

# Back-to-Class Across Generations



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**As parents and students continue to spend at record levels in preparation for the first day of school, NRF and GfK Consumer Life partnered to share insights into the minds and spending habits of the two core groups making up back-to-class shoppers.**

Back-to-class shopping is starting earlier than ever before — many consumers are beginning to think about the upcoming school year when the last has barely come to a close. And it continues to be a significant spending season for both consumers and retailers. NRF's latest data shows that combined spending on back-to-school and college could reach a record \$136 billion.

This year, two of the most talked-about generations are playing a critical role in the season: millennials as they shop for their own kids, and Gen Z as they fully embrace the college experience after the pandemic.

# Parents of Gen Alpha and back-to-school shopping

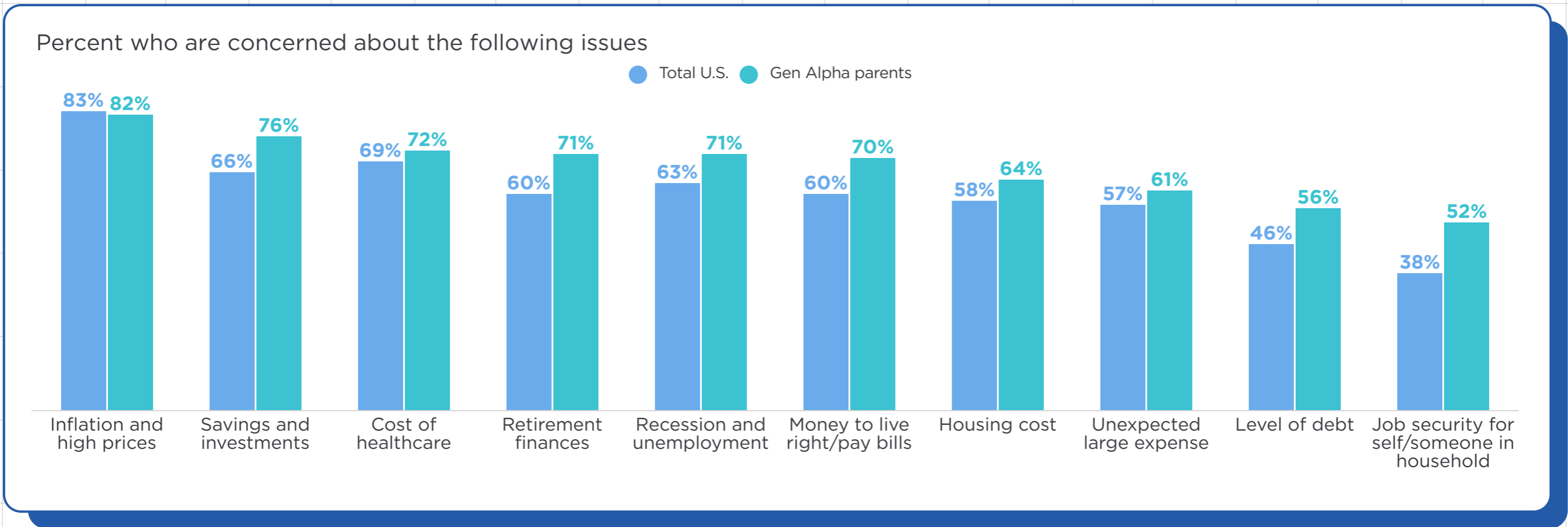
Generation Alpha is the newest generation on the horizon. Generally understood to have been born after 2010, most of Gen Alpha is still too young to be surveyed, so we took a look at how their parents think, act and shop for clues about this young generation's future as consumers.

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# Parents of Gen Alpha are conscious not only of their personal concerns, but also the world around them.

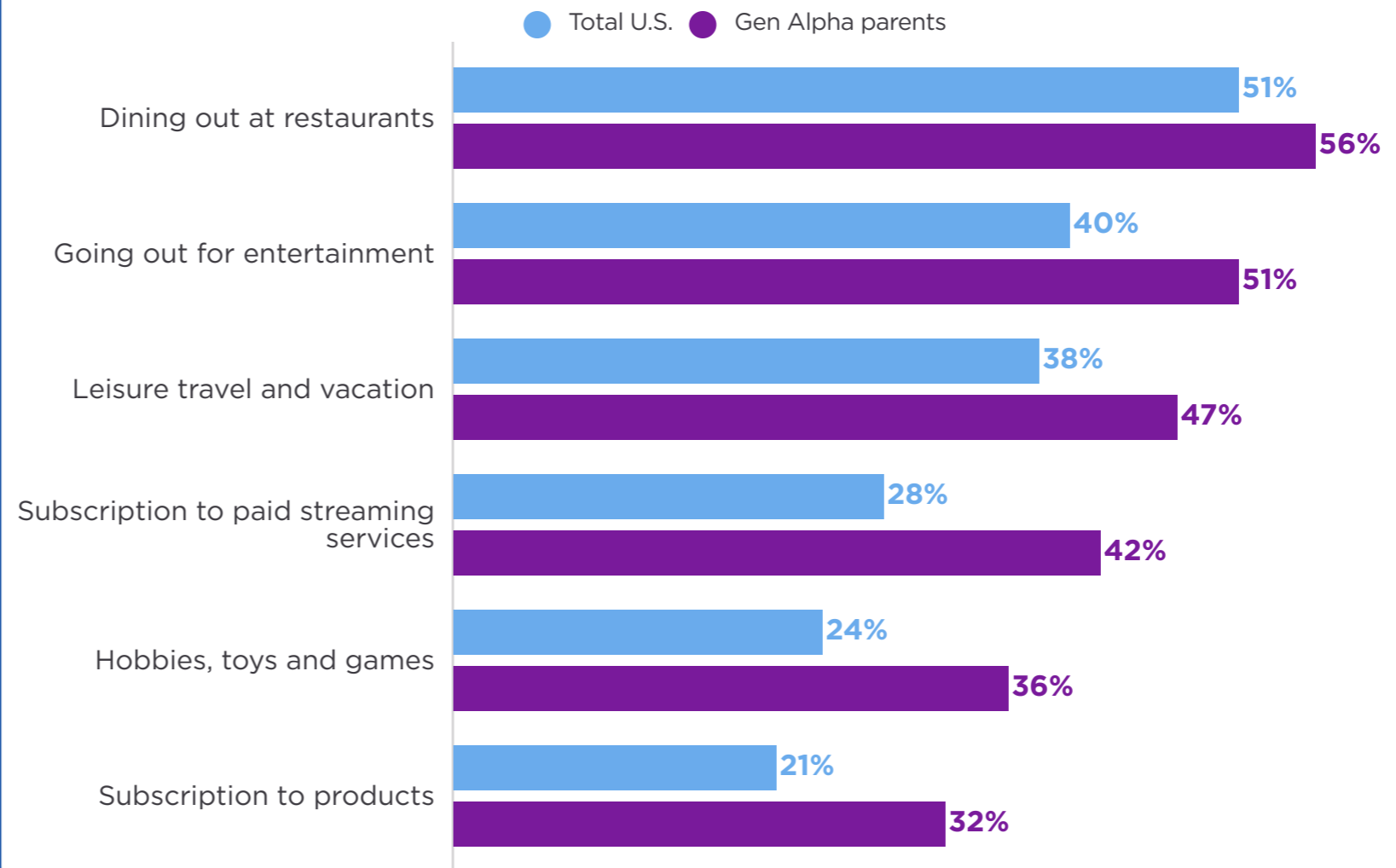
Gen Alpha's parents are more likely than the average American to be concerned about personal issues such as housing costs and credit ratings, as well as larger matters relating to the country and economy. They have more concerns relating to recessionary fears and are more likely to be concerned about economic polarization than the average American.



## Concerns around personal finance and the broader economy lead to cost-saving measures.

Because of these concerns around personal finances and the broader U.S. economy, parents of Gen Alpha have adopted a wide variety of cost-saving measures in the past year in greater numbers than the average American. They are also more likely to be cutting back in core discretionary areas such as entertainment, paid streaming service subscriptions, out-of-home entertainment, product subscriptions and toys and games.

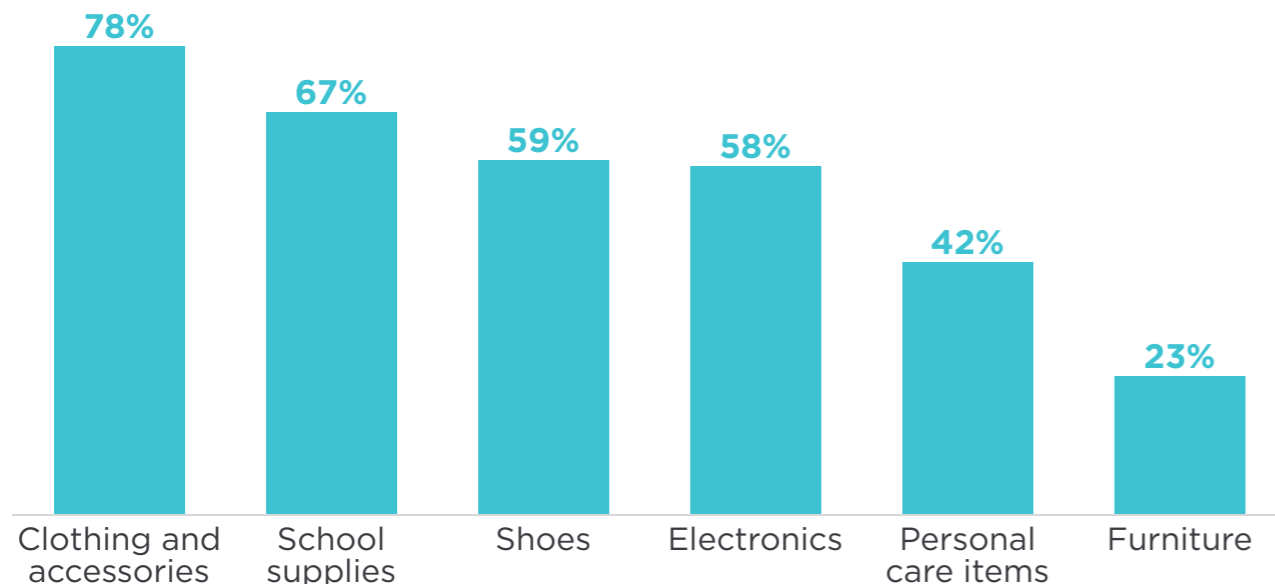
Categories in which consumers are cutting costs



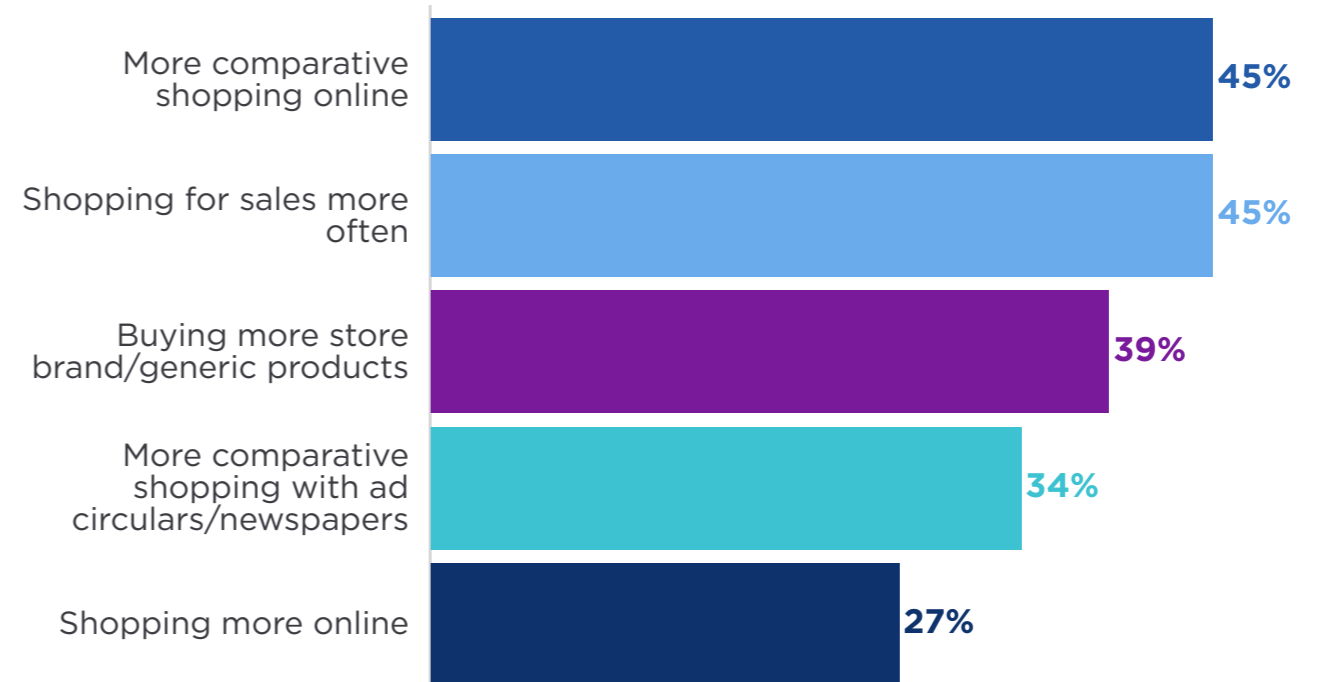
## Parents also adopt price-conscious back-to-school shopping habits.

As parents plan for the upcoming school year, 67% are seeing higher prices when browsing for new clothes, school supplies and more. Gen Alpha is seeing their parents react to these broader economic concerns by adopting more cost-saving measures such as shopping around for the best price or switching to more affordable brands or destinations.

Items back-to-school shoppers expect to see higher prices on



"How will the state of the U.S. economy impact your back-to-class purchases?"



**Although these parents maintain concerns around higher prices, personal matters and the world at large, they make technology a priority.**

**87%**

of Gen Alpha parents report their children have at least one tablet, smartphone, video game console or TV of their own.

**62%**

of Gen Alpha parents say they "wait to buy new tech until proven" compared with 69% of the U.S. population, waiting less time than the general public to purchase the newest technology.

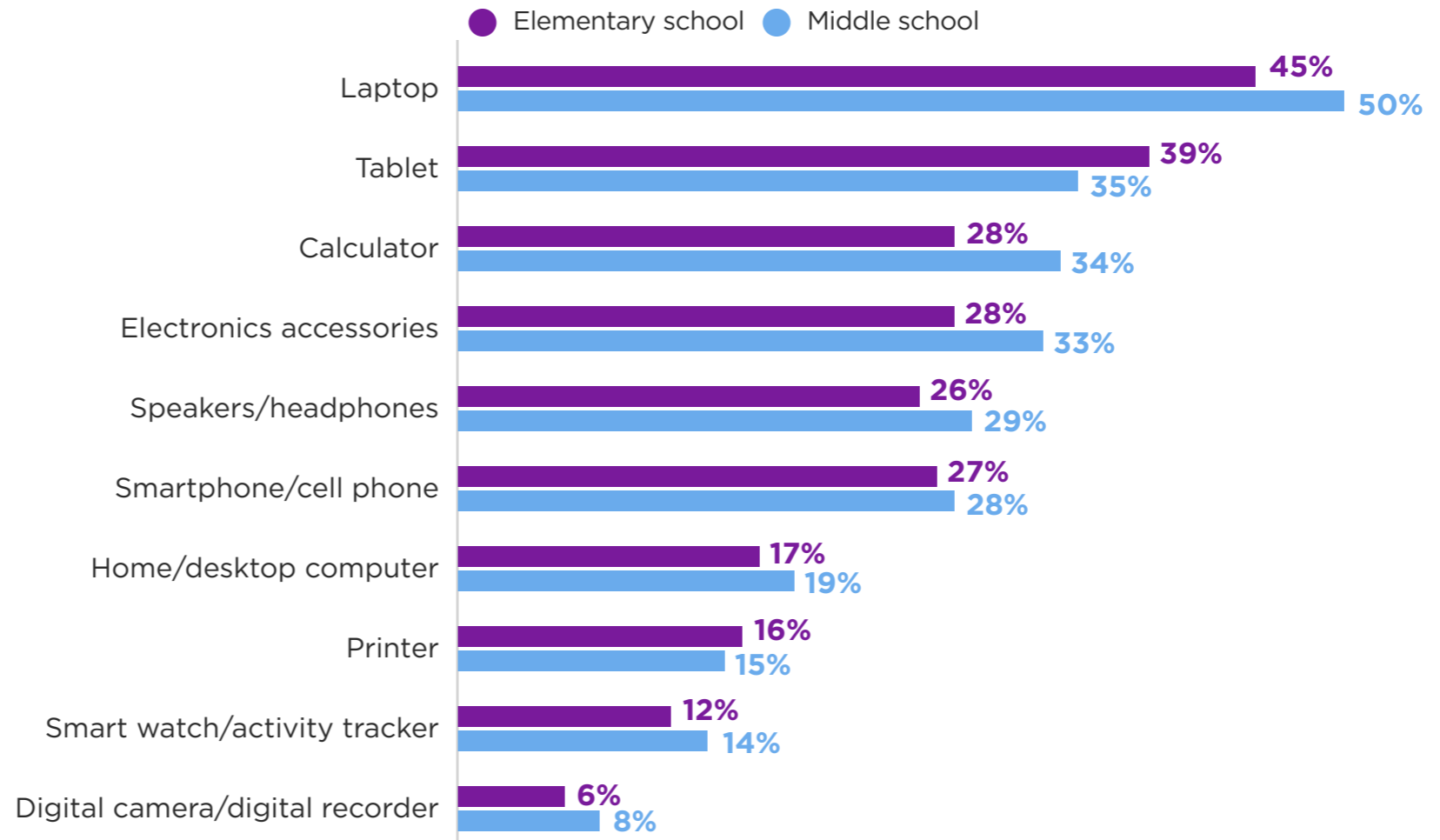
**43%**

of Gen Alpha parents say "having the latest technology" is an indication of status, compared with 37% of the U.S. population at large.

## Technology is becoming a back-to-school essential for many families.

69% of all back-to-school shoppers are planning to purchase electronics for their kids to use in the upcoming school year. This goes up to 77% among parents of middle schoolers. However, even parents of younger children are purchasing items like laptops, tablets and smartphones for their students.

Types of electronics parents plan to purchase for back-to-school (among those purchasing electronics)





## Back-to-college shopping

While Gen Alpha is still gearing up for elementary and middle school, a slightly older cohort is preparing for a very different milestone: the first day of college.



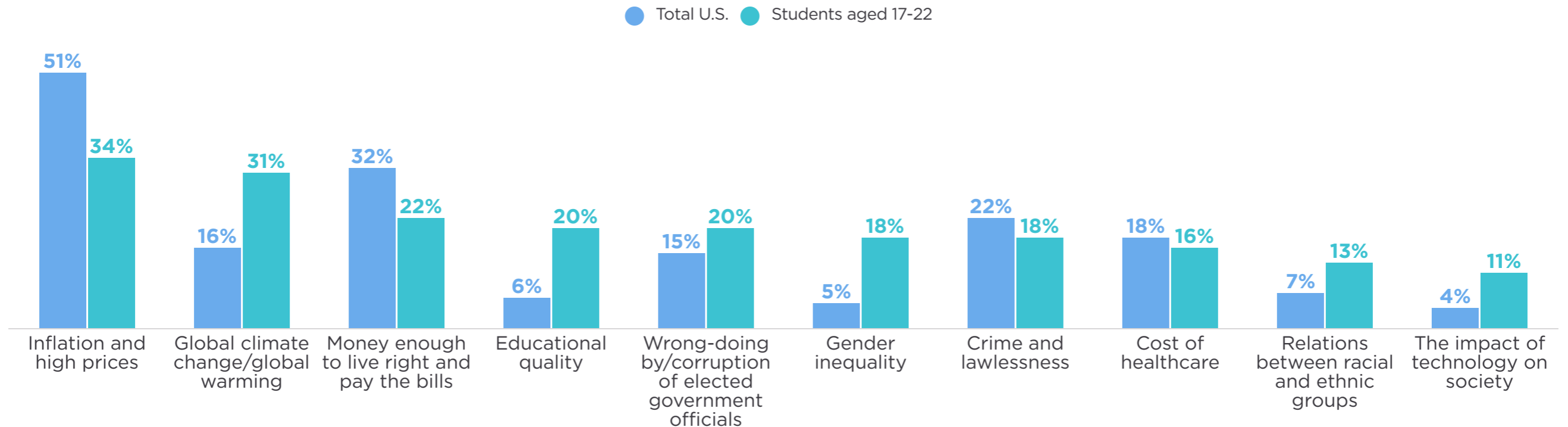
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Federation

## College students express lower levels of concern around economic issues.

Although inflation and higher prices are a top priority for college students, these consumers are still much less likely to say it is a concern compared with the general population. Their focus is more likely to be on social issues like climate change and educational quality rather than economic concerns like recessions, economic inequality and the future of retirement funds.

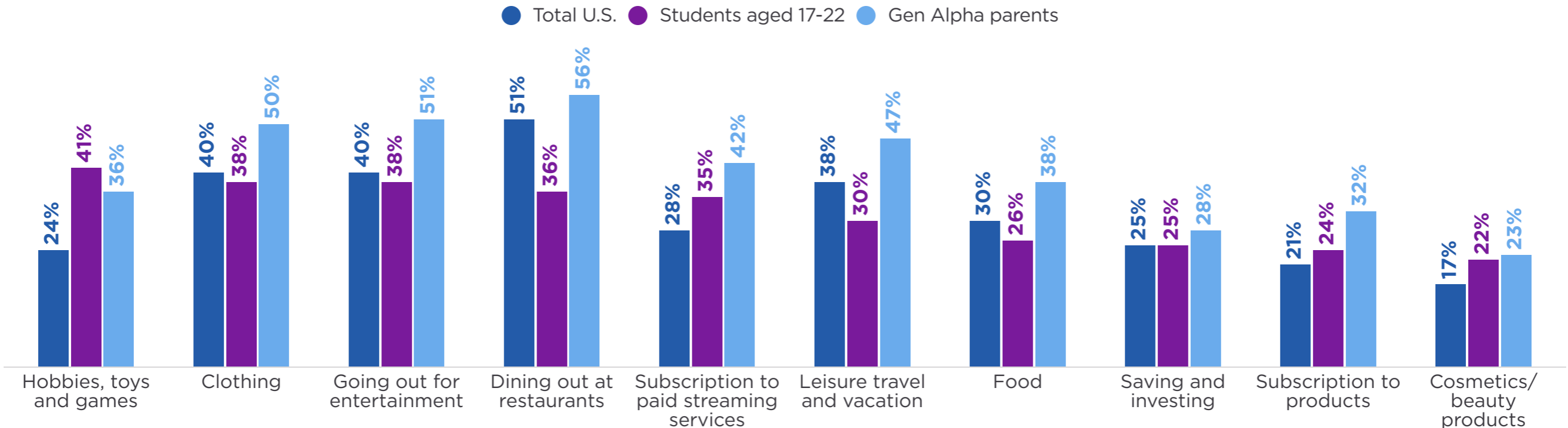
Top 10 societal concerns (from a list of 24)



## Unlike parents of Gen Alpha, college students are not cutting back on spending to keep up with their shopping habits.

College students are less likely to say they are cutting back on many major spending categories when compared with Gen Alpha's parents or even the general population. However, there are a few categories where they are pulling back at higher rates than the average American, including in hobbies, streaming services and subscriptions, and cosmetics.

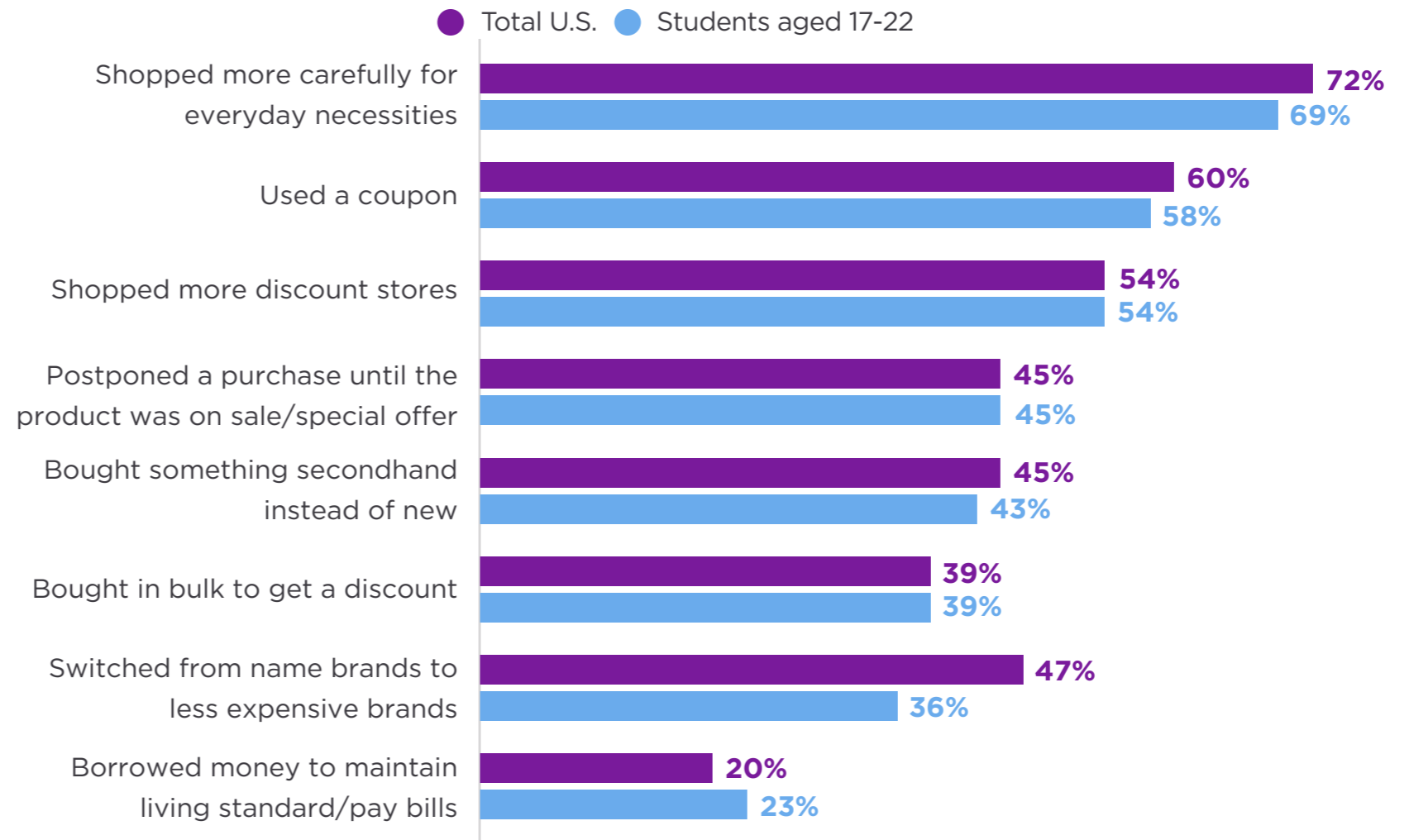
Categories in which consumers are cutting costs



# College students are just as price-savvy as the general public.

Although college students are less likely to cut back on spending, these shoppers are implementing similar price-conscious behaviors as the general population, with the exception of being less likely to switch from name brands to less expensive brands and opting to borrow money to maintain their standard of living or pay bills more often.

Cost-saving measures taken in the past year



## College students want the full retail experience and are committed to making shopping fun.

College students do what they can to make shopping an experience to be enjoyed rather than a necessary task. These consumers are more likely to do their research on what they're purchasing and talk to friends about potential purchases. Not only do they care deeply about others' opinions, they are also more likely to gravitate toward novel or fun products even for everyday purchases. College students are also more likely to prioritize novelty and fun when shopping, even in everyday products, and make sure their purchases reflect their individuality.

Difference in sentiments ranking between students aged 17-22 and general population based on a list of 43 attitudinal statements

Versus total population

"I am interested in other people's opinions about what products and services to buy."	↑ 20 ranks
"I am always looking for novelty and fun, even in everyday products."	↑ 8 ranks
"My individuality is reflected in how I look and what I buy."	↑ 6 ranks
"I spend quite a lot of time researching brands before making a major purchase."	↑ 3 ranks



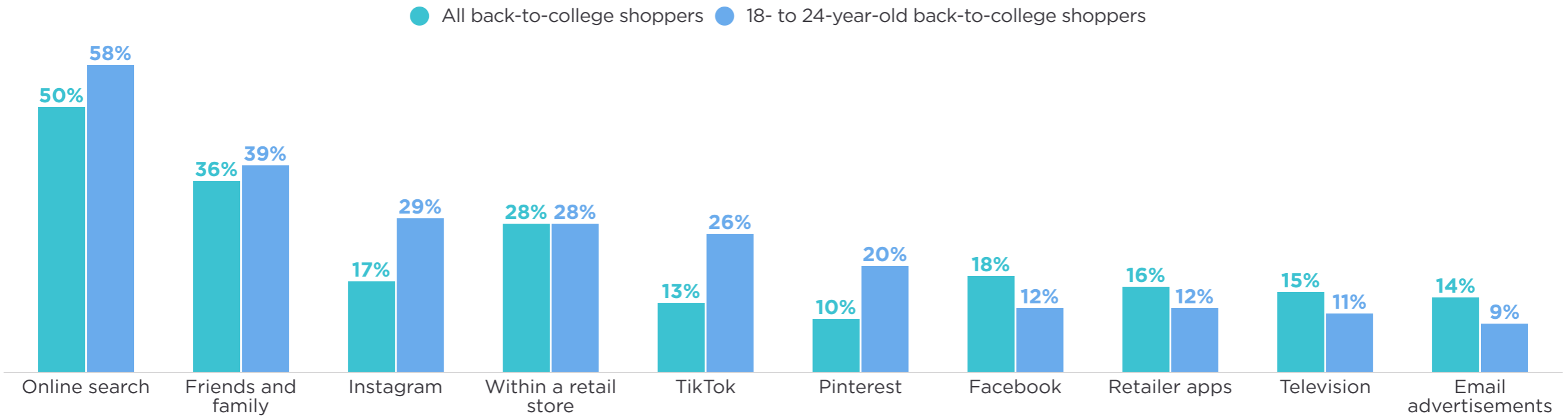
"Gen Z, many of whom are college students, have re-entered physical stores in droves and want shopping to be an enjoyable activity, with their purchases much more likely to be inspired by their peers and social media influencers."

— **Rachel Bonsignore**,  
Vice President, GfK

## Back-to-college shopping inspiration is a social experience.

Unsurprisingly, social media plays a large role in influencing Gen Z's back-to-college shopping and for many may play a central role in getting feedback from their peers. However, online search remains the primary source of inspiration for most college students.

Sources of back-to-college shopping inspiration among 18- to 24-year-olds



To learn more about the back-to-class season, visit NRF's [back-to-school headquarters](#).

For more insights from GfK Consumer Life, visit [GfK.com](#).

## National Retail Federation



The National Retail Federation passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail succeed. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation's largest private-sector employer, contributing \$3.9 trillion to annual GDP and supporting one in four U.S. jobs — 52 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies.

## GfK. Growth from Knowledge.



For over 89 years, we have earned the trust of our clients around the world by solving critical questions in their decision-making process. We fuel their growth by providing a complete understanding of their consumers' buying behavior, and the dynamics impacting their markets, brands and media trends. In 2023, GfK combined with NIQ, bringing together two industry leaders with unparalleled global reach. With a holistic retail read and the most comprehensive consumer insights - delivered with advanced analytics through state-of-the-art platforms - GfK drives "Growth from Knowledge".