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How people shop on their phones

New research by Google

Apps and mobile sites provide advertisers with a vital link to shoppers. Partnering with Ipsos, Google sought to understand how people shop on their smartphones—and how they find, use, and stay engaged with the apps that help them do so. According to the findings, 58% of smartphone users report having used a shopping app in the last 30 days. With over half of consumers using these tools, it's important for marketers to understand the features, notification preferences, and use habits keep shoppers coming back.

In this report, Google presents insights into the role that apps and the mobile web play in consumers' shopping journeys.

Methodology

FORMAT	15-minute online questionnaire covering shopping category.
POPULATION	Smartphone users in the U.S., aged 18–64, who used a smartphone for shopping in the past month. Quotas set on enumeration data per vertical for age, gender, education, and internet usage frequency.*
SAMPLE SIZE	N=500 per vertical
MARKET	U.S.
DATE	October 2016

*To ensure vertical representation, a soft launch based on the online population was conducted to determine the makeup of each vertical. After the soft launch was complete and each vertical's makeup was defined, quotas were set per vertical to match this universe. Weighting was applied on the back end if needed.

Key findings

1 Phones are our shopping companions.

Whether at home, on the go, or at the register, consumers turn to their phones to make their shopping experience easier (and cheaper). The top two reasons people turn to their phones for shopping is to browse products and find discounts and deals.

2 Show me the discount.

Discounts and deals play a big role for the mobile shopper. They are the top motivating factors when deciding whether to install an app, and—along with bonus offers—are the top reason someone will return to an app after uninstalling.

3 Apps are for loyalty and sharing.

Smartphone users rely on both downloaded apps and the web for shopping, but for different purposes. Consumers use apps to keep up with loyalty programs and share their purchases. They turn to mobile sites for browsing and store information.

4 Memory is a dealbreaker.

Taking up too much phone memory is the #1 app-related issue that leads consumers to uninstall an app. However, most people will give an app another shot if changes are made.

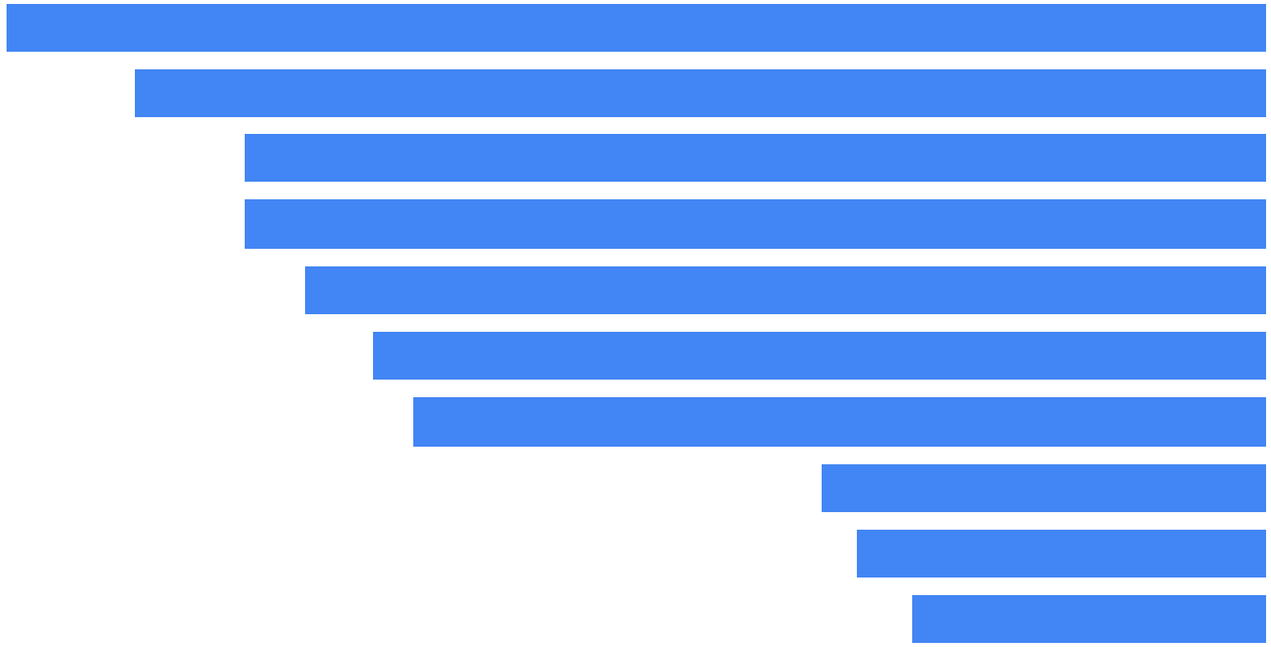
More than half of smartphone owners turn to their phone to shop

58% use their smartphone for shopping-related activities

And of those, **66%** perform shopping functions at least weekly

Q2. Below is a list of activities you can do using your smartphone. Please select all the activities you've done on your smartphone in the last 30 days.
*Data for this question was taken from the 2016 App Landscape study.
Base: 500
Q4. You've said you use your smartphone to do the following activities. How often do you do these on your smartphone? - Shop

Most often, shoppers are browsing for products



Top shopping activities over the past 30 days

68% Browsed or looked for products

61% Looked for discounts or offers

55% Compared prices

55% Purchased a product

52% Read reviews of a product

48% Found store contact information (e.g., phone number)

46% Found directions to a store

24% Retrieved account/loyalty card information

22% Shared a product with friends or family

19% Wrote a review for a product

Base: 500
Q8. Which of the following activities have you done on your smartphone in the past 30 days (using either a mobile website or an app)?
Q9. How often do you do each of the following activities on your smartphone?

Apparel is the most commonly shopped for category on our phones

Shopped for in the past 30 days

70% Clothes, shoes & accessories

30% Skin care & cosmetics

24% Home, garden & DIY

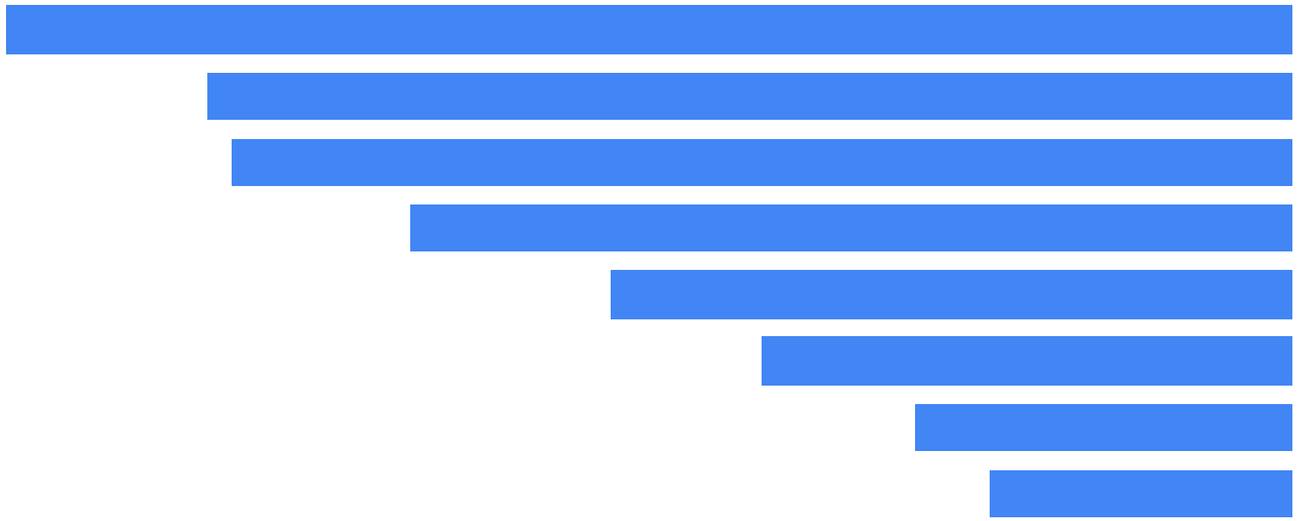
51% Electronics

28% Groceries

22% Sports & outdoor

Base: 500
Q7. Which of the following have you shopped for in the last 30 days (using either a mobile website or an app)?

Even in a store, phones are a go-to resource, particularly to compare prices



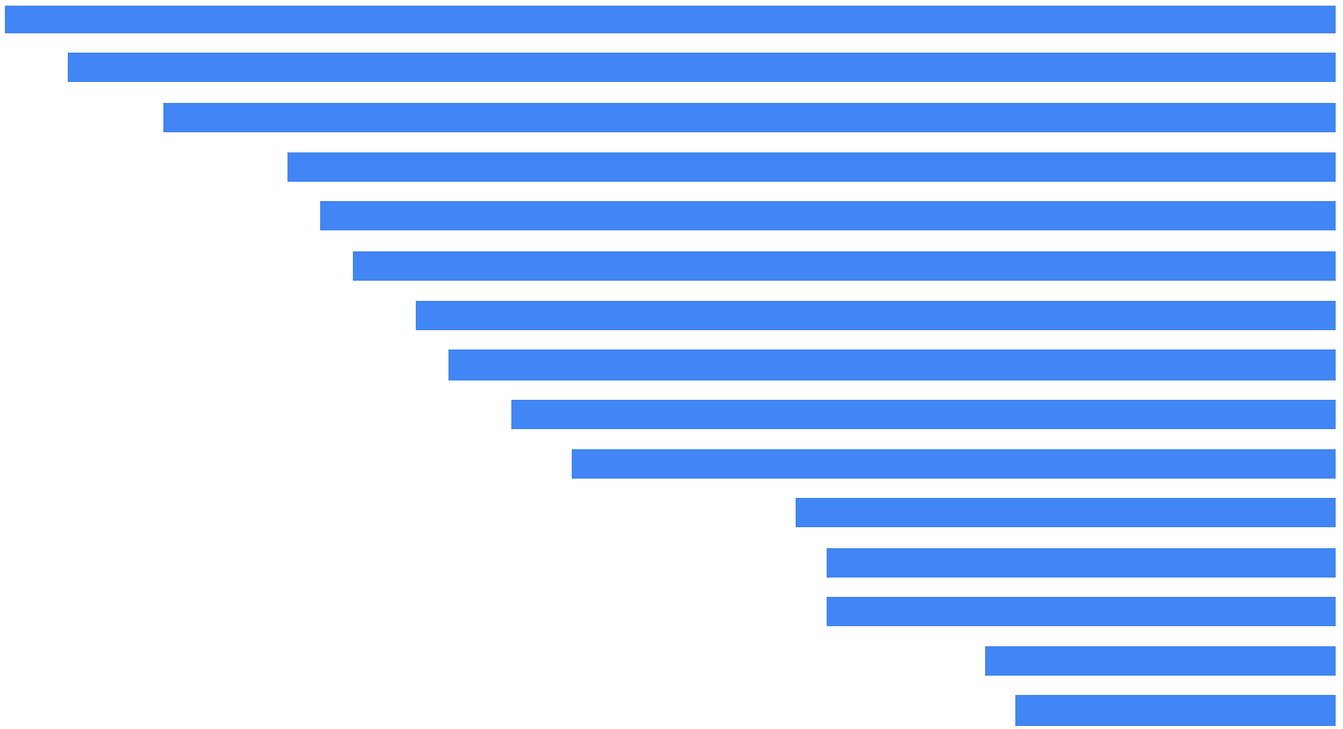
In-store smartphone activities in the past 30 days

51%	Compared prices
43%	Browsed or looked for products
42%	Looked for discounts or offers
35%	Read reviews of a product
27%	Took a picture of a product
21%	Tried on/used a product
15%	Spoke with a sales representative
12%	Shared a product with friends/family

Base: 500
Q10. Which of the following activities done while in a store have led you to make a purchase on your smartphone in the past 30 days (using either a mobile website or an app)?

To discover new shopping apps, people are more likely to browse app stores and ask their friends and family

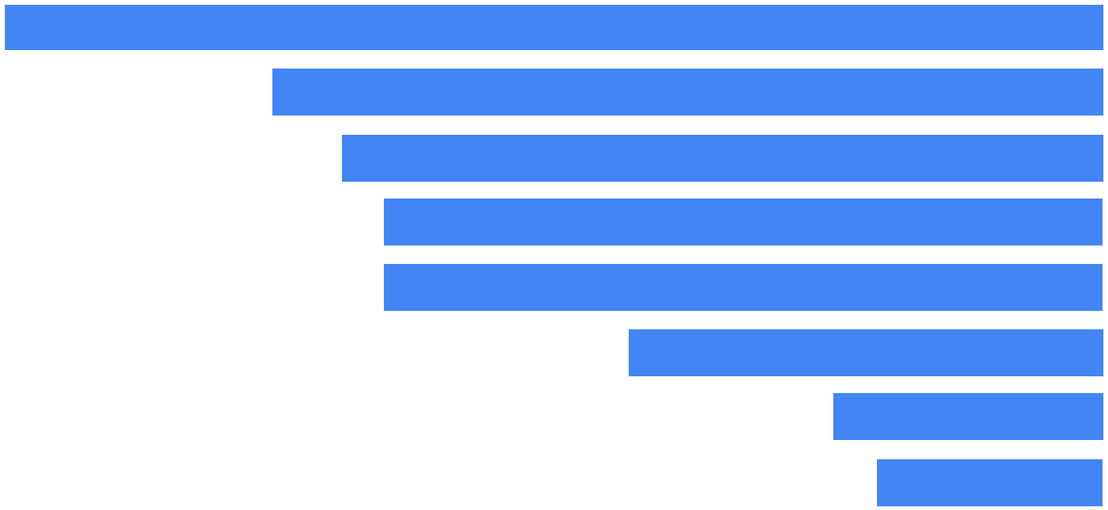
Top methods of app discovery



42%	By browsing app stores
40%	My friends/family are using them
37%	Saw an ad while browsing the web
33%	Recommended to me in the app store
32%	I read about them online
31%	From visiting the mobile website first
29%	I see them shared on social networks
28%	Through search engines
26%	Saw an ad while using another app
24%	Saw an ad on TV
17%	Saw an ad on YouTube
16%	Suggested to me in a store or branch or while traveling
16%	Saw an ad in a magazine, newspaper, or flyer
11%	I heard about them on YouTube
10%	An organization/business informed me about its app directly

Base: 500
Q32. How do you typically find out about new shopping smartphone apps?
Q33. And have you found out about a shopping app in any of these ways?

When deciding whether to install an app, access to discounts and offers provide a hook



Top motivating factors for downloading shopping apps

49% To access discounts or offers

37% To complete a purchase

34% Got a specific reward for downloading the app

32% To make a specific activity/task easier

32% Recommended by others

20% Past experience with a similar app

12% Activity unavailable on the mobile website

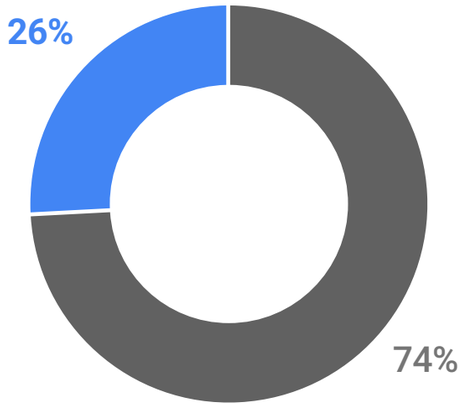
10% None of the above

Base: 500
Q35. For which of these reasons have you downloaded a shopping app in the past? Select all that apply.

Only one in four people have paid to download a shopping app. And for them, reviews were the driving factor

Reasons for paying

39%	The app had good reviews
34%	It had the content I wanted
34%	There were exclusive deals/discounts offered through the app
31%	I wanted an app that was ad-free
29%	It offered features/functionality unavailable on the free alternatives
24%	I'm a frequent user of the brand/company offering the app
22%	I thought it would be easier to use than free alternatives
20%	There were no free alternatives
17%	I wanted to have the same app as my friends
6%	None of the above

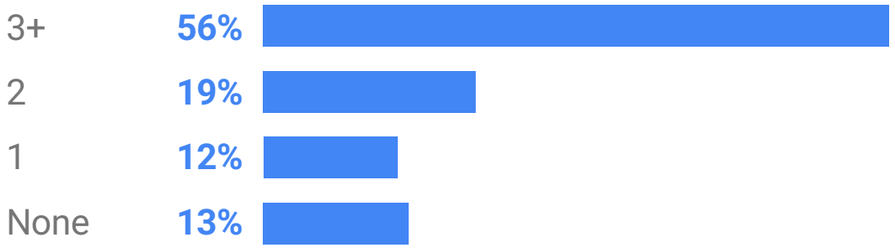


- Have never paid to download shopping app
- Have paid to download shopping app

Base: 500 *Median
Q22. What is the most you have ever paid for a shopping app? Please enter amount to the nearest whole number.
Base: Have paid to download a shopping app (n=133)
Q23. Why have you chosen to pay for shopping apps over other free alternatives?

On average, smartphone users have 4.2 shopping apps installed on their phone and use about half of them weekly

Number of apps currently installed



Frequency of app use

Daily	**19%**
Weekly	**29%**
Never	**5%**

Base: 500
Q14. How many shopping apps are installed on your smartphone (including any that were already installed when you bought it)?
Base: Has shopping apps installed on smartphone (n=437)
Q15. Roughly what percentage of the shopping apps installed on your smartphone do you use?

App or mobile site? Depends on the task

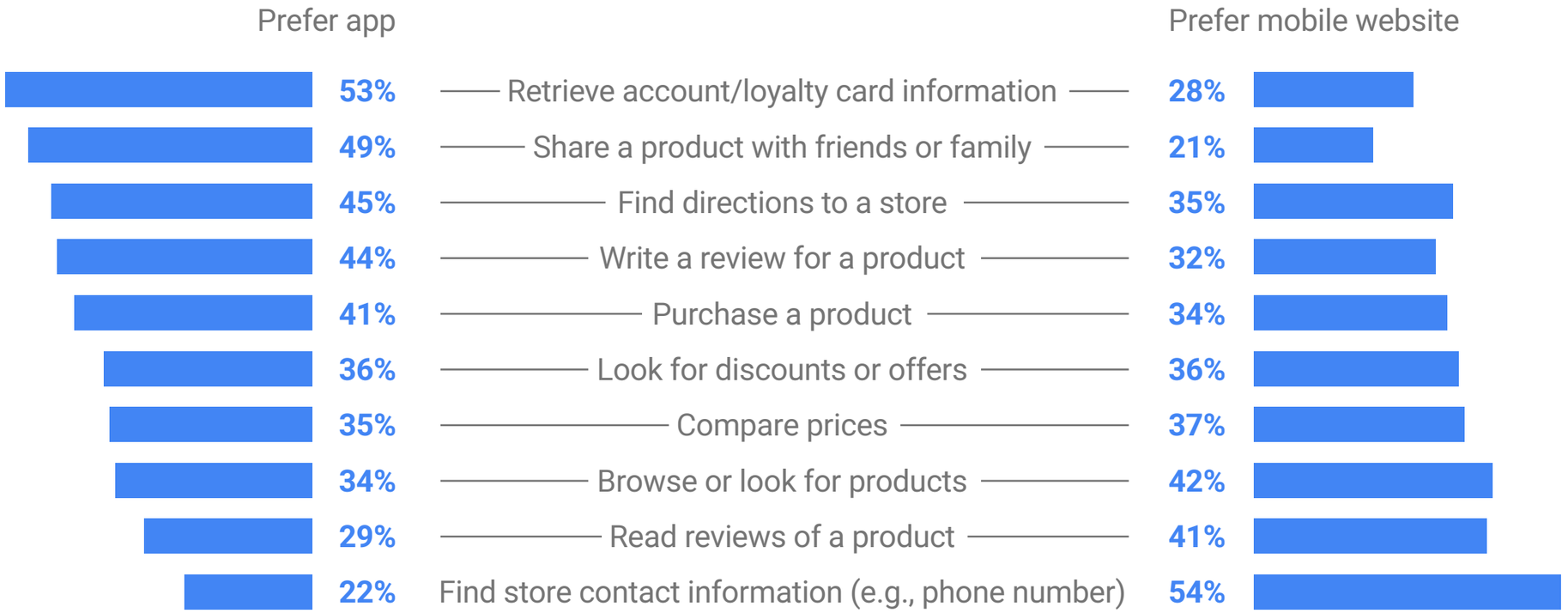
In past 30 days

54%
Used an app

64%
Used a mobile website

Preferences for top shopping activities

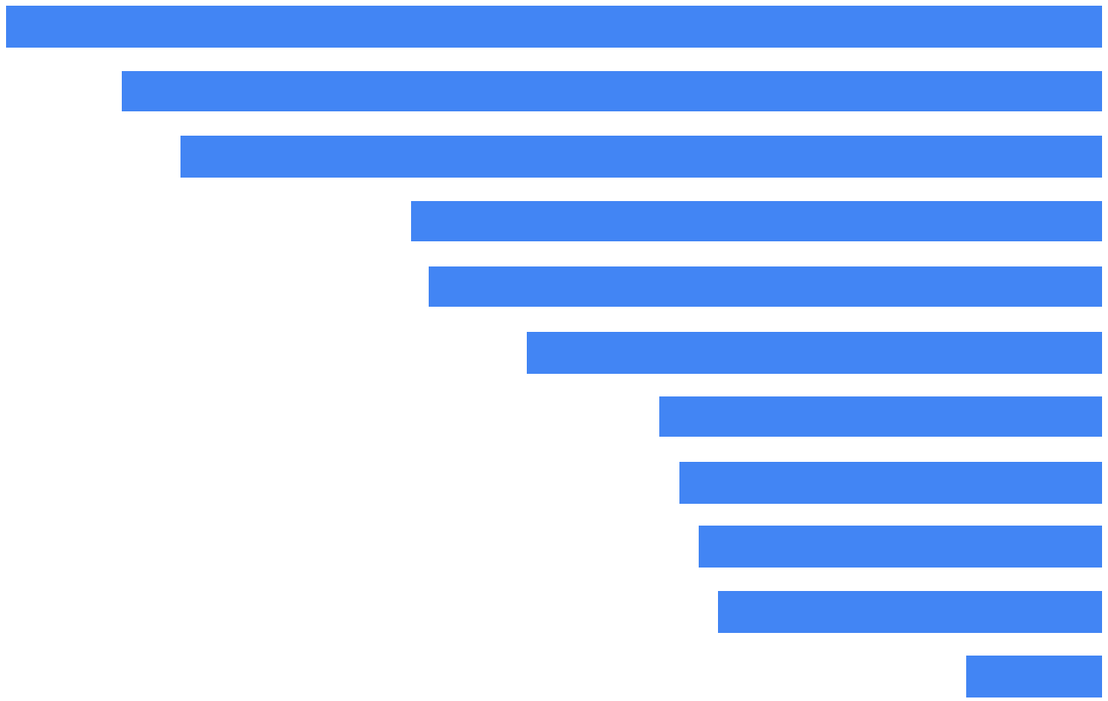
Among those who have done activity in the past 30 days



Base: 500
Q5. Have you used a mobile website or an app for each of these in the last 30 days? - Shop
Base: Have done the activity on smartphone in past 30 days
Q11. For which of these activities would you prefer to use an app, and for which would you prefer to use a mobile website?

The shopping apps they love the most are easy to use and navigate, offer strong discounts, and have a range of products to explore

What users find most valuable about their favorite apps

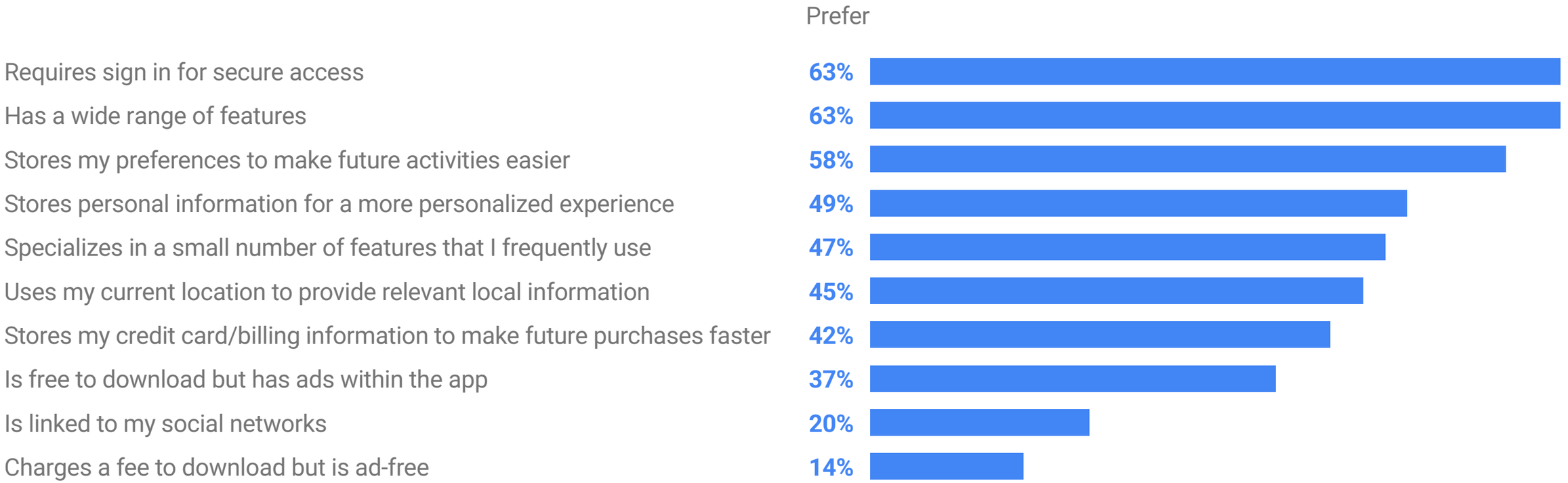


57%	They’re easy to use and navigate
51%	They have good discounts or offers
48%	There’s a large range of products to explore
36%	There’s always new products to explore
35%	They’re from a brand or company I use a lot in the real world
30%	I receive useful notifications from them
23%	I like the way they look
22%	I’ve personalized them so I get the best experience
21%	The products feel more relevant to me than in other apps
20%	They have app-only offers or products
7%	None of the above

Base: 500
Q27. Which of the following are true of your favorite apps?

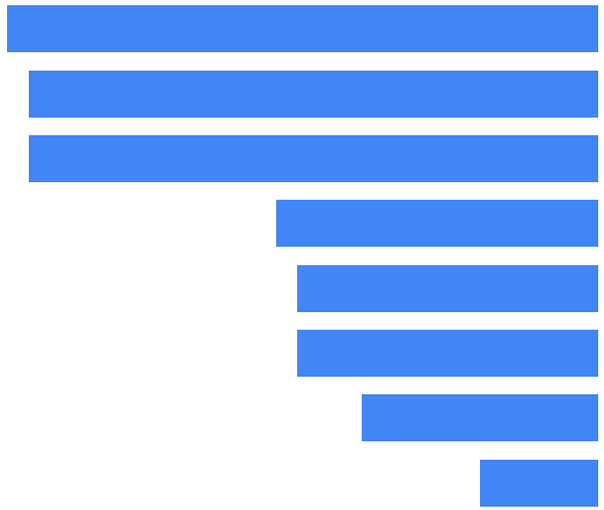
Security and a wide range of features are also key to building app preference

Features that people prefer to have in their favorite shopping apps



Base: 500
Q28. Thinking about all of the shopping apps that you use, which of the following features do you prefer to have?

If they provide value, push notifications aren't a turnoff



Most useful notifications

55% Purchase being shipped/delivered

53% New discount or offer

53% Price reduction for a product I'm following

30% New product available

28% Reminder of an item left in my cart

28% Upgrade to the app itself (e.g., new feature added)

22% Recommendation of a product/service

11% Friend or family member purchasing an item

91%

find shopping notifications on mobile **useful**

Base: 500
Q29. Apps or websites can give you notifications on your phone to tell you about a new update, message, or event, for example. What sort of shopping notifications do you find useful?
Q30. What is the most useful shopping notification you have ever received on your smartphone?

Remember this: People stop using apps when they're not useful or take up too much memory

Why no longer needed?

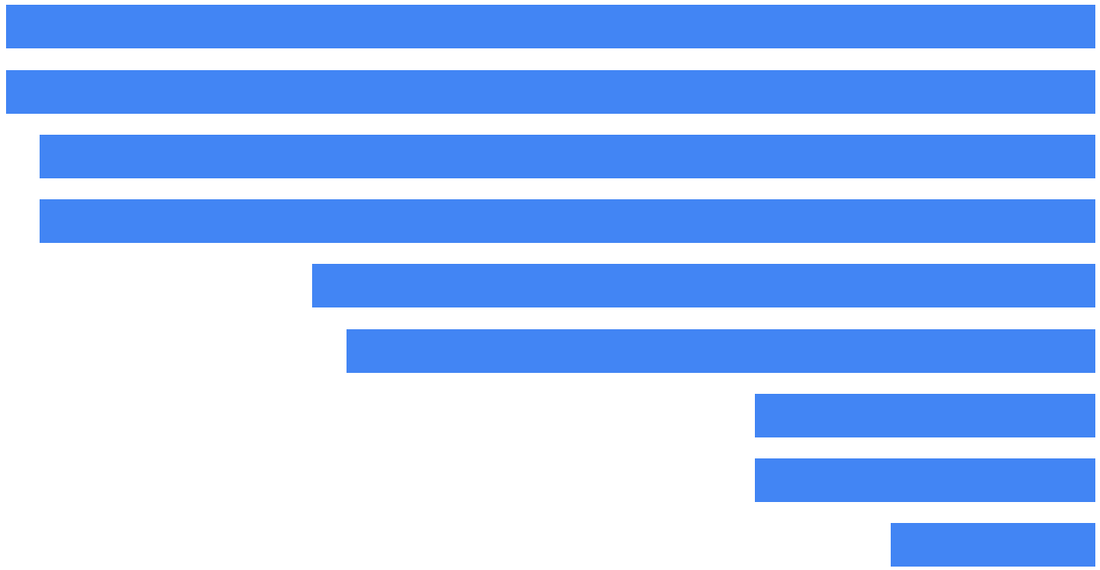
47% Other apps covered shopping needs

44% No longer interested in the brand/company

28% Was using for one-off purchase

Base: 500
Q40. Have you stopped using shopping apps on your smartphone for any of the reasons below? Select all that apply.
Q41. And have you stopped using shopping apps on your smartphone for any of these reasons?
Base: No longer has need for a particular app (n=191)
Q42. You said you've stopped using shopping apps because you no longer had a need for it/them. Why did you no longer need it/them?

The good news: People can be incentivized to re-engage with shopping apps



Reasons why users re-engage with shopping apps

37%	Discount on next purchase
32%	Exclusive or bonus offers or products
31%	The app uses less memory
31%	The app was redesigned for easier use
23%	The app uses less mobile data
22%	New features added
10%	Family or friends start using it
10%	Being linked to the app in a relevant situation online
6%	Nothing would make me start using the app(s) again

Base: 500
Q43. Thinking about shopping apps that you've stopped using, which of the following would encourage you to use the app again?

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