BRIEFING NOTE:

HOW AND WHERE U.S. CONSUMERS BUY TECH

Key insights from our February 2025 study on retail channel preferences and shopping behavior

OVERVIEW

In February 2025, PR agency Proper Propaganda, in collaboration with Audience Audit, surveyed 1,001 U.S. consumers to understand what drives their consumer tech-buying decisions. The full study explored how Americans evaluate technology brands—domestic and foreign—through the lens of retail channel preferences, product trust, transparency, AI integration, political alignment, trade policies, and more.

This report breaks down where and how consumers like to shop, what influences their choices, and the biggest barriers to conversion.

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PURPOSE

For consumer tech brands looking to grow in the U.S., knowing where and how consumers prefer to shop is crucial. This report explores:

- Where consumers like to buy tech—from online marketplaces and manufacturer websites, to physical stores.
- What drives purchases—pricing, selection, convenience, and trust in product information.
- Why consumers abandon carts—shipping costs, unclear return policies, and skepticism toward direct-to-consumer (DTC) sites.
- How preferences shift across demographics—from digital-first younger shoppers to in-store loyalists.

By identifying these trends, brands can optimize sales channels, remove friction points, and increase conversions.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Simply being available online or in-store isn't enough—brands must meet consumers where they shop, remove friction, and create a seamless buying experience. While e-commerce dominates, brick & mortar remains a key touchpoint for certain demographics.

This report breaks down shopping trends, key demographic differences, and actionable strategies to help brands refine their retail approach for higher conversions and stronger customer loyalty.

WHERE CONSUMERS BUY TECH - RETAIL CHANNEL PREFERENCES

OVERALL INSIGHTS

- General e-commerce sites like Amazon.com, Walmart.com, and Costco.com reign supreme as the shopping channel where consumers typically buy their consumer tech (66.6%), followed by big box stores like Walmart and Target (48.8%), and tech-focused stores like Best Buy or Circuit City (48.7%)[15].

- Direct-to-consumer (DTC) websites (29.9%) and manufacturer stores such as Apple (35.5%) play a smaller but notable role[15].

- Preference split: 33% prefer general e-commerce, like Amazon over DTC (28.3%), while 38.7% say it depends[16].

- Brick & mortar still matters: 38.9% prefer in-store shopping, 26.9% favor websites, and 34.2% say it depends[19].
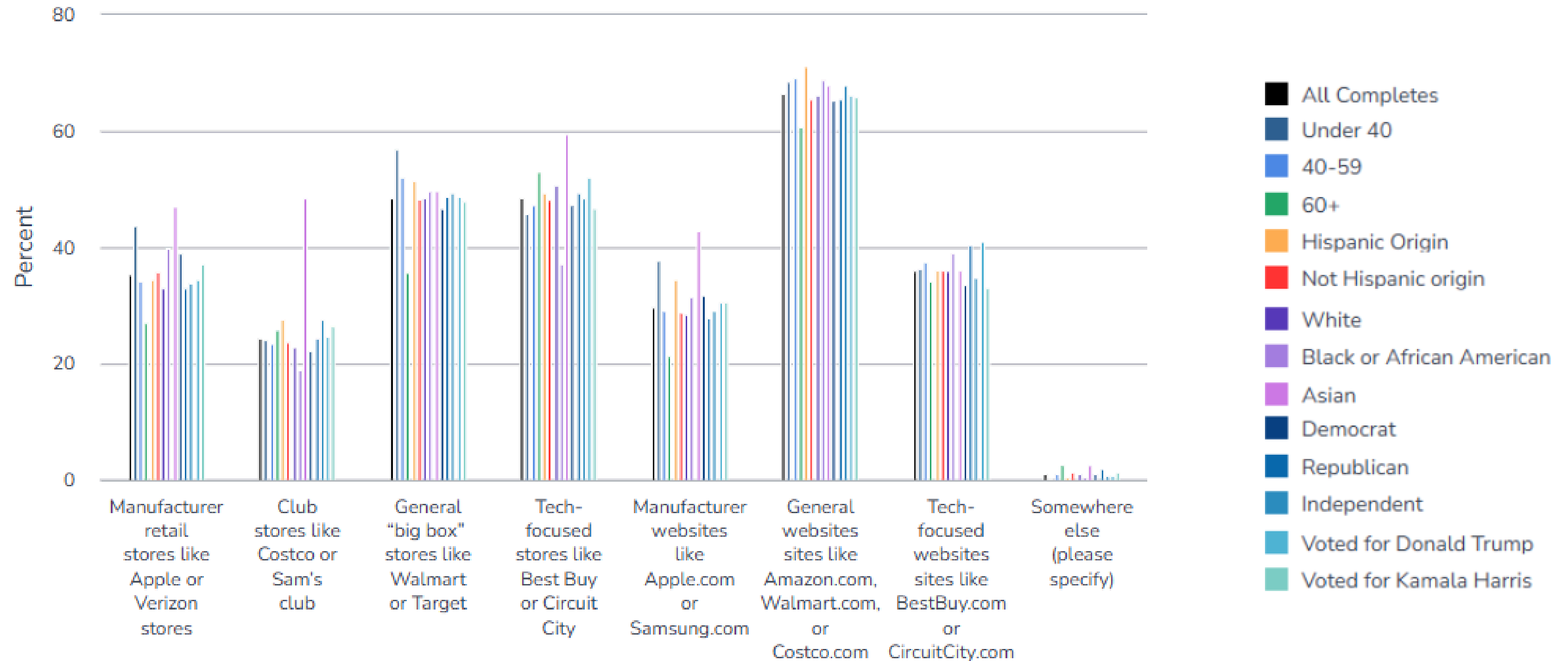
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SUBGROUP INSIGHTS

- Older consumers (60+) favor brick & mortar (47.3%) and tech-focused stores (53.1%) more than younger shoppers[15] [19].
- Hispanic consumers lean digital—71.4% buy from general websites and prefer online shopping[15] [19].
- Asian consumers are the most online-first racial group, with 68.1% using general e-commerce like Amazon[15].

OPPORTUNITIES

- Brick & mortar continues to thrive—especially for tech-savvy shoppers. Keep in-store hands-on experiences and knowledgeable staff to attract these buyers.
- For DTC, invest in fast checkout, direct pricing perks, and exclusive online incentives to drive conversion.
- Consumers expect a seamless online experience. Prioritize mobile-first design, fast shipping, and responsive customer service.

WHERE DO YOU TYPICALLY BUY CONSUMER TECH PRODUCTS?

Legend:
- All Completes
- Under 40
- 40-59
- 60+
- Hispanic Origin
- Not Hispanic origin
- White
- Black or African American
- Asian
- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Voted for Donald Trump
- Voted for Kamala Harris

Categories (x-axis):
- Manufacturer retail stores like Apple or Verizon stores
- Club stores like Costco or Sam's club
- General "big box" stores like Walmart or Target
- Tech-focused stores like Best Buy or Circuit City
- Manufacturer websites like Apple.com or Samsung.com
- General websites sites like Amazon.com, Walmart.com, or Costco.com
- Tech-focused websites sites like BestBuy.com or CircuitCity.com
- Somewhere else (please specify)

WHY CONSUMERS CHOOSE ONLINE OR IN-STORE - THE FACTORS THAT MATTER MOST

OVERALL INSIGHTS

- When asked why they prefer buying from general websites, like Amazon, over DTC sites, consumers most frequently cited price and selection[18].
- When asked why they prefer websites over brick & mortar stores, convenience overwhelmingly emerged as the top reason, with many also mentioning wider selection and the ability to read reviews[21].
- When asked what influences their decision between buying online or in-store, three themes stood out: convenience, price, and product availability[22].

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SUBGROUP INSIGHTS

- Older consumers (60+) emphasize the importance of hands-on evaluation before making a purchase[22].
- Hispanic consumers frequently mentioned valuing online convenience and broader selection more than the overall average, whereas Asian consumers are highly review-driven and favor having a variety of options[21].

OPPORTUNITIES

- Consumers expect both price and experience. Blending digital and physical strategies—like price matching and in-store exclusives—can enhance engagement.
- Older shoppers need strong in-store touchpoints. Providing personalized assistance, product demos, and a seamless checkout process can improve conversions.
- Hispanic and Asian consumers expect frictionless online shopping. Brands should prioritize detailed product descriptions, clear pricing, and verified customer reviews to drive trust and sales.

AMAZON - THE ONLINE RETAIL GIANT'S INFLUENCE ON TECH SHOPPING

OVERALL INSIGHTS

- Amazon dominates both research and purchasing: 59.3% of consumers check buyer ratings or reviews on online retail purchase platforms like Amazon.com, Walmart.com, etc. before buying a $100 tech product[3].

- Amazon is the top choice for tech shopping. 66.2% of consumers prefer buying from general e-commerce sites (Amazon, Walmart, Costco) over other retail channels[15].

- Trust in Amazon rivals brand websites. 59.8% of consumers feel equally confident in a product's quality whether it's listed on Amazon or a manufacturer's site[30].

- Speed matters. 42.6% of consumers are less likely to buy from a manufacturer if delivery is slower than Amazon[31].

SUBGROUP INSIGHTS

- Under 40s rely on Amazon most—68.8% buy from general websites like Amazon, and 67.7% trust Amazon listings as much as product listings on manufacturer e-commerce sites[30].
- Before buying a $100 tech product, 61.2%[3] of consumers aged 60+ consult Amazon reviews. Still, confidence in product quality from online listings is low: just 11% trust Amazon product listings over product listings on the manufacturer's site, and 9.4% trust the reverse[30]. Nearly half (49.2%) feel equally confident in both[30]. This group values credible sources and hard evidence of quality —something listings often lack[11]. They're also the most sensitive to slow delivery (48.5%)[31].
- Hispanic consumers are the most confident in Amazon, with 70.7% trusting its product listings equally with manufacturer websites[30].
- Asian consumers are the most review-conscious of all the demographics polled, with 77.8% looking at buyer ratings or reviews on online retail purchase platforms like Amazon.com, Walmart.com, etc. when researching consumer tech products[3].

OPPORTUNITIES

- Amazon sets the bar. Brands need to match pricing, delivery speed, and customer service to compete.
- Younger shoppers are all-in on Amazon. Optimize product pages, verified reviews, and competitive pricing.
- Older consumers expect reliability. Fast delivery and easy returns support conversions. Enhance DTC sites with detailed product info, exclusive offers, and quicker shipping.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHICH MAKES YOU MOST FEEL MOST CONFIDENT ABOUT THE QUALITY OF A PRODUCT?
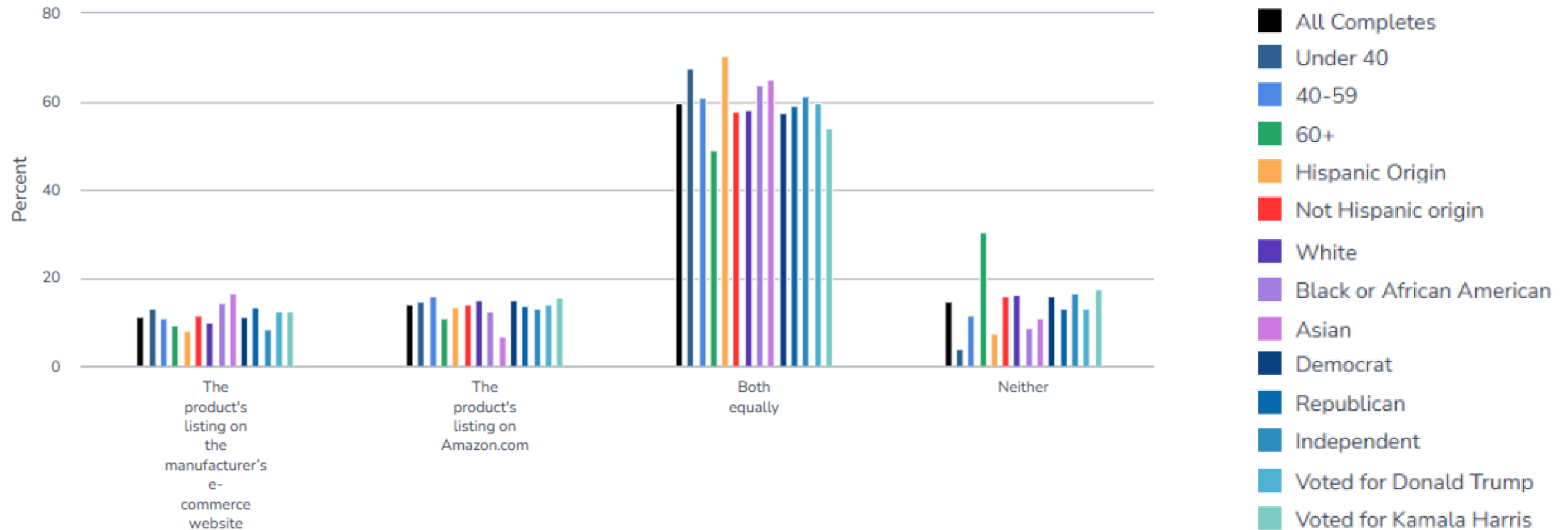
ONLINE TECH SHOPPING FRUSTRATIONS - WHAT DRIVES CONSUMERS AWAY?

OVERALL INSIGHTS

- When asked about their biggest gripes about the purchase experience when buying consumer tech products online, lack of hands-on experience is the biggest frustration. Consumers also cite misleading photos, unclear descriptions, and not being able to test products before buying as top concerns[23].
- Untrustworthy product info is a dealbreaker. Fake reviews, vague specs, and unclear return policies create hesitation[23].
- Shipping issues drive shoppers away. High costs, slow delivery, and damaged goods are major deterrents[23].
- 38.8% of consumers have abandoned an online tech purchase due to a poor shopping experience[24].

- DTC websites struggle with trust. Consumers avoid them due to high shipping costs (62.1%), unclear return policies (55.4%), lack of customer reviews (53.7%), and concerns over authenticity (52.6%)[31].

SUBGROUP INSIGHTS

- Younger consumers (under 40) are the most likely to abandon an online purchase (46.1%)[24].
- Older consumers (60+) are highly sensitive to shipping costs (74.1%) and unclear return policies (69.6%)[31].
- Hispanic consumers back out of online purchases at a higher rate (49.2%)[24].
- Compared to other racial groups surveyed, asian consumers are a highly skeptical group concerning DTC websites, citing unclear return policies (62.5%), being the most concerned about limited reviews (63.9%), expressing a significant level of secure payment worries (61.1%), and having a high level of authenticity concerns (52.8%), and secure payment worries (61.1%)[31].

OPPORTUNITIES

- Honest, high-quality product listings build trust. Invest in detailed descriptions, verified reviews, and video demos to reduce hesitation.
- Shipping policies make or break conversions. Free or discounted shipping, faster delivery, and flexible returns can increase sales.
- Asian consumers need extra security and authenticity guarantees. Highlight third-party certifications, secure payment methods, and strong customer service.
- Older shoppers demand simple, no-hassle returns. Retailers should clearly communicate return policies, provide accessible support, and ensure smooth refund processes.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This research report is based on data from an online survey taken from January 29 to February 3, 2025, by 1,001 U.S. consumers aged 18-70 who have purchased a consumer technology product in the last six months. The respondent group was secured through a research panel provider and balanced to match US Census data based on age group, gender, annual household income, ethnicity, and race. The data quality was assured through both pre-survey and post-survey methods. The overall number of respondents exhibits a margin of error of +/- 3.34 percentage points at a 97% confidence level. Some questions were served only to specific subgroups and thus have a higher margin of error.

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ATTRIBUTION

The research was conducted by Proper Propaganda, a public relations firm serving technology companies, in partnership with Audience Audit Inc., a US-based research agency.

All statistics cited in this report must be attributed to "**Proper Propaganda & Audience Audit Inc. (2025). Briefing Note: How and Where U.S. Consumers Buy Tech - Key insights from our February 2025 study on retail channel preferences and shopping behavior**" when shared or referenced.

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MODERN PR FOR TECH

audienceaudit

LET'S TALK

Breaking into the U.S. market takes more than great products—it takes the right retail strategy, clear messaging, and consumer trust.

At Proper Propaganda, we help consumer tech brands navigate the complexities of the U.S. market —optimizing sales channels, strengthening brand credibility, and turning insights into action.

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ENDNOTES

[3] Actions taken before purchasing a $100 consumer tech product.

[15] Where consumers buy consumer tech products.

[16] Preference for buying consumer tech from manufacturer websites vs. general retail websites.

[18] Reasons for preferring general retail websites over manufacturer websites.

[19] Preference for buying consumer tech from brick & mortar stores vs. online.

[21] Reasons for preferring online shopping over brick & mortar stores.

[22] Reasons for preferring brick & mortar stores over online shopping.

[23] Biggest frustrations with online consumer tech purchases.

[24] Reasons for abandoning online consumer tech purchases due to a poor shopping experience.

[30] Key factors influencing consumer confidence in product quality.

[31] Factors that discourage purchases from a company's e-commerce website.