



The Fragile Nature of Loyalty

razorfish | **GW**I.

Loyalty is fragile, contingent and often misunderstood.

Marketers often romanticize consumer loyalty, framing it as an expression of emotional devotion or brand love. In reality, the drivers of repeat purchase behavior are far more pragmatic. Consumers tend to “stick” with brands not out of trust or affection, but because of convenience, product performance or situational need.

This distinction matters. In today’s fragmented, AI-enabled and socially fluid marketplace, the traditional levers of loyalty are rapidly eroding. As switching costs diminish and alternatives proliferate, even long-standing brand relationships are increasingly vulnerable to disruption.

The opportunity for brands lies in confronting this reality head-on: To move beyond idealized notions of loyalty and instead understand the functional, contextual factors that sustain repeat buyers. By identifying what truly keeps customers coming back—and reinforcing those ties with relevant programs, modern benefits and meaningful experiences—brands can build loyalty that is not just emotional, but enduring.

Methodology

Razorfish partnered with research company GWI to conduct quantitative interviews exploring U.S. consumers' attitudes toward brand loyalty across various industries, including grocery, credit cards, banks, mobile providers, streaming platforms, quick-service restaurants, insurance, ride-hailing apps, mobile and coffee shops. They also surveyed a panel of 130 marketers to also gauge their perspective on loyalty today and make a comparison between beliefs and reality.

GWl Database

Quantitative

(n = 2,000)

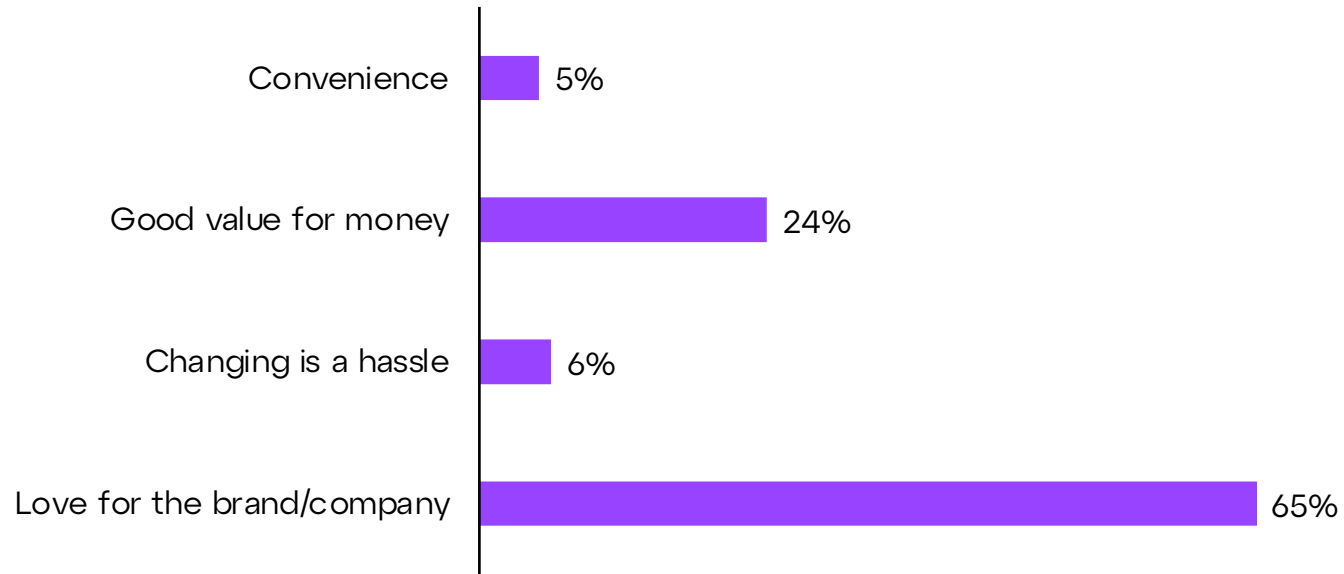
18 to 64

Fieldwork dates:

June 19–
July 2, 2025

What marketers believe about their repeat buyers

Thinking of people who buy your product repeatedly, what are the main reasons why they do so?



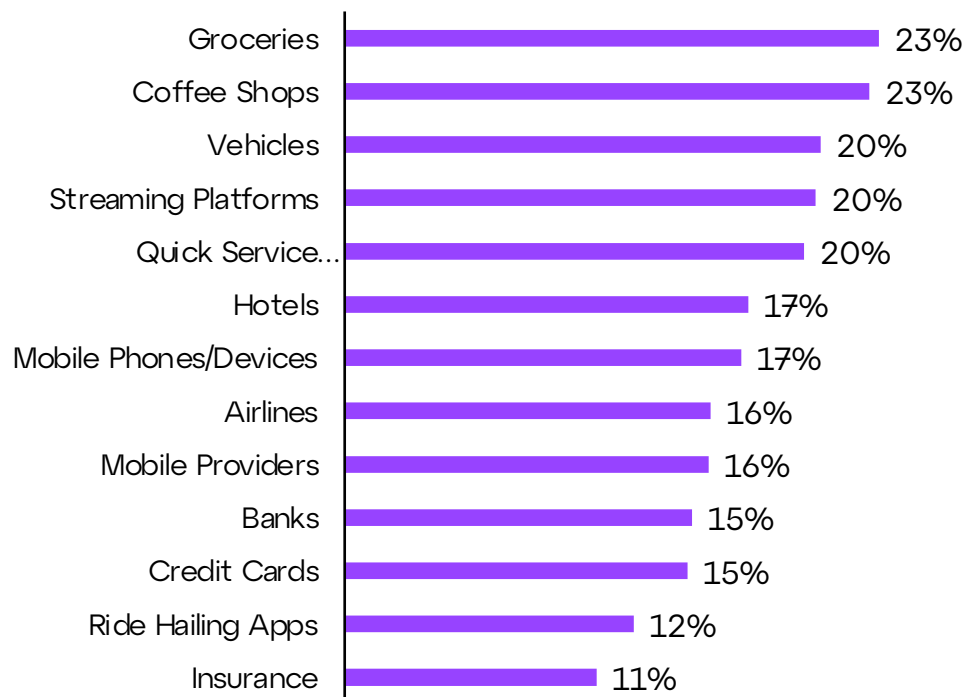
Marketers think loyalty is mostly about *brand love*—with nearly two-thirds convinced that repeat buyers return because of emotional attachment.

Far fewer credit practical drivers like price, convenience or friction.

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Total (n=2,000); Airlines (n=1,357), Groceries (n=1,895), Vehicles (n=1,670), Credit Cards (n=1,693), Banks (n=1,834), Mobile Providers (n=1,848), Streaming Platforms (n=1,648), Hotels (n=1,548), Quick Service Restaurants (n=1,748), Insurance (n=1,788), Ride Hailing Apps (n=1,051), Mobile Phones/Devices (n=1,845), Coffee Shops (n=1,426)

What's love got to do with it? Not a lot

% of people who say **Love for a Brand** is one of their top 5 motivations for repeated category purchases



The data shows that across most categories, emotional reasoning for staying loyal is a small part of why people claim they buy a product repeatedly.

In most categories, **fewer than 1 in 4** cite **love for a brand** as the motivation for repeat purchase, and in low-affinity categories like ride-hailing and insurance, that number drops even further. This underscores the fragility of loyalty when it is grounded in emotional attachment.

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Total (n=2,000); Airlines (n=1,357), Groceries (n=1,895), Vehicles (n=1,670), Credit Cards (n=1,693), Banks (n=1,834), Mobile Providers (n=1,848), Streaming Platforms (n=1,648), Hotels (n=1,548), Quick Service Restaurants (n=1,748), Insurance (n=1,788), Ride Hailing Apps (n=1,051), Mobile Phones/Devices (n=1,845), Coffee Shops (n=1,426)

Number 1 answer by category

Thinking about a product or service you buy or use repeatedly, why do you continue to buy it?

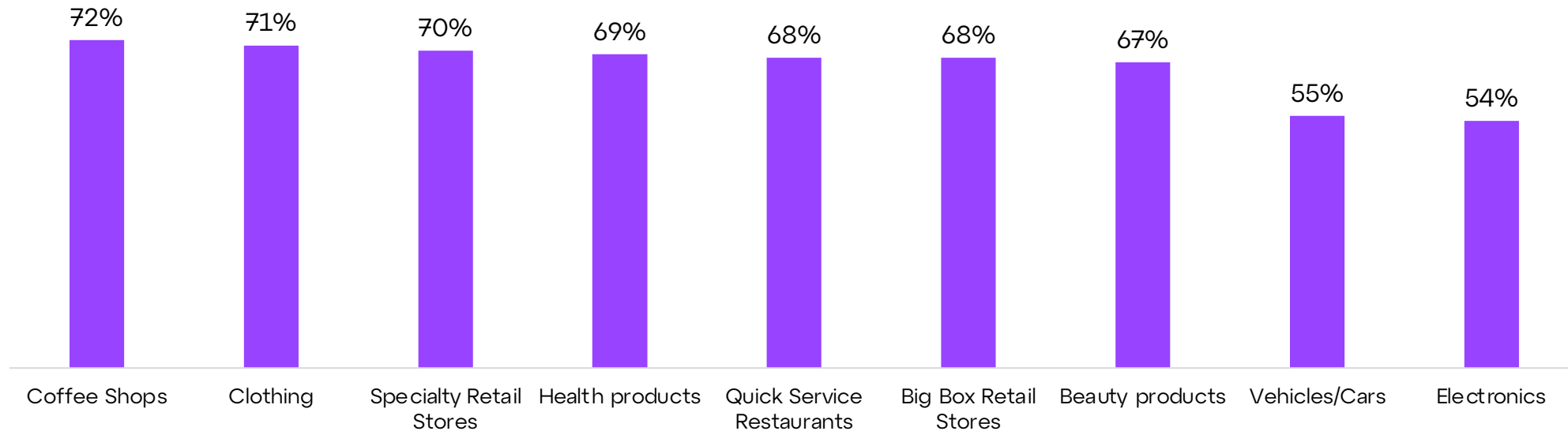
Airlines	"I do it for points"
Grocery	"It's convenient"
Credit Cards	"I do it for points"
Banks	"Changing is a hassle and can't be bothered"
Mobile Providers	"Changing is a hassle and can't be bothered"
Auto	"I like the product"
Ride Hailing	"There aren't alternatives"
Insurance	"Changing is a hassle and can't be bothered"

This chart makes the tenuous nature of loyalty clear: Consumers rarely stay with a brand out of deep emotional attachment. Instead, their reasons are largely pragmatic—points for airlines and credit cards, convenience for groceries, product satisfaction in auto or simply the hassle of switching when it comes to banks and mobile providers. Loyalty in these cases isn't about devotion; it's driven by inertia, utility or transactional benefit. That means the bonds holding consumers are thin: If a competitor makes the experience easier, more rewarding or less burdensome, those ties can snap overnight.

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Total (n=2,000); Airlines (n=1,357), Groceries (n=1,895), Vehicles (n=1,670), Credit Cards (n=1,693), Banks (n=1,834), Mobile Providers (n=1,848), Streaming Platforms (n=1,648), Hotels (n=1,548), Quick Service Restaurants (n=1,748), Insurance (n=1,788), Ride Hailing Apps (n=1,051), Mobile Phones/Devices (n=1,845), Coffee Shops (n=1,426)

Most consumers would trade out of a brand if a specific SKU went away

Respondents who would purchase a similar product from a different brand if a product they use regularly was discontinued



Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Total (n=2,000)

People are only as loyal as their options: Case studies

Loyalty is conditional. Higher-income consumers are more likely to describe themselves as loyal, while lower-income groups are quicker to switch based on price or availability. Loyalty, in other words, bends under the weight of circumstance.

Beauty Products

I care more about the product;
I'd buy a similar product from another brand



I only purchase from this brand;
I'd buy a substitute product from the same brand

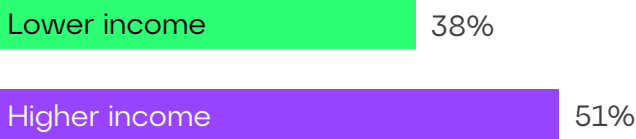


Cars/Vehicles

I care more about the product;
I'd buy a similar product from another brand



I only purchase from this brand;
I'd buy a substitute product from the same brand



Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Low Income and High Income Rebase (n=1,231); Low Income (Under \$50,000) (n=556), High Income (\$100,000+) (n=675)

The Forces That Can Undermine Loyalty

The perceived gap between consumer sacrifice and brand effort

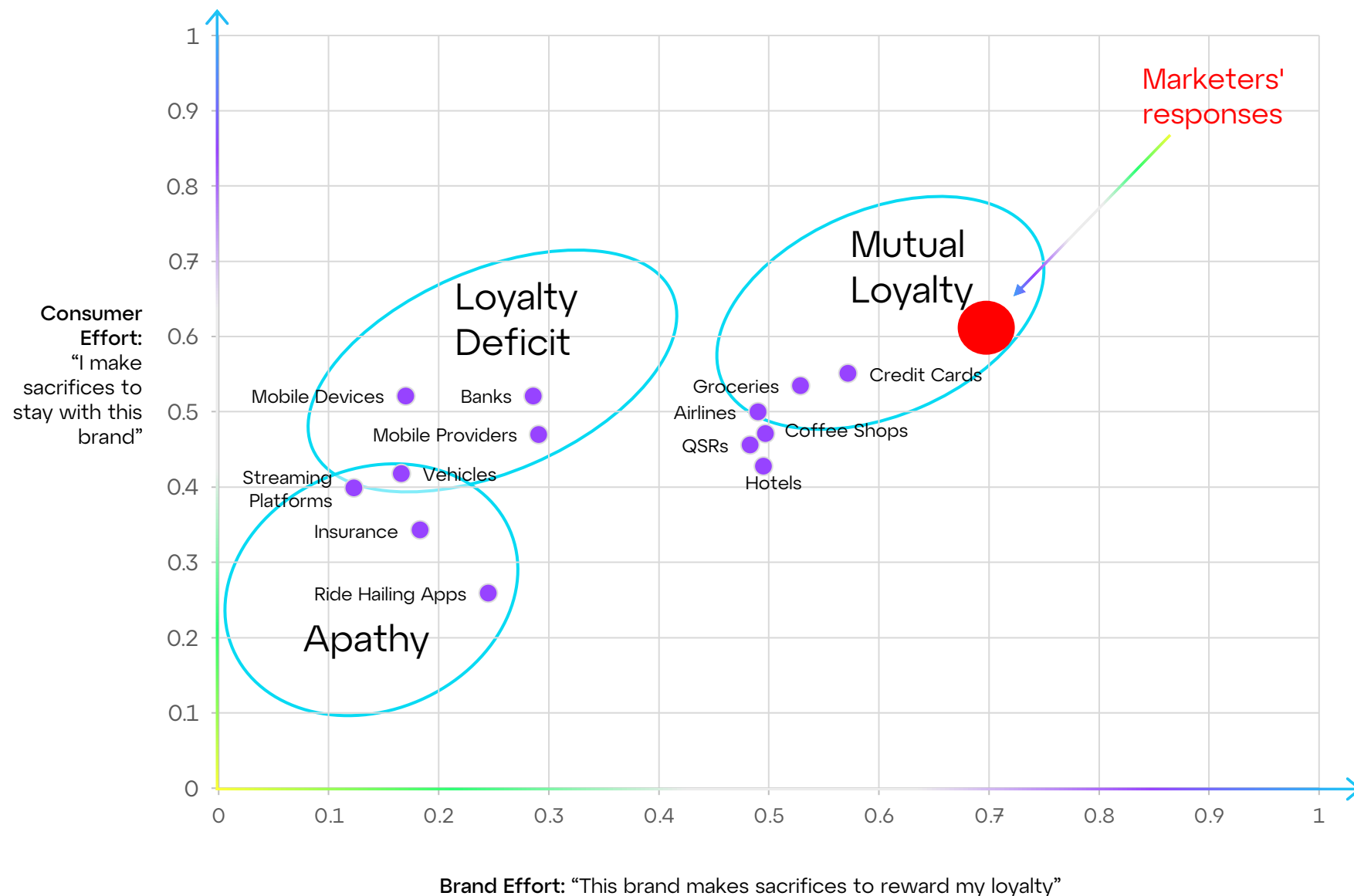
When consumers feel they're giving up more than brands return, a **Loyalty Deficit** forms—it's a fragile state where loyalty can collapse the moment better options emerge.

At the opposite extreme is **Apathy**—categories where neither side sacrifices much, so loyalty is shallow, transactional and easily abandoned.

Only a handful of brands achieve **Mutual Loyalty**, where both parties invest and perceive value. But this is a high-stakes zone: To stay here, brands must continually prove the relationship is worth it, because expectations are already at their peak.

Marketers' perspective:

When asked, marketers consistently place themselves in the “Mutual Loyalty” zone, believing they invest heavily to reward loyalty and that consumers in turn make significant sacrifices to stay.



Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Airlines (n=1,357), Groceries (n=1,895), Vehicles (n=1,670), Credit Cards (n=1,693), Banks (n=1,834), Mobile Providers (n=1,848), Streaming Platforms (n=1,648), Hotels (n=1,548), Quick Service Restaurants (n=1,748), Insurance (n=1,788), Ride Hailing Apps (n=1,051), Mobile Phones/Devices (n=1,845), Coffee Shops (n=1,426)

Tariffs will shake up loyalty

According to McKinsey's consumer research, more than **60% of people have already changed or expect to change their spending habits in response to tariff announcements**. The most common adjustments include cutting non-essentials, delaying discretionary purchases or trading down to lower-cost brands.

The automotive category offers a case in point. When asked how tariffs would affect their next car purchase, **nearly 90% of respondents indicated they would change behavior**—whether by buying American (35%), delaying purchases (33%) or switching to second-hand (21%). Only 11% said they would make no change.

Tariffs, in this context, are a loyalty stress test. They show just how fragile brand commitment becomes when price pressure and policy collide.

In-market vehicle buyers' response to tariffs

4. What impact will these tariffs have on your decision to buy a car?



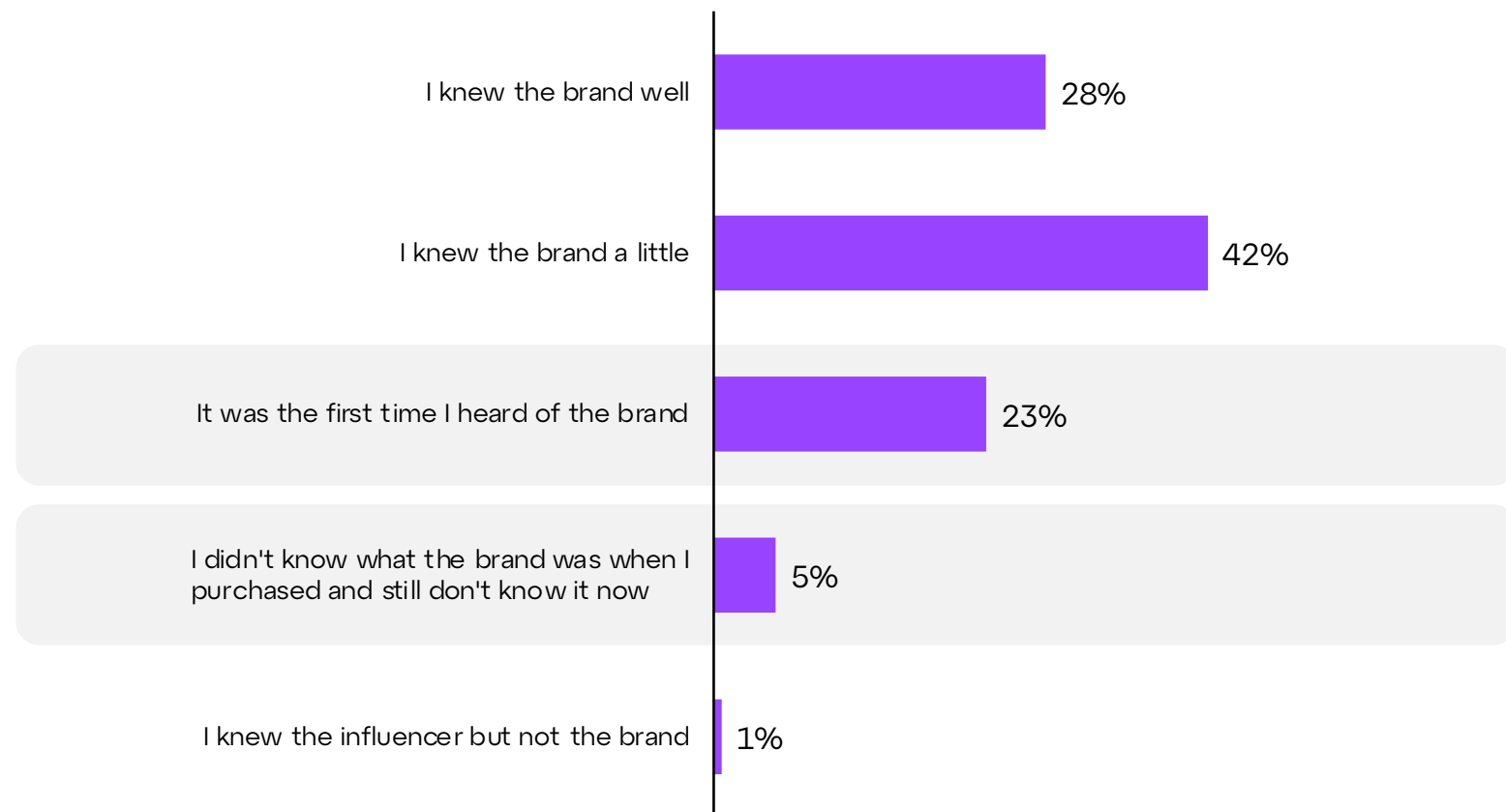
Sources: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Total (n=2,000); Notice AI-generated content (n=1,122); McKinsey research: www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/the-state-of-the-us-consumer

Social commerce has fueled brand promiscuity

Just 28% of respondents say their most recent social purchase was from a brand they knew. Forty-two percent were only somewhat familiar, and nearly a third had never heard of the brand before.

Discovery has become decoupled from brand equity: a compelling product with the right influencer behind it can win conversion.

Familiarity with Brand Prior to Social Media Purchase



Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Purchased a product through social media in the past 12 months (n=537)

Social purchase satisfaction may fuel cross-brand exploration

I am very satisfied/satisfied with my purchase



84%
Snapchat



82%
TikTok



77%
Instagram



77%
Discord



74%
Facebook

Social commerce isn't just fueling promiscuity; it's also delivering satisfaction. Across platforms like Snapchat (84%), TikTok (82%), and Instagram (77%), the vast majority of consumers who purchased through social channels report being satisfied with their experience. This flips a long-standing assumption: People aren't disappointed after trying unknown brands—they're actually reassured.

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Purchased a product through social media in the past 12 months (n=537)

Brand equity built loyalty. Influencer equity is shaking it up.

“I guess I trust certain influencers to curate quality products—they are my reassurance”

—Female, 38

Trust has long been the biggest barrier to trial—the belief that a product will deliver on its promise. Traditionally, that assurance came from brand equity: name recognition, reputation and reliability. Today, that trust is shifting. Increasingly, influencers are stepping into the role brands once owned.

Through lived experience, relatability and perceived authenticity, they're providing the assurance consumers need to “wonder wisely” and confidently try new products.

Influencer's promotion has had a strong impact on a recent purchase

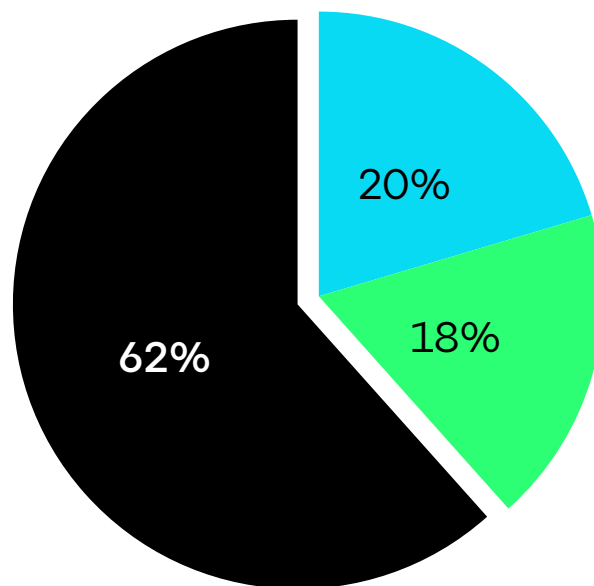
30.1% — Groceries
30.1% — Quick Service Restaurants
28.0% — Mobile Phones/Devices
27.9% — Streaming Platforms
27.2% — Coffee Shops
26.6% — Mobile Service Providers
25.7% — Vehicles
24.8% — Credit Cards
23.5% — Banks
23.2% — Airlines

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Purchased a product through social media in the past 12 months (n=537)

AI that looks like AI unsettles loyalty

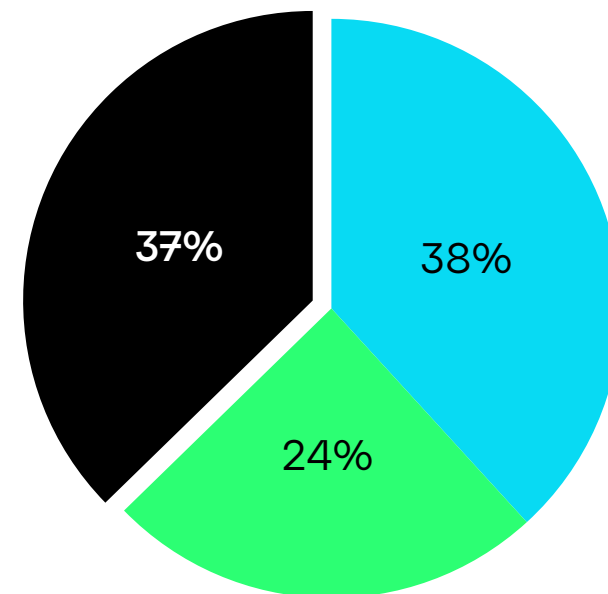
Overtly AI-generated content divides opinion. Some consumers appreciate its efficiency and personalization, while many others view it as diminishing authenticity, eroding equity and cheapening loyalty. Still, a combined 38% say that they either don't notice AI-generated content or aren't sure when they're seeing it.

Noticing
AI Content



- Not sure
- Don't notice AI-generated content
- Notice AI-generated content

Impact of Advertising
AI Content on Loyalty



- No Impact
- Positive Impact
- Negative Impact

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Total (n=2,000); Notice AI-generated content (n=1,122)

What You Can Do

Actionable items

01

Understand the real
"why" behind your
repeat buyers

02

Moments of
vulnerability can
build connection

03

Loyalty programs
still matter, when
they are useful

04

Think beyond
points to soft
benefits

05

Broaden the
redemption
ecosystem
beyond
your own

Understand the real "why" behind your repeat buyers

Dissect drivers of repeat purchase

- **KPI:** % of buyers citing product quality/performance vs. price/convenience in surveys.
- **Insight:** Repeat doesn't always mean loyal. Some stay because it's rational, not emotional.
- **Pitfall:** Assuming all repeat buyers are emotionally attached.

Measure switching vulnerability

- **KPI:** % of customers saying they would switch if a competitor offered a lower price, better feature or more availability.
- **Insight:** Loyalty under pressure is the real test of retention.
- **Pitfall:** Relying solely on Net Promoter Score (NPS); it misses fragility and competitive temptation.

Track engagement beyond the transaction

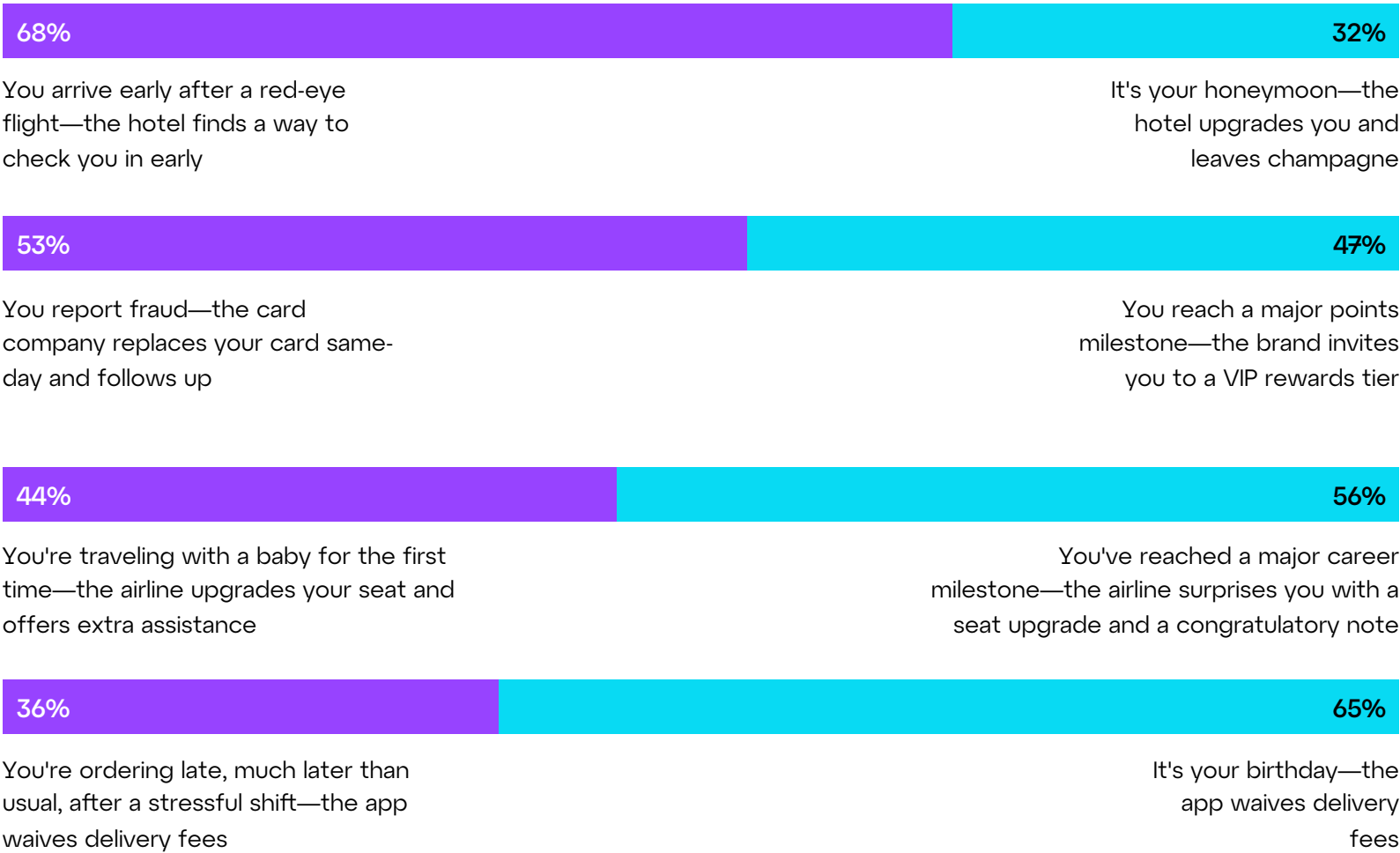
- **KPI:** Participation in loyalty programs, engagement with exclusive content or interaction with community/brand experiences.
- **Insight:** True loyalty shows up in advocacy, participation and resilience to alternatives.
- **Pitfall:** Over-indexing on sales volume; true loyalty shows up in advocacy, content engagement and resilience to alternatives.

Moments of vulnerability can build connection

Many brands focus on celebrating milestones, and rightly so. But consumers are also signaling a desire for support in life's inflection points (where appropriate): A first trip with a baby, an early hotel check-in after a red-eye or an insurer proactively checking in after a flood.

These aren't transactions; they're acts of empathy. When brands show up in these moments and meet emotional as well as functional needs, they can anchor loyalty in a way discounts never will.

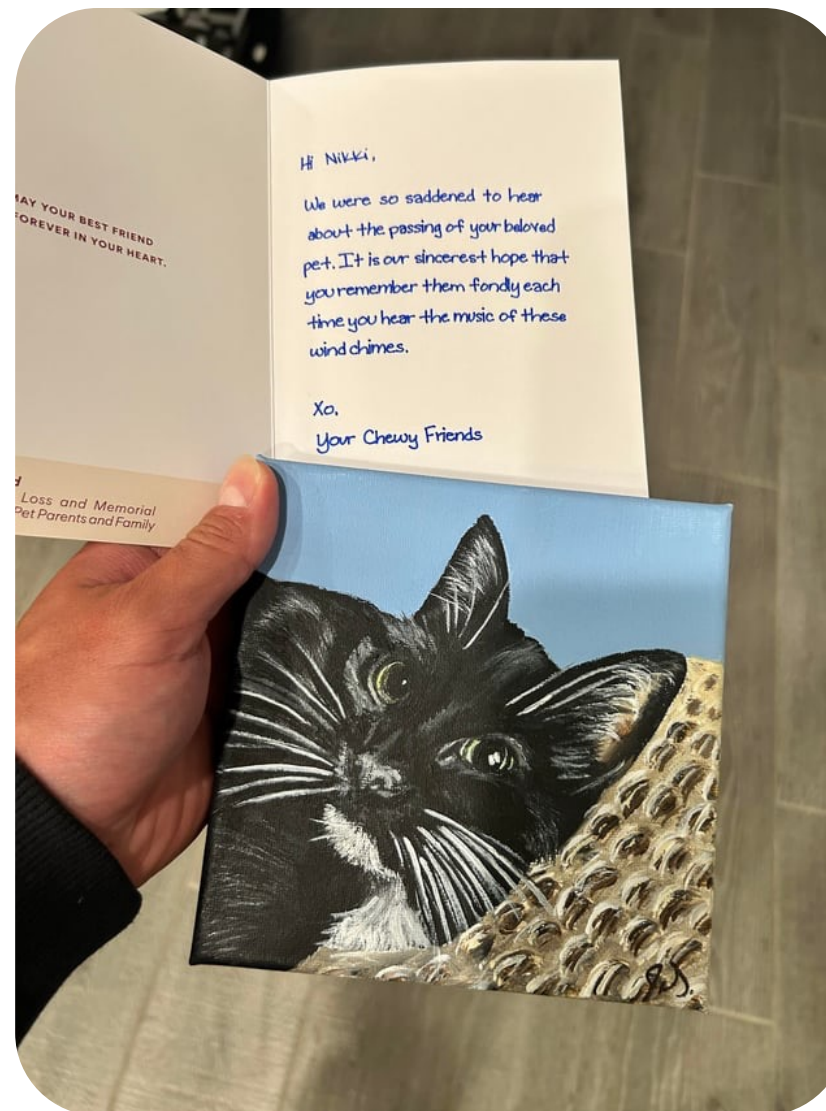
Which of the following moments would be more likely to increase your loyalty or result in repeat or additional purchases from a brand?



Case in point: Chewy

When a pet passes away, Chewy often sends flowers, handwritten notes or refunds for unused food. These gestures step into one of life's hardest moments in a way that is appropriate, personal and heart-warming.

By acknowledging grief with empathy rather than promotion, Chewy turns vulnerability into a lasting bond, proving loyalty is built as much in sorrow as in celebration.



Loyalty programs still matter, when they are useful

Despite talk of fatigue, interest in loyalty programs remains strong. A majority of consumers are willing to download apps, track points and actively engage if the benefits feel valuable.



Most people are willing to download an app.

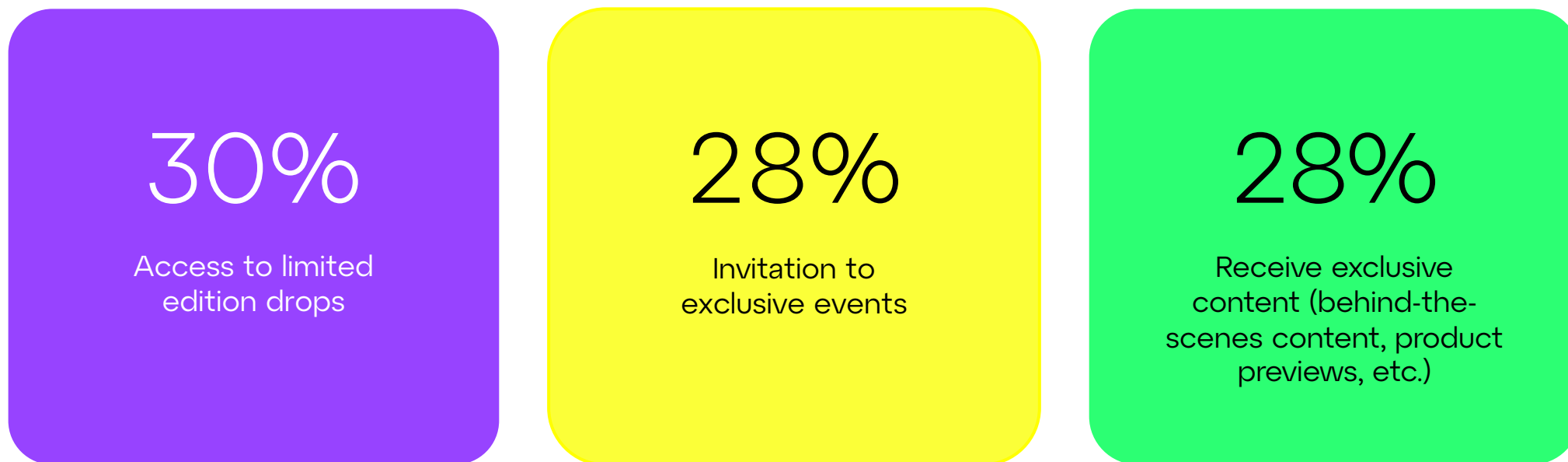


Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. Base: Total (n=2,000)

Think beyond points to soft benefits

While discounts and points still motivate participation, softer perks—like exclusivity, early access and VIP treatment—rank among the strongest loyalty drivers.

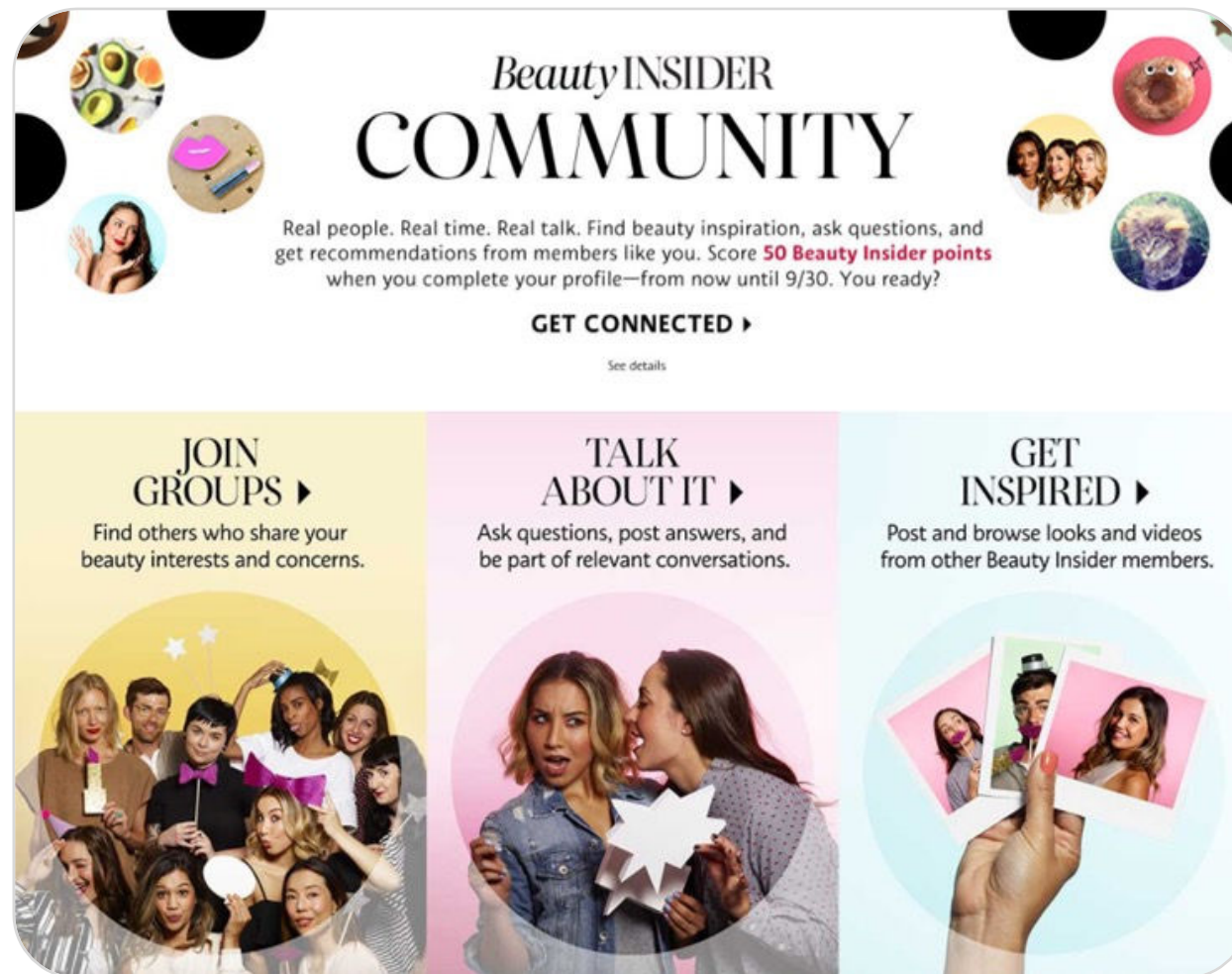
These benefits make people feel seen, not just sold to, creating the kind of sticky loyalty that transcends price and promotion.



Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Total (n=2,000); *Percentage of participants who agree a perk is of high value or very high value.

Case in point: Sephora Beauty Insider

Sephora blends discounts with **experiential perks**: Early access to new product launches, VIP events and exclusive “Rouge” status experiences. The result: Members feel like part of an insider community, not just shoppers, creating strong emotional stickiness.



Broaden the redemption ecosystem beyond your own

Loyalty programs lose power when they're confined to a single brand.

Consumers are signaling a clear shift in expectations: Nearly **54%** say the most valuable perks are those that reach across products, services or categories. The ability to earn in one place and redeem in another creates greater relevance than points trapped in a closed ecosystem.

When redemption extends into everyday life—groceries, fuel, entertainment—loyalty becomes practical rather than promotional. It turns episodic engagement into habitual interaction, positioning the brand as part of a broader ecosystem of value.

Source: Razorfish Future of Loyalty Survey. **Base:** Total (n=2,000); *Percentage of participants who agree a perk is of high value or very high value.

Want to know
more?

Reach out.
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