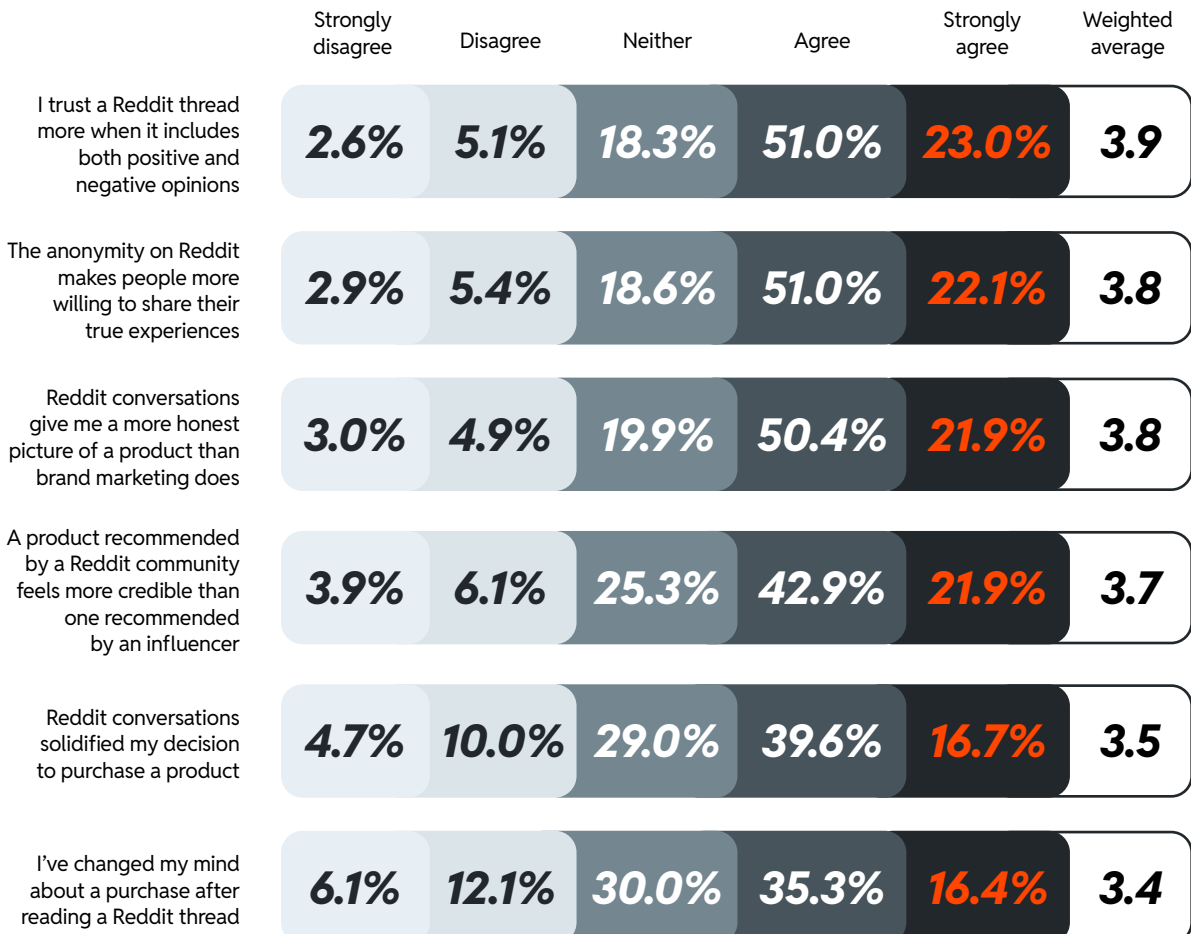


Shoppers value specificity, candor, and debate

Consumers are becoming more skeptical of retailer-controlled content.

Some 18.3% of respondents said they trust brand advertising less than they did two years ago, and 25.2% have become more skeptical of reviews on retailer sites in that period.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



n= 1,001. Source: EMARKETER and Reddit "Holiday Consumer Survey," May 2026

The majority (73.1%) of respondents either agree or strongly agree that the anonymity of Reddit makes people more willing to share their true experiences, and **74.0% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that they trust a Reddit thread more when it includes positive and negative opinions.**

The findings suggest consumers increasingly value candid perspectives and balanced discussion when evaluating purchases.

When thinking about the last purchase they made during the holiday period, consumers said an honest discussion of the product's downsides alongside its strengths (26.0%) made them feel more confident than endorsements from experts (18.7%) or influencers (12.6%). Rather than avoiding criticism altogether, brands benefit from understanding the questions, tradeoffs, and concerns consumers discuss before making a purchase.

Which of the following best describes your overall approach to high-consideration* purchases during the holiday period?**



* (important or expensive) ** (gifts, self-purchases, or any other meaningful spending)
n= 1,001. Source: EMARKETER and Reddit "Holiday Consumer Survey," May 2026

When reading Reddit threads about products or purchase decisions, consumers were most likely to value specific, real-world experiences (43.3%), honest criticism alongside praise (41.3%), and seeing disagreement and different perspectives in one place (29.9%).

One opinion from a few anonymous people doesn't always cut it. When it comes to higher-cost purchases during the holiday period, **a detailed conversation or thread where multiple people debated (31.9%) is more valuable than one detailed recommendation from a single trusted source (18.5%),** according to the survey.

Daily Reddit users are most likely to say they make high-consideration holiday purchases based on what experts and professional reviewers recommend (27.7%), showing that while they do consult community forums, they also value more vetted recommendations.

During the holiday season, **reading a thread debating different products or options is the most common Reddit use case (33.4%).**



Source: Reddit, United States, "Let's talk about your purchases & Social Media," n=1,004, A18+, monthly Reddit users, Attest panels, February 2026. Question: "After researching brands or products on Reddit, how much more confident did you feel about your purchase decision?" Platforms: Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Pinterest, Discord, Snapchat, YouTube.

AI is becoming another checkpoint in the purchase journey

AI has entered the research mix.

23.9%

of consumers say they use AI tools to research and decide on purchases **more often** than they did two years ago.

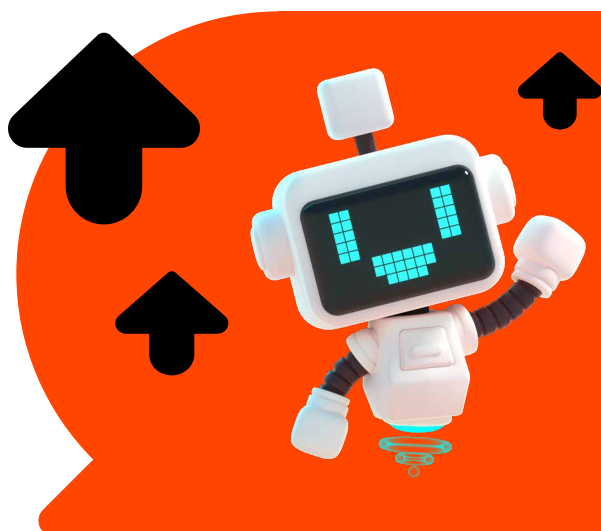
Large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT or Amazon's Alexa for Shopping are gaining traction as a source in the AI shopping process. Some 60% of US AI users are willing to share their online purchase history with an AI shopping agent for more accurate recommendations, according to a March 2026 Horizon survey.

While consumers are increasing their expectations for AI agents, they still look to peers and other trusted sources for reassurance before buying. AI may streamline product discovery, but it hasn't eliminated the need for corroboration.

Almost half of monthly social media, LLM, and ecommerce users (48%) verify their AI recommendations on Reddit, and Reddit users trust Reddit twice as much as LLMs for their final purchase decision, according to Reddit Path to Purchase 2026 Survey.

"Shoppers value both LLMs and social search, so I think the two will complement each other," said Smiley. "People ultimately value human perspectives, especially for expensive or high-stakes purchases."

Daily Reddit users are also most likely to trust generative AI tools completely (22.4%), according to the EMARKETER/Reddit survey, suggesting that AI tools and peer-driven platforms are often used in tandem.



Consumers turn to communities when questions get specific

Daily Reddit users are particularly comfortable seeking this type of input. They are very comfortable consulting anonymous online communities (32.4%) and social media posts (32.4%) for financial and health decisions. Logged-in mobile Reddit users are most likely to say they are very comfortable consulting an anonymous online community like Reddit for financial or health decisions (23.8%) or a generative AI tool (25.4%).

Consumers turn to peer-driven platforms when questions become highly specific to their circumstances. Whether they are deciding how to spend a gift card, evaluating a financial decision, or researching a health-related issue, they are often looking for firsthand experiences from people in similar situations.

These forums can give consumers context that can be difficult to find elsewhere. Users can compare experiences, weigh different perspectives, and find advice tailored to their specific situation.

This trust also appears in holiday-specific behaviors. Logged-in Reddit users are more likely than those without an account to turn to Reddit for gift card redemption or spending. As questions become more brand-specific or situation-specific, consumers increasingly seek input from people who have navigated similar choices.

Purchases vary by category, but the need for validation remains

While holiday shopping is often associated with gifting, consumers are making a wide range of decisions during the season.

Across categories, shoppers seek out perspectives from people with relevant experience to help validate important purchases related to the holidays. Whether that's managing health concerns, researching financial services, evaluating tech upgrades or comparing retail purchases, consumers increasingly look beyond brand messaging to understand how these products resonate in the real world.

➔ Health & wellness

Health questions are personal in ways most purchases aren't, and consumers research them accordingly. During the holiday period, 34.1% of consumers researched supplements, vitamins, or wellness products, the most common health-related research area, while 20.8% researched cold, flu, or seasonal illnesses, and 20.7% looked into mental health and sleep support. For mental health decisions specifically, Reddit was the second most consulted source after Google. And 40.2% of consumers said they are comfortable or very comfortable turning to an anonymous online community for health input, a level of openness that reflects how much peer experience matters when the decision is personal.



➔ Tech (consumer electronics)

Consumer electronics was a widely purchased holiday category: 53.7% of consumers bought electronics for themselves and 46.0% bought as gifts. Some 28.4% of consumers said Reddit played a role in their holiday shopping decisions in consumer tech.





Retail (apparel, beauty, and home)

Apparel was the most gifted category of the holiday period, 67.2% of consumers bought it for someone else, with beauty and personal care following at 59.5%. Both generated meaningful Reddit engagement, with 26.6% of Reddit users citing apparel and 25.1% citing beauty as categories where the platform influenced a purchase.



Financial services

Financial decisions don't stop during the holidays. Some 24.1% of consumers researched budgeting, saving, or debt management during the period, and 18.4% were evaluating major financial decisions. For both, Reddit was a meaningful research source. More broadly, 40.2% of consumers said they are comfortable or very comfortable consulting an anonymous online community for financial input, above comfort levels for social media (33.2%) but behind professional or medical advisors (63.4%). Consumers want honest input from people who have navigated the same decision, and they're willing to find it outside their immediate networks.



What this means for marketers

Holiday shoppers aren't just looking for one-off recommendations, but enough credible information to feel confident in a purchase.



Build for a longer consideration phase.

Consumers are consulting more sources and spending more time researching purchases. Brands should ensure their messaging remains consistent across creator content, retailer pages, reviews, AI tools, search results, and community discussions.



Lead with expertise and credibility.

As consumers seek more tailored answers, brands should think carefully about who represents them and where. Subject matter experts can often answer detailed questions more credibly than traditional marketing spokespeople.

“Brands should also reconsider who they’re putting forth to engage in discussions,” said Smiley. “People will quickly be skeptical of someone in a marketing, advertising, or public relations role.”

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**Make trust a cross-channel effort.**

Friends and family, creators, reviews, search, online communities, and brand familiarity all play a role in helping consumers gain confidence before buying.

**Don't fear balanced discussion.**

Consumers increasingly value honest criticism, mixed opinions, and real-world experiences. Rather than trying to control every conversation, brands should focus on providing accurate information and addressing common concerns transparently. That approach requires patience and a long-term investment in credibility.

“In these instances, brands need to play the long game,” said Smiley. “This can take different shapes. For instance, a cat food brand might host a weekly AMA with a creator who’s a veterinarian, giving cat owners a chance to ask questions.”

Investing in credibility also means prioritizing customer service, responding to consumer comments and questions on social media, and creating opportunities for consumers to engage with brands and one another beyond product marketing.

**Prepare for AI-assisted shopping.**

AI is becoming another source consumers use to research products, but it has not replaced the need for human perspectives. Brands should ensure product information is accurate, accessible, and consistent across both AI-driven and peer-driven sources.



About the survey

This survey was developed and fielded by EMARKETER in collaboration with Reddit. We surveyed 1,001 US adult consumers who made a purchase between Black Friday 2025 and the first week of January 2026 to better understand their holiday shopping behaviors.

About this report

Research for this report was compiled by members of the EMARKETER Studio team in partnership with Reddit, using reports, forecasts, and research by EMARKETER on the holiday shopping habits of US consumers.

Author:

Emmy Liederman - Analyst,
Media, EMARKETER

Design

Miri Kramer - Creative Director,
Content Studio, EMARKETER

Laura Williams - Art Director,
Content Studio, EMARKETER

The following people contributed to this report:

Minda Smiley - Senior Analyst,
EMARKETER

Thank you



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Reddit is a community of communities. Built on shared interests and passions, it is home to the most open and authentic conversations online. Every day, millions of people post, vote, comment, and search for answers across nearly every topic imaginable, and brands build trusted relationships with their audiences.

With 25+ billion posts and comments and more than 126 million daily active uniques, Reddit is one of the internet's largest sources of information. Learn more at www.redditinc.com. The Reddit app is available on the App Store and Google Play.