

Snowsports Industries America Retail Consumer Behavior Study

Winter 2017/2018



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Image Courtesy Atomic Skis

SECTION 1:

Executive Summary

The consumer journey is more complicated than ever before. There has been a fundamental shift in how transactions occur; however, marketing departments have been slow to catch on to the intricacies of the new normal of doing business in the digital age. Companies are acknowledging that their Customer Journey Map is flawed. There is no longer a straightforward path, or direct funnel, that a consumer takes from research to purchase.

Consumers seamlessly move from channel to channel, even within a specific phase of the consumer lifecycle. There are no more “online” or “offline” phases, just complicated blends of the two. As if that wasn’t complex enough, consumers are embracing a multi-device pattern of use, leaving a complicated trail for marketers to follow and make sense of.

This study is the first element in a series of studies aimed at understanding the modern snow sport consumer. This first report focuses on general trends affecting the consumer lifecycle in the snow sports market, setting the stage for follow up studies that will focus on discipline specific behaviors. In these studies, we will focus on the different behaviors exhibited by snowboarders, skiers, and other participants of snow sports.

In order to be effective marketers, it is not enough to simply understand the current behavior of consumers; we must also anticipate the changes in preference and behaviors of years to come. To construct this base of understanding, we decided to analyze the three primary phases of the consumer journey: research, purchase, and use. Our look into the use phase will be brief for now, but will be expanded heavily in the discipline specific studies. In addition, the subsequent research will push into the awareness phase. This will enhance our understanding of how users come to be aware of new brands/products/innovations and how this awareness affects their journey. These studies will be focused on the evolving nature of consumer behavior/preference.

[Partner. Resource. Advocate](#)

Ryan Coombs

SIA Research Manager



Image Courtesy Atomic Skis

SECTION 2:

Research

"The research that consumers perform is rapidly changing. Those who do not understand this evolution will miss out on related opportunities."

— Nick Sargent, *President*

In this digital age, consumers are more informed about their purchases than ever before. The Internet has created a marketplace where up to date information is at our fingertips at all times. Individuals must first wade through the vast sea of information in order to uncover the details they have deemed important to their purchase decision. This is not a trend unique to a specific demographic. Across the board, users are getting more sophisticated in their approach.

The research phase is also characterized as the information gathering phase. The consumer is aware that they have a potential need for a product, and are now reviewing the different options available to them. During this phase, the consumer could be making a decision on brands, models, or even product types.

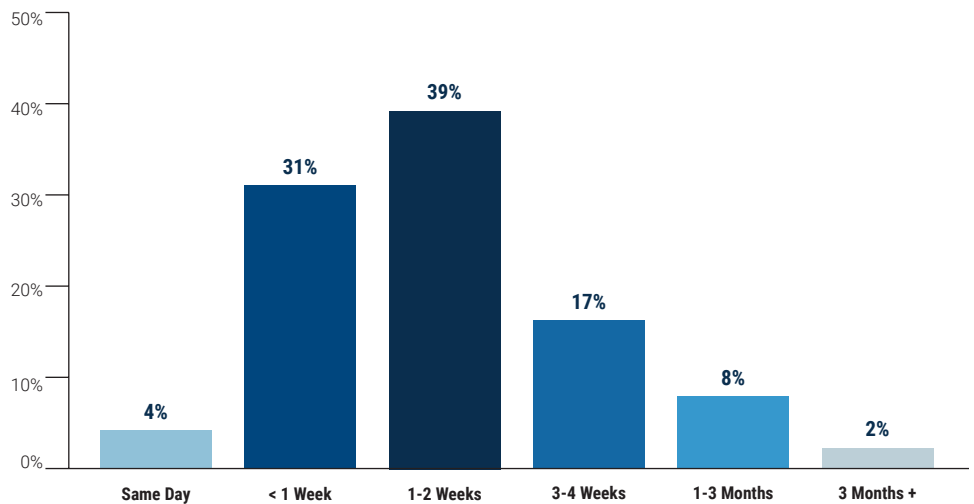
The research phase extends beyond the immediate purchase. As an example, a consumer who has made the decision that they are interested in snow sports but is evaluating whether they want to snowboard or ski, would be in the research phase. Decisions about how to make the purchase are included in the purchase phase. As mentioned before, the consumer journey is not a straight path. Consumers may end up in the research phase many times throughout their snow sports career. Most often customers will end up back in the research phase when they are ready to repurchase or upgrade. Understanding the lifespans of products and how quickly a consumer will end up back in the research phase will be covered in detail in the discipline specific studies coming later this year.

Consumers aren't rushing purchases.

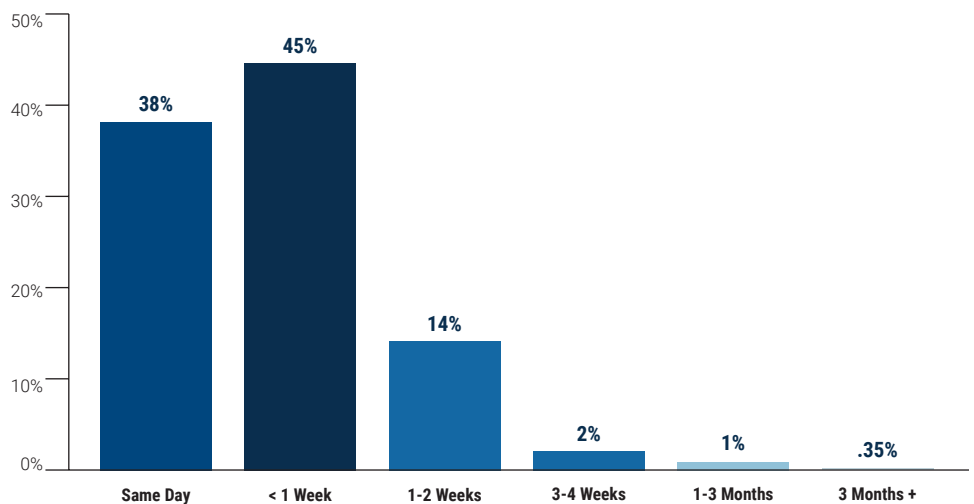
Across all demographics, consumers now are choosing to be armed with better information prior to purchasing an item. They are carefully researching and evaluating their gear; considering a wide variety of data sources before making the purchase.

Looking at consumer data for snow sports purchases over \$100 reveals that approximately 65% of consumers are taking more than a week to research their gear prior to purchase. This has significant implications on how organizations market to their consumers. From the first point of contact, consumers can take weeks or even months researching before making the purchase. Small purchases, however, were made much quicker, with 82% of purchases happening in under one week.

Time Spent Researching Before Purchasing for Items Over \$100

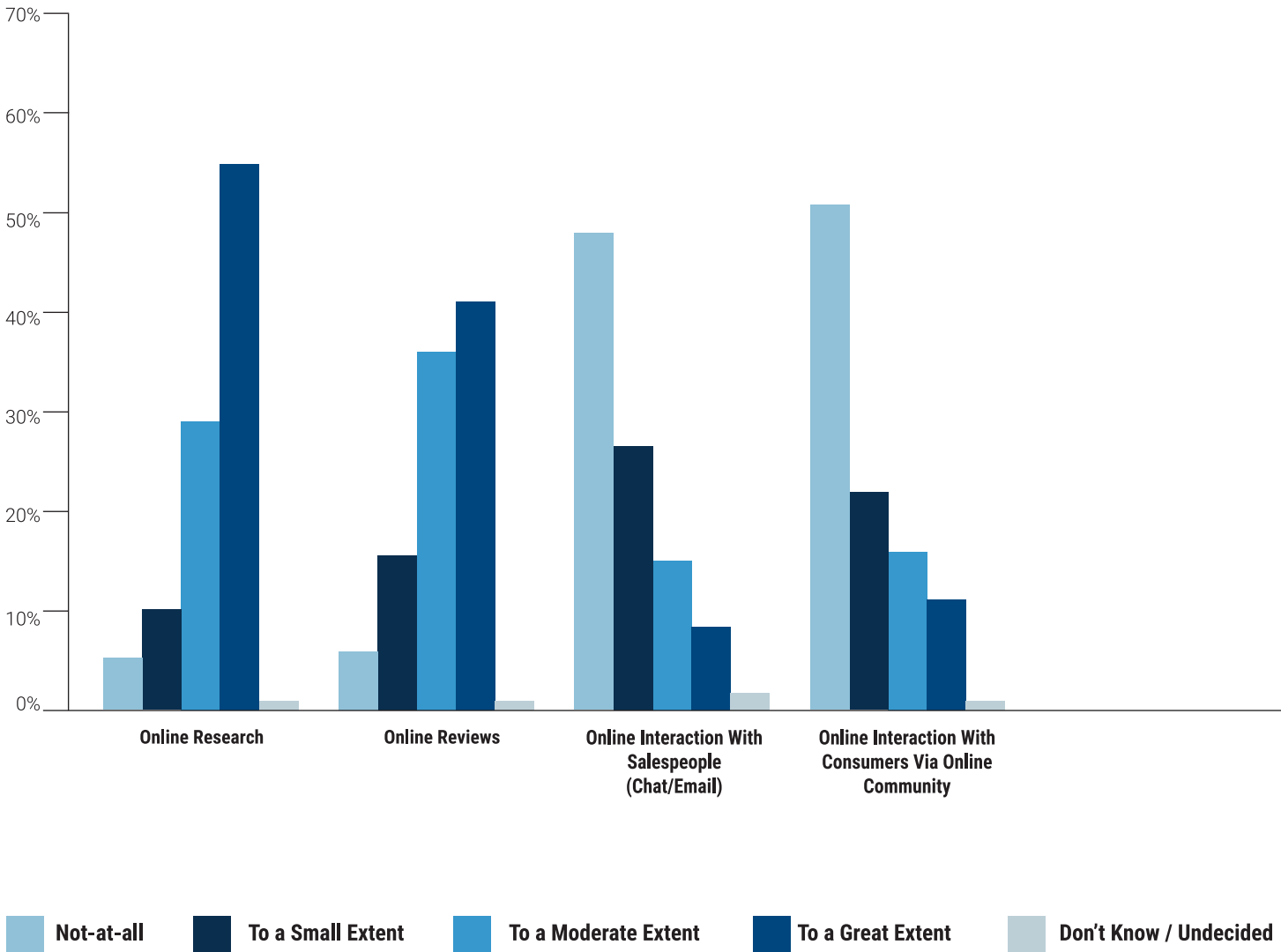


Time Spent Researching Before Purchasing for Items Under \$100



To What Extent Consumers Are Using the Following to Research Snow Gear Purchases

Online Interactions

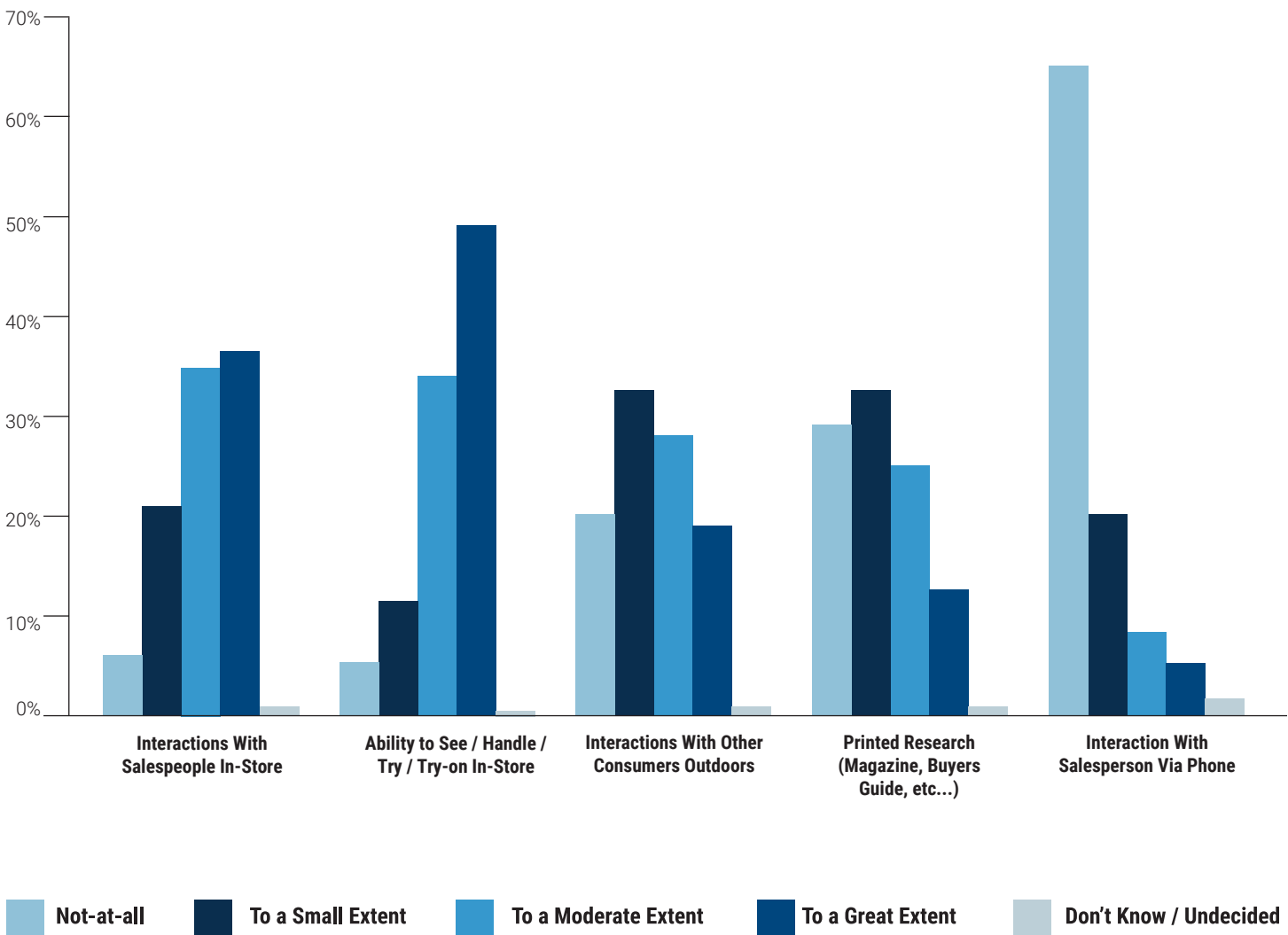


More depth,
more breadth of
information.

With this information at our fingertips, why are consumers taking so long to research their purchase? The answer is simple: the information available is vast, and consumers are taking all information into consideration prior to making a purchase.

To What Extent Consumers Are Using the Following to Research Snow Gear Purchases

Offline Interactions

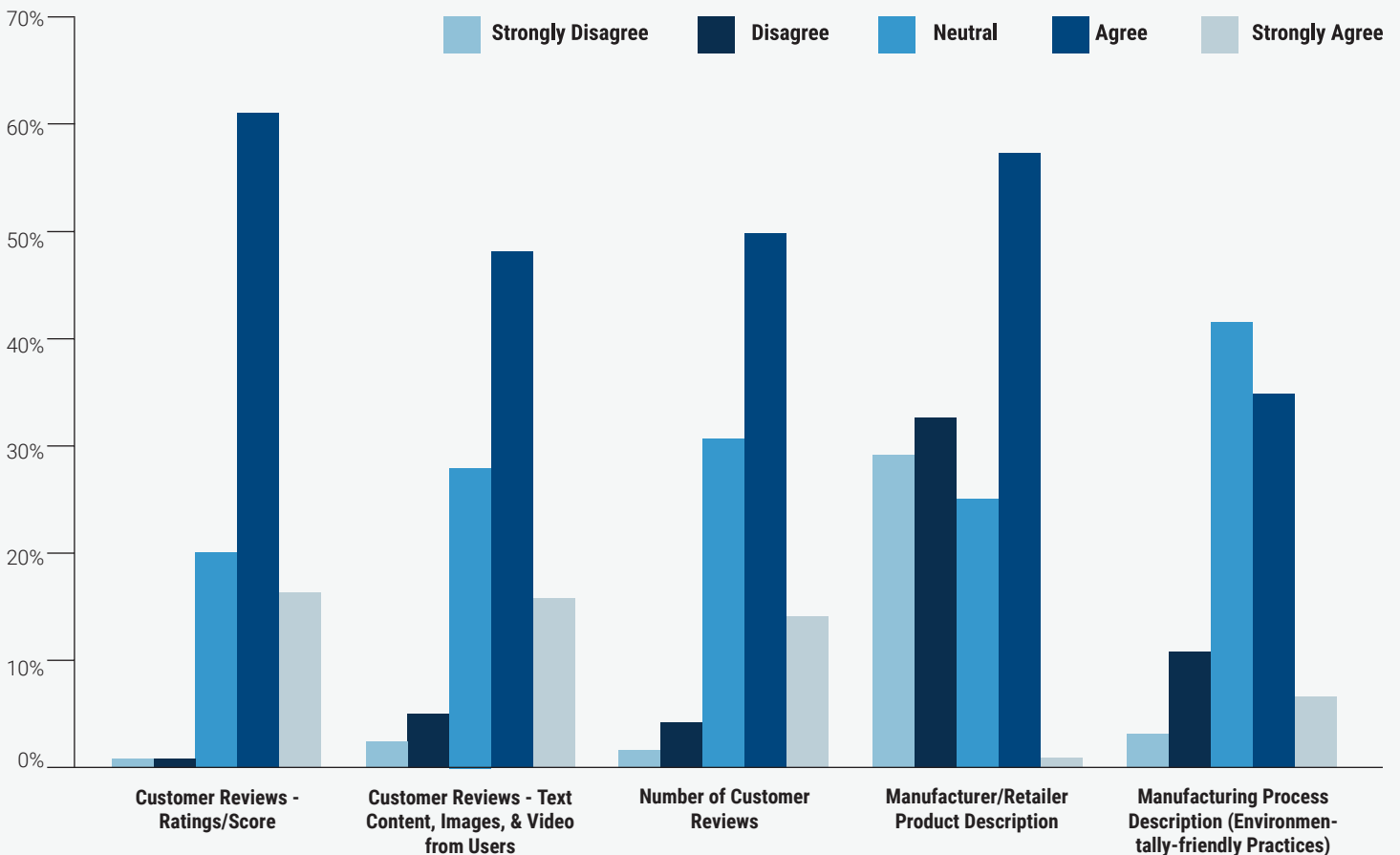


Online research
is only half the
picture.

Online research is prevalent, but consumers are still getting their information from a variety of sources outside of the internet. Traditional methods of research have not fallen out of favor yet. The ability to try on gear and talk to representatives in store remain an important part of the consumer journey.

To What Extent Do the Following Factors Influence Snow Gear Purchases

Online Purchasing Behavior



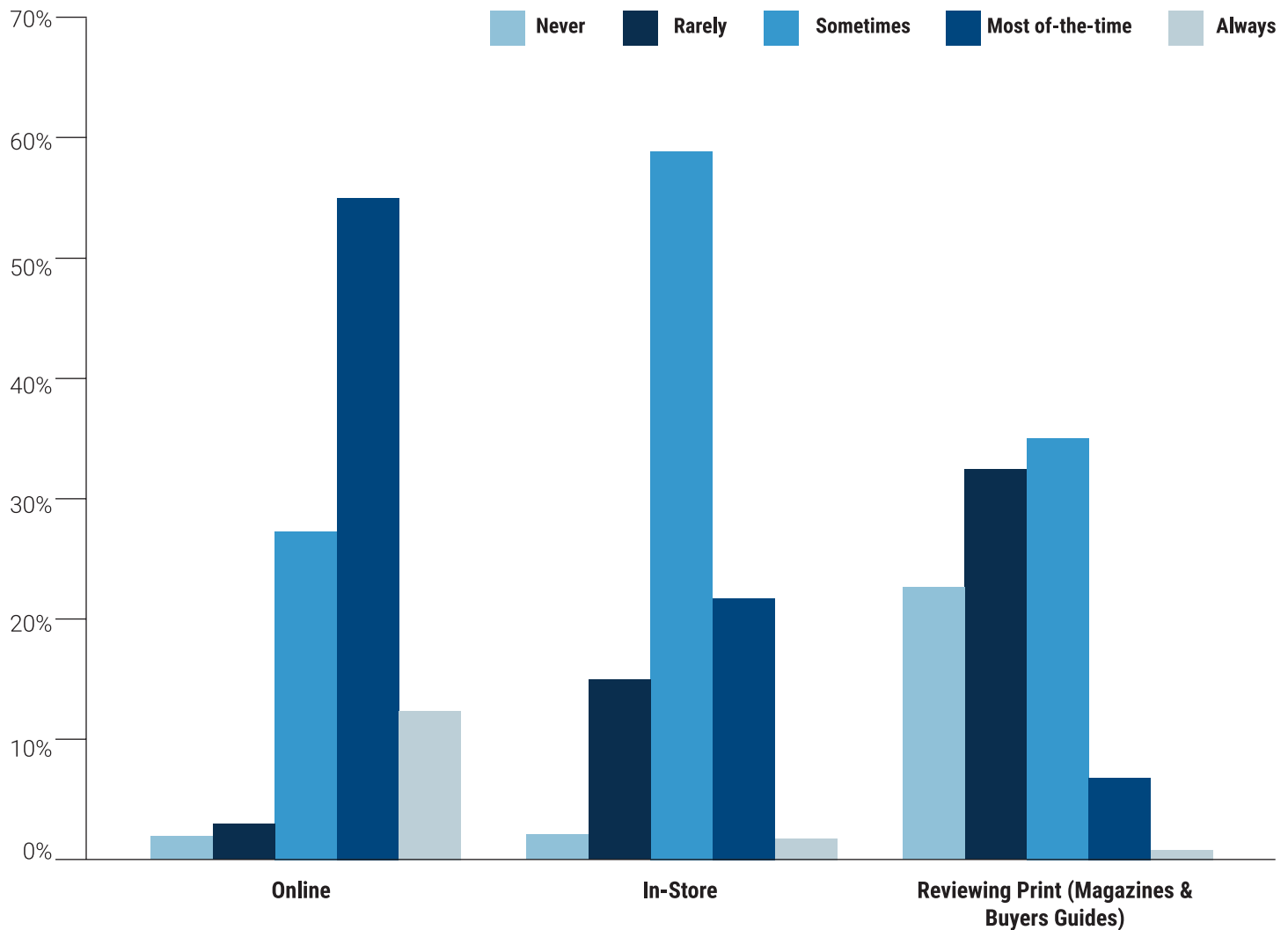
Research: What's Important

Although strong preference is shown for different research activities, one thing is clear: individuals are varied in the type of research they do. There are few categories that are sworn off by buyers, but for the most part, individuals are open to all of the options available to them.

All research does not have the same impact on consumers purchasing habits. When performing research online, consumers have varying levels of preference towards the type of content they are reviewing. Although there is a general similarity across categories, it is interesting to focus on the ratio of "agree" to "neutral" categories. Manufacturing process description is an interesting category. The large amount of neutrals hint towards the fact that consumers are uneducated about this topic, and can be pushed into meaningful categories with education.

When Researching Snow Sports Gear, How Often Do Consumers Use the Following Resources:

Research Channels



Overall preference by channel shows some interesting trends. More than 67% of respondents note that they utilized online research channels “most of the time” or “always”. This dwarfs the percentage of in-store research as primary method, which comes in at approximately 24% for these categories. This is not to say that in-store research is dying out; only 17% of individuals noted that they “never” or “rarely” did in-store research.

Print media, on the other hand, appears to be losing favor with snow sports consumers. Over 56% of consumers responded that they “never” or “rarely” consulted print resources for their research.

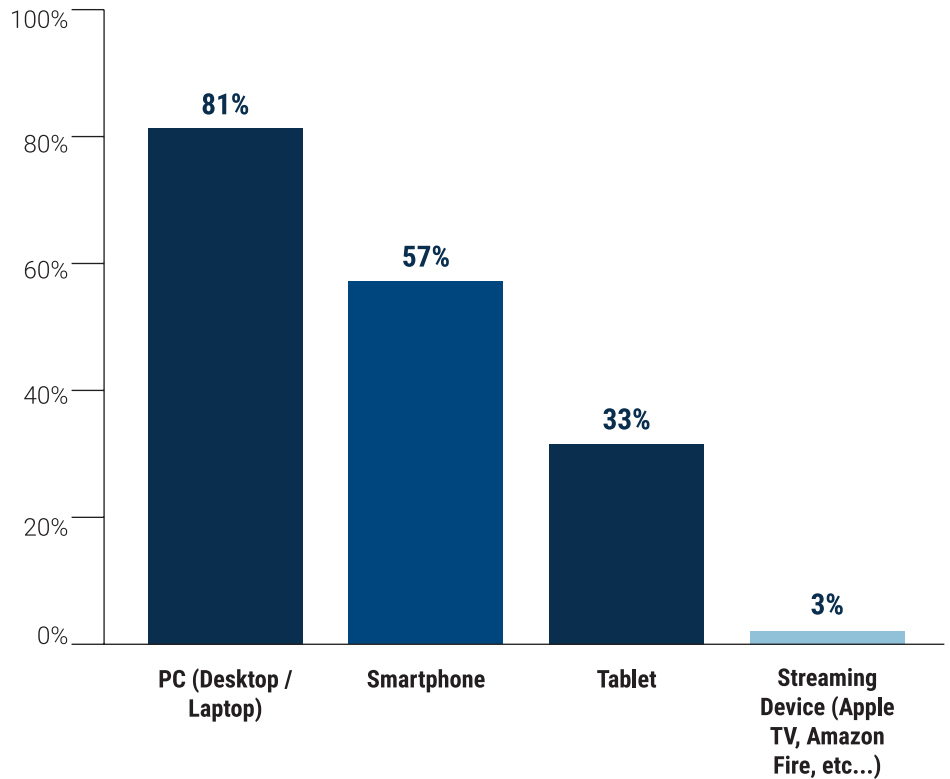
Device preference is shifting.

The trend towards online research for retail purchases has come a long way and is far-reaching. This is not an activity simply for the younger generations anymore. All demographics have embraced online research as being a critical part of their process in buying snow sports gear. Online research has even surpassed in-store research in terms of prevalence.

Overall customer preference for online research method by device varies, but the data tilts slightly in favor of PC usage over smartphone or tablet. However, this device preference differs according to customer demographic. Older generations are more likely to show a strong preference to their laptop/PC, while for younger generations the gap is much narrower, showing a nearly equal percentage of smartphone utilization relative to that of PC or laptop.

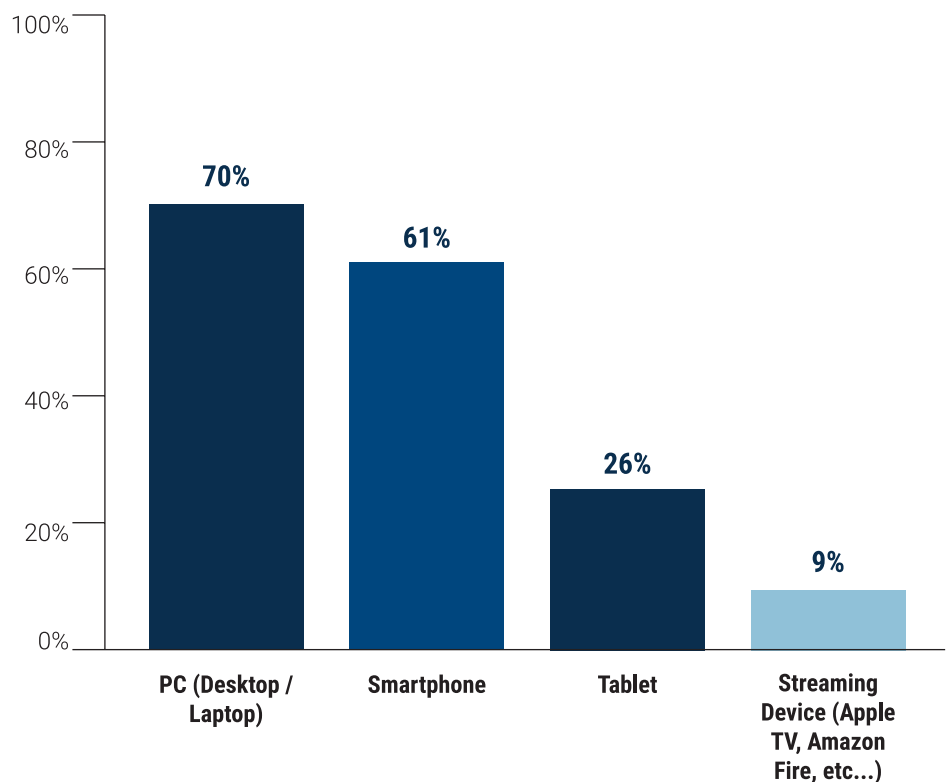
Consumer Behavior by Device

Participants Age 35 and Older



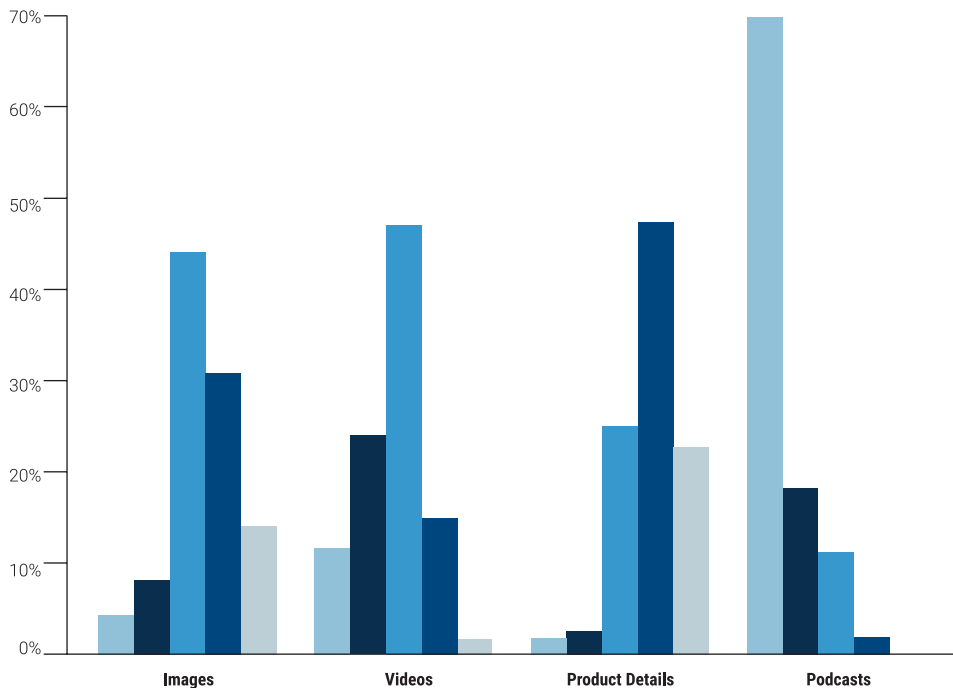
Consumer Behavior by Device

Participants Under Age 35



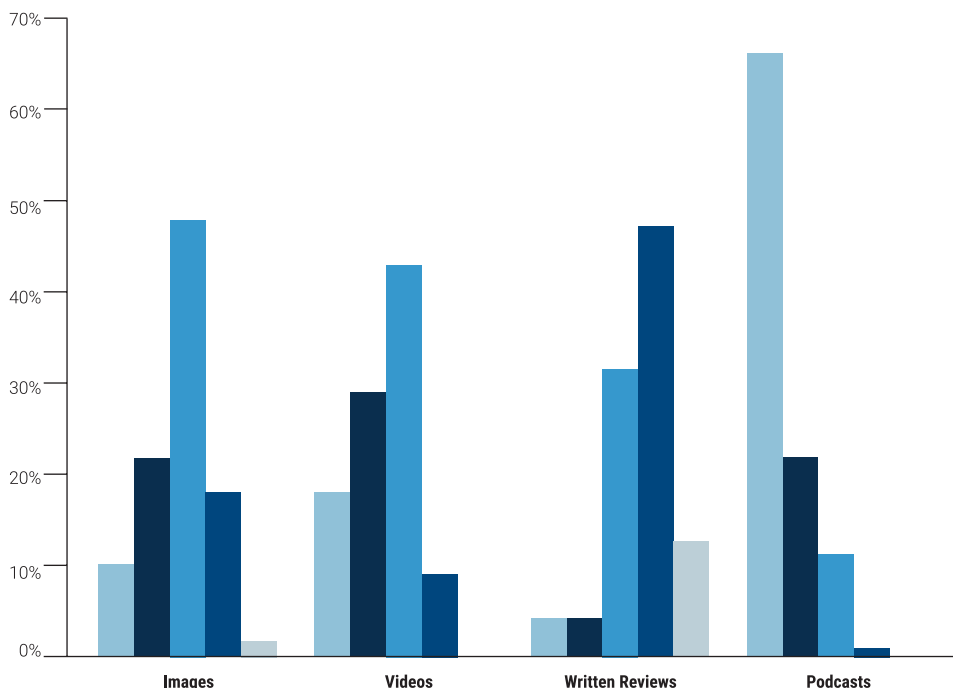
How Often Consumers Use Content to Research Purchases

Manufacturer / Retailer Content



How Often Consumers Use Content to Research Purchases

User-Generated Content



Never
 Rarely
 Sometimes
 Most of-the-time
 Always

Written content reigns as king.

Across devices, one rule is clear: consumers are interested in seeing varied content from both peers and manufacturers/retailers. Text dominates both categories, with “written reviews” and “product details” showing clear preference over the content types. Although podcasts are rising in prevalence in other industries, its importance in the snow sports field is dwarfed by other media types.

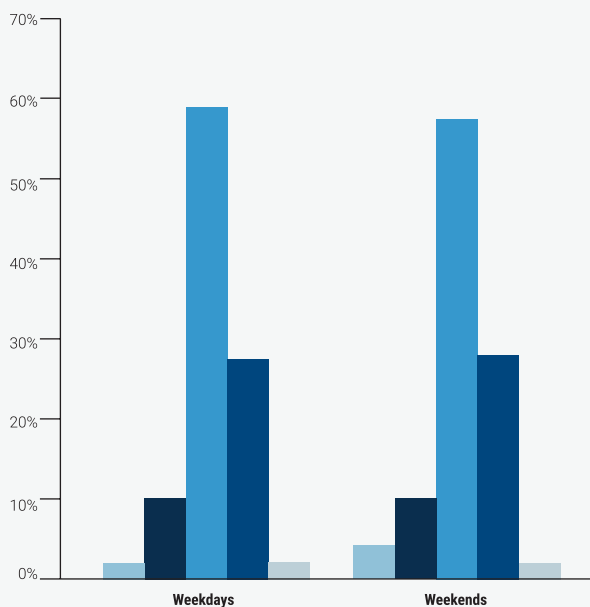
For manufacturer and retail media outlets, the cheapest content to produce dominated the charts for customer engagement. Images and videos followed in popularity, within more interest pushing towards images. This sentiment was also reflected in the responses to user generated content. When reviewing feedback to your product/brand, snow sports consumers seem most interested in the written reviews, but will also view images and videos to a lesser extent.

Researching at all hours of the day (and night).

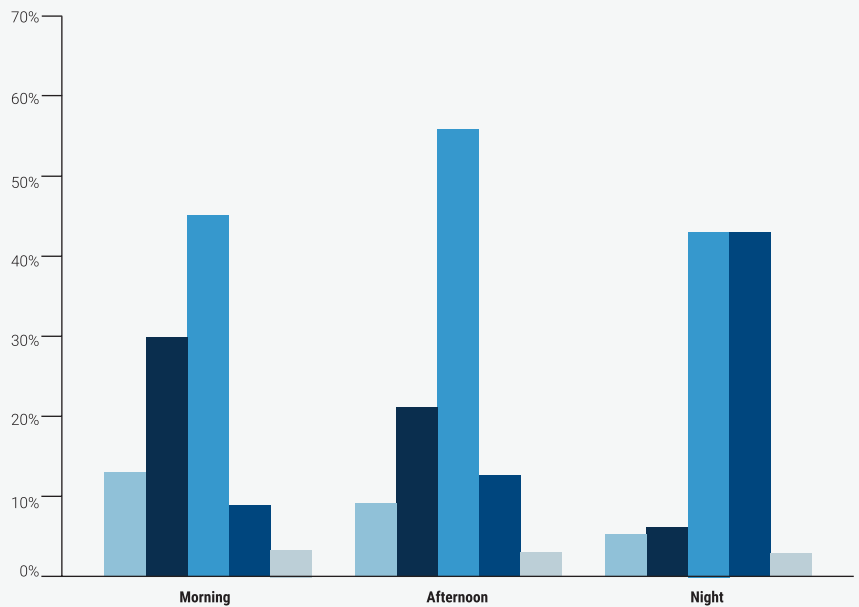
The effect of time on research was also evaluated; ideally, if temporal effects were found, this could assist retailers/manufacturers in targeting marketing efforts in a way that could reduce spend and increase conversions. Although the responses look similar for weekdays and weekends, there are some interesting insights to draw from these results. There are a number of respondents who research primarily on weekend or weekdays.

When Consumers Are Typically Researching Products

Day-of-Week



Time-of-Day



Never
 Rarely
 Sometimes
 Most-of-the-time
 Always

Time of day as a factor also showed some interesting trends. Consumers showed a significant preference to shopping for snow sports gear at night, although a presence during the day and morning is still critical, as there were strong showings across the board.



Image Courtesy Dakine

SECTION 3:

Purchase

“Consumers value their purchasing experience. We need to listen to the consumer and facilitate transactions that meet their expectations.”

— Maria McNulty, *Chief Operating Officer*

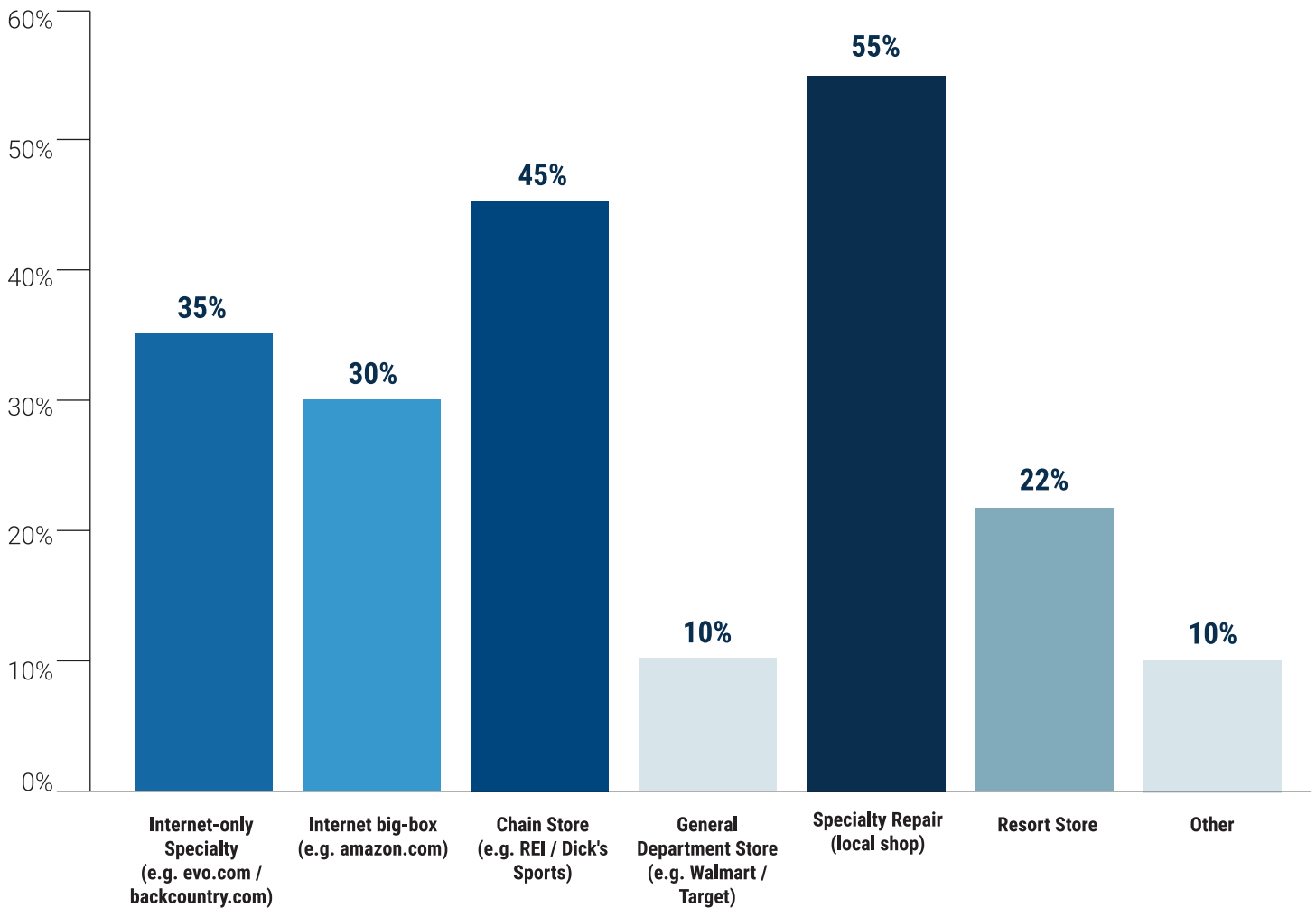
In the snow sports customer journey, the purchase phase has a close and complementary relationship to the research phase. The consumer can go back and forth between phases as they decide on how and where to make the purchase, as well as decisions about future purchases.

The purchase phase can also include research about how the consumer will facilitate the transaction. They have to make the choice to purchase the product(s) online or offline. They have to decide which retail or online outlet they want to purchase through. Sometimes the choice of outlet can be the simple proximity to one's home, and the entirety of the research occurs on site. Other times, the consumer decides which item to purchase, then evaluates the best method to facilitate the transaction.

There is a significant amount of research already done in industry about what influences customers to purchase through specific channels. In order to provide meaningful information we focused on items that may be unique for our industry and customer demographics. This segment is meant to establish a baseline for subsequent discipline specific studies.

Where Consumers Are Purchasing Snow Sports Gear

Shoppers have made at least one purchase at the following in the last twelve months.



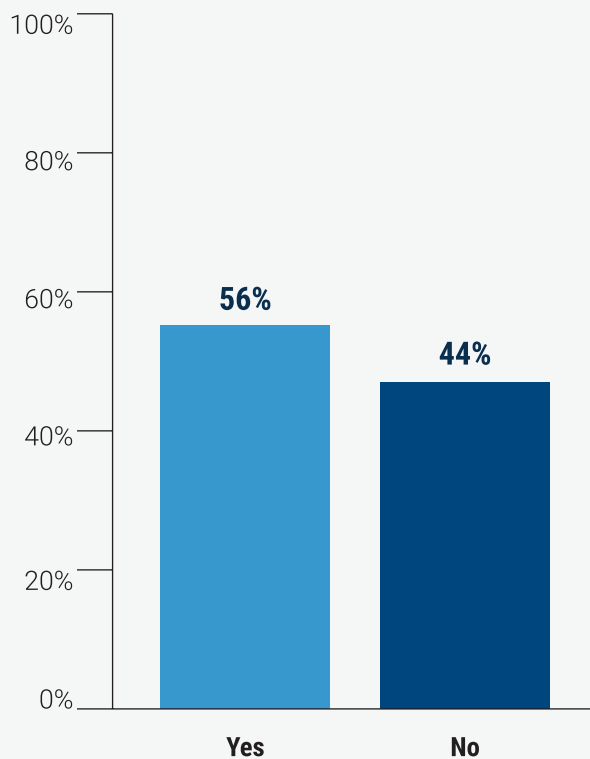
**The path to
purchase
starts here.**

In order to fully understand the complexities of purchase paths, we must first start with the basics. Of the number of choices that consumers must make before buying a piece of gear, they first need to decide where they want to purchase the item. As expected, the channels of purchase are varied.

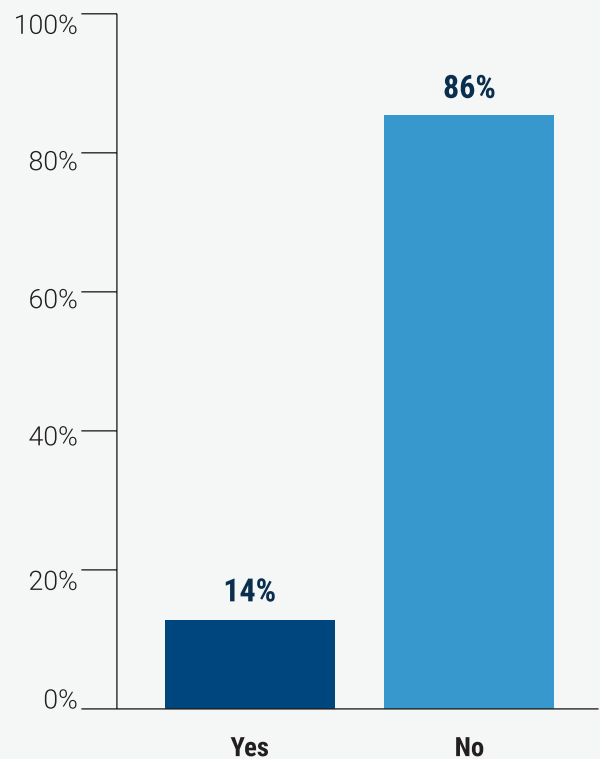
Consumers are never really offline.

The growing presence of smartphones as a research tool reveals the clearest example of the non-linear path from research to purchase. As illustrated in the responses below, more than 55% of individuals have utilized a smart phone for research while simultaneously shopping at a brick and mortar store.

Consumers That Have Used a Smartphone to Research (e.g. checking price)



Consumers That Have Used a Smartphone While Shopping at a Brick & Mortar to Make a Purchase

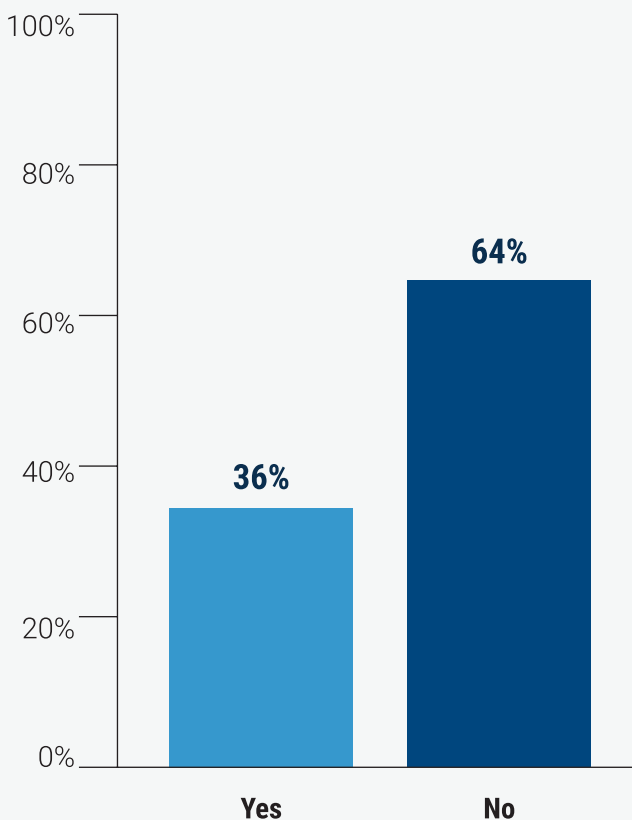


Not only does widespread smartphone use for consumer research complicate the journey, it adds even more complexity to the overall picture when individuals make a purchase from a smartphone while physically at a brick and mortar store. Approximately 14% of respondents admitted to making a purchase on their phone while shopping at a store. The implication here is clear: armed with smartphones, a consumer is never truly offline.

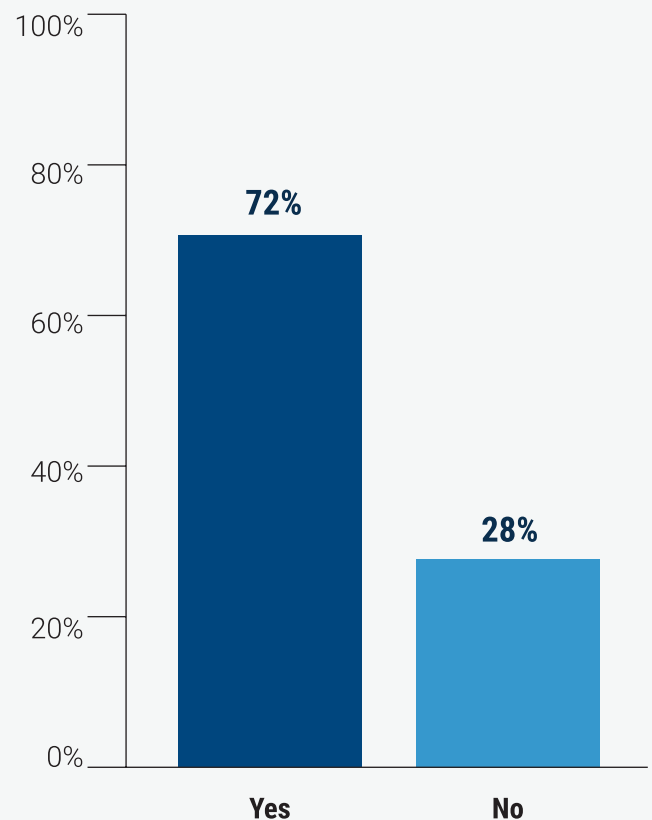
The Amazon effect and strong speciality representation.

When discussing purchases in the last 12 months we see that the largest portion of shoppers have purchased from a specialty retail store. This is followed by chain stores and internet-only specialty retailers. Focusing on Amazon specifically, we see that approximately 36% of our respondents said that they have made a snow sports purchase on Amazon.com.

Consumers Who Purchased Snow Sports Gear From Amazon in the Last 12 Months



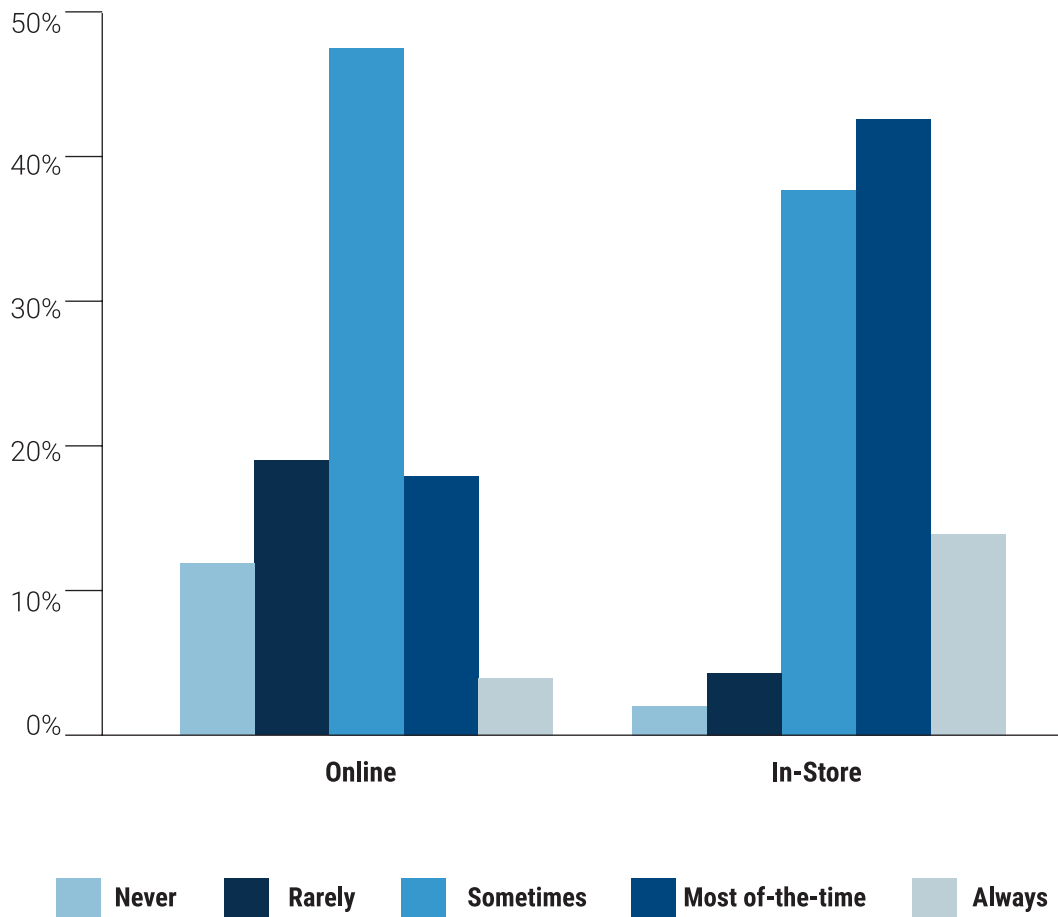
Consumers Who Purchased From a Specialty Store in the Last 12 Months



Specialty stores are far from dying out. When combining the online and brick and mortar variants, we see that more than 72% of individuals reported as having made a snow sports purchase from a specialty store.

How Often Consumers Purchase by Channel

Online vs In-Store



Purchase channels aren't set in stone.

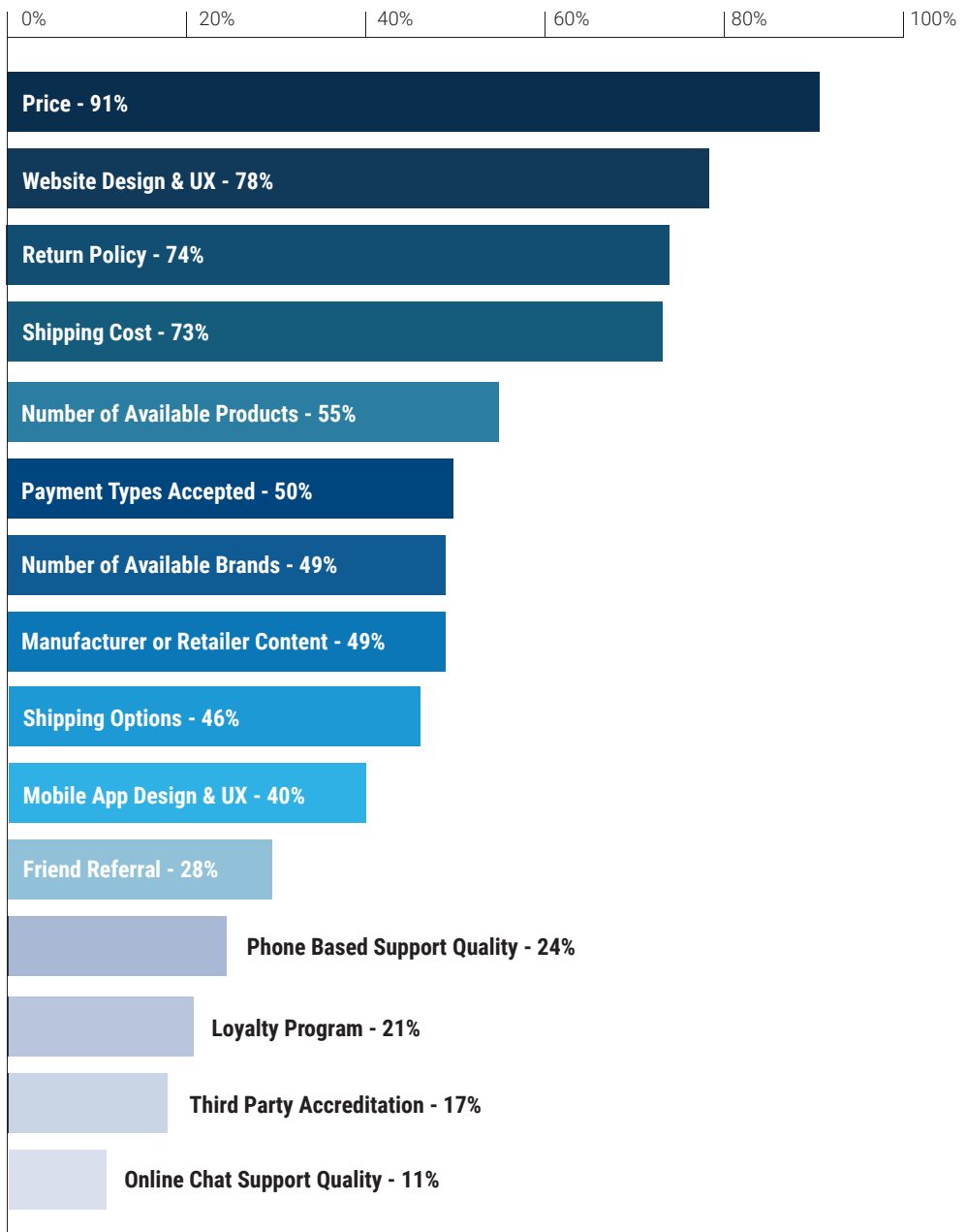
Similar to the trends that were present at the research level, it is clear that consumers show preference for both the online and in-store channels. Very few consumers swore off one channel, with the majority of respondents saying that they "sometimes" purchased online and offline. There was a higher preference among in-store purchases to respond that they purchased from the store "most of the time"

What drives preference for websites?

Within primary channel (online / in-store) the criteria for choosing a store provides incredible insight into the drivers for the consumer. As expected, price is the most important factor in website selection; however, the next choices are less obvious. Return policy, shipping costs, website ease of use and user ratings/reviews all showed very strong numbers. The following chart showcases the most important factors for choosing a website, by noting the respondents who rated the respective category as “very important” or “extremely important.”

Most Important Factors for Choosing an Online Store

Consumers who responded “very important” or “extremely important”

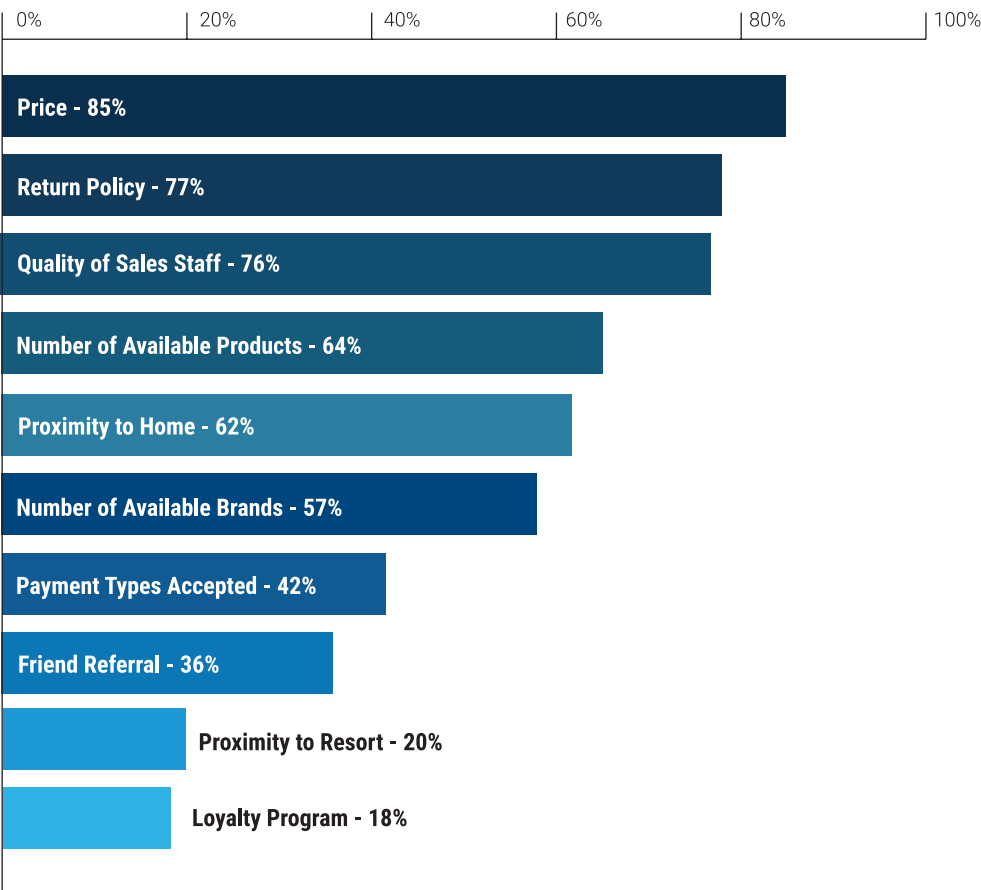


Driving factors for store preference:

Comparing online results to their in-store counterparts, we observe a continued primacy of price concerns as well as return policy. Quality of sales and service staff both were listed as top reasons for choosing a brick and mortar store. The strong preference for these attributes is mirrored by our previous results, showing that consumers valued sales staff input and customer service while shopping in store. The following chart showcases the most important factors for choosing a brick and mortar location, by noting the respondents who rated the respective category as “very important” or “extremely important.”

Most Important Factors for Choosing a Brick & Mortar Store

Consumers who responded “very important” or “extremely important”

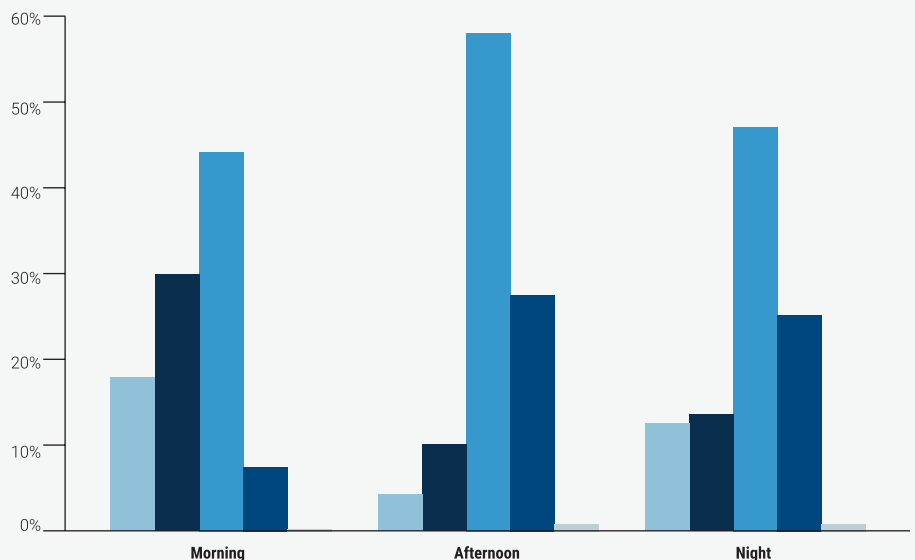


When are purchases being made?

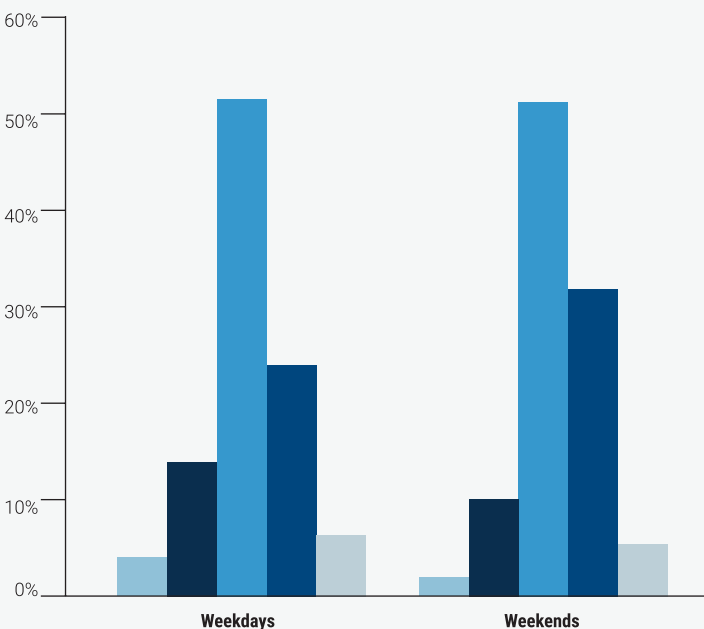
The temporal effect on purchases did not seem to have the strong trends seen in research. There was a slight preference toward weekend transactions versus weekday. With regard to time of day, nighttime showed the strongest response, followed by afternoon, and finally morning. However, for all of the temporal effects, the most frequent response was “sometimes”. This indicates that the majority of shoppers did not prefer a specific time of day or day of the week to shop.

When Consumers Are Typically Purchasing Products

Time-of-Day



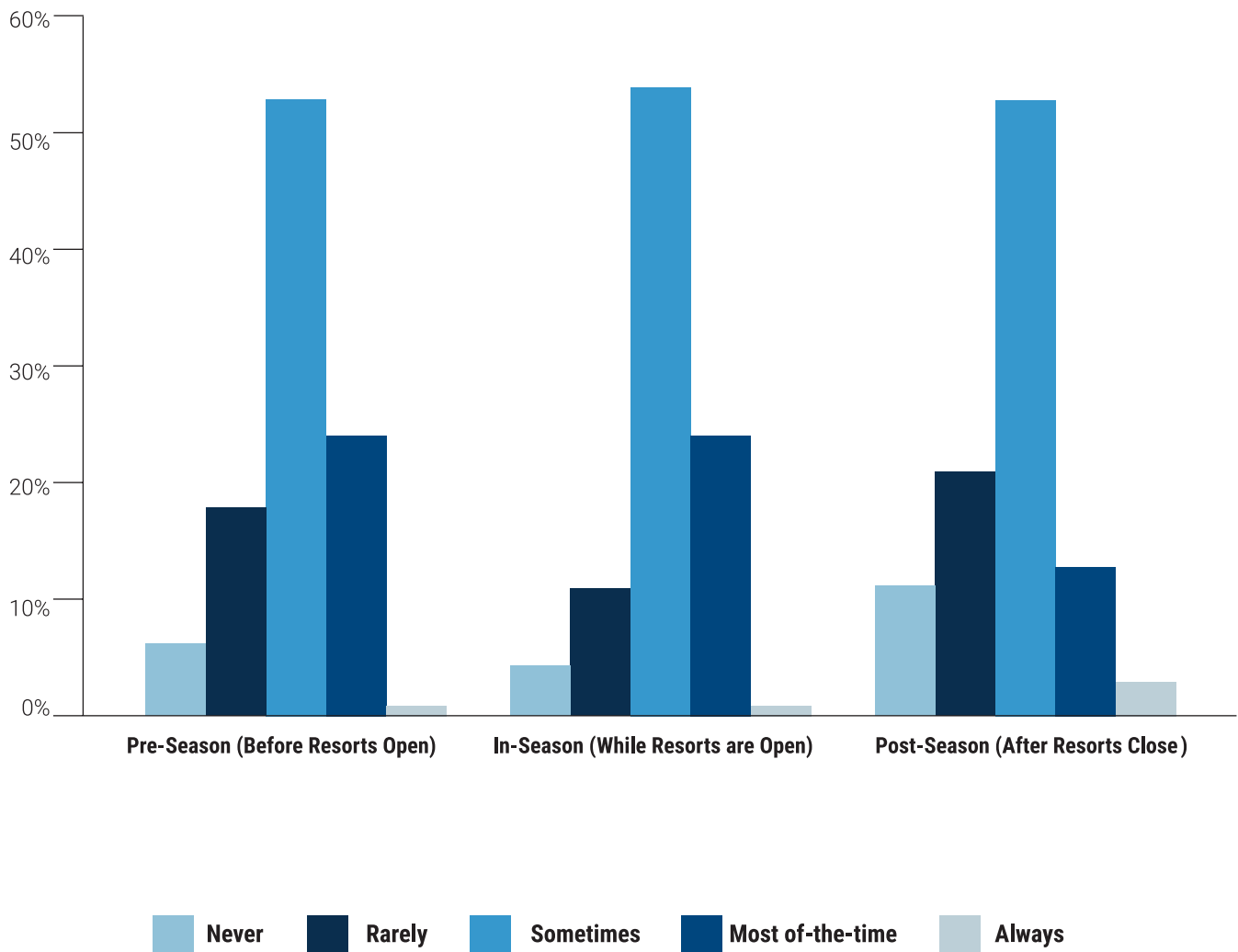
Never Rarely Sometimes Most of-the-time Always



When Consumers Are Typically Purchasing Products

Day-of-Week

How Often Consumers Purchase Based on Season



**It's that time
the season.**

Seasonal factors have a large influence on purchases of snow sports gear. There is a clear aversion to purchasing these items in post-season. Consumers responded similarly to purchasing both in-season, or during the pre-season. Our discipline specific studies will dive into the different purchase behaviors that are exhibited by consumers who purchase at different points of the season.



Image Courtesy: Dakine

SECTION 4:

Use

"In the digital age, a consumer's use and subsequent opinion about a product has more widespread influence than ever before."

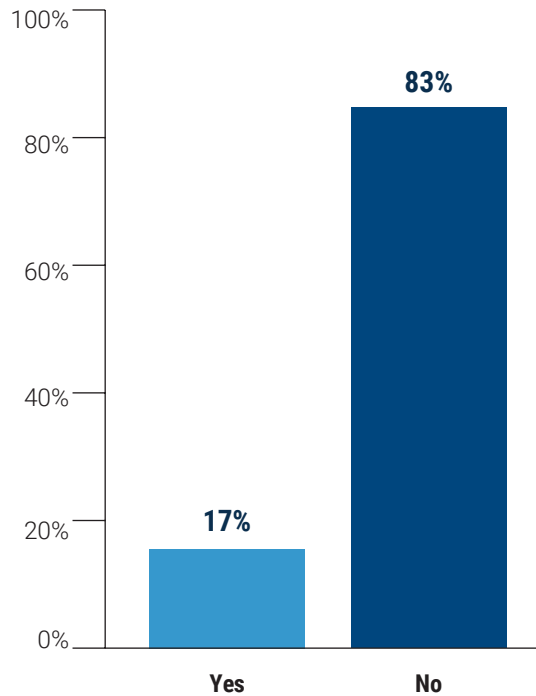
– Ryan Coombs, *Research Manager*

Once the purchase is complete, consumers continue to interact with their current and previous products directly. Whether it is the repurposing of the old items, or reviewing of the new, continued engagement with the consumer is crucial. As use patterns vary greatly by sport, the Use phase will be covered in depth by our discipline specific studies. For the purposes of this study we are interested in understanding generally what happens when the purchase is complete. At this time consumers can have continued impact on the brand through reviews. They may purchase other items, or eventually repurchase the item they have just bought. Regardless of the path they take, we should strive to engage consumers during the Use phase.

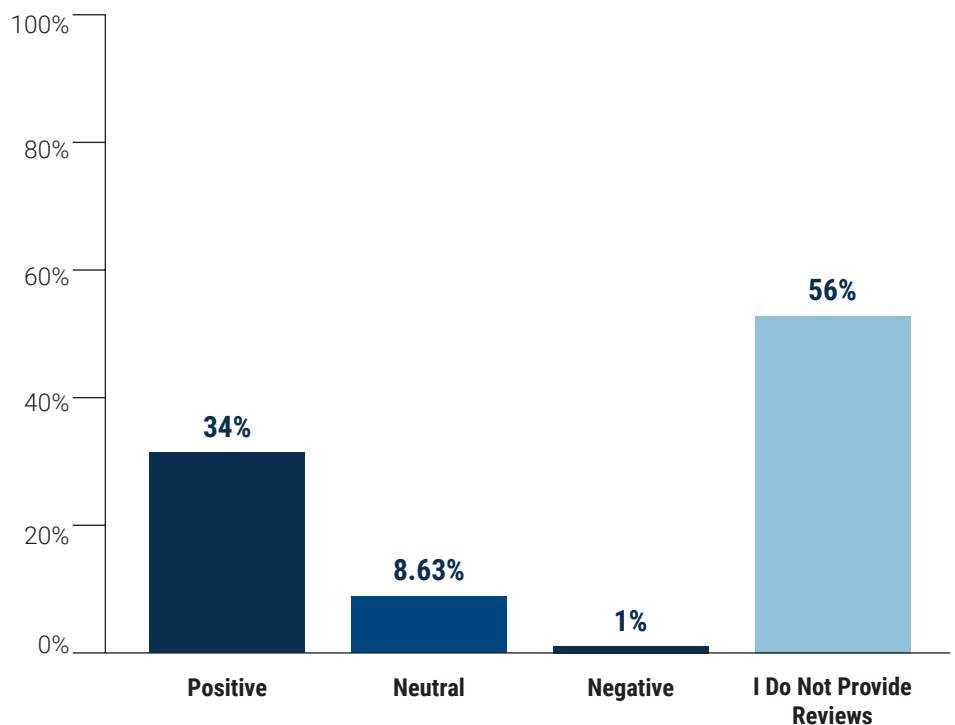
Positive Consumers

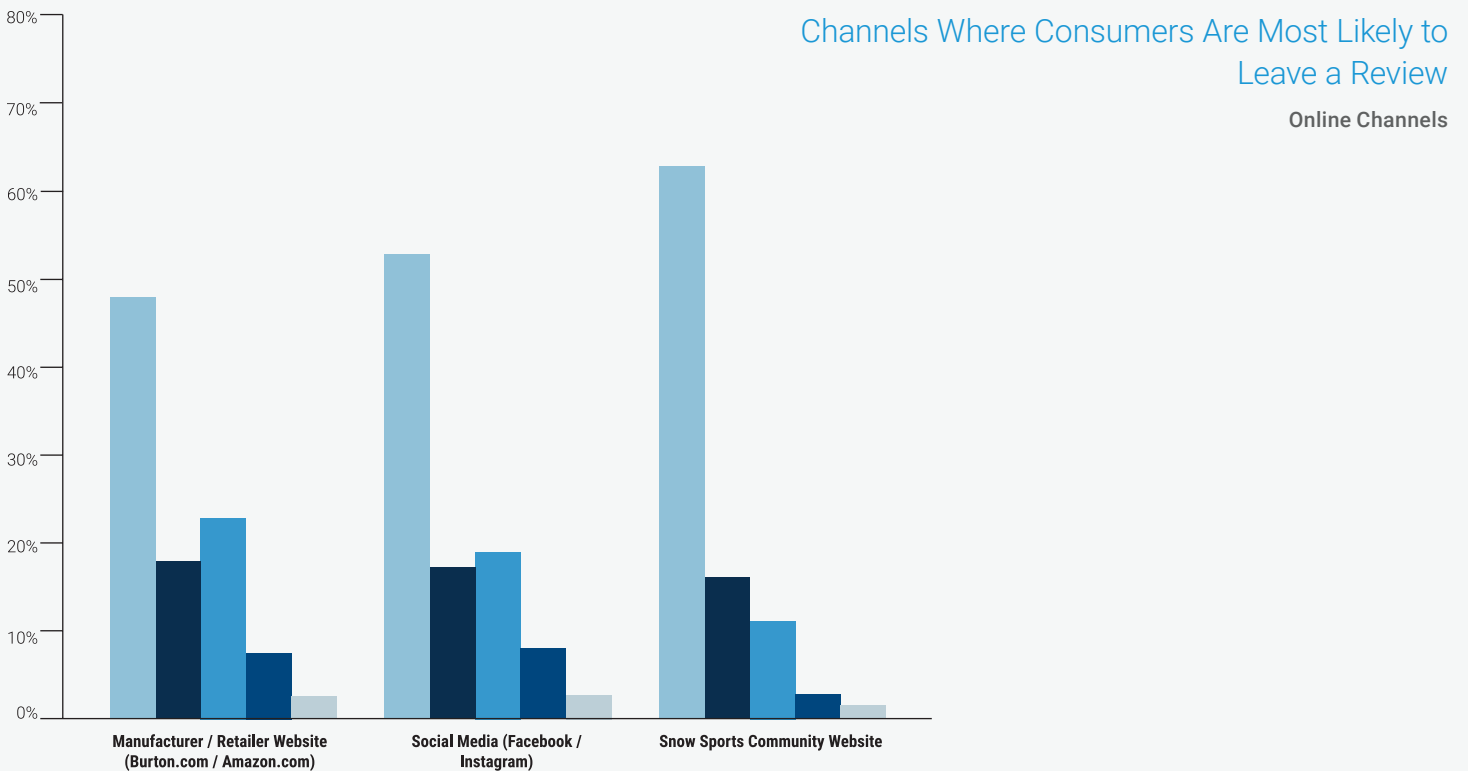
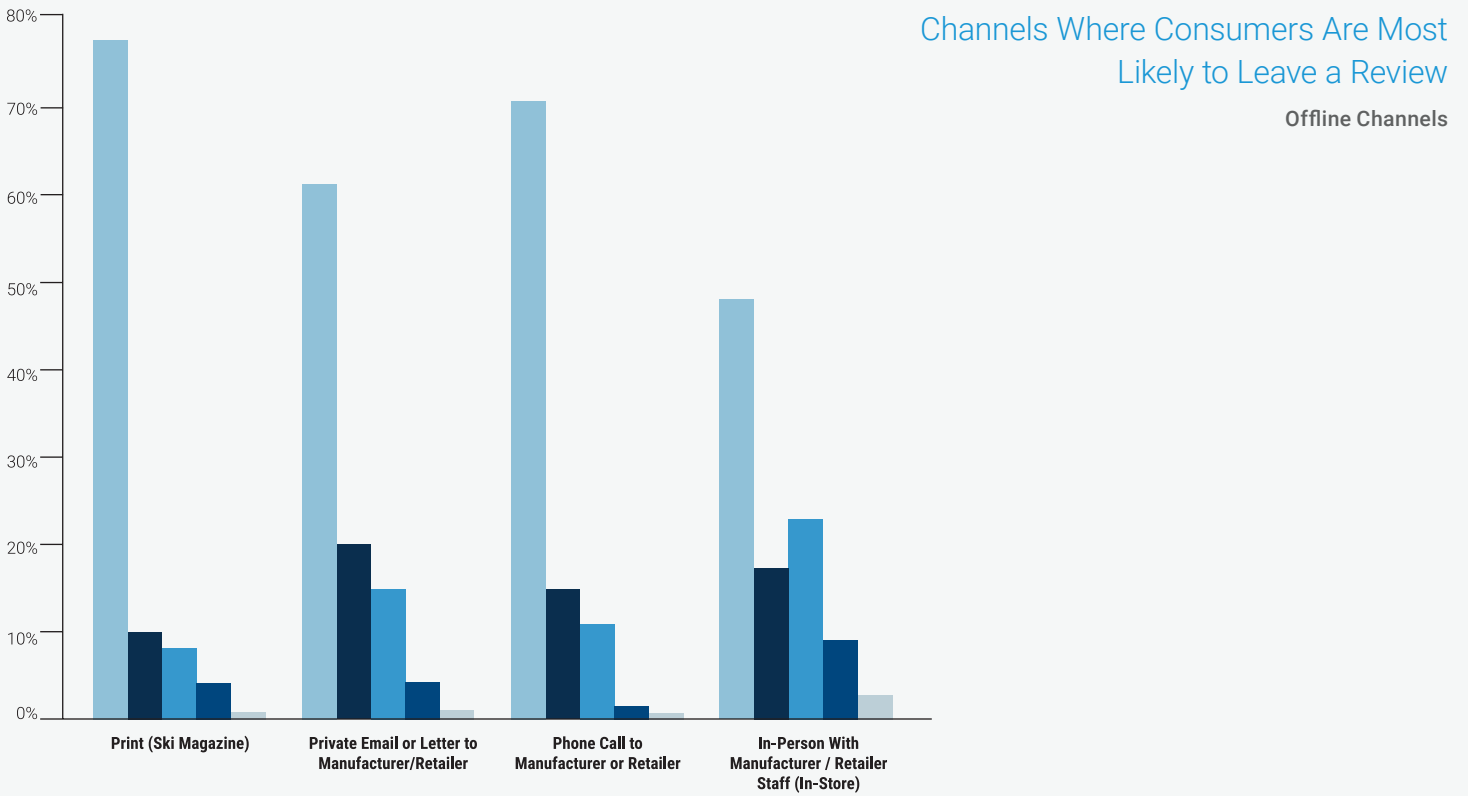
Over 83% of respondents said that they have not provided reviews for snow sports products in the past. Interestingly enough, when thinking about their most recent review for a product, the majority of the responses were positive or neutral. Less than one percent of users talked about their last review being negative. There are many things that can drive this prevalence of positive reviews. Some researchers feel that companies soliciting feedback and the movement of feedback channels to a less anonymous nature are contributing factors to the increasing prevalence of positive reviews. Knowing the importance of written reviews in the research process, it is important we understand both “why” and “how” reviews are made.

Percentage of Consumers Who Reported as Providing a Snow Gear Review in the Past 12 Months



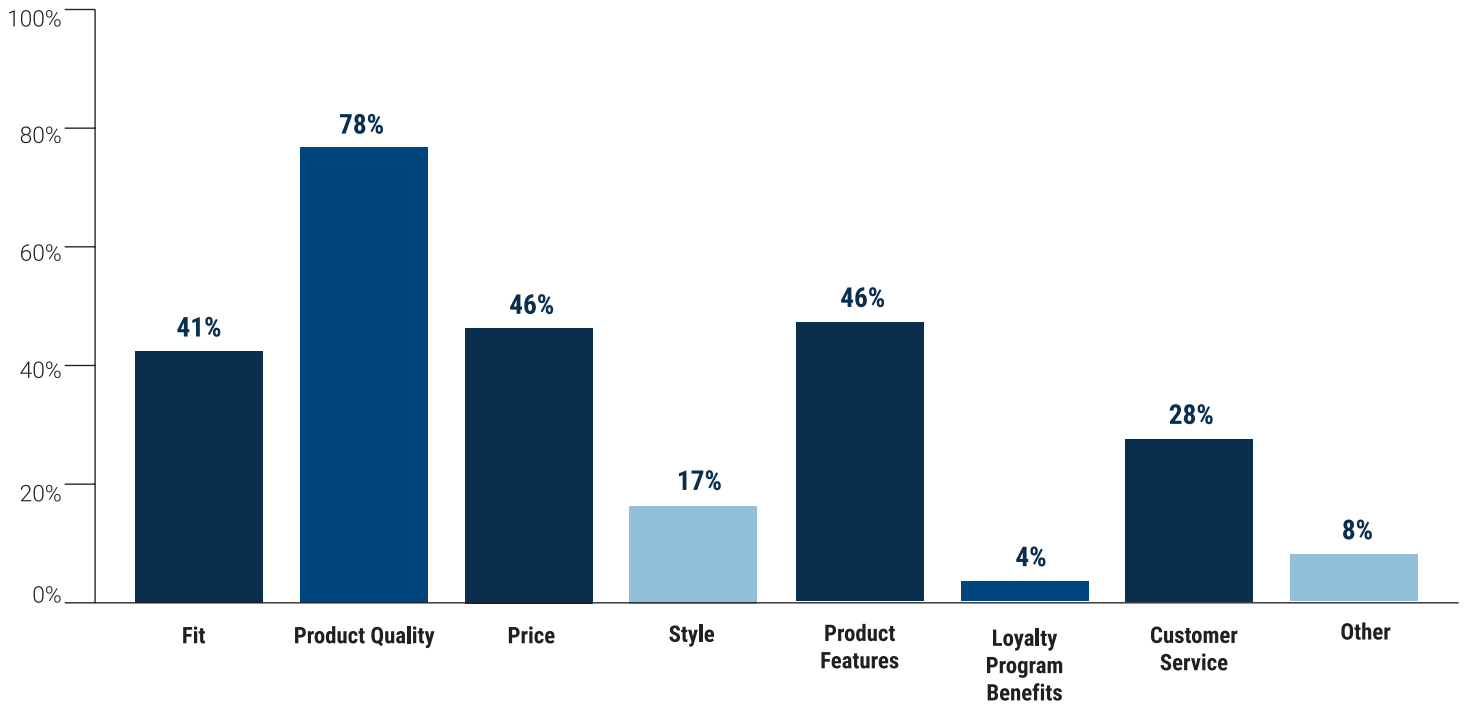
How Consumers Categorize Their Most Recent Review





Never
 Rarely
 Sometimes
 Most of the-time
 Always

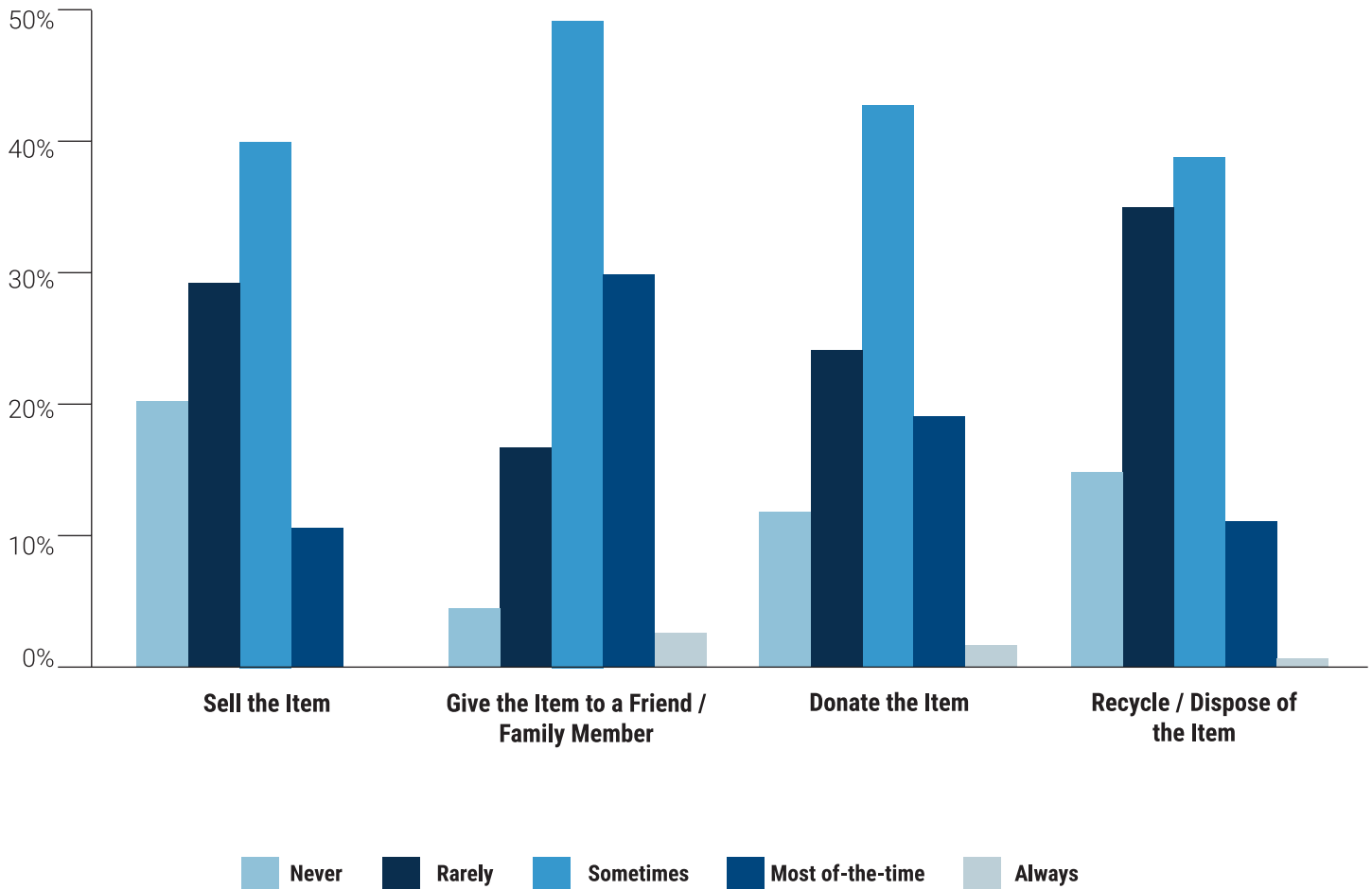
After Purchase, Consumers Are Most Likely to Comment to Others About:



**Reviews that
matter.**

By far, the primary concern that individuals are likely to provide feedback on is product quality. After product quality we see strong showings from price, product features, and fit.

How Snow Sports Gear Gets Replaced



Gone, not forgotten.

The gear that is being replaced sees a variety of fates. Our respondents are most likely to give the item to a friend/ family member or donate it. These categories are not far ahead of the lower represented categories of “selling the item” or “recycle/disposing of the

item”. As the item is most likely going to be passed on to another user, we plan on diving into this interaction more in our discipline specific studies. If these second hand users are leaving reviews about the items, there is exposure (and opportunity) around these items.



About Us

Supporting the Snowsports Industry Since 1954

SIA is the non-profit, member-owned trade association representing suppliers of consumer snowsports with constituents in the retail, rep and resort communities. We're helping our members succeed by providing insightful research, innovative education and growing participation.

We're the voice of the snow sports industry and our community — continually educating our members, providing them with research, knowledge, tools and opportunities to grow their businesses.

Just as important, we're committed to increasing participation, growing our vibrant community and building the future of our sports.

Learn more about SIA at www.snowsports.org