



# 2023 BACK TO SCHOOL COMMERCE REPORT



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# SYLLABUS: WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

This year, Back-to-School shoppers will expect more than just savings from brands and retailers. Convenience and ethics are also high on their list of must-haves, so you'll need a cohesive omnichannel strategy that includes all three to guarantee a share of their wallets.





This guide contains custom survey insights, seasonal shopping trends, proprietary social listening data, and third-party research — and is designed to help retailers and brands:

LEARN

what factors are impacting Back-To-School purchase decisions

UNDERSTAND

the shopper response to continued economic change

DISCOVER

successful tactics to engage and inspire Back-To-School shoppers





# SOURCES:



CUSTOM SURVEY DATA --  
1,000 U.S. SHOPPER RESPONDENTS

- AGES 18-24 - **13%**
- AGES 25-34 - **31%**
- AGES 35-44 - **38%**
- AGES 45-54 - **12%**
- AGES 54+ - **6%**
- PARENTS OF AN ELEMENTARY STUDENT - **36%**
- PARENTS OF A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT - **38%**
- PARENTS OF A COLLEGE STUDENT - **7%**
- COLLEGE STUDENT - **19%**



3RD-PARTY DATA



# SUMMER READING: SHOPPER BASICS

**Before diving into the guide,**  
here's your 2023  
Back-to-School cheat sheet.



# SUMMER READING: ECONOMICS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

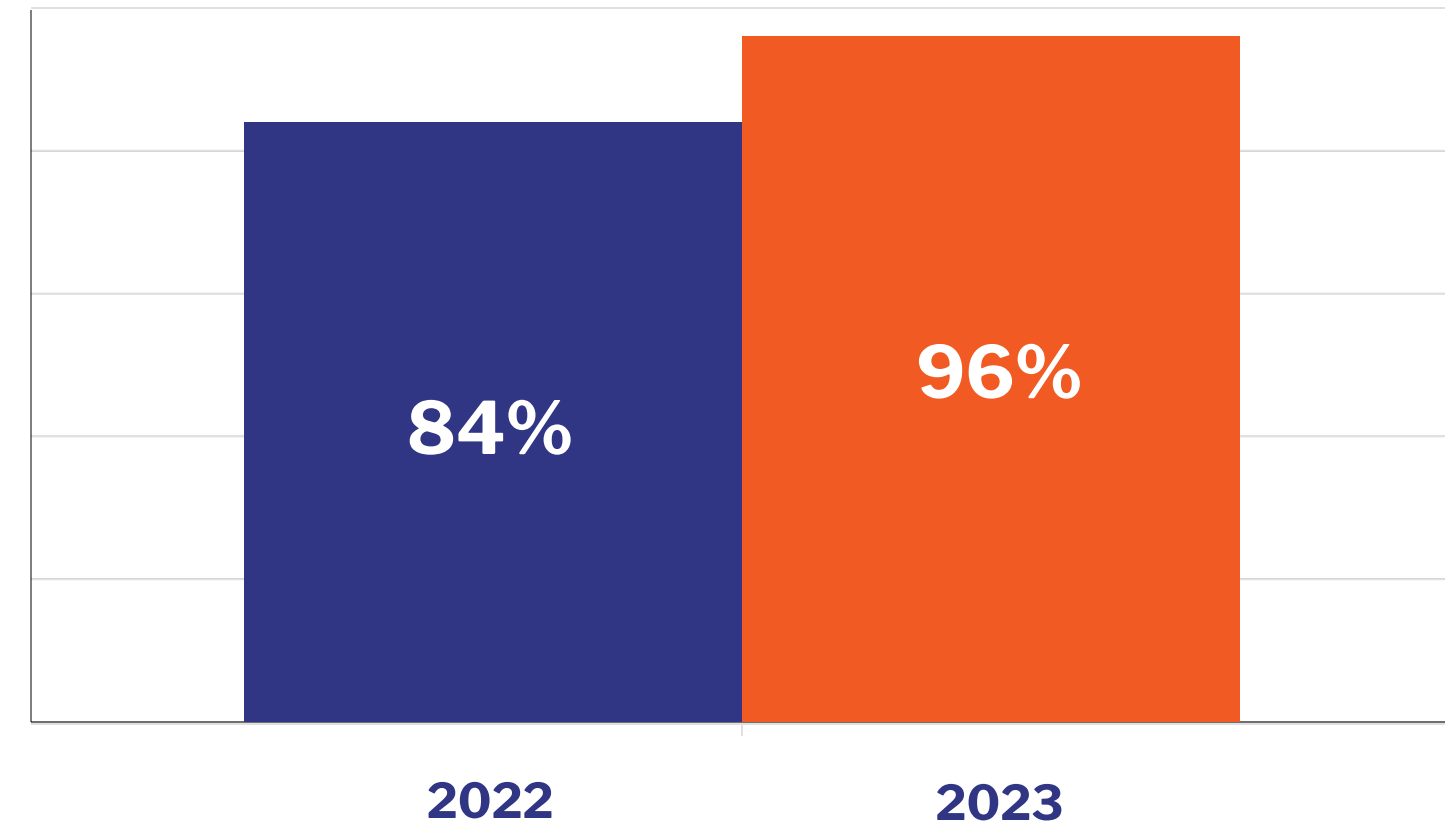
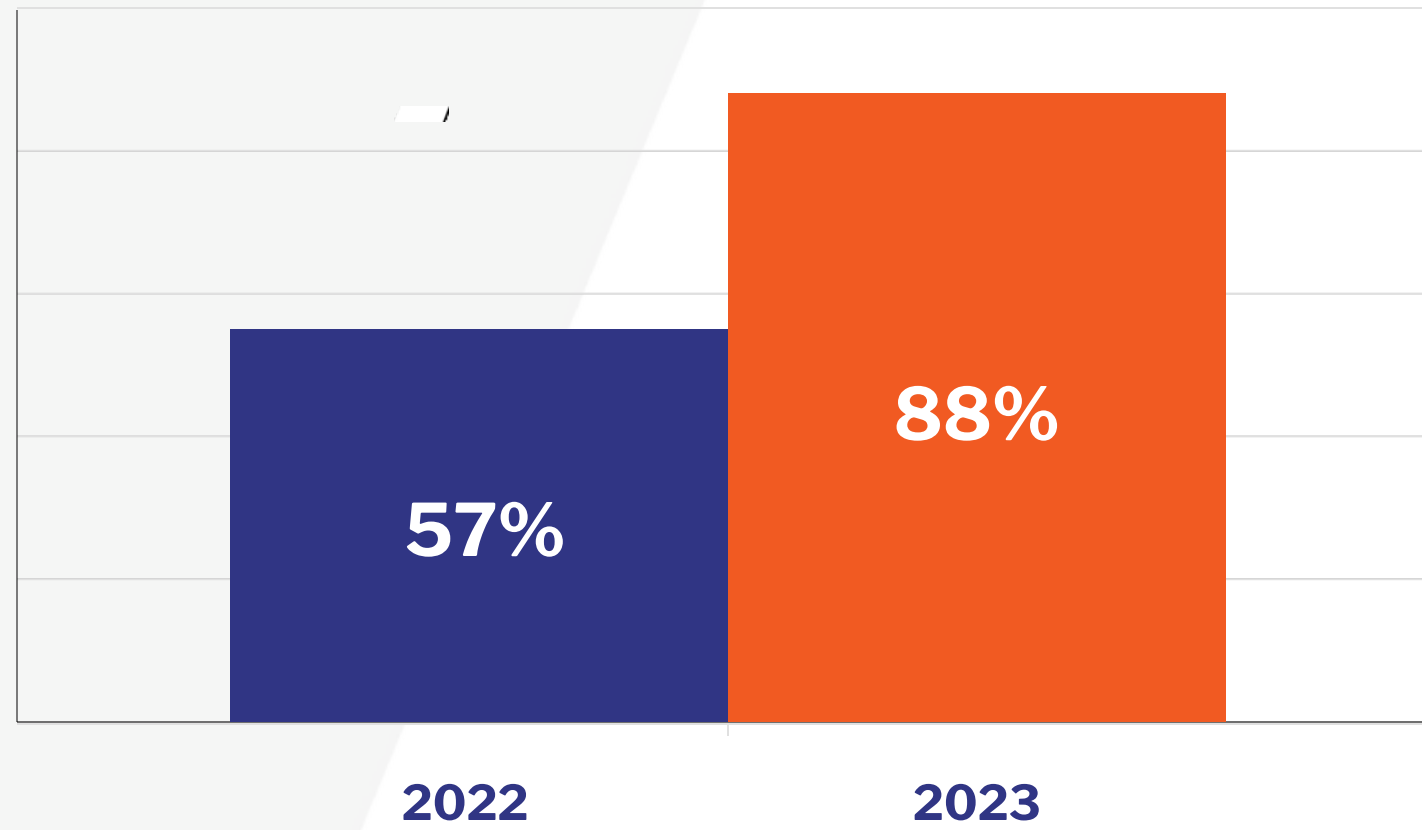
Economic concerns will continue to influence how shoppers make purchase decisions.

88%

88% say their shopping behavior will change as a result of continued economic friction.

96%

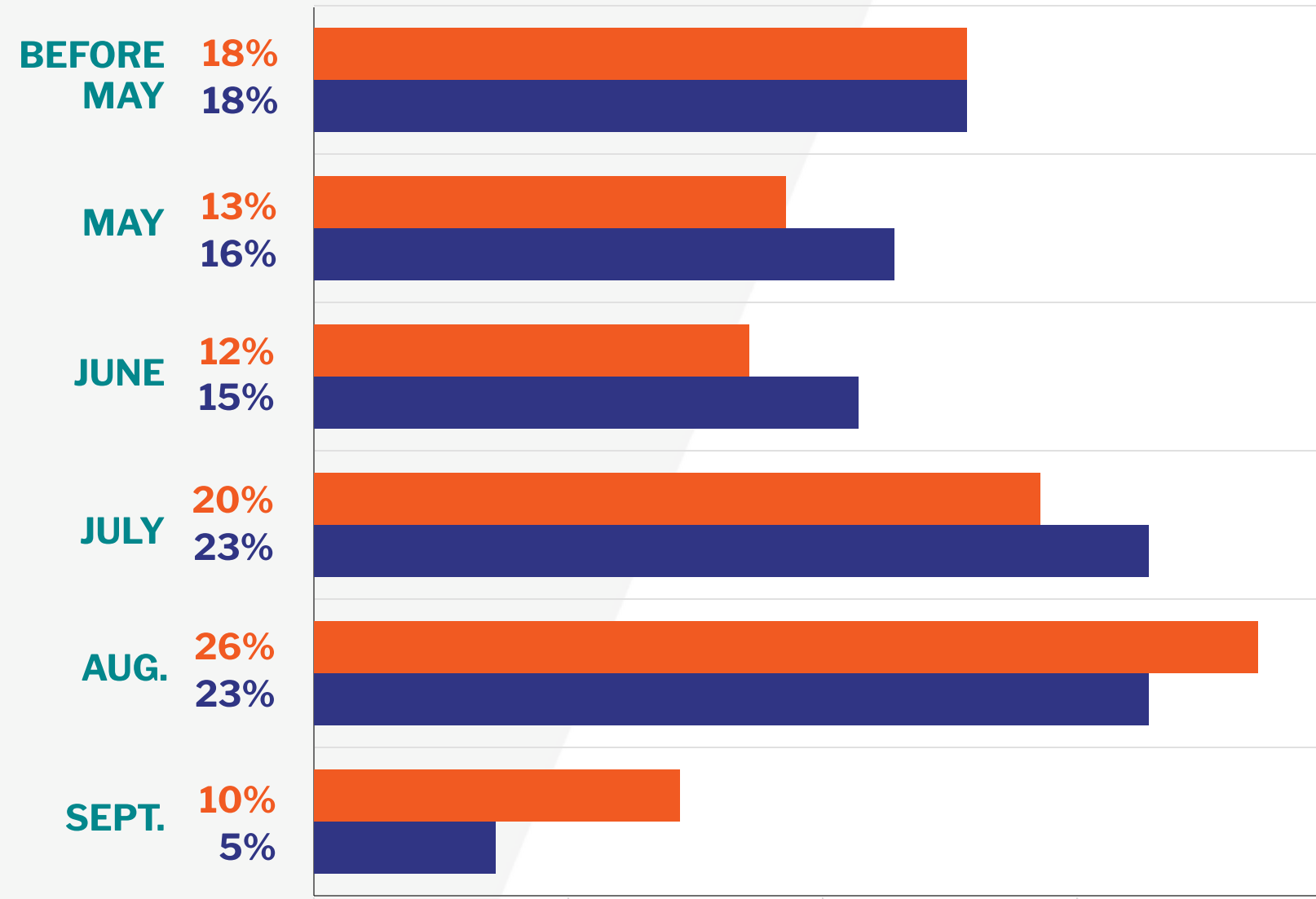
96% will buy school supplies from a new brand that offers a coupon if their preferred brand doesn't.





What month are you most likely to start shopping for your back-to-school list?

● 2022 ● 2023



# SUMMER READING: GEOGRAPHY

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

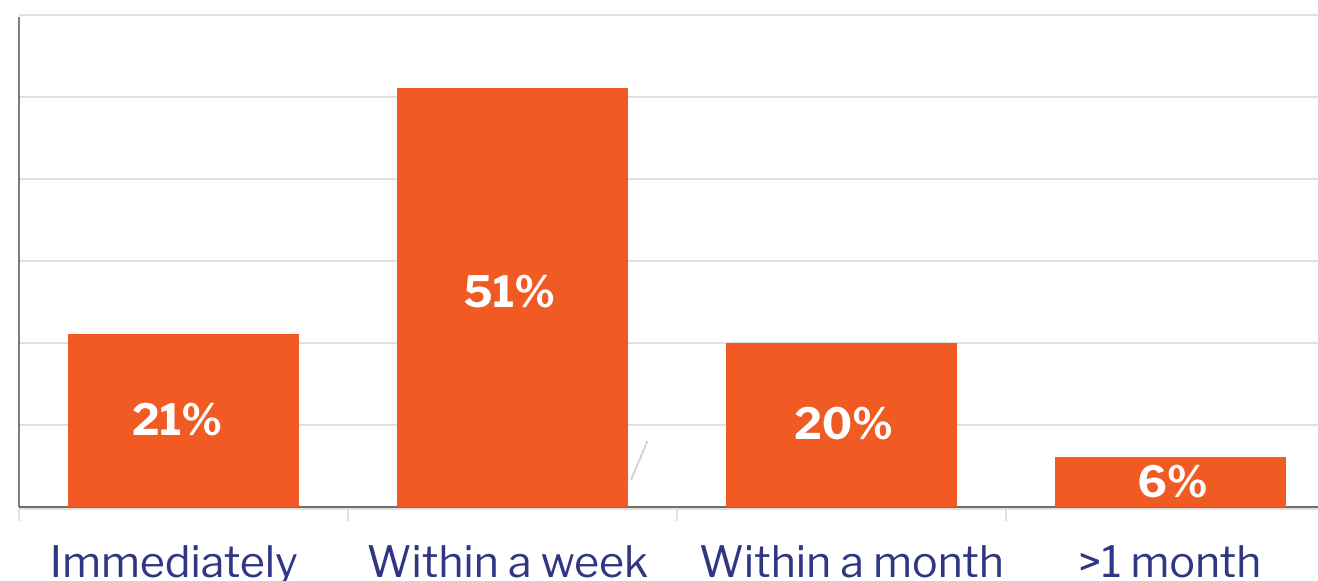
Consumers have become more patient and selective. They're more likely to start earlier, compare prices, wait for discounts, and/or save purchases for a later date.

The majority of Back-to-School shopping will occur in July and August this year.



While **59%** of shoppers have made purchases based on content viewed on social media, only **21%** buy immediately.

When you see a product you like in a post or ad on social media, how long does it take you to purchase that product?



Brick and mortar stores still rank

**#1**

for new product discovery

**46%**  
RETAIL  
STORES

**14%**  
SOCIAL  
MEDIA

**40%**  
RETAIL E-  
COMMERCE



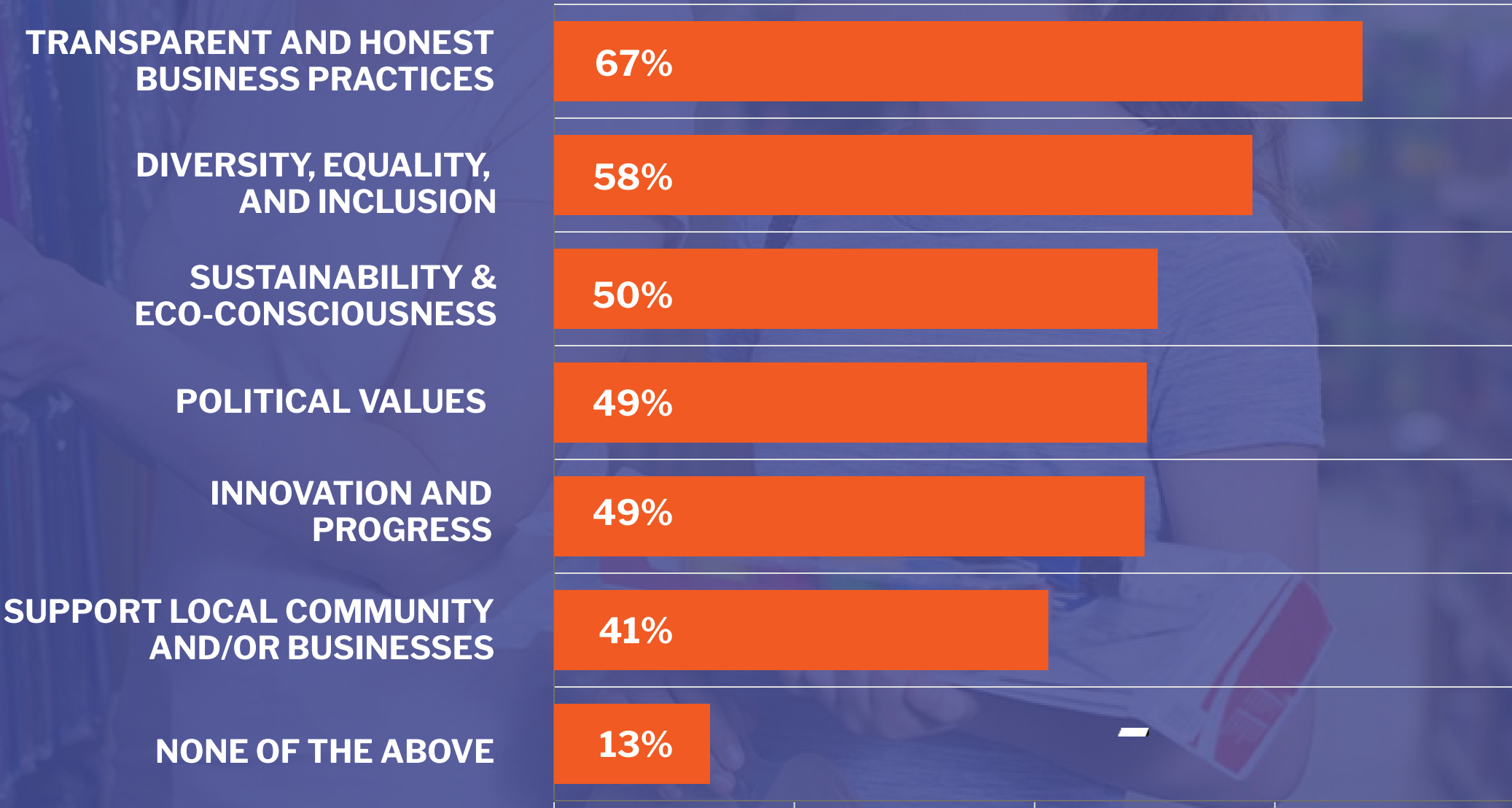
# SUMMER READING: PSYCHOLOGY

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Beyond the usual factors like price and features, the majority of consumers will look for honest, transparent business practices.

When shopping, most people want to buy from brands that are transparent and ethical. They might even value these things over price or quality.

What types of values are important to you when choosing a brand or retailer?



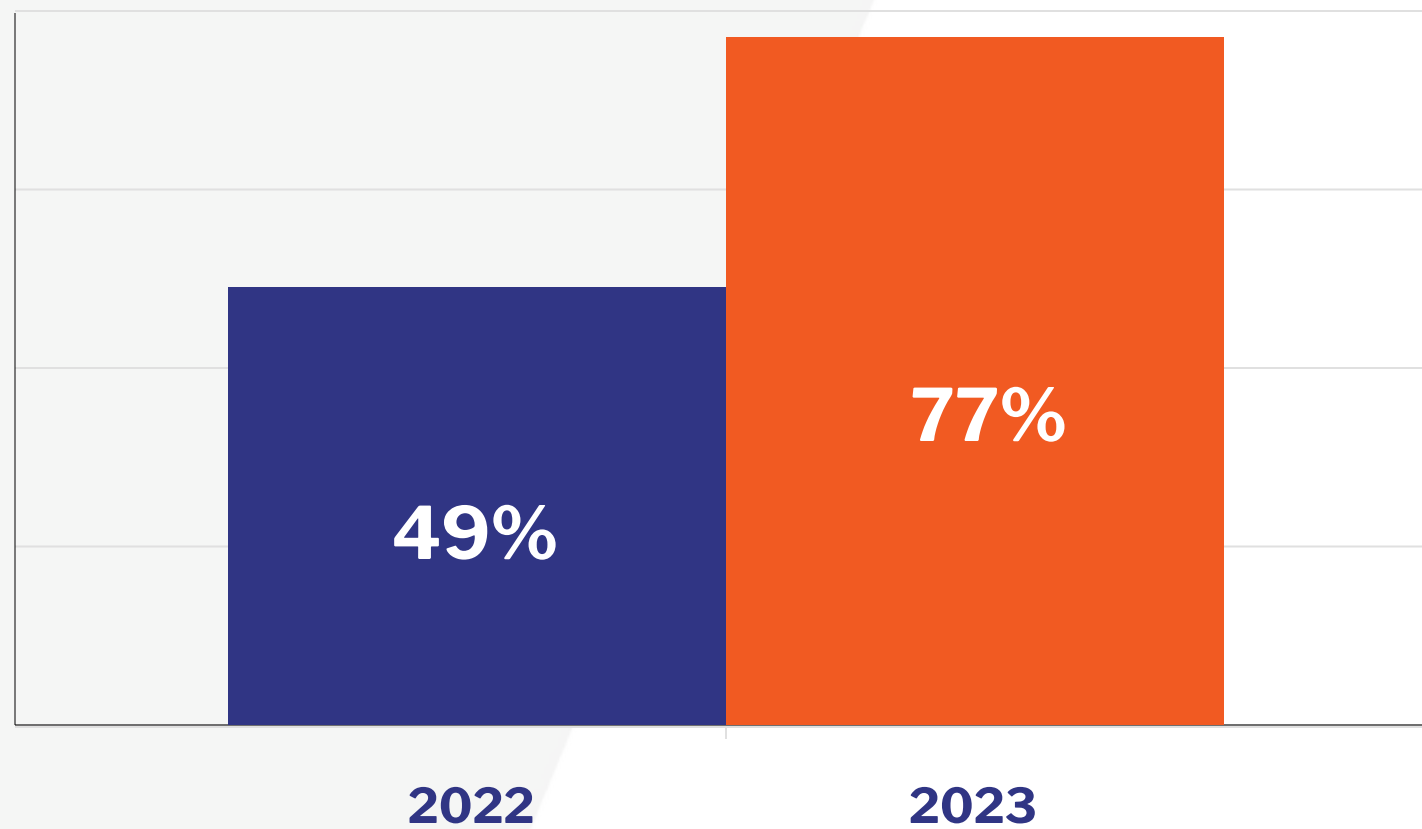


# SUMMER READING: PSYCHOLOGY

77%

of consumers consider brands' alignment with their personal values to be of above-average importance, a **57%** increase year-over-year.

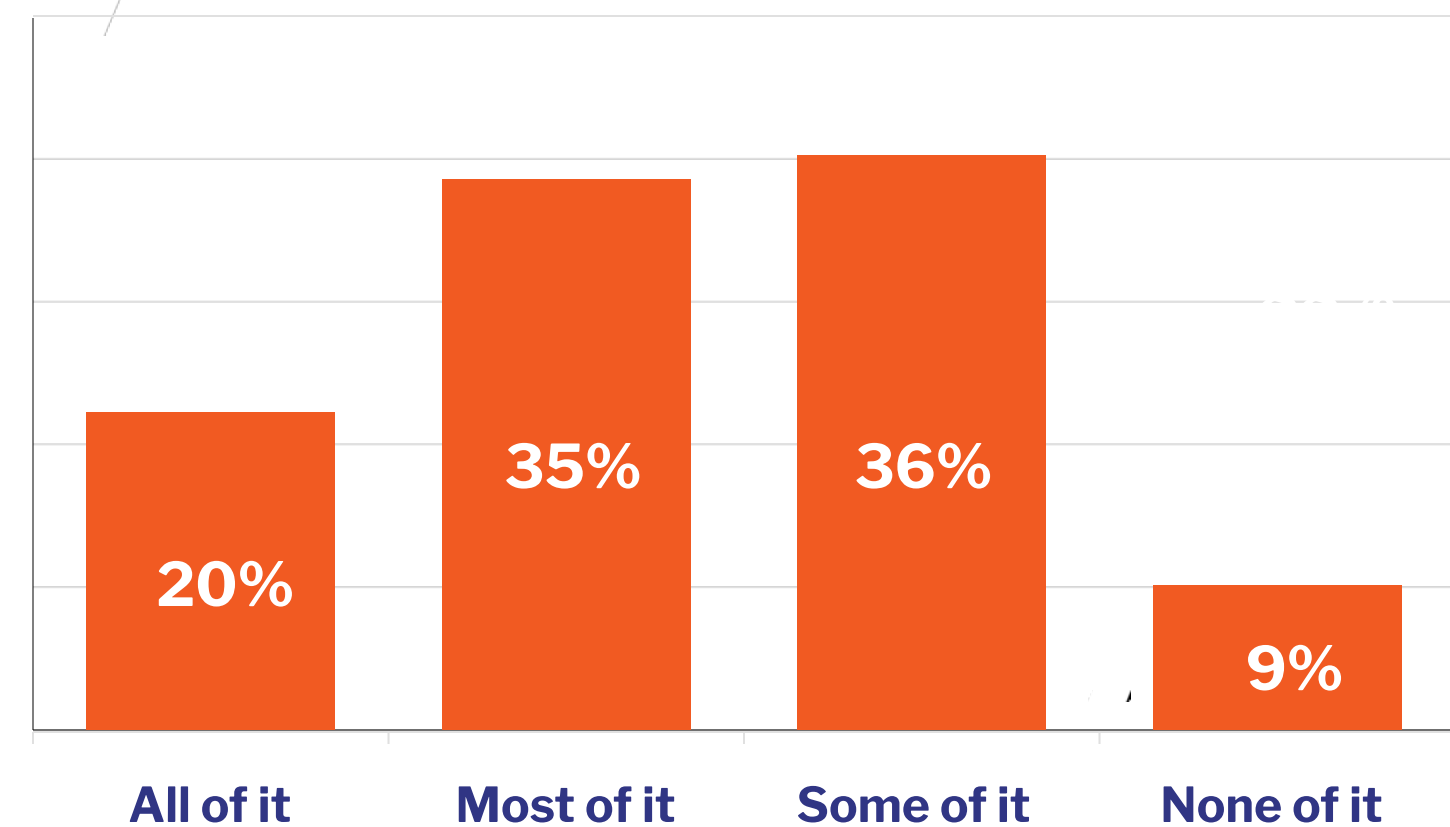
Shoppers who consider it important that the brand they shop with shows alignment with their personal values



91%

91% of shoppers expect some element of their shopping experience to be personally tailored.

In 2023, how much of your shopping do you expect to be curated to your likes, dislikes, and preferences?





# SUMMER READING: SOCIOLOGY

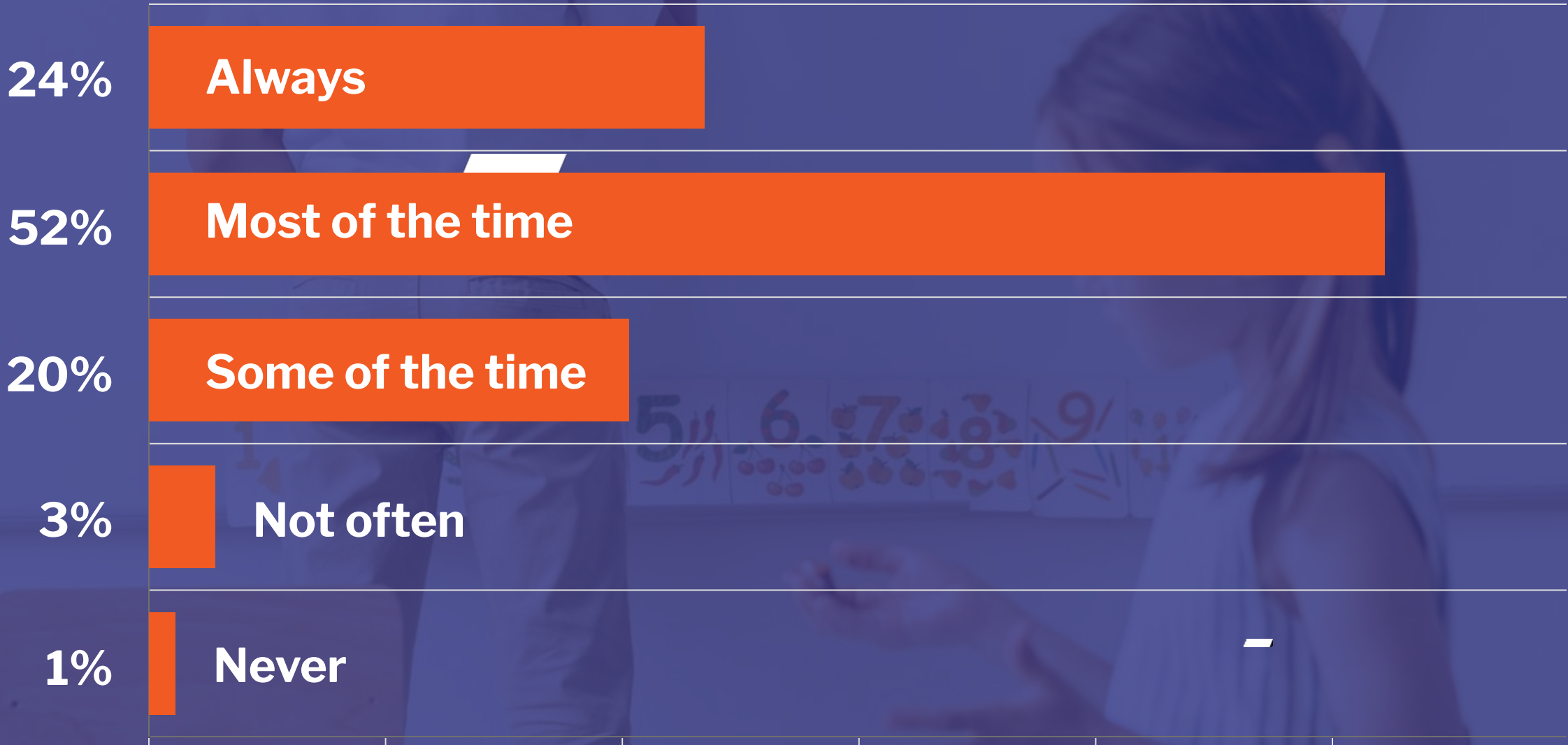
## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:



96% of consumers will treat shopping as a form of a fun activity, rather than an errand; 52% do so “most of the time.”

Back-to-School consumers want to have fun while they shop. When creating strategies to attract them, think about how you can make the experience enjoyable and exciting.

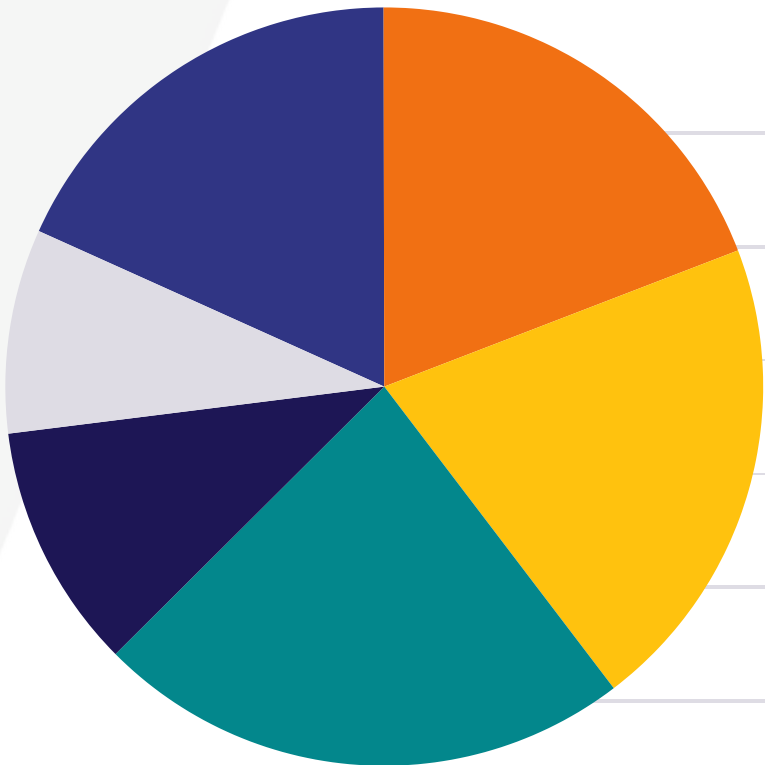
How often do you treat shopping as a form of fun (a social experience or entertainment) rather than solely an errand?



# SUMMER READING: SOCIOLOGY

82%

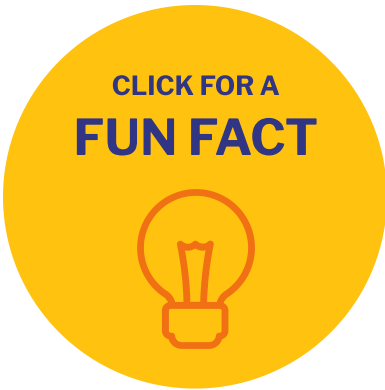
browse social media during the workday.



- 19% Up to thirty minutes
- 20% Thirty minutes to an hour
- 23% 1-2 hours
- 11% 2-4 hours
- 9% More than 4 hours
- 18% I do not use social media during the workday

74%

of shoppers browse brand or retailer websites during the workday.





# SUMMER READING: SOCIOLOGY

How do you define an “enjoyable” shopping experience?

To consider a shopping experience “enjoyable,” consumers look for convenience, ease of discovery, availability of information, and entertainment.



58%

A shopping experience that is convenient and seamless

66%

A shopping experience that helps me discover new products easily

65%

A shopping experience that allows me to find product information easily

54%

A shopping experience that's entertaining or fun



# 3 BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRENDS TO STUDY THIS YEAR



# A CRASH COURSE IN SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT



The 2023 Back-to-School shopper has leaned into flexible shopping conveniences — like browsing and buying morning, noon and night — that gained popularity over the past three years.

SHOPPERS WHO SAY THAT THEIR SCHEDULE  
HAS BECOME MORE FLEXIBLE POST-PANDEMIC

54%

SHOPPERS WHO SAY THAT ADVERTISING HAS A  
GREATER IMPACT ON THEIR DECISIONS POST-PANDEMIC

61%



# A CRASH COURSE IN SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT

Because of this increased flexibility, Back-to-School consumers will choose to shop at different times using different channels.



During the workday, **82%** of shoppers browse social media, and **75%** browse e-commerce sites.

Shoppers who browse social media during the workday

**82%**

Shoppers who browse e-commerce sites during the workday

**75%**

Compared to when or if they worked in an office, consumers who work from home:

**64%**

SHOP IN STORES  
AT DIFFERENT  
TIMES OF DAY

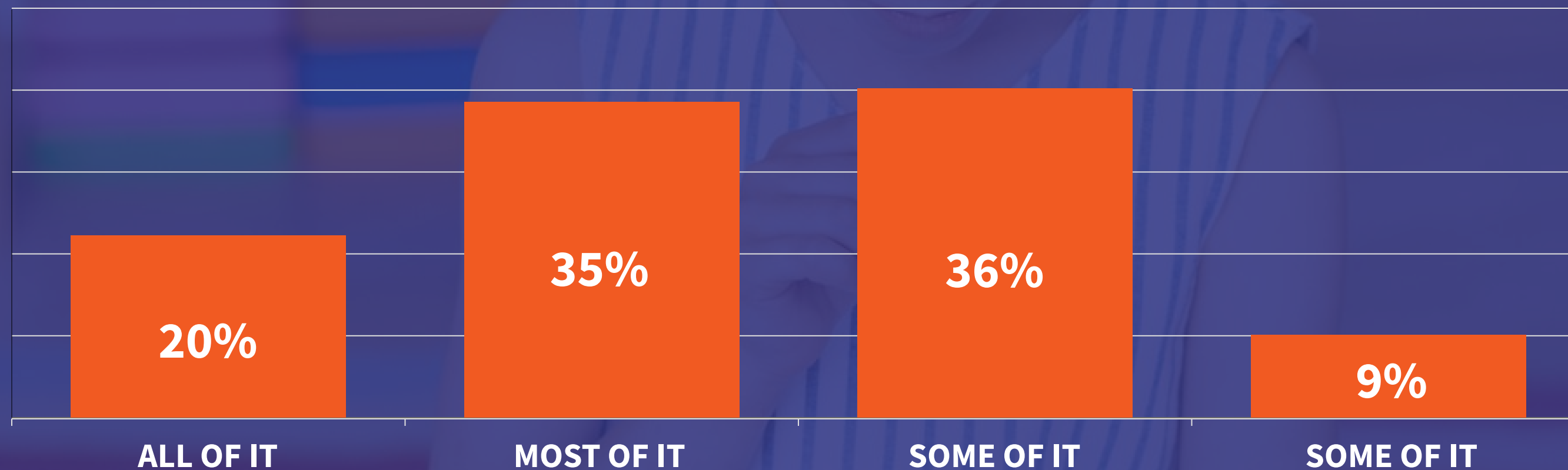
**70%**

SHOP ONLINE  
AT DIFFERENT  
TIMES OF DAY



Over 90% of Back-to-School consumers will expect at least some of their shopping to be curated to their likes, dislikes, and preferences.

**In 2023, how much of your shopping do you expect to be curated to your likes, dislikes, and preferences?**





# A CRASH COURSE IN SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT

MORE THAN  
**70%**  
OF CONSUMERS

would choose an individualized experience over one that's not, and over a third would spend more as a result.

ALMOST  
**80%**

are willing to share their personal data with brands in exchange for custom offers and experiences.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW:

Form a 360° view of each shopper by accessing nationwide transaction and behavior signals through Inmar's ShopperSync® CDP. Understanding previous buying signals will help you reach the right shopper at the right moment with the right message.



The newfound freedom consumers find in their schedules, combined with an increased desire for individualization, has made marketers' jobs more complex. Traditional, blanket dayparting is rapidly losing steam as the number of "average" consumers shopping at "typical" times has dropped.

# A CRASH COURSE IN SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT

FURTHERMORE, SHOPPERS ARE INCREASINGLY IGNORING OR BLOCKING ADS. WHY?



SOURCE: GLOBALWEBINDEX



# A CRASH COURSE IN SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT

Back-To-School shoppers are engaging with touchpoints uniquely, creating new opportunities to speak with them individually.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Pair pivotal moments in the consumer journey with personalized messages. With **Aki Technologies, the Media Division of Inmar Intelligence®**, brands and retailers can dynamically update ads moment-by-moment — based on region, weather, buying preferences, and other historical and shopper attributes.



Today's Back-to-School shoppers will spend their money with businesses that align with their values and beliefs, making traditional, feature-descriptive advertising less impactful. Instead, retailers and brands need to wear their genuine values and beliefs on their sleeves.

## Why should you care?

**77%**

of consumers consider it important that the brand they shop with shows alignment with their values.

**92%**

of shoppers are more likely to purchase from a new brand if they align with their personal values.



Back-to-School shoppers are particularly concerned about a brand’s values and beliefs when buying for their children. When choosing who to do business with, consumers consider a wide range of values or beliefs important.

What types of values are important to you when choosing a brand or retailer?





Whether attracting new customers or retaining loyal shoppers, showcasing values has become as important as competitive pricing.

In fact, 26% of shoppers will refuse to buy from a brand that opposes their personal values, and another 47% will only shop with that brand “to a certain extent” before seeking an alternative.



When we asked consumers to name a brand that's transparent about their values, Nike was by far the most popular response. The company is known for communicating its views, and has attracted significant attention as a result. Like Nike, learn to take a value-based marketing approach.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW:

In our 2022 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion survey, shoppers told us they perceive social media marketing to be the most authentically diverse or inclusive form of advertising. This makes sense, because influencers, for example, typically treat their audience as a tribe of like-minded individuals — allowing brands to scale receptive messaging. Incorporate influencers as part of your marketing strategy, aligning their values with your target audience's.



Financial pressure is a regular part of any Back-to-School experience, but recent economic shifts have made things even more difficult. Sustained, record-high inflation throughout the course of 2022 — continuing into 2023 — has left consumers fatigued.

Nearly all shoppers, regardless of income or family size, are looking for savings and actively changing purchase behavior based on coupons and incentives. As a result, promotions and discounts are critical to improving experiences and motivating shoppers.

## How influential are coupons and discounts on your purchase decisions?

I WOULD SWITCH, OR CONSIDER SWITCHING, TO A DIFFERENT BRAND BECAUSE OF A COUPON OR DISCOUNT

72%

I AM LOYAL TO CERTAIN BRANDS AND WOULD NOT CONSIDER SWITCHING BECAUSE OF A COUPON OR DISCOUNT

16%

I WOULD PURCHASE MY PREFERRED BRAND IF THEY OFFERED A COUPON OR DISCOUNT INSTEAD OF A LOWER-PRICED BRAND

11%

To mitigate the stress of the Back-to-School season, and win shopper dollars and loyalty as a result, focus on adding enjoyment to existing experiences or creating new ones. To consumers, an “enjoyable” shopping experience can be defined in many ways.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW:

The shopping experience needs to feel seamless. As consumers browse between social media platforms and other channels like digital media, messaging needs to reflect the moments they’re in. To expand receptivity and capture attention everywhere, in addition to leveraging creator content within social media, bring the influence of creators into those receptive environments like digital media, DOOH and CTV, expanding reach and creating an authentic, impactful and engaging multi-channel consumer experience.

How do you define an “enjoyable” shopping experience?

- A SHOPPING EXPERIENCE THAT HELPS ME DISCOVER NEW PRODUCTS EASILY
- A SHOPPING EXPERIENCE THAT ALLOWS ME TO FIND PRODUCT INFORMATION EASILY
- A SHOPPING EXPERIENCE THAT IS CONVENIENT AND SEAMLESS
- A SHOPPING EXPERIENCE THAT’S ENTERTAINING OR FUN





**With more freedom to treat errands as adventures, shoppers are seeking out the most entertaining retail experiences. They're not just looking to meet their needs, they want to discover new products and explore — so brands that encourage an enjoyable, seamless physical and digital journey are going to benefit.**

# MASTERING CONSUMER MOTIVATION

## WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW:

To excite shoppers, begin a treasure hunt outside the store (online or digitally near the store), then greet them at the doors with Inmar's bollard wraps or pedestal covers. Once in the store, lead them on a journey with cross-merchandised signage that guides to products at-shelf. An added incentive on the sign at the end of their journey will make the treasure hunt even more fun and add value for the shopper.





Shoppers point to mobile shopping, e-commerce, and in-store retail as being the best overall shopping experiences right now — and mobile pulls ahead as a result of its convenience.



# MASTERING CONSUMER MOTIVATION

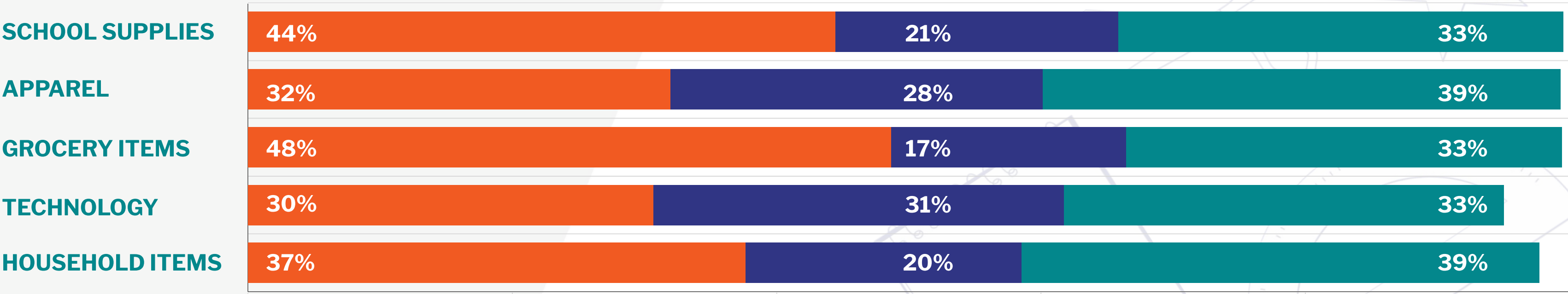
Which shopping method do you feel is giving you the best shopping experience right now?



While e-commerce and traditional retail are valued almost equally by consumers, most Back-to-School purchase behavior occurs in physical stores.

Do you plan to purchase the following items in-store, online, both, or not at all?

● In-store ● Online ● Both



WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW:

Unite Inmar's Digital Incentives with the power of social, digital and DOOH mediums to drive shoppers to retail locations. Amplify your reach by geotargeting key screens during peak times and offer discounts that entice customers in-store for redemption!





## REPORT CARD: KEY LEARNINGS



Back-to-School shoppers have taken ownership of their own time, and will choose to engage only with shopping channels that meet their needs for flexibility and convenience. Approach them with contextually-relevant messaging based on their individual signals and behaviors through Moments Media.

01

Consumers will choose brands that connect with their values over those that don't, and will spend more when they find alignment. Activate influencers whose audiences resonate with your brand's messages and products.

02

Back-to-School shoppers want to enjoy their shopping experiences, whether it's through fun, unique engagements or through savings that help them stick with the brands they love. Engage consumers with omnichannel strategies, then draw them to stores — where they're most likely to purchase — with Digital Incentives and Digital Media.

03

Shoppers have never been more willing to switch brands. Savings are absolutely critical to winning shoppers — for Back-to-School and any season during this inflationary period. Combining your digital offers with media will ensure consumers can easily find relevant savings.

04



**Ready to put what you've learned to use? Contact us now to build your best Back-to-School strategy.**



**GET IN TOUCH**

Through curiosity and the intelligent use of data and technology, we make businesses smarter to improve consumers' lives. As a trusted partner to brands and retailers for over 40 years, we design, build and operate reliable, dynamic, personalized media and incentives solutions to create greater efficiencies and enable connections that unlock the potential of sophisticated marketplaces and help shoppers save billions.

For more information about Inmar, please follow us on Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook, or call (866) 440-6917.

 LinkedIn  Twitter  Facebook

