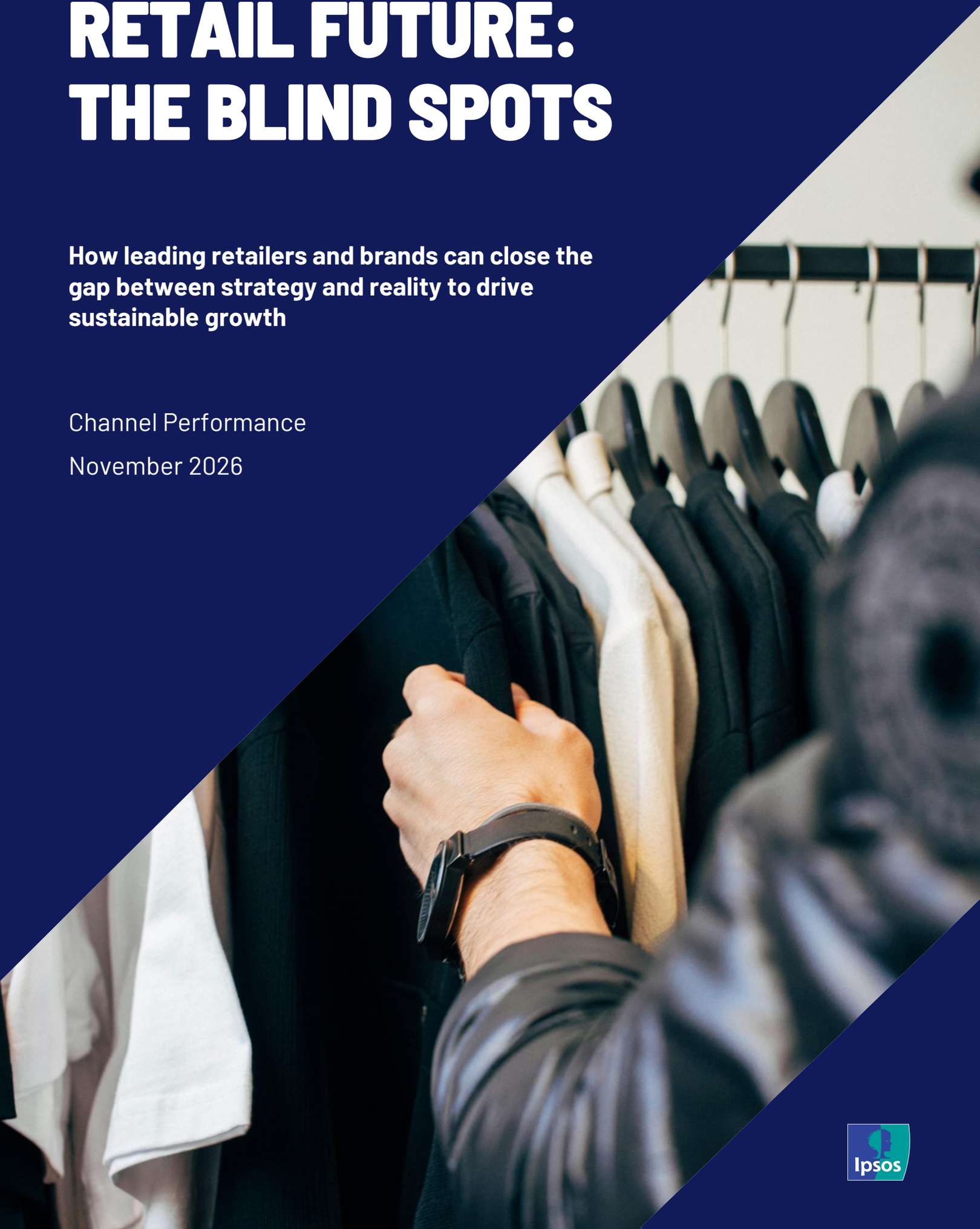
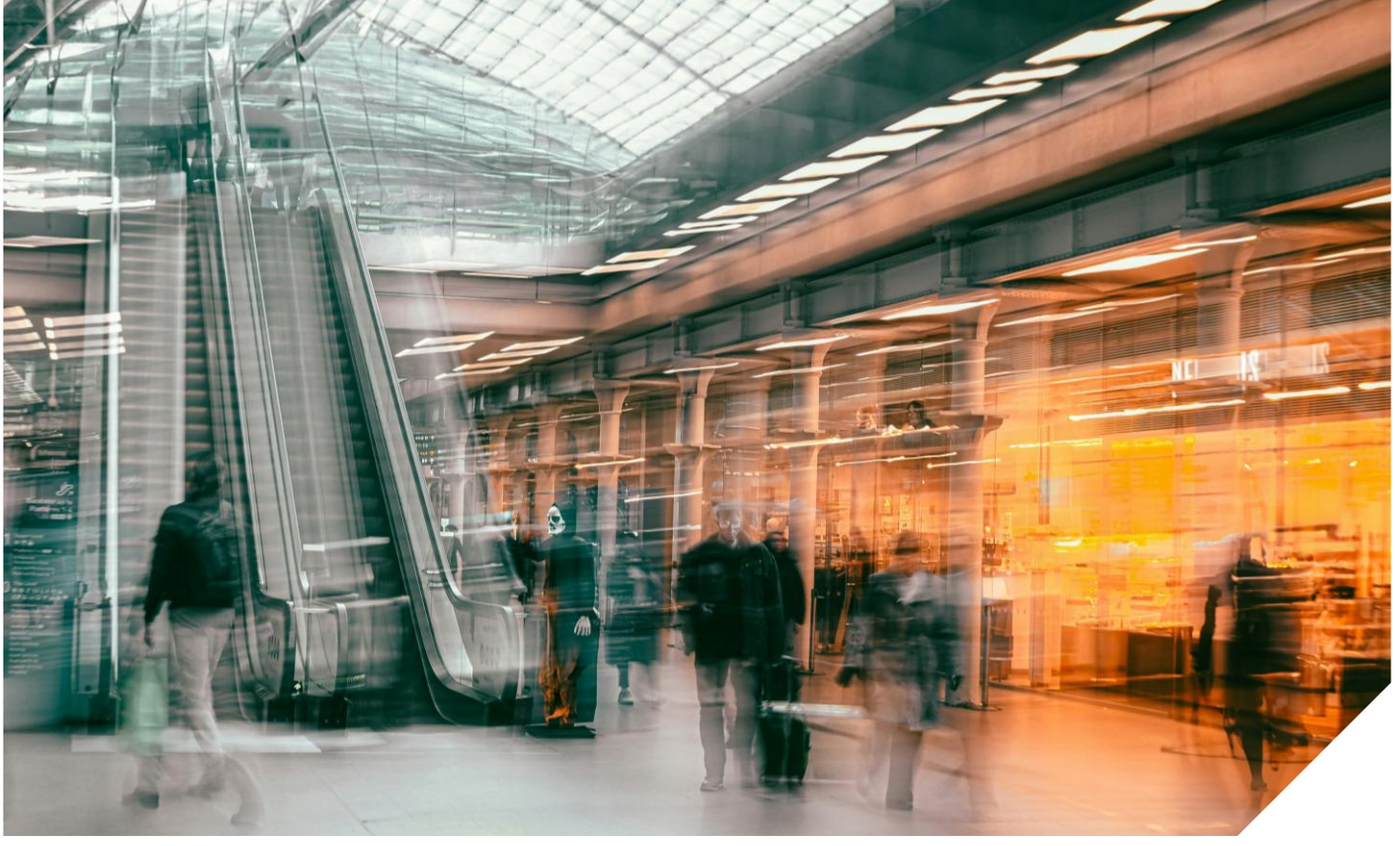
RETAIL FUTURE: THE BLIND SPOTS

How leading retailers and brands can close the gap between strategy and reality to drive sustainable growth

Channel Performance

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Retail Future: The Blind Spots

In this document, Ipsos Channel Performance experts share their perspective on the retail industry and some of the most significant periods of transformation in its history. Retailers and brands are operating in an environment characterised by inflationary pressures, margin compression, omnichannel complexity, supply chain volatility, and increasing competition from both traditional and emerging players.

Across the thousands of retail locations, digital touchpoints, and customer interactions measured by Ipsos Channel Performance globally, we continue to observe that the gap between retail strategy and retail reality remains one of the greatest barriers to growth.

Our Retail Future point of view examines four defining challenges shaping the industry:

The Erosion of Customer Trust

Competing Beyond the Shelf

Consistency Drives Growth

The Selective Consumer

These forces are redefining how retailers and brands compete, requiring sharper execution, greater agility, and stronger measurement systems to ensure strategic ambitions are consistently translated into customer experiences and commercial outcomes.

Increasing consumer scepticism

"Trust is no longer built through communications alone. It is earned through consistent execution."

Source: Ipsos Global Trends 2026.





The Erosion of Customer Trust

For years, retailers have focused on managing inflation, supply chain disruption and changing consumer spending patterns. Yet a more fundamental challenge is emerging: the gradual erosion of consumer trust.

Customers have traditionally trusted retailers to offer fair prices, stock the products they need and deliver a consistent experience. Today, that trust is under pressure. Consumers are exposed to fluctuating prices, personalised promotions, sponsored search results, AI-generated recommendations and increasingly complex loyalty programmes. While designed to improve relevance and drive conversion, these can also create uncertainty around value, fairness and transparency.

As consumers gain greater visibility of competitor pricing, promotions and product availability, even small inconsistencies can trigger doubt. A price that differs from expectations, a promotion unavailable at checkout or an inaccurate stock indicator can quickly undermine confidence.

Many organisations continue to track customer satisfaction and advocacy, but these measures often fail to capture the interactions where trust is won or lost. Yet these everyday moments shape perceptions of reliability, transparency and fairness.

Trust is no longer primarily a brand asset built through marketing. It is increasingly an operational asset built through consistent execution. Consumers are placing greater weight on what retailers do than on what they say.

The retailers and brands that succeed over the next decade will be those that consistently deliver on their promises at every stage of the customer journey.

Ipsos Recommendation

Organisations should start treating trust as an operational KPI, not just a brand KPI.

Retailers should systematically monitor the moments where trust is won or lost, including pricing accuracy, promotion execution, product availability, policy transparency and employee interactions. Trust should be measured at the point of experience, not simply at the point of opinion.

Leading retailers combine customer experience measurement, mystery shopping, retail audits and operational performance metrics to identify where trust is being reinforced and where it is being undermined.

Organisations that continuously validate whether their promises are being delivered consistently across channels will be better positioned to strengthen loyalty, reduce customer defection and build lasting trust.

Customer choice is shaped beyond the shelf

"41% of shoppers actively compare prices, while 29% shop across retailers for better value."

Source: Source: Ipsos Essentials, 2025





Competing Beyond the Shelf

Retail competition has fundamentally changed.

For decades, success was largely driven by strong distribution, availability and shelf presence. Products competed against the items beside them, and winning often meant securing the right placement, visibility and promotional execution in-store. That model is no longer sufficient.

Today, shoppers arrive at the shelf having already been influenced by a wide range of physical and digital touchpoints. Online reviews, social media content, influencer recommendations, marketplace experiences, search results, price comparison tools, retailer apps and quick-commerce platforms all shape perceptions before a purchase decision is made.

As a result, products are no longer competing only against neighbouring items on the shelf. They are competing against every alternative a shopper has encountered throughout their decision journey.

This has fundamentally expanded the competitive set. A product can be available, visible and competitively priced, yet still lose because a competitor has stronger ratings, better reviews, greater social endorsement or a more compelling value proposition.

The implication for retailers and brands is significant. Traditional metrics such as distribution, availability and share of shelf remain essential, but they explain only part of the purchase decision. They measure whether shoppers can buy a product, not necessarily why they choose it.

The challenge is no longer simply optimising execution at the shelf. It is understanding the full ecosystem of influences that shape customer choice before, during and after the shopping experience.

Ipsos Recommendation

Retail measurement can no longer focus exclusively on physical execution. To understand what drives customer choice, retailers need to measure the full ecosystem of influences shaping decisions before, during, and after the shopping journey. This requires integrating:

- Visibility & Availability (Retail audits, digital shelf)
- Decision-Making (Customer journey)
- Competitive Landscape (Competitive Intelligence)
- Price & Value Perceptions (Price Benchmarking)
- Reviews & Social Influence (Social Listening)
- Omnichannel Consistency (Integrated Channel Assessment)

The goal is to understand what drives choice and whether the brand remains competitive across the broader decision ecosystem.

"The biggest competitor of many brands is not another brand. It is inconsistent execution."

Craig Bradley,
Global CEO Channel Performance
Ipsos





Consistency Drives Growth

Retailers invest heavily in innovation. New formats, products, digital capabilities, AI, automation and emerging shopping experiences continue to dominate industry conversations.

Yet customers rarely complain about a lack of innovation. More often, they notice when the basics are delivered inconsistently.

Prices vary between channels. Product availability differs from store to store. Service standards fluctuate between locations. The experience customers receive one day is not always the experience they receive the next.

While retailers focus on what is new, many overlook one of the biggest drivers of customer trust and loyalty: consistent execution.

The challenge is that inconsistency is rarely visible from head office. It emerges through thousands of daily decisions made across stores, channels, teams, suppliers and partners.

Customers do not judge a brand against its best-performing location. They judge it against the experience they have come to expect. Every inconsistency creates doubt. Every doubt creates friction. Every point of friction increases the risk of losing a sale or a customer.

The retailers that outperform will not necessarily be those that innovate the fastest, but those that deliver the most consistent experience across every customer touchpoint.

Ipsos Recommendation

Retailers should place greater focus on measuring and managing consistency across their network.

This means ensuring that standards are delivered consistently across every store, channel and customer touchpoint, not just in selected locations or at specific moments.

Key areas to monitor include:

- Service consistency
- Price consistency
- Product availability
- Execution of operational standards
- Cross-channel experience consistency

Leading retailers combine mystery shopping, retail audits, customer experience measurement and operational performance tracking to identify where standards break down and where customer friction occurs.

The greatest opportunity may not lie in launching the next initiative. It may lie in reducing variation across the existing customer experience.

Consistency should be measured and managed with the same discipline applied to sales, profit and operational performance.

Price sensitivity remains high

29%

of consumers globally rate inflation as their second-highest concern, increasing scrutiny of value and price across every purchase decision.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor





The Selective Consumer

One of the most common narratives in retail today is that consumers are becoming increasingly price-sensitive.

This explanation is convenient, but incomplete. Consumers are not behaving like bargain hunters. They are behaving more like portfolio managers.

They make deliberate decisions about where to invest their money, attention and loyalty. Every purchase is evaluated based on the value they expect in return. Sometimes that value is convenience. Sometimes it is quality, status or peace of mind.

This helps explain why the same consumer may purchase a premium beauty product while choosing a private-label grocery item.

From the retailer's perspective, this behaviour may appear contradictory. From the consumer's perspective, it is entirely rational.

The implication is significant. **Consumers no longer fit neatly into premium, value or mainstream segments. Instead, they move fluidly between them depending on the occasion, category and personal context.**

The retailers and brands that thrive will be those that understand the value customers seek from each purchase decision. Price will remain important, but perceived value will become even more important.

The question is no longer, "How much will customers pay?" The question is, "What do customers believe is worth paying for?"

Ipsos Recommendation

Retailers need to move beyond traditional customer segmentation and understand the different forms of value customers seek across categories and occasions.

To do this, organisations should identify:

- What drives value perception
- When customers trade up or trade down
- What triggers switching behaviour
- What builds loyalty and repeat purchase

This understanding should then be used to tailor assortments, pricing, promotions and customer experiences to different shopping missions.

The objective is not to compete on price alone, but to deliver the right value proposition for the right customer, in the right context.

Retailers that better understand the value customers seek will be better positioned to strengthen loyalty, increase share of wallet and drive sustainable growth.

Key Takeaways

Channel performance is increasingly driven by customer perception rather than operational assumptions.

01

Trust has shifted from brand asset to operational metric

Insight: Trust is no longer built primarily through brand reputation and marketing. It's earned through consistently delivering the promises customers experience every day.
Business Implication: Retailers that cannot consistently deliver availability, pricing, service and fulfilment risk eroding trust at every touchpoint.
Ipsos Recommendation: Measure trust through operational execution. Combine customer experience, mystery shopping and retail audits to identify where promises are not being consistently delivered.

02

Customer choice is influenced beyond the store

Insight: Customer choice is increasingly shaped beyond the shelf, influenced by reviews, social media, digital content and price transparency.
Business Implication: Retailers focusing only on in-store execution are measuring only part of what drives purchasing decisions.
Ipsos Recommendation: Adopt an integrated measurement framework combining retail audits, digital shelf tracking, shopper journey research, social listening and competitive intelligence to understand the full decision ecosystem.

03

Consistency is becoming a competitive advantage

Insight: As innovation becomes easier to replicate, the ability to deliver a reliable experience across stores, channels and touchpoints is becoming a more sustainable differentiator.
Business Implication: Customers are more likely to notice inconsistent pricing, availability or service than the latest innovation.
Ipsos Recommendation: Manage consistency as rigorously as financial performance. Use a combination of mystery shopping, customer experience measurement and operational scorecards to identify and reduce variation across the network.

04

Consumers are seeking value, not just lower prices

Insight: Consumers do not evaluate every purchase in the same way. They make trade-offs between convenience, quality, trust, experience and price depending on the category and occasion.
Business Implication: A single value proposition is unlikely to meet the needs of increasingly selective consumers.
Ipsos Recommendation: Move beyond traditional segmentation. Understand what customers value by category and occasion, then tailor assortments, pricing, promotions and experiences accordingly.

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