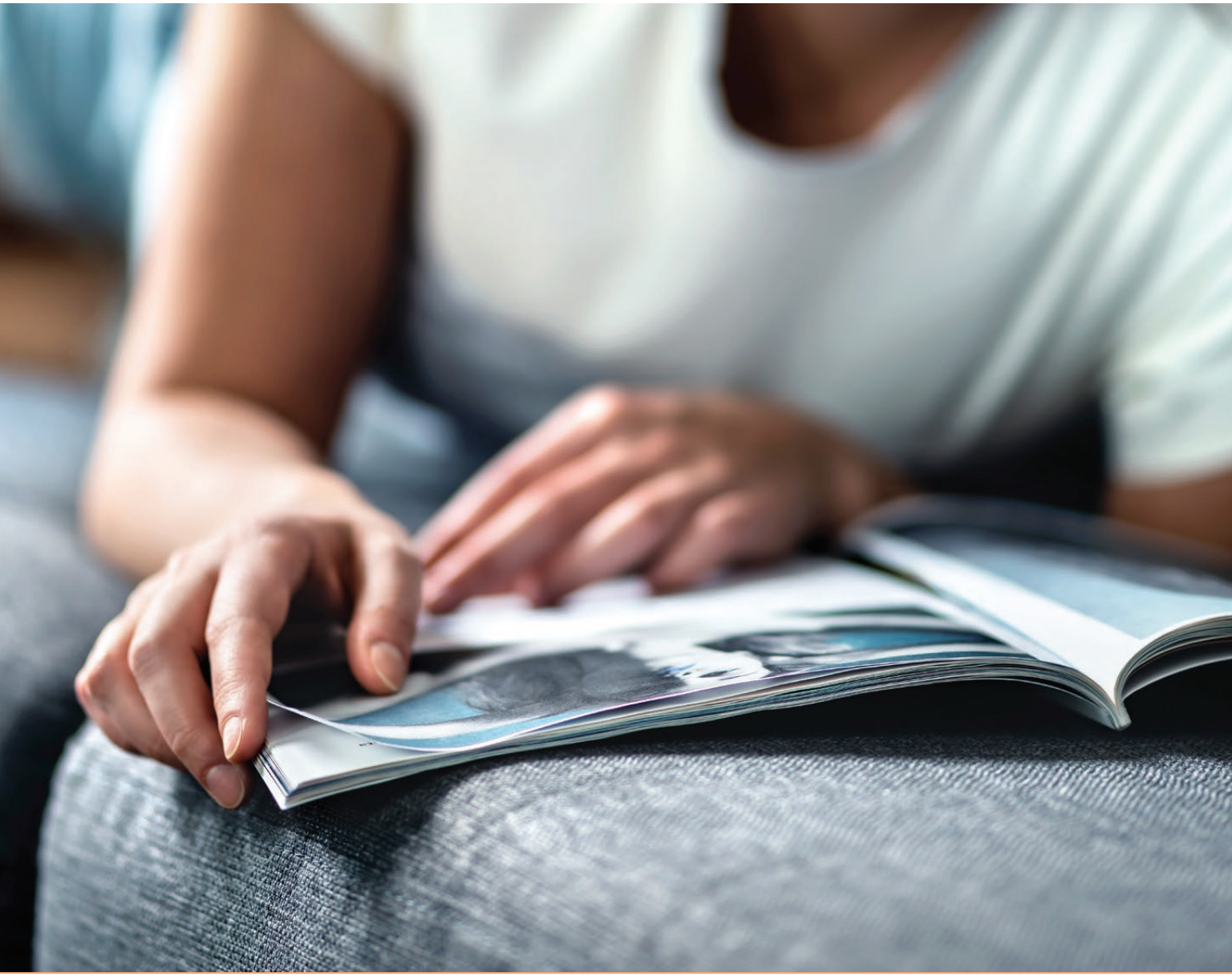
The Harris Poll



The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected

New research reveals consumer preferences for catalog shopping and brick-and-mortar retail in 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Holiday shopping in 2025 reflects both the strain of a challenging economy and the enduring pull of tradition. Value remains top of mind — 75% of Americans say getting the lowest possible prices is their top priority — but they also want meaning, inspiration, and connection. Two-thirds look for personalized or locally sourced gifts (66%), and nearly as many are drawn to bundled promotions (66%). For younger generations, experience matters almost just as much as price: 76% of Gen Z and 73% of Millennials say making shopping enjoyable is important, while Millennials, in particular, see it as a chance to spend time with loved ones (73%) and plan earlier (72%).

Even as digital convenience grows, the heart of holiday shopping remains firmly in person. Three-quarters of Americans say going to stores feels like a holiday ritual (76%) or helps them connect with family and friends (75%). Most trust what they see in-store far more than online — whether it's the quality of items (72%), the reality of a deal (69%), or the confidence of avoiding buyer's regret (70%).

At the same time, some traditions are losing steam. Three-quarters of Americans now say Black Friday and Cyber Monday feel transactional (75%) and overhyped (74%), while 84% prefer meaningful deals spread across the season.

Meanwhile, print is continuing its comeback era as 70% of Americans see catalogs as a good starting point for shopping. Engagement is especially strong among Gen Z and Millennials, who are more likely to mark items, share catalogs at home, and even scan QR codes directly from the page. In a season of rising costs and digital fatigue, shoppers are signaling clearly: they want savings, yes, but also joy, trust, and inspiration.

Methodology

This report is based on a custom survey that was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between September 18 to 20, among 2,105 American adults aged 18 and over.

This research comprises 360 Gen Z (ages 18-28), 629 Millennials (ages 29-44), 547 Gen X (ages 45-60), and 569 Boomers (ages 61 and older).

VALUE AND DELIGHT

With rising prices and economic pressures affecting holiday shopping this year, how important are each of the following when it comes to how you shop?
(Somewhat/Very Important)

Holiday shopping this year is being shaped by the realities of rising prices and ongoing economic pressure. Americans are highly focused on value, with three-quarters (75%) saying that finding the lowest possible prices is their top priority. Yet price is far from the only factor driving behavior. Many are also looking to make more thoughtful choices: two-thirds want to support local or small businesses (66%), the same share say that they want meaningful or personalized gifts (66%). Another two-thirds are drawn to bundled promotions such as “buy one, get one” or multi-gift offers (66%).

For younger generations, the shopping experience itself holds particular weight. Nearly three-quarters of Gen Z (76%) and Millennials (73%) say that making the process fun and enjoyable is important; a vast majority of Millennials (73%) even frame holiday shopping as an opportunity to spend quality time with family or friends. This same group also shows the strongest desire to shop early (72%) and to cut back on the total number of gifts they purchase (69%), suggesting that Millennials in particular are balancing excitement with caution. Gen Z, on the other hand, is more likely than average to prioritize in-person browsing, with 68% saying they want to touch and feel products before buying.

While cost-consciousness runs through all groups, discovery still plays a role. Over half of shoppers (54%) say they value stumbling across new ideas while browsing; this rises to nearly six in ten among high-income households (59%). Even in a tight economy, shoppers want to be surprised and inspired.

In-Person Shopping *Feels* Like the Holiday Season

Despite the convenience of digital channels, the holiday season continues to belong to brick-and-mortar. Americans overwhelmingly associate in-person shopping with holiday traditions and memories: more than three-quarters say a trip to the store makes the experience feel like a seasonal ritual (76%), while 75% say it helps them feel connected to family and friends. Nearly as many (74%) describe it as the best way to get into the holiday spirit.

The emotional draw of in-person shopping is particularly striking. Beyond nostalgia and tradition, it also provides a sense of confidence and assurance. For example, 72% say they feel more certain about buying high-quality items when shopping in-store, and 70% say they are more comfortable spending on higher-priced items (compared to only 30% online). The same proportion (70%) say they are less likely to regret their purchases later when they shop in person.

Trust also plays a critical role. Nearly seven in ten (69%) say they trust that a deal is "real" when they see it in-store rather than online. More broadly, 65% of Americans — including 72% of Gen Z — say they trust retailers more when holiday shopping in physical stores compared to online.

The tactile and spontaneous nature of shopping makes stores especially powerful. Almost three-quarters (73%) say that physically touching and holding potential gifts makes it easier to imagine how friends and family will enjoy them. Two-thirds (66%) say that some of their favorite gifts have come

73% of Americans agree, **"Physically touching and holding potential holiday gifts makes it easier to imagine how friends or family will enjoy them."**

71%

of Americans agree,
“In-person holiday shopping helps me feel more present and less distracted by my phone.”

78% Millennials

from unexpected in-store discoveries — a figure that rises to 71% among Gen Z. On top of that, 63% of all consumers say they are more likely to find unique or one-of-a-kind gifts in stores than online.

Importantly, in-person shopping also offers a reprieve from digital fatigue. Nearly seven in ten (69%) agree that shopping in physical stores helps them unplug and take a break from screens, while 71% say it helps them feel more present and less distracted by their phones (rising to 78% among Millennials). Many also see it as a chance for connection: 64% agree that “going to stores during holidays allows me to reconnect with people and experiences” — a sentiment especially strong among Millennials (76%) and Gen Z (70%). In the end, holiday shopping in stores is about far more than what goes into the bag. It’s about the atmosphere, the memories, and the sense of connection that make the season feel complete.

When shopping for holiday gifts, which option do you prefer in each case?
(Always/Often)

Black Friday and Cyber Monday: Hype Without Heart

For years, Black Friday and Cyber Monday were the cornerstones of holiday shopping. Today, many consumers see them differently. Three-quarters of Americans (75%) say these events feel transactional rather than joyful, and nearly as many (74%) dismiss them as more hype than genuine savings. In fact, 72% say they often find better deals outside of these so-called shopping "holidays."

The strongest signal comes from the overwhelming majority: 84% agree it's better when retailers spread meaningful deals across November and December, instead of concentrating them on just two days. For many shoppers, Black Friday and Cyber Monday no longer spark the excitement or deliver the value they once did — and retailers who lean too heavily on them risk falling behind shifting expectations for transparency and season-long savings.

(SVETLANAIS/GETTY IMAGES)

A Return to the Era of the Holiday Catalog

At the same time that some traditions are fading, others are making a comeback. Holiday catalogs are experiencing a revival — and younger generations are leading the way. For many households, the arrival of a catalog now feels like the unofficial kickoff of the season: 42% of Americans say they get excited when one shows up in the mail, rising to 54% of Gen Z and 51% of Millennials. Beyond excitement, 41% say receiving a catalog makes them feel more connected to the retailer; that connection is even stronger among Gen Z (52%) and Millennials (50%).

The power of catalogs lies not just in nostalgia but the experiences they create. Seventy percent of Americans see them as a good starting point when planning holiday shopping, and 69% agree that catalogs often spark gift ideas they wouldn't have found online. Just as importantly, catalogs feel more enjoyable and less stressful than digital browsing: 69% say they turn gift inspiration into an enjoyable experience rather than a chore; 68% find them more relaxing than scrolling online; and 64% say catalogs help them

How often do you do the following with printed holiday catalogs?
(Always/Often)

	Americans	Gen Z	Millennials
Feel excited when a new holiday catalog arrives, as if it's part of the season's kickoff	42%	54%	51%
Mark or circle items I'd like to give	42%	52%	48%
Feel more connected to a retailer when I receive their holiday catalog	41%	52%	50%
Share or show them to members of my household	39%	49%	47%
Keep them in my home to browse throughout the season	39%	44%	45%
Use them as a way to start conversations with kids or family about holiday wish lists	37%	51%	48%
Mark or circle items I'd like to receive	36%	48%	46%
Use them to spark holiday decor or wrapping ideas	34%	47%	46%
Scan QR codes or visit product websites directly from them	29%	49%	39%

narrow choices faster than online. For many shoppers, print reduces digital fatigue — in fact, 51% say they'll rely more on catalogs this year to cut down on online scrolling.

Americans don't just glance at catalogs — they actively engage with them. Four in ten (42%) mark or circle items they'd like to give, while 36% mark items they'd like to receive. Many keep catalogs in their homes throughout the season (39%), share them with household members (39%), or use them to spark conversations about wish lists with kids or family (37%). Others use them as a source of creativity, with 34% drawing inspiration for holiday décor or wrapping ideas. And as digital natives, younger generations are embracing a more integrated, omnichannel approach to shopping: nearly half of Gen Z (49%) and 39% of Millennials scan QR codes or visit websites directly from catalogs, compared to just 29% overall.

What stands out most is how personal catalogs feel. Two-thirds of Americans (66%) say they would love a personalized catalog curated just for them, and six in ten report revisiting the catalogs they receive multiple times throughout the season. Over half (59%) even say they share and discuss catalog gift ideas with others. In an era of digital overload, print has reclaimed its place as a source of inspiration, conversation, and trust — with 58% of shoppers feeling more confident in the quality of items they see in a catalog than in online ads. For Gen Z and Millennials especially, catalogs are no longer a relic of the past but a reimagined holiday ritual.