Carbon Arc

THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE AI ECONOMY

2026 Holiday Shopping Preview: Early-Season Spend and Attention

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Beauty makes gains as discretionary retail spend declines in the early holiday season

- **Discretionary retail card spend grew 1.9% Y/Y from October 3–November 13,** but fell Y/Y over the first two weeks of November. Card transactions rose slightly, but ticket and store visits fell.
- **Electronics' share of in-store baskets at mass merchandisers fell 18% Y/Y,** vs. 24% growth for Party, Gifts & Cards and 7% growth for both Toys and Sporting Goods.
- **Of the top 10 categories for Amazon US sales, Beauty & Personal Care led spend growth Y/Y** in both the last four weeks of October and the first week of November. Beauty & Cosmetics Retail card spend also grew 11.4% Y/Y.
- **Christmas music and movie streaming has grown at or just behind the seasonal growth pace of 2025,** suggesting the lack of momentum in spend is not due to a lack of attention.
- **In the first two weeks of November, normalized web traffic grew 29% or more at Nordstrom Rack, Temu, and Shein** but declined 30% or more at Aritzia, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Lululemon. Gen Z card spend grew at resale and off-price platforms but fell at fast-fashion retailers.
- **US TikTok Shop revenue grew 83% Y/Y from November 1–18** as men's and women's apparel both gained share at the expense of Beauty & Personal Care. Read alongside Gen Z card spend, apparel sales are shifting to creator-led and resale platforms while beauty spend moves in-store.

SECTION 01

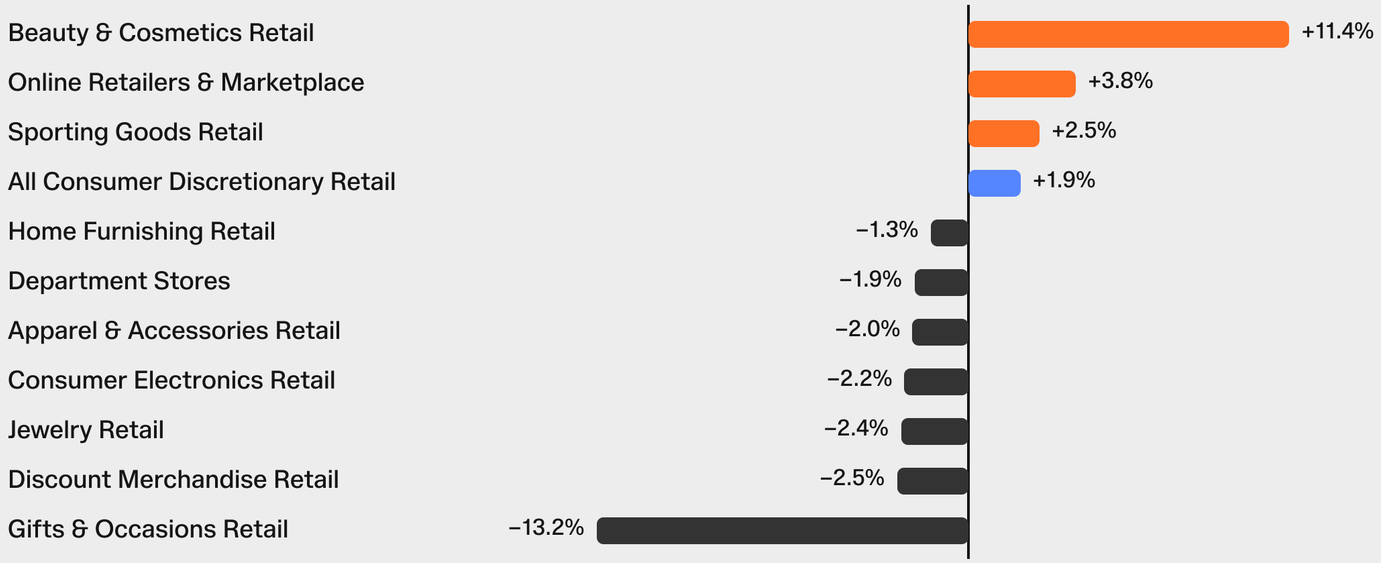
Early-season consumer activity and sentiment

Card spend, trips and tickets, mass merchandiser receipts, Amazon spend, consumer sentiment, and Christmas listening and streaming

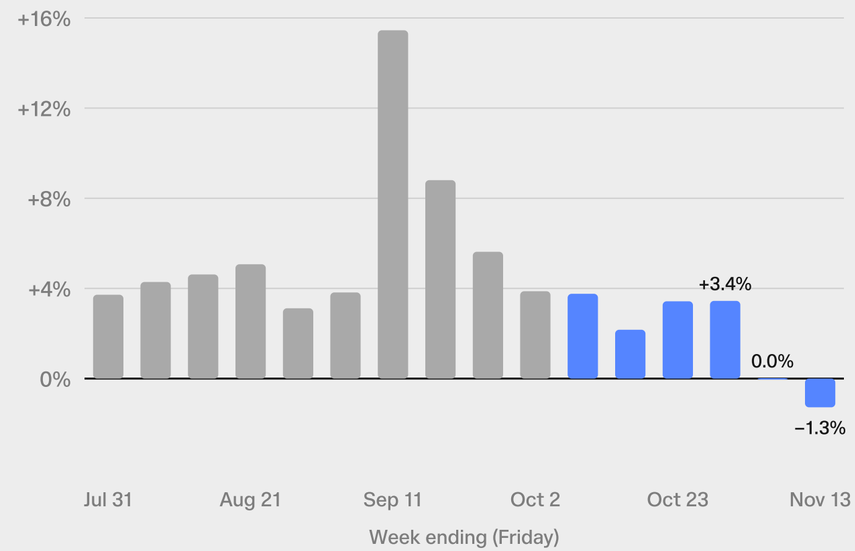
Beauty & Cosmetics Retail outpaces consumer discretionary spend

Card spend at Beauty & Cosmetics Retail grew 11.4% Y/Y from October 3 to November 13, three times the next-highest-growing category. Consumer discretionary retail spend grew only 1.9%, below the rate of inflation, and fell Y/Y in the first two weeks of November after consistent growth in the late summer and early fall.

Card spend Y/Y by retail category, Oct 3–Nov 13, 2026 vs. Oct 4–Nov 14, 2025



All Consumer Discretionary Retail card spend Y/Y by week, Aug–Nov 2026



Blue bars cover the six weeks in the chart at left.

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Source: Carbon Arc Credit Card – US Complete Panel – CA0056

More trips, smaller tickets: card transactions rose 2.9% Y/Y as the average ticket fell 1.0%, while foot traffic fell

Card transactions grew faster than spend in most categories as discretionary retail tickets shrank Y/Y. Department stores had 5.4% more card transactions Y/Y, but tickets were 7.0% smaller and foot traffic fell 5.8%. Visits, card transactions, and ticket all grew Y/Y at Beauty & Cosmetics Retail.

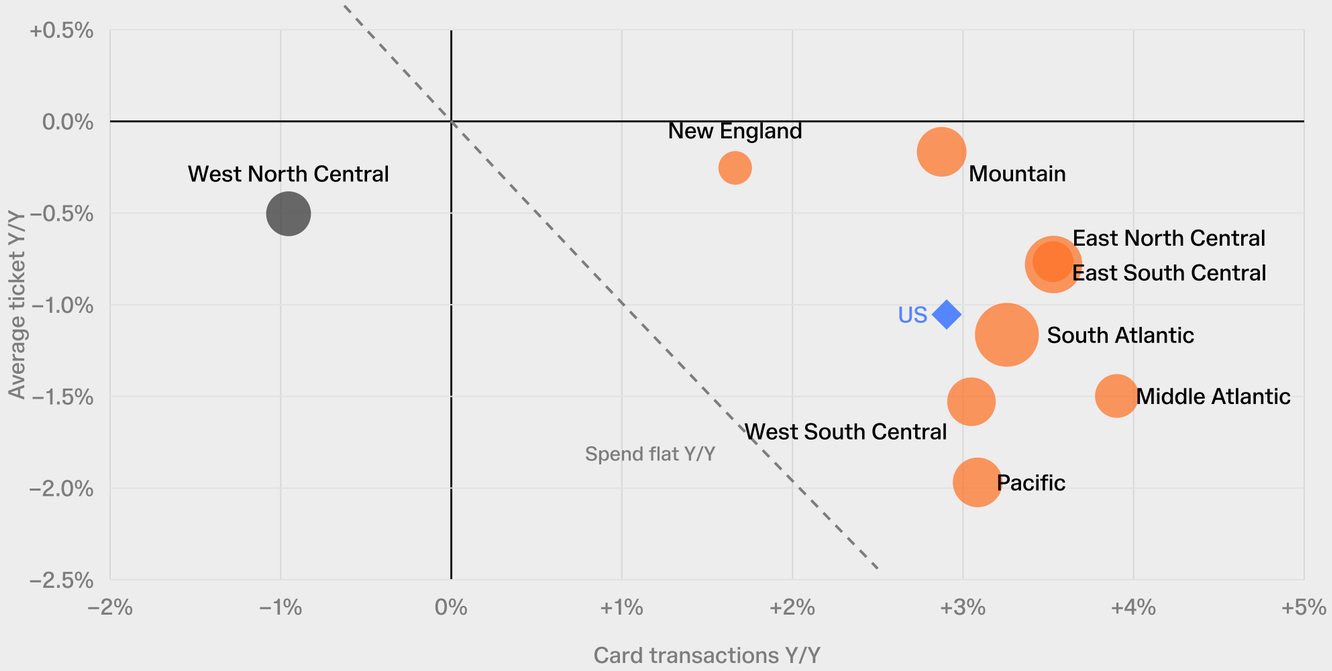
Card spend, transactions, ticket, and store visits Y/Y, Oct 3–Nov 13, 2026 vs. Oct 4–Nov 14, 2025

RETAIL CATEGORY	CARD SPEND	TRANSACTIONS	AVERAGE TICKET	STORE VISITS (FOOT TRAFFIC)
Beauty & Cosmetics Retail	+11.4%	+7.5%	+3.6%	+0.5%
Online Retailers & Marketplace	+3.8%	+8.5%	–4.3%	–
Sporting Goods Retail	+2.5%	+6.9%	–4.1%	–5.1%
All Consumer Discretionary Retail	+1.9%	+2.9%	–1.0%	–3.0%
Home Furnishing Retail	–1.3%	–2.4%	+1.1%	–3.6%
Department Stores	–1.9%	+5.4%	–7.0%	–5.8%
Apparel & Accessories Retail	–2.0%	–5.0%	+3.2%	–2.4%
Consumer Electronics Retail	–2.2%	+0.3%	–2.6%	–2.7%
Jewelry Retail	–2.4%	–13.0%	+12.3%	+0.4%
Discount Merchandise Retail	–2.5%	–1.9%	–0.6%	–2.8%
Gifts & Occasions Retail	–13.2%	–10.3%	–3.2%	–0.7%

Spend improves most in East-Central and Mountain regions; ticket falls nationally

Across discretionary retail, transactions rose 2.9% from October 3 to November 13 while average ticket fell 1.1%, resulting in +1.8% total spend growth. Spend increased most (+2.7% Y/Y) in the East-Central and Mountain regions, while the West North Central was the only region with fewer transactions Y/Y (–1.0%).

Card transactions vs. average ticket Y/Y by census division; bubble size is share of spend



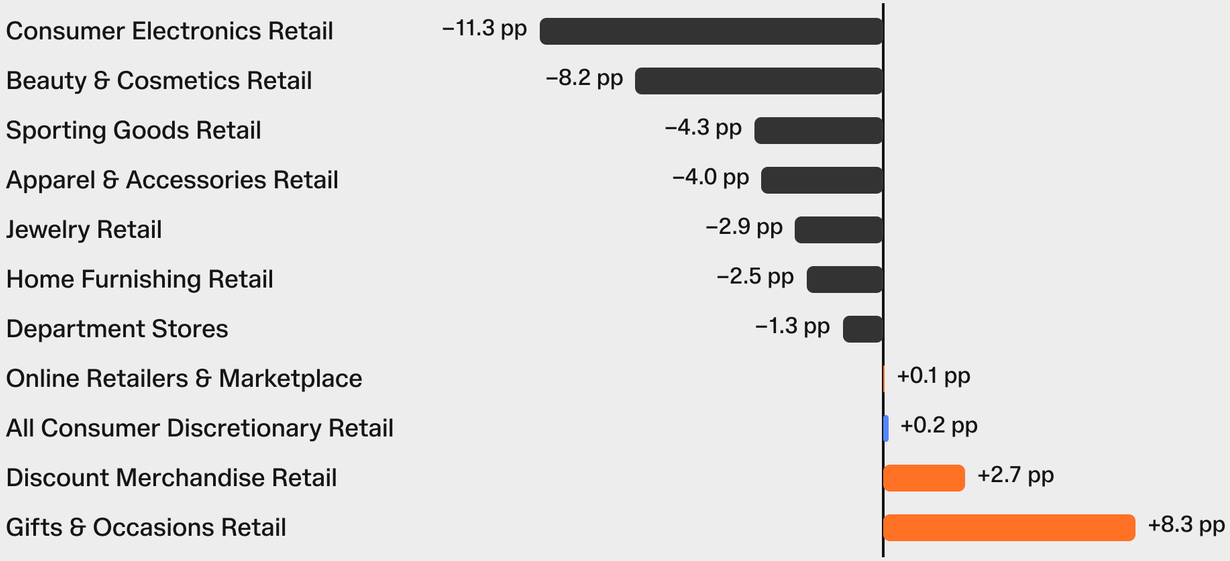
Card spend, transactions, and ticket Y/Y by census division, Oct 3–Nov 13, 2026 vs. Oct 4–Nov 14, 2025

CENSUS DIVISION	SPEND	TRANSACTIONS	AVG. TICKET
East South Central	+2.7%	+3.5%	–0.8%
East North Central	+2.7%	+3.5%	–0.8%
Mountain	+2.7%	+2.9%	–0.2%
Middle Atlantic	+2.3%	+3.9%	–1.5%
South Atlantic	+2.1%	+3.3%	–1.2%
West South Central	+1.5%	+3.0%	–1.5%
New England	+1.4%	+1.7%	–0.3%
Pacific	+1.1%	+3.1%	–2.0%
West North Central	–1.5%	–1.0%	–0.5%
United States	+1.8%	+2.9%	–1.1%

Last holiday season, electronics and beauty retail growth slowed from Sep–Oct to Nov–Dec, while gifts and discount stores picked up

In 2025, Consumer Electronics Retail card spend growth decelerated from +0.4% Y/Y in September–October to –11.0% in November–December, and Beauty & Cosmetics Retail growth slowed from +11.2% to +3.0%. Gifts & Occasions Retail and Discount Merchandise Retail spend growth improved, while total discretionary retail spend growth held steady. This year's Sep–Oct starting point is stronger than last year's, though the last two weeks of spend are the weakest of the period.

Change in card spend Y/Y, Nov–Dec 2025 minus Sep–Oct 2025 (pp)



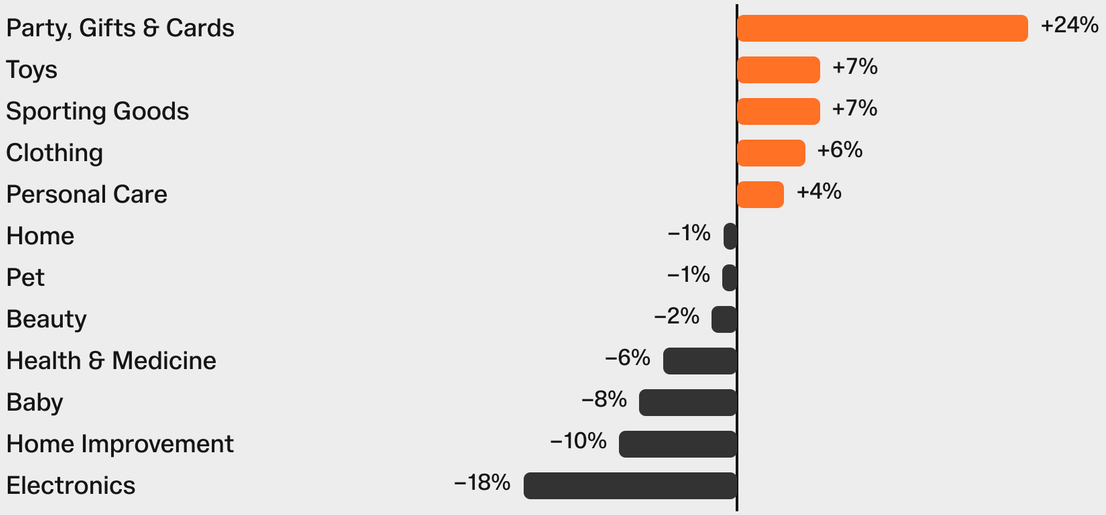
Card spend Y/Y by period

RETAIL CATEGORY	SEP–OCT 2025	NOV–DEC 2025	SEP–OCT 2026
Consumer Electronics Retail	+0.4%	–11.0%	–1.0%
Beauty & Cosmetics Retail	+11.2%	+3.0%	+13.8%
Sporting Goods Retail	+4.6%	+0.3%	+7.4%
Apparel & Accessories Retail	+5.3%	+1.3%	+3.4%
Jewelry Retail	+2.7%	–0.2%	+1.4%
Home Furnishing Retail	–1.2%	–3.8%	+6.9%
Department Stores	–3.2%	–4.6%	+2.5%
Online Retailers & Marketplace	+3.8%	+3.8%	+6.7%
All Consumer Discretionary Retail	+2.6%	+2.8%	+5.7%
Discount Merchandise Retail	+4.2%	+6.9%	+2.4%
Gifts & Occasions Retail	–25.4%	–17.1%	–8.6%

In stores, electronics is losing share of the basket while gifting, toys, and sporting goods are gaining

On in-store receipts at mass merchandisers, Electronics fell from 0.50% to 0.41% of category-mapped spend, a 18% drop in share, from Oct 1–Nov 11, 2026 vs. Oct 2–Nov 12, 2025. Party, Gifts & Cards rose 24% in share, while Toys and Sporting Goods both rose 7%.

Change in share of in-store receipt spend, Oct 1–Nov 11, 2026 vs. Oct 2–Nov 12, 2025



Share of in-store receipt spend

CATEGORY	2025	2026	CHANGE
Party, Gifts & Cards	0.73%	0.91%	+24%
Toys	0.71%	0.76%	+7%
Sporting Goods	0.20%	0.22%	+7%
Clothing	1.52%	1.60%	+6%
Personal Care	2.26%	2.35%	+4%
Home	1.49%	1.47%	−1%
Pet	2.89%	2.85%	−1%
Beauty	3.02%	2.96%	−2%
Health & Medicine	4.14%	3.89%	−6%
Baby	1.17%	1.07%	−8%
Home Improvement	0.95%	0.86%	−10%
Electronics	0.50%	0.41%	−18%

On Amazon, Beauty and Home category sales are up Y/Y in October while electronics and toys are down

Across Amazon's 10 largest categories, estimated revenue was –1.4% Y/Y from October 4–31; units rose 2.9% but average price paid fell 4.2%. Beauty & Personal Care grew 16.0% Y/Y and a further 44.8% Y/Y in the first week of November.

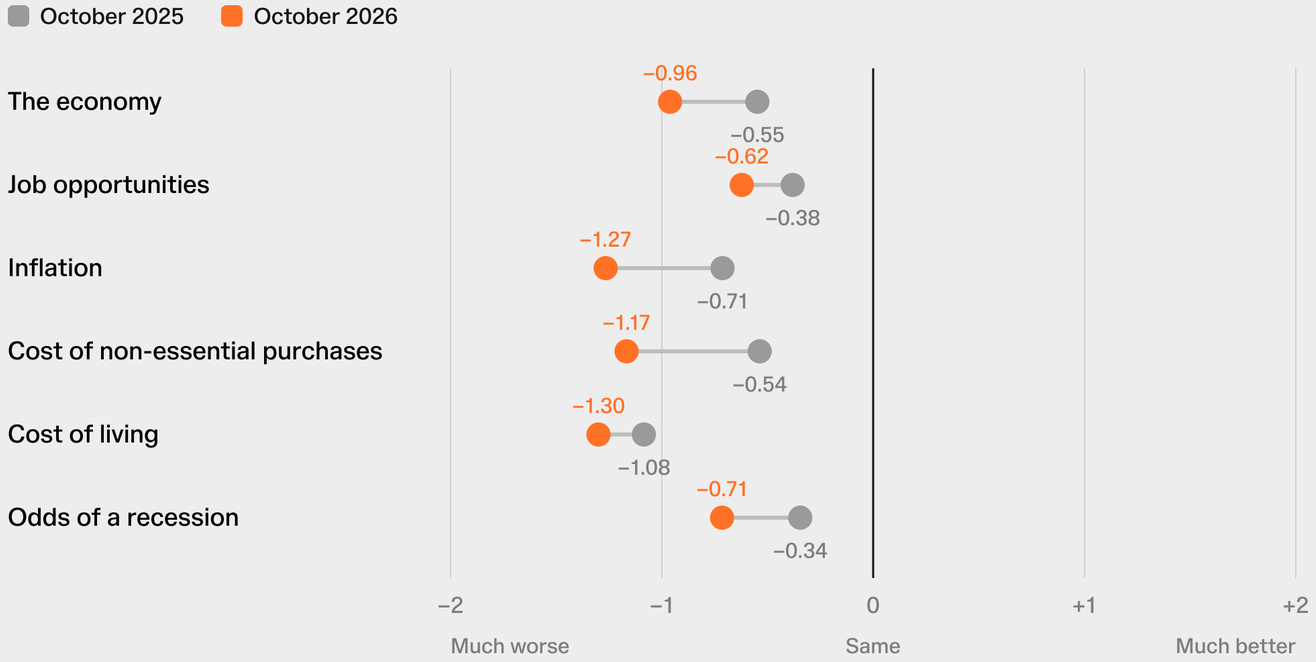
Amazon US sales Y/Y by top-level category, Oct 4–31, 2026 vs. Oct 5–Nov 1, 2025, and Nov 1–7, 2026 vs. Nov 2–8, 2025

AMAZON CATEGORY	OCT 4–31 REVENUE	OCT 4–31 UNITS	OCT 4–31 AVG. PRICE	AVG. PRICE, 2026	NOV 1–7 REVENUE
Top 10 categories	–1.4%	+2.9%	–4.2%	$28.51	+15.1%
Beauty & Personal Care	+16.0%	+14.9%	+0.9%	$18.86	+44.8%
Arts, Crafts & Sewing	+8.4%	+9.5%	–1.1%	$15.05	+27.4%
Home & Kitchen	+7.5%	+8.5%	–1.0%	$37.31	+19.4%
Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry	+2.8%	+4.3%	–1.4%	$26.84	+15.3%
Sports & Outdoors	–2.6%	+0.8%	–3.3%	$38.25	+8.5%
Cell Phones & Accessories	–6.0%	+3.1%	–8.8%	$21.76	+14.2%
Tools & Home Improvement	–16.0%	–12.1%	–4.5%	$35.30	+4.1%
Toys & Games	–21.7%	–19.3%	–3.0%	$22.99	–4.9%
Electronics	–27.5%	–27.5%	0.0%	$83.72	–3.5%
Appliances	–33.1%	–20.8%	–15.5%	$39.66	–18.6%

Economic sentiment falls as perceived affordability worsens

Surveyed consumers rate the economy, job opportunities, and inflation worse than a year ago. On a –2 (much worse) to +2 (much better) scale, the average answer on the economy fell from –0.55 in October 2025 to –0.96 in October 2026. While cost-of-living sentiment only worsened from –1.08 to –1.30, "cost of non-essential purchases" fell more than any other answer, from –0.54 to –1.17. Sentiment has improved month-to-date in November, led by "cost of non-essential purchases," but remains worse Y/Y and vs. September 2026.

Average answer, October 2025 vs. October 2026



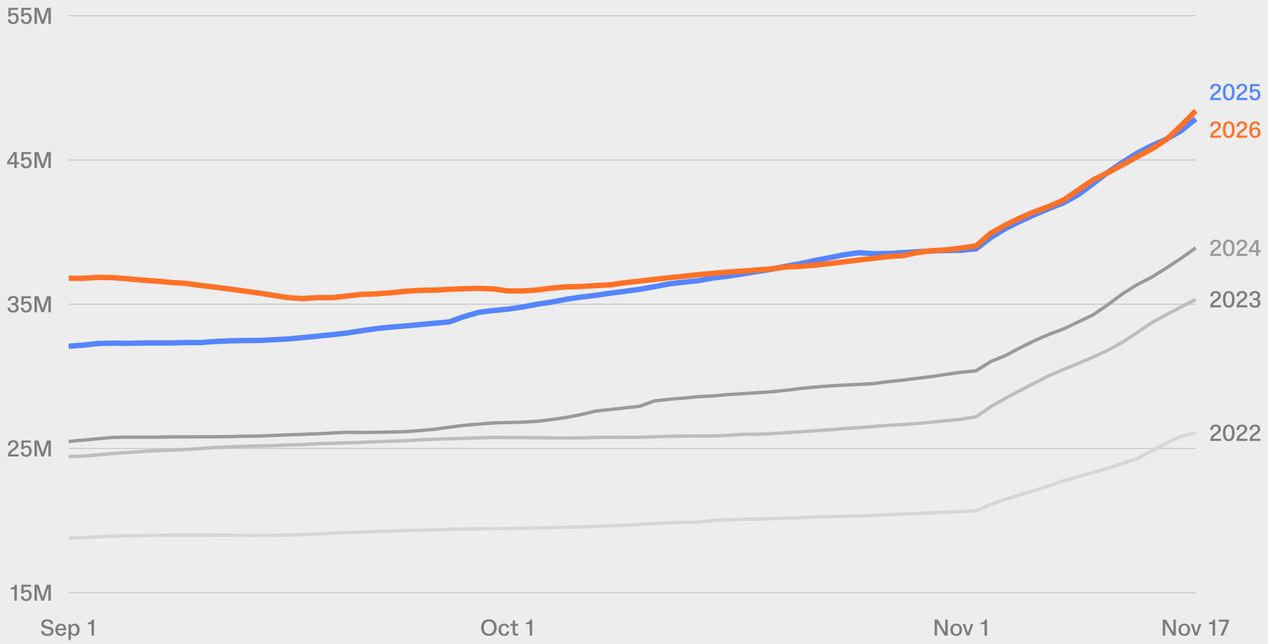
Average answer by month

COMPARED WITH A YEAR AGO	OCT 2025	SEP 2026	OCT 2026	NOV 2026 TO DATE
The economy	–0.55	–0.78	–0.96	–0.91
Job opportunities	–0.38	–0.49	–0.62	–0.51
Inflation	–0.71	–1.24	–1.27	–1.24
Cost of non-essential purchases	–0.54	–0.95	–1.17	–0.99
Cost of living	–1.08	–1.19	–1.30	–1.31
Odds of a recession	–0.34	–0.51	–0.71	–0.71

Christmas listening is tracking 2025's pace

Mariah Carey's Spotify monthly listeners, a proxy for Christmas music streaming, reached 48.4M on November 17, 2026, +1.2% vs. the same day in 2025. Listening has grown 24% since November 1, the same pace as last year, and 35% since October 1 vs. 38% in 2025.

Mariah Carey Spotify monthly listeners, Sep 1–Nov 17 of each year



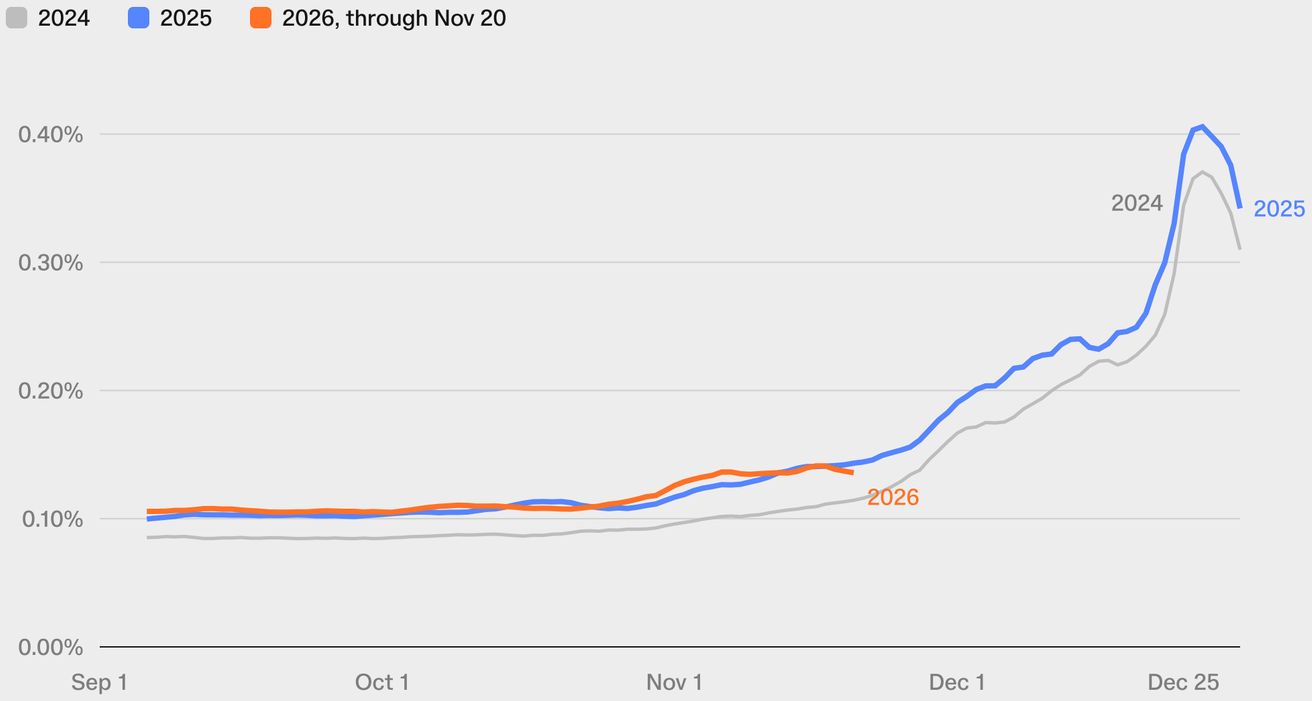
Monthly listeners by year

YEAR	OCT 1	NOV 1	NOV 17	SINCE OCT 1	SINCE NOV 1	DEC 25
2022	19.4M	20.6M	26.1M	+34%	+26%	65.1M
2023	25.8M	27.0M	35.3M	+37%	+31%	80.6M
2024	26.8M	30.3M	38.9M	+45%	+28%	88.4M
2025	34.7M	38.7M	47.9M	+38%	+24%	91.4M
2026	35.9M	38.9M	48.4M	+35%	+24%	–

Christmas movie streaming is tracking just behind 2025

The 10 most-watched Christmas movies were 0.136% of all US streaming views in the seven days to November 20, vs. 0.144% in the same seven days of 2025. The movies started the fall higher and matched 2025 through the second week of November but have not picked up viewing share since.

Top 10 Christmas movies' share of all US streaming views, trailing 7 days, Sep 1–Dec 31



Top 10 Christmas movies' share of all US streaming views by week

YEAR	FIRST WK OF SEP	FIRST WK OF OCT	FIRST WK OF NOV	SECOND WK OF NOV	CHRISTMAS WEEK
2024	0.086%	0.086%	0.103%	0.111%	0.354%
2025	0.100%	0.105%	0.129%	0.141%	0.398%
2026	0.106%	0.107%	0.135%	0.140%	–

Top 10 Christmas movies by US streaming views, Sep 1–Dec 31, 2025: Home Alone; Home Alone 2: Lost in New York; How the Grinch Stole Christmas (2000); The Nightmare Before Christmas; National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation; The Grinch (2018); The Polar Express; It's a Wonderful Life; Elf; and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

SECTION 02

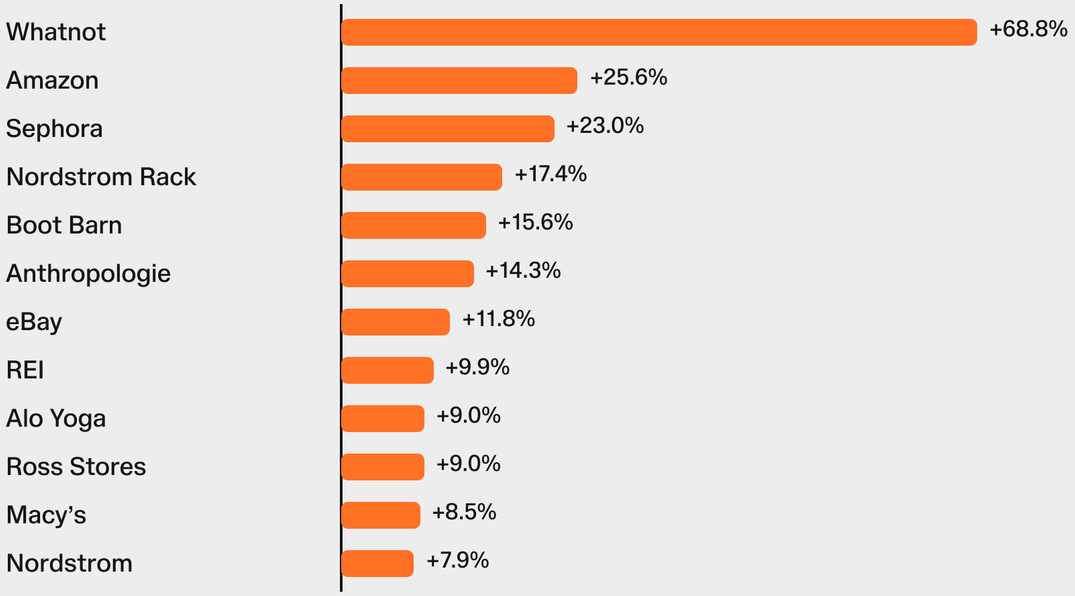
Attention and intention

What shoppers are buying and browsing, and who is spending on ads

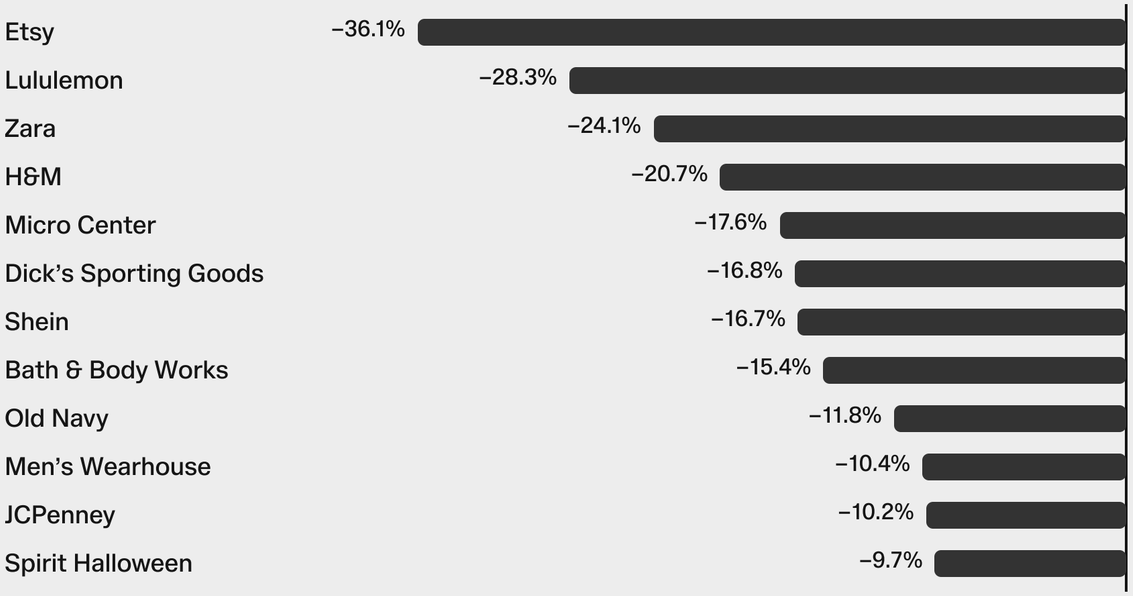
Gen Z is spending more at Whatnot and discount apparel, less on Etsy and fast fashion

Among 48 large discretionary retailers, Gen Z card spend rose 6.2% Y/Y from October 3 to November 13, including +25.6% growth at Amazon. Spend grew most in resale and off-price: Whatnot +68.8%, Nordstrom Rack +17.4%, eBay +11.8%, and Ross +9.0%. Fast fashion suffered, including Zara at −24.1%, H&M at −20.7%, and Shein at −16.7%. Etsy spend fell most, at −36.1% Y/Y.

Largest increases in Gen Z card spend Y/Y, Oct 3–Nov 13, 2026 vs. Oct 4–Nov 14, 2025



Largest declines in Gen Z card spend Y/Y, Oct 3–Nov 13, 2026 vs. Oct 4–Nov 14, 2025

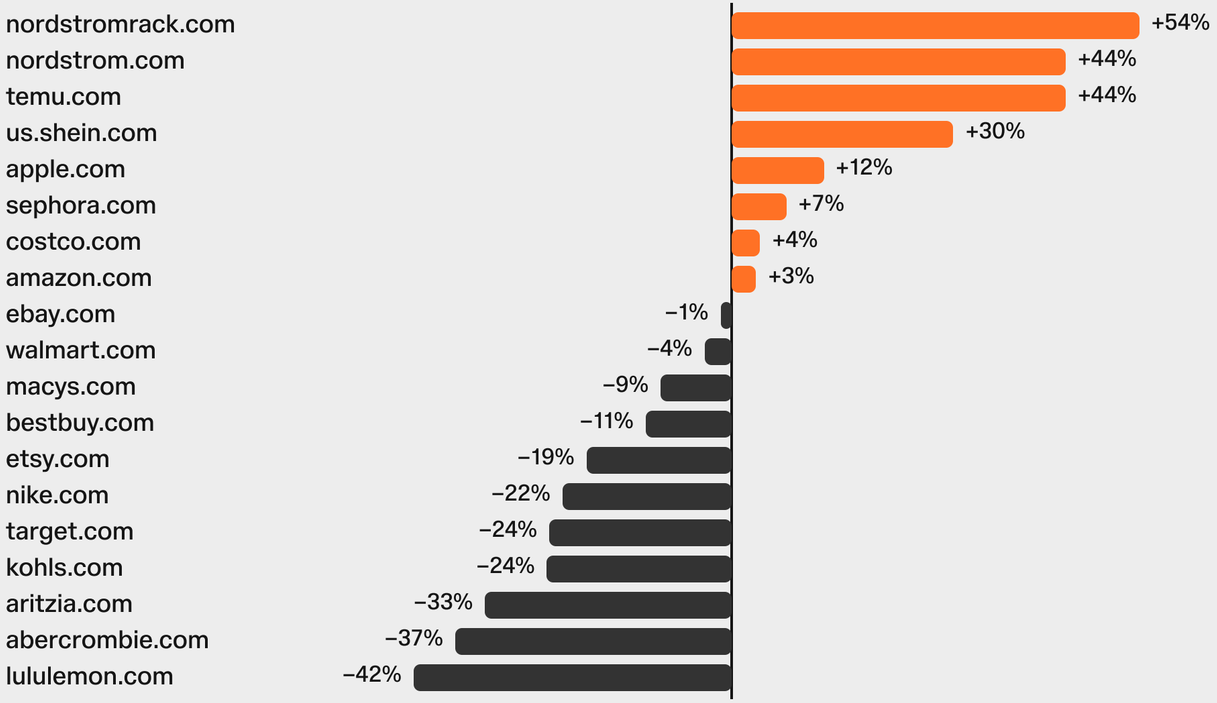


Retailers are the 50 largest by card spend in apparel, beauty, footwear, department stores, off-price, marketplaces, electronics, and sporting goods; charts show those with at least $100K of Gen Z spend in 2025.

Off-price and cross-border sites are drawing the most new web traffic; specialty apparel traffic declines

Normalized visits to Nordstrom Rack, Temu, and Shein all grew about 30% or more Y/Y in the first two weeks of November, while traffic to Aritzia, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Lululemon all declined at least 30%. Most mass merchandisers were about flat Y/Y, though Target lost both raw and normalized volume.

Normalized website visits Y/Y, Nov 1–14, 2026 vs. Nov 2–15, 2025



Raw and normalized visit growth

WEBSITE	RAW Y/Y	NORMALIZED Y/Y
nordstromrack.com	+72.7%	+54.2%
nordstrom.com	+61.7%	+44.4%
temu.com	+61.7%	+44.4%
us.shein.com	+45.0%	+29.5%
apple.com	+25.7%	+12.3%
sephora.com	+20.2%	+7.3%
amazon.com	+15.7%	+3.3%
walmart.com	+8.0%	−3.5%
target.com	−15.1%	−24.1%
aritzia.com	−24.6%	−32.7%
abercrombie.com	−29.0%	−36.6%
lululemon.com	−35.2%	−42.1%

Normalized to google.com visits in 2026 vs. 2025 (+12%).

Knives and appliances are gaining share in premium kitchenware; cookware is losing share

In premium culinary retail POS data, cookware brands like Le Creuset, Staub, and All-Clad have lost market share Y/Y to knife brands (Miyabi, Shun) and appliance makers (Breville, Vitamix). Despite overall share losses by cookware brands, Hestan was the top-gaining brand at +0.9 pp of share.

Share of named-brand in-store sales, Oct 1–Nov 14, 2026 vs. Oct 2–Nov 15, 2025

BRAND	TOP CATEGORY	SHARE, 2025	SHARE, 2026	CHANGE
Hestan	Cookware	2.7%	3.6%	+0.9 pp
Miyabi	Knives	2.5%	3.1%	+0.6 pp
Breville	Coffee	9.8%	10.3%	+0.6 pp
Shun	Knives	3.5%	4.0%	+0.5 pp
Vitamix	Electrics	0.7%	1.0%	+0.3 pp
Fellow	Electrics	0.5%	0.7%	+0.3 pp
JURA	Coffee	11.9%	12.0%	+0.1 pp
GreenPan	Cookware	2.1%	1.9%	–0.3 pp
De’Longhi	Coffee	0.5%	0.2%	–0.3 pp
Le Creuset	Cookware	8.3%	7.8%	–0.5 pp
All-Clad	Cookware	7.3%	6.8%	–0.5 pp
Staub	Cookware	4.8%	3.7%	–1.1 pp
Scanpan	Cookware	5.8%	4.3%	–1.5 pp

Top category is the retailer’s department with the largest share of the brand’s in-store sales in 2026.

In Christmas-heavy subcategories, Apple holds 6 of Amazon's top 12 spots

Among products in subcategories with large holiday-season lifts, MacBooks led Amazon with $51.1M (+5% Y/Y) in the two weeks to October 31. Mac mini and iPad sales are growing seasonally and vs. 2025, while watch sales are shifting to the SE version. The Oura Ring and Shark Navigator Lift-Away vacuum were the top items unrelated to devices and networks.

Top 12 Amazon products and product families by revenue in Christmas-heavy subcategories, two weeks to Oct 31, 2026

PRODUCT OR FAMILY	SUBCATEGORY	DEC. CATEGORY LIFT	REVENUE	VS. 2 WKS TO OCT 3	Y/Y (2 WKS TO NOV 1, 2025)
All Apple MacBooks	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$51.1M	–4%	+5%
Apple iPad 11-inch (A16)	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$20.9M	+15%	+62%
All Apple AirPods	Headphones & Earbuds	1.6x	$20.7M	–14%	–13%
Oura Ring 5	Smart Rings	2.5x	$11.8M	–7%	New
Apple Mac mini (M6)	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$6.0M	+140%	+100% vs. M4
Apple Watch Series 12	Smartwatches	2.3x	$5.8M	–18%	+56% vs. Series 11
TP-Link Deco X55 mesh WiFi	Computer Networking	1.6x	$5.6M	+13%	+138%
Apple Watch SE 3	Smartwatches	2.3x	$4.4M	+66%	+218%
TP-Link Deco XE75 mesh WiFi	Computer Networking	1.6x	$3.9M	+35%	+49%
Shark Navigator Lift-Away vacuum	Household Vacuums	1.6x	$3.8M	–34%	New
Amazon Fire HD 10 tablet bundle	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$3.4M	–48%	–39%
CGK Twin XL sheet set	Sheets & Pillowcases	1.5x	$3.2M	–9%	+7%

Christmas-heavy subcategories are those whose average weekly Amazon revenue from Dec 7–20, 2025, was at least 1.5 times their average from Sep 14–Nov 1, 2025.

A digital calendar, Kim Kardashian Beats, and a Carhartt beanie were some of the top holiday purchases in 2025

In mid-December 2025, MacBook sales increased 146% vs. the two weeks to November 1, dominating sales in Christmas-heavy subcategories. Like in fall 2026, Apple products dominate the list; non-Apple items were led by the Skylight 15-inch digital calendar, Amazon Fire Kids tablet, Beats Studio Pro x Kim Kardashian, and the Carhartt knit cuffed beanie. Apple Watch sales also grew more than 300% from October; AirPods grew much less.

Top 12 Amazon products and product families by revenue in Christmas-heavy subcategories, Dec 7–20, 2025

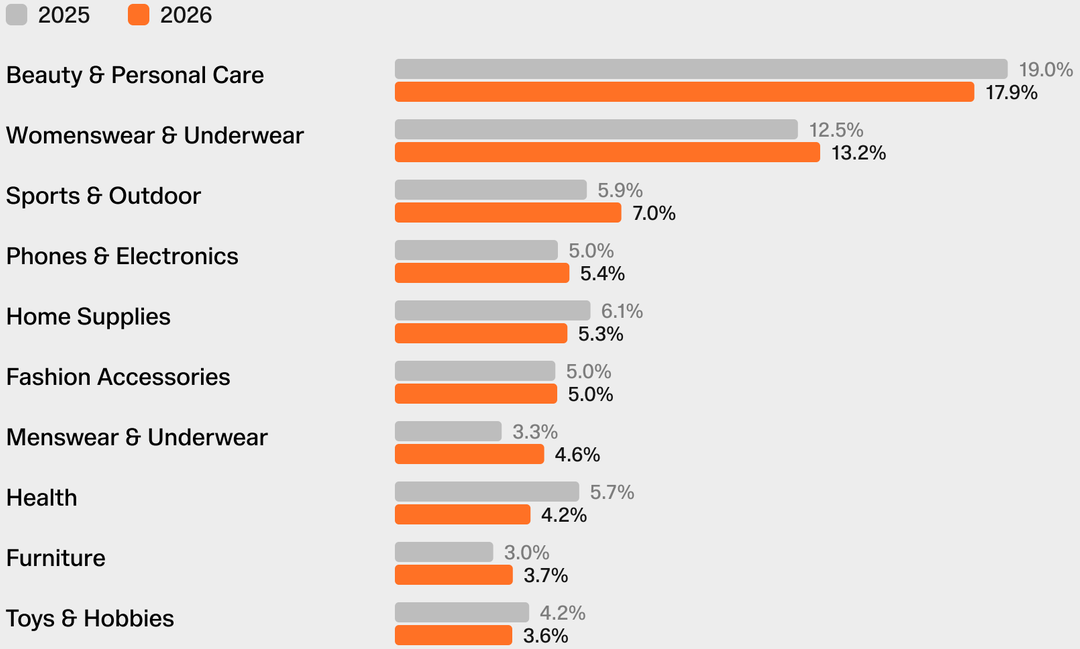
PRODUCT OR FAMILY	SUBCATEGORY	DEC. CATEGORY LIFT	REVENUE	UNITS	VS. 2 WKS TO NOV 1, 2025
All Apple MacBooks	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$119.6M	119K	+146%
All Apple AirPods	Headphones & Earbuds	1.6x	$34.9M	188K	+47%
Apple Watch Series 11	Smartwatches	2.3x	$16.3M	43K	+341%
Apple iPad 11-inch (A16)	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$15.5M	34K	+19%
Skylight 15-inch digital calendar	Calendars, Planners & Organizers	4.0x	$11.0M	34K	+561%
Apple Mac mini (M4)	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$9.9M	17K	+233%
Amazon Fire HD 10 Kids Pro tablet	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$9.5M	64K	+342%
Apple iPad Air 11-inch (M3)	Computers & Tablets	2.0x	$9.4M	16K	+154%
Beats Studio Pro x Kim Kardashian	Headphones & Earbuds	1.6x	$8.1M	44K	–
Carhartt knit cuffed beanie	Men’s Accessories	2.4x	$7.8M	388K	+835%
Apple Watch SE 3	Smartwatches	2.3x	$7.7M	35K	+461%
Bose QuietComfort headphones	Headphones & Earbuds	1.6x	$7.2M	37K	+176%

Uses the same Christmas-heavy subcategories and product families as the 2026 list.

Apparel and sports categories take share on TikTok Shop

US TikTok Shop revenue rose 83% Y/Y from November 1 to 18, on pace for $3.72B in sales over the full month. Beauty & personal care remains the largest category, but lost share while both men's and women's apparel gained. Read alongside Gen Z card spend, this suggests apparel spend shifting toward creator-led and resale platforms while beauty spend moves in-store.

Share of TikTok Shop revenue by category, Nov 2–19, 2025 vs. Nov 1–18, 2026



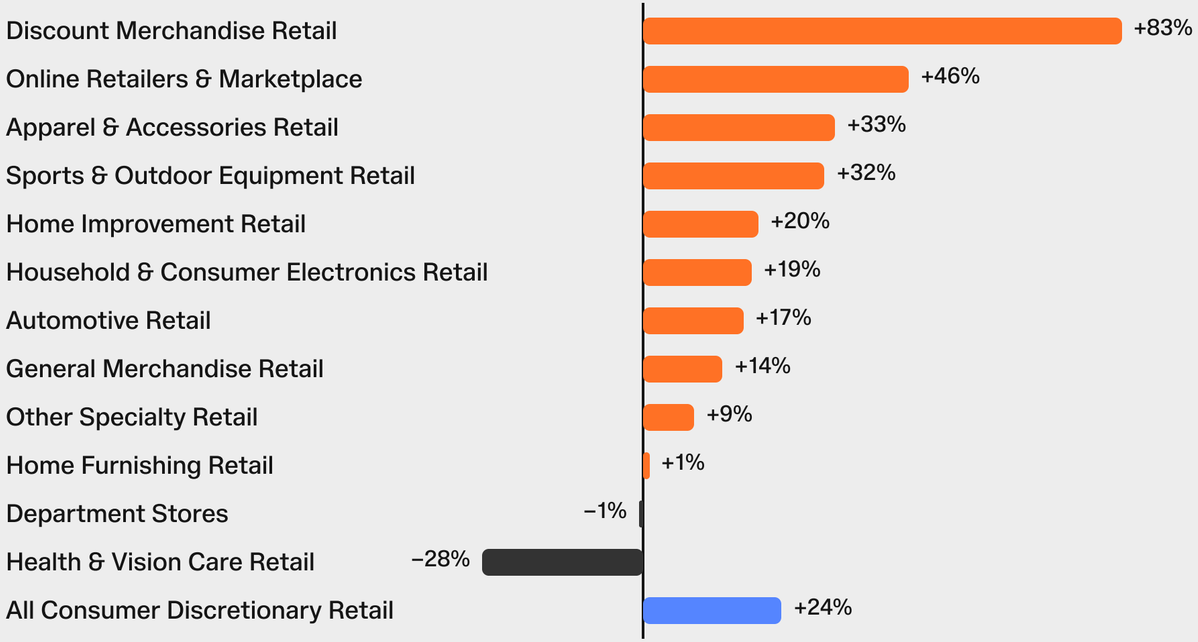
Top products by units sold, Nov 1–18, 2026

PRODUCT	UNITS	REVENUE
medicube body care set	168K	$5.2M
Rosemary & rice water hair spray	141K	$1.4M
medicube PDRN peptide mask	139K	$3.3M
medicube NAD+ EGF firming serum	121K	$2.2M
medicube Zero Pore Pads	121K	$2.8M
EPAIS eyelash growth serum	79K	$1.4M
Foldable LED lanterns, 4-pack	78K	$1.5M
KKPeople shaping bodysuit	78K	$1.9M
OEAK wireless bras	61K	$0.9M
Toplux magnesium complex	60K	$0.9M

Discretionary retail ad spend grows 17% Y/Y in October

Digital ad spend by Consumer Discretionary Retail brands rose 24% Y/Y in September–October 2026, including 17% Y/Y in October, led by large growth in Discount Merchandise Retail spend. Specialty Retail and Department Stores stayed closer to flat Y/Y, suggesting momentum is against purchases of premium goods as holiday shopping ramps up.

Digital ad spend Y/Y by retail category, Sep–Oct 2026 vs. Sep–Oct 2025



Consumer Discretionary Retail digital ad spend by platform, October 2026

PLATFORM	AD SPEND	SHARE	Y/Y
Facebook	$437M	27.2%	+19%
Instagram	$313M	19.5%	+25%
YouTube	$125M	7.8%	+30%
Pinterest	$87M	5.4%	+22%
TikTok	$75M	4.7%	+40%
All platforms	$1,603M	100.0%	+17%

Source: Carbon Arc Digital Advertising – CA009