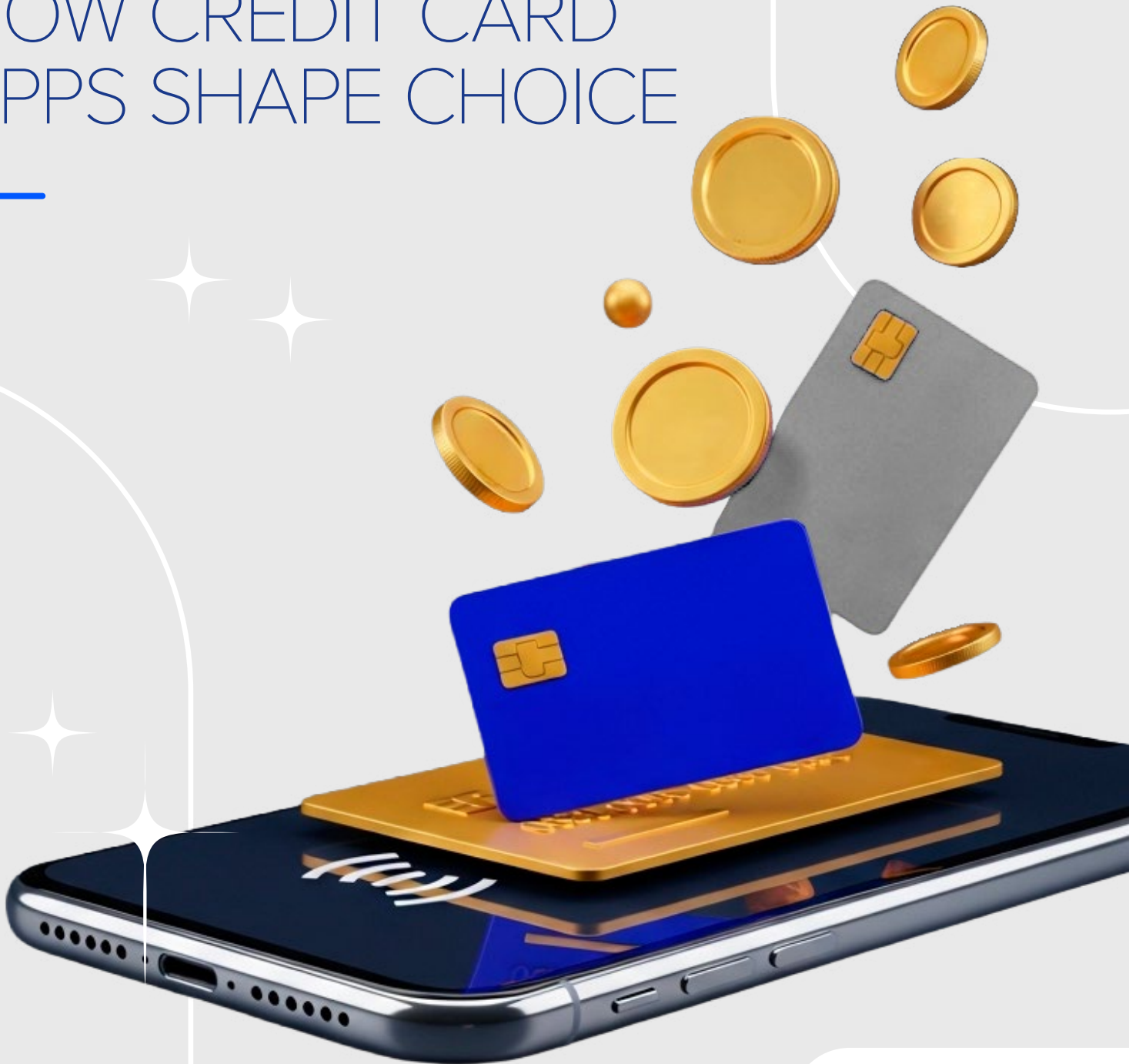


April 2026 Report

WINNING TOP OF WALLET: HOW CREDIT CARD APPS SHAPE CHOICE



PYMNTS
INTELLIGENCE

elan.
Credit Card

WINNING TOP OF WALLET: HOW CREDIT CARD APPS SHAPE CHOICE

READ MORE



October 2025

Credit limits:
Understanding Requests, Denials
and the consumer experience

PYMNTS
INTELLIGENCE

elan
Credit Card

Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice was produced in collaboration with Elan Credit Card, and PYMNTS Intelligence is grateful for the company’s support and insight. [PYMNTS Intelligence](#) retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What’s at Stake	04
Essential Background	08
Key Findings	18
The Full Story.	20
Actionable Insights	52
Conclusion	54
Methodology	57
About	59

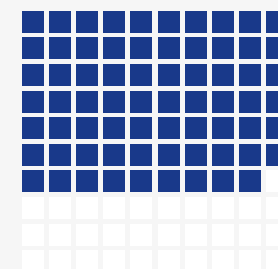
WHAT'S AT STAKE

Mobile apps have become a critical driver of competition in the credit card market. What began as a digital service channel for checking balances and making payments has evolved into a core engagement layer that influences which cards consumers prioritize, how much they spend and whether those cards are part of their everyday financial behavior.

Nearly seven in 10 U.S. adult cardholders (69%) say the quality of a credit card's mobile app influences which card becomes their most used, including nearly nine in 10 Gen Zers.¹ Once downloaded and used, the app quickly becomes embedded in how consumers manage their credit. Seven in 10 cardholders use their primary card's mobile app. For more than half of card app users (54%), it's the tool that helps them avoid missed payments or interest charges.

1. PYMNTS Intelligence uses the following approximate birth dates and approximate age ranges in 2026 for generational cohorts: baby boomers: born in 1964 or earlier and now aged 62 or older; Generation X: born between 1965 and 1980 and now aged 46–61; millennials: born between 1981 and 1996 and now aged 30–45; bridge millennials: born between 1978 and 1988 and now aged 38–48; zillennials: born between 1991 and 1999 and now aged 26–35; and Generation Z: born in 1997 or later and now aged 29 or younger.

69%



Nearly seven in 10 U.S. adult cardholders, including almost nine in 10 Gen Zers, say **the quality of a credit card's mobile app influences which card becomes their most used.**

But apps also influence spending behavior. Nearly one-third of card app users (32%) report increasing their spending after adopting their card's mobile app, with the effect strongest among younger consumers and credit-reliant users. Four in 10 users say that specific app features, particularly rewards visibility and redemption, incentivized them to spend more on a card.

32%

Nearly one-third of card app users (32%) **report increasing their spending after adopting their card's mobile app**, with the biggest increase among younger consumers and credit-reliant users.

At the same time, this digital experience now carries a meaningful retention risk. Nearly one in four cardholders (24%) say a weak app or poor digital experience has already contributed to them reducing or stopping their use of the associated card, including 45% of Gen Z.

Taken together, these findings suggest that credit card mobile apps are becoming a central mechanism through which issuers influence card choice, reinforce spending behavior and sustain long-term card engagement.

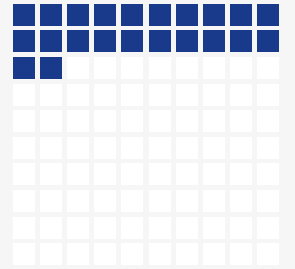
"Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice" is based on a survey of 3,198 U.S. adult cardholders that was conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026. This report examines how credit card mobile apps influence card choice, consumer engagement and spending behavior, and how digital experiences shape long-term card usage and retention.

This is what we learned.

ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND

Why people use credit cards, and how

22%

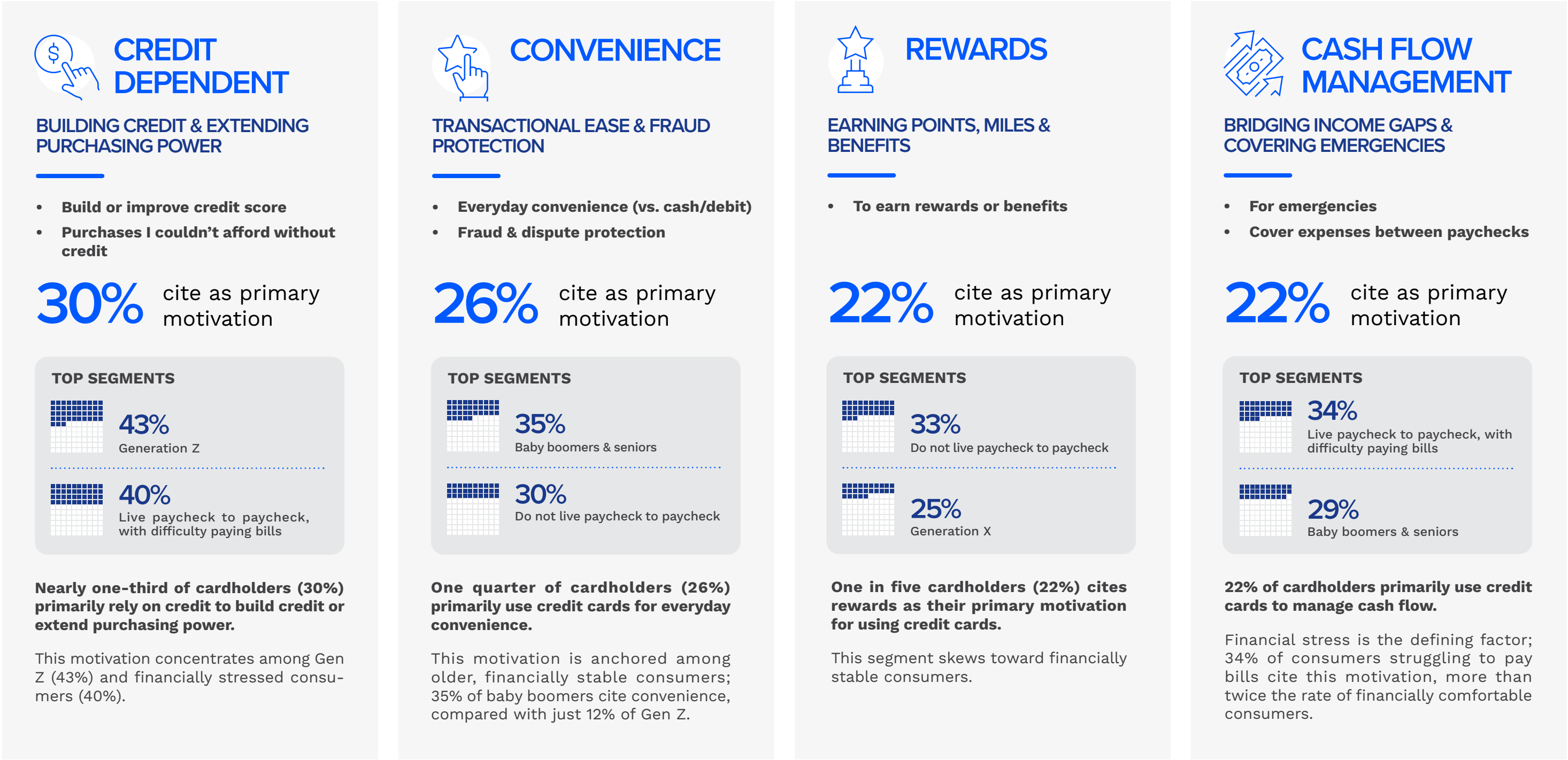


of cardholders cite rewards as their primary motivation for using credit cards.

Half of rewards maximizers (50%) say that **using a credit card's mobile app to track or redeem rewards encouraged them to spend more on the card.**

Four distinct personas define cardholder behavior, with credit dependence, convenience, rewards and cash flow management each playing distinct roles.

FIGURE 1
Why people use credit cards: four motivations that define cardholder behavior
Seven survey measures grouped into four categories · Share shown = % citing as primary motivation



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
eN = 3,198; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

Financial stress reshapes primary card purpose entirely, displacing rewards with credit dependence and cash flow management for a significant share of cardholders.

Credit dependence, convenience, rewards and cash flow management are all meaningful primary drivers of credit card use, with no single motivation dominating overall. Roughly three in 10 consumers cite credit dependence (30%) or convenience (26%) as their primary reason for using credit cards, while about two in 10 point to rewards (22%) or cash flow management (22%).

These motivations diverge more sharply across generations. Gen Z stands out as the most credit-dependent cohort, with 43% citing credit as their primary reason for use, the highest of any generation. In contrast, baby boomers skew toward convenience (35%) and rewards (27%), reflecting more discretionary use patterns.

Financial lifestyle tells the clearest story. Among consumers who don't live paycheck to paycheck, convenience (36%) and rewards (33%) lead, while credit dependence drops to just 19%. Among those living paycheck to paycheck and struggling, the pattern reverses: Four in 10 cite credit dependence, while rewards fall to 11% and convenience to 15%.

For issuers, the implication is that credit cards serve two distinct roles: a liquidity tool for financially constrained consumers, and a convenience and rewards product for financially stable ones. Features, messaging and engagement strategies must reflect that split.

Most cardholders carry more than one card, but Gen Z's smaller portfolio and near-equal card ownership among financially stressed consumers point to two distinct competitive dynamics for issuers.

The average U.S. cardholder in this sample holds 2.1 general-purpose credit cards. Just over eight in 10 hold two or more.

Card ownership increases with age.

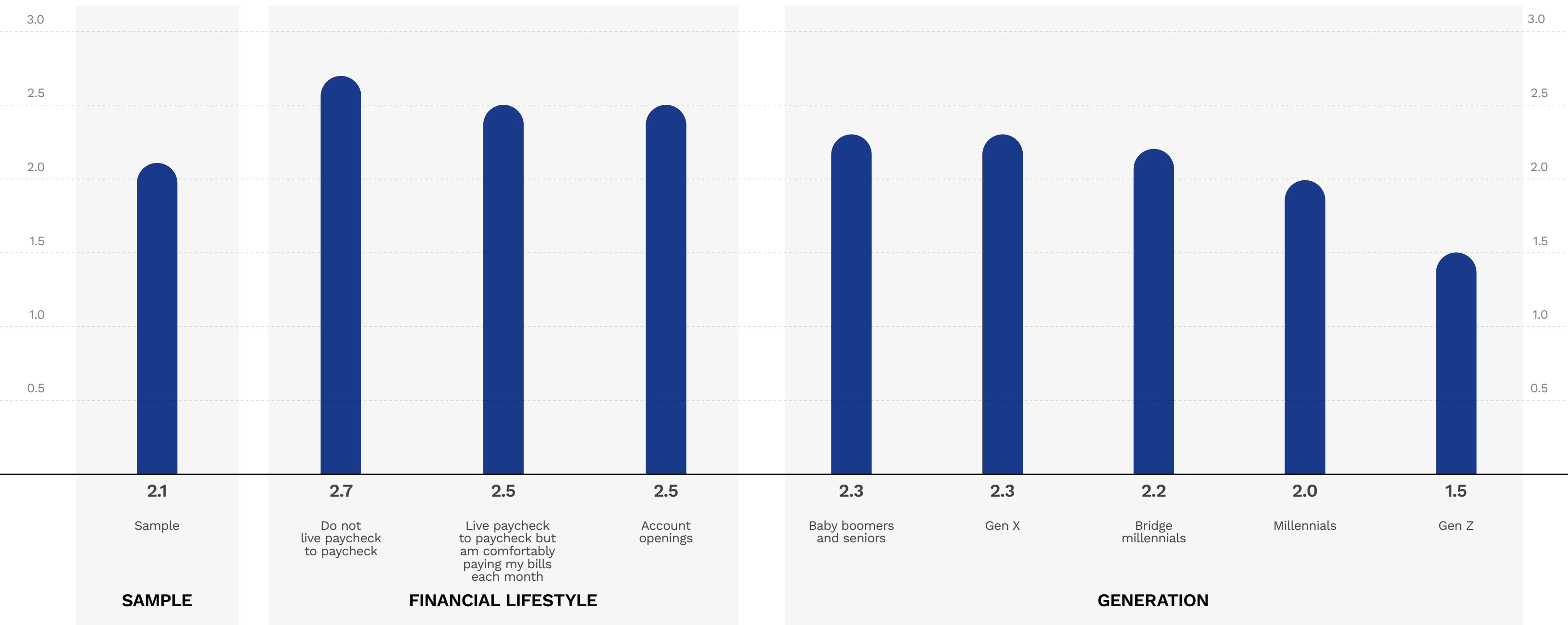
Gen Z averages 1.5 cards and 30% hold only one, compared to baby boomers and seniors, where just 20% hold one card and 84% hold two or more. This generational gap likely reflects differences in credit history length and income trajectory; younger consumers are earlier in their credit-building lifecycle.

The financial lifestyle data tells a different story.

Despite lower financial stability, consumers living paycheck to paycheck hold nearly as many cards as those who don't—2.5 on average versus 2.6—and paycheck-to-paycheck segments show similar multi-card distribution patterns. Only 27%–30% of paycheck-to-paycheck consumers hold a single card. This could suggest that card acquisition is outpacing financial stability for some households or that multiple cards are being used to actively manage cash flow constraints.

For issuers, the data points to a competitive multi-card environment where top-of-wallet position, not card acquisition, is the more relevant retention metric.

FIGURE 2
Number of general-purpose credit cards currently held



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 3,198; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

KEY FINDINGS

01

CREDIT CARD APPS INFLUENCE WHICH CARD BECOMES TOP OF WALLET.

Nearly 70% of cardholders say an app's quality influences which card they use the most, including 87% of Gen Zers.

02

THE APP ASSOCIATED WITH A CREDIT CARD IS A CARDHOLDER'S PRIMARY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TOOL.

Half of users of mobile apps for credit cards (54%) say reminders or autopay have helped them avoid late fees and pay bills on time, but how app users rely on each differs sharply by generation.

03

CONSUMER USAGE OF CARDS APPS IS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE SPENDING.

Nearly a third of app users increased their card spending after installing the issuer's associated app.

04

REWARDS FEATURES INCREASE WALLET SHARE.

Four in 10 app users say identifying or redeeming rewards encouraged them to spend more on the card, rising to five in 10 among rewards maximizers.

05

POOR EXPERIENCE WITH A CARD APP DRIVES CHURN.

Nearly one in four cardholders say a poorly designed app or lousy digital experience contributed to reduced card use.

THE FULL STORY

01

CREDIT CARD APPS
INFLUENCE WHICH CARD
BECOMES TOP OF WALLET.

Nearly seven in 10 cardholders say an app's quality influences which card becomes their primary card, rising to 87% for Gen Z.

Seven in 10 cardholders say their experience using a mobile app shapes their card preferences, particularly among younger and credit-reliant consumers.

Among all cardholders, 69% say the quality of a credit card's mobile app influences which card becomes their top of wallet, including 28% who say it is very influential and 26% who say it is extremely influential.

The signal is strongest among younger cardholders.

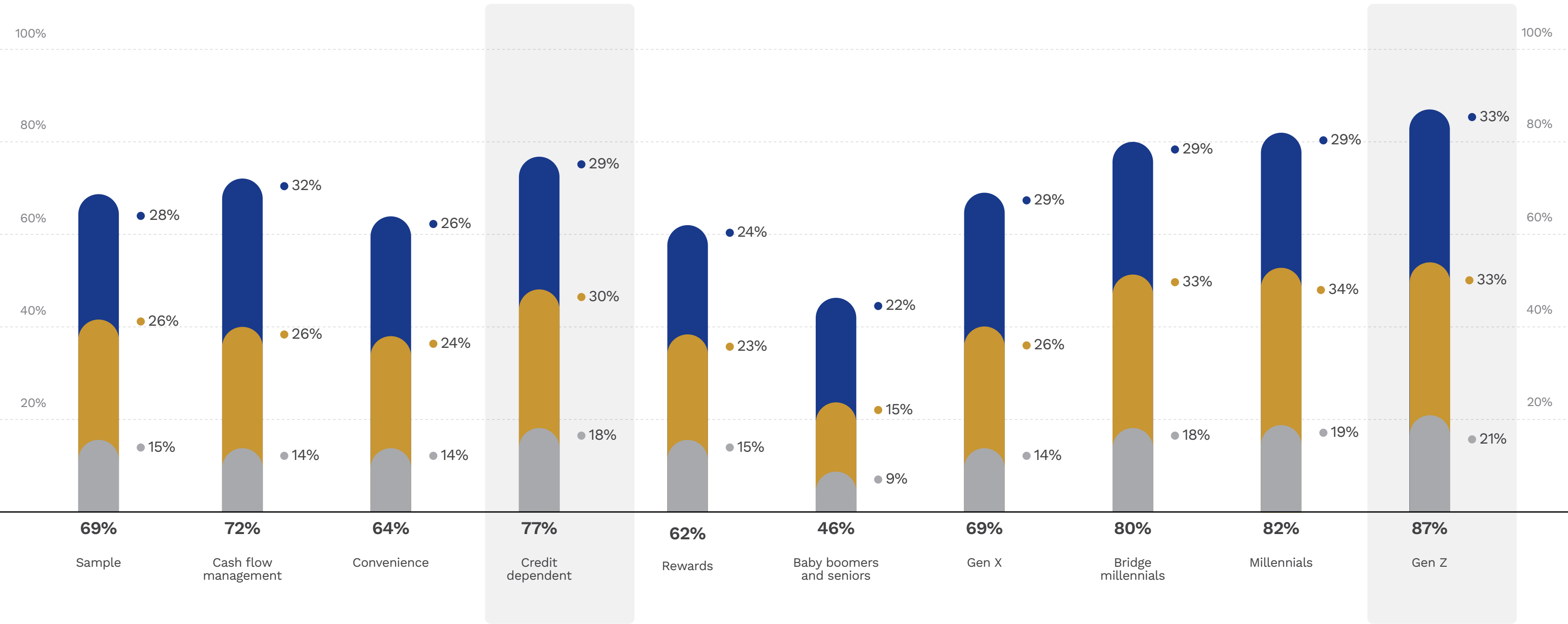
Gen Z leads at 87%, including 33% who say app quality is extremely influential, followed by millennials at 82% and bridge millennials at 80%. By contrast, just 46% of baby boomers and seniors say the app influences which card they use most.

Financial reliance on credit also amplifies the effect. Credit-dependent users report the highest influence at 77%, while consumers managing cash flow report 72%. These groups rely more heavily on credit for everyday financial management and are therefore more sensitive to the digital experience surrounding the card.

Together, these patterns suggest that mobile app quality has become a meaningful factor in credit card competition, particularly among younger and credit-reliant consumers.

FIGURE 3
Influence of app quality on which card becomes top of wallet

- Somewhat influential
- Very influential
- Extremely influential



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 3,198; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

Seven in 10 cardholders use their primary credit card's mobile app, with adoption highest among younger and credit-reliant consumers.

Across the full sample of cardholders, seven in 10 report using their primary credit card's mobile app, including 42% who use it regularly and 28% who do so occasionally. Three in 10 don't engage at all. Non-engagement reflects gaps at several stages: Sixteen percent of cardholders are aware of the app but haven't installed it, and 6% say they were unaware the app exists.

Adoption varies by generation. Millennials (85%) and bridge millennials (82%) report the highest adoption, followed by Gen X (75%) and Gen Z (72%). Baby boomers and seniors show substantially lower adoption, at 46%.

Card motivation helps explain these differences. Credit-dependent cardholders report the highest adoption (77%), while convenience-focused users show the lowest engagement (65%), consistent with more passive card use. The differences by financial lifestyle are comparatively modest, suggesting that financial stress doesn't substantially limit app usage.

The remaining opportunity for issuers is not access but activation, through increasing awareness, installation and habitual use so the app becomes a routine part of managing the credit card.

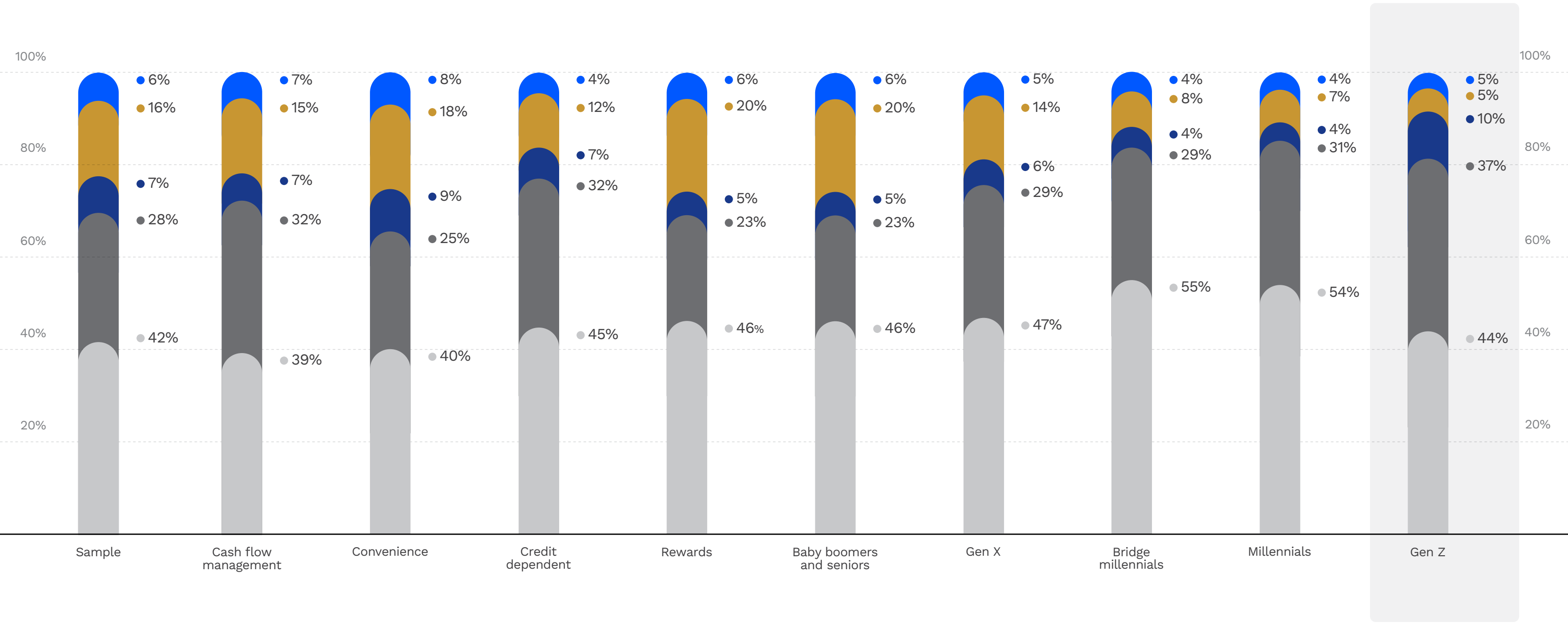
FIGURE 4
Usage status of primary credit card’s mobile app

- No - I’m not aware of the app

No - I’m aware of the app but don’t have it installed

No - I installed the app but never use it
- Yes - I use the app occasionally

Yes - I use the app regularly



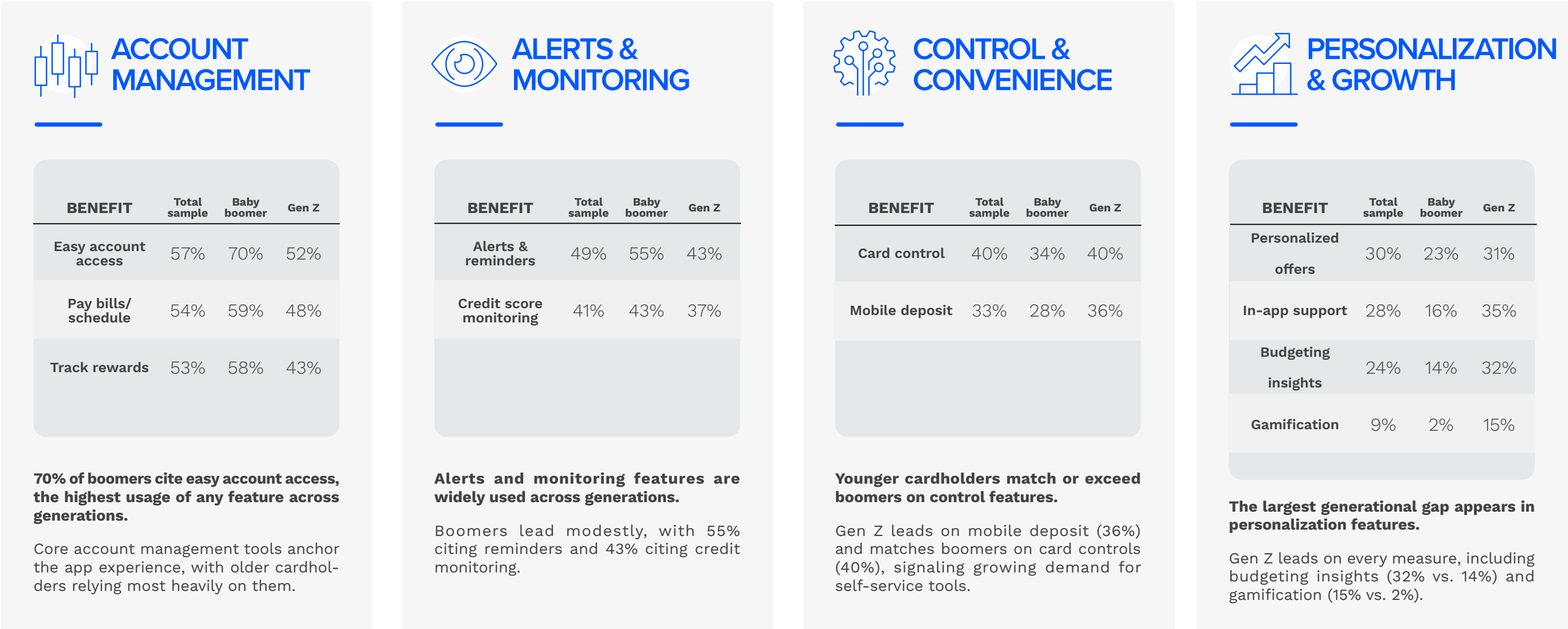
Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 3,198; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

02

THE APP IS A CARDHOLDER'S **PRIMARY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TOOL.**

Half of mobile app users (54%) say reminders or autopay have helped them avoid late fees or pay bills on time. Still, how app users rely on each differs sharply by generation. Boomers favor core app functions like easy account access (70%), while Gen Z leads on personalization features such as budgeting insights (32%) and gamification (15%).

FIGURE 5
Percentage of card app users citing a benefit from using a mobile app for their primary credit card



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 2,229; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

Half of mobile app users (54%) say reminders or autopay have helped them avoid late fees or pay bills on time, but how these users rely on each tool differs sharply by generation.

Alerts and autopay do the heavy lifting. More than half of app users say payment reminders have helped them stay ahead of a late payment or interest charge. Nearly as many (46%) say autopay has done the same. No other feature comes close.

But not every generation uses automation the same way. Baby boomers are far less likely to rely on autopay; just 30% say it has helped them manage payments, compared to 53% of Gen Z. Instead, boomers prefer to stay informed: They lean on reminders rather than handing payment timing over to the app.

Younger cardholders have set it and forgotten it. Autopay rates climb with each generation, to 42% among Gen X, 51% for bridge millennials, 52% of millennials and 53% among Gen Z. For that cohort autopay now ties reminders as the most-cited tool for staying current on payment due dates.

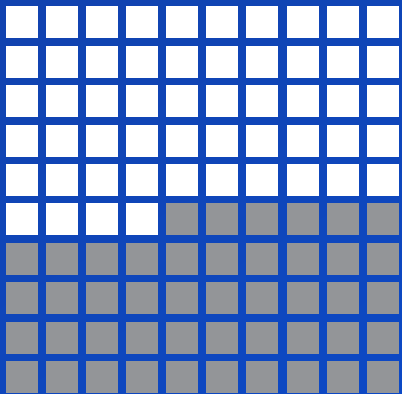
The more sophisticated tools are gaining ground, but only among younger users. Balance alerts, budgeting tools and payoff planners are two to five times more common among Gen Z than baby boomers. For older cardholders, the app's financial safety net runs almost entirely on reminders.

For more than half of users, credit card apps are what stand between them and a missed payment. But how cardholders rely on apps varies by age. Issuers serving both groups need to design financial automation for two very different relationships.

FIGURE 6
Percentage of credit card app users citing a selected feature as helping them avoid interest or pay on time

Generation						
	Sample	Gen Z	Millennials	Bridge millennials	Gen X	Baby boomers and seniors
Payment due alerts or reminders	54%	49%	55%	57%	55%	53%
Auto-pay	46%	30%	42%	51%	52%	53%
Balance threshold alerts	24%	12%	21%	31%	32%	28%
Budgeting tools	21%	6%	16%	23%	27%	30%
Payoff planners/ interest etc.	18%	6%	16%	22%	22%	24%

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 2,229; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026



54%

of card app users say that payment due alerts or reminders help them pay bills on time or avoid interest charges.

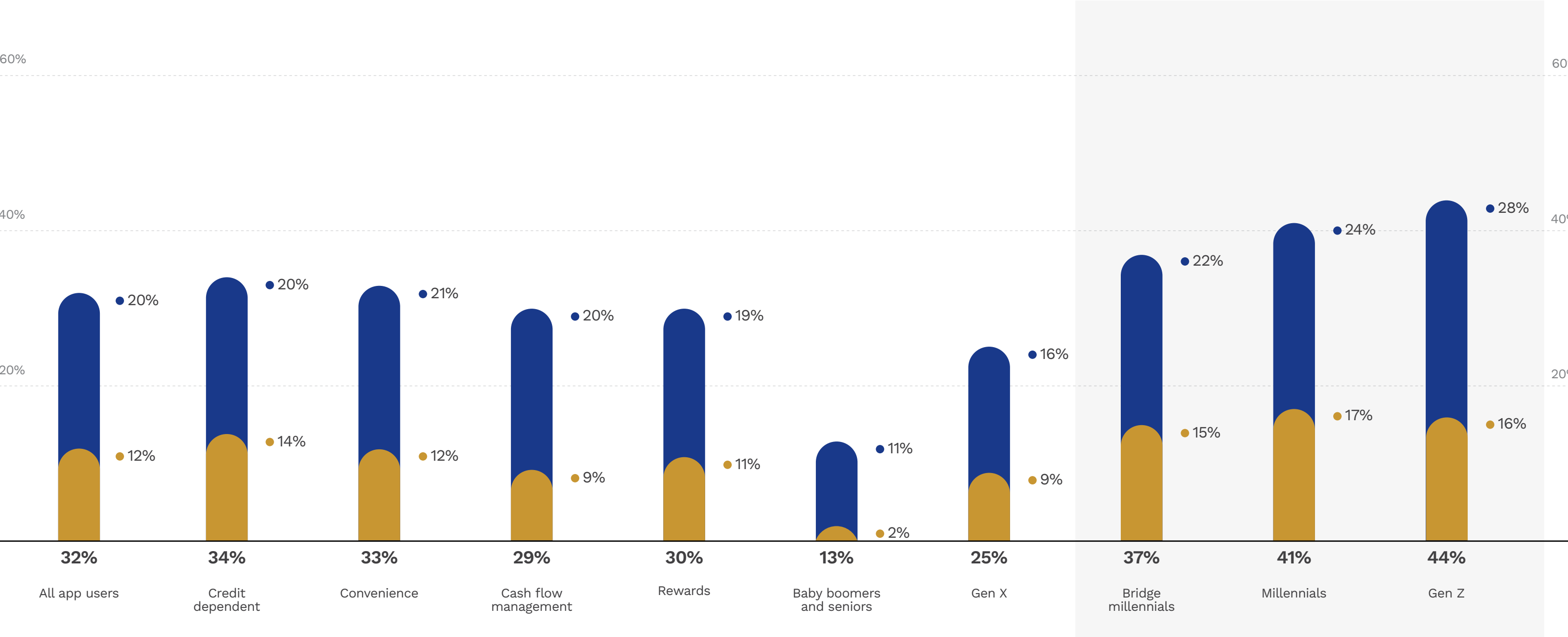
03

CONSUMER USAGE OF
CARDS APPS IS **ASSOCIATED
WITH MORE SPENDING.**

Nearly a third of app users increased their card spending after installing the associated app, with the effect strongest among younger generations.

FIGURE 7
Change in spending on primary credit card since using its mobile app

● Increased somewhat
● Increased significantly



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 2,229; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

04

REWARDS FEATURES
INCREASE **WALLET SHARE.**

40%

of app users say at least one app feature encouraged them to **spend more on their card.**

But which features move the needle depends entirely on why the cardholder is using their card in the first place.

Four in 10 app users say that identifying or redeeming rewards encouraged them to spend more on the card, rising to five in 10 among those who prioritize maximizing rewards.

As financial stress increases, rewards recede as a spending trigger and financial visibility features take over. The app earns spending not through perks alone, but also by giving cardholders more control.

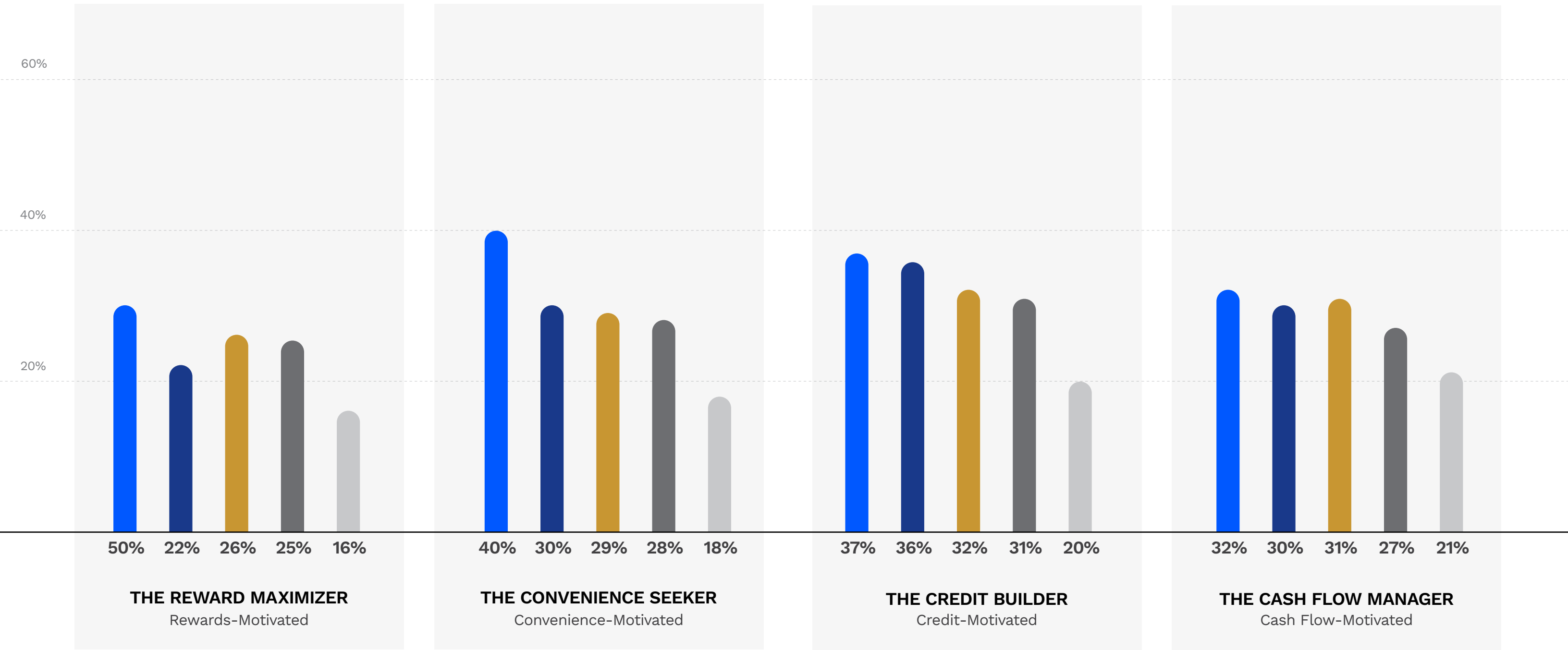
- Identify/redeem rewards

● Check next payment due

● Check credit remaining
- Schedule payment/auto-pay

● Set up/change alerts

FIGURE 8



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 2,229; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

05

POOR EXPERIENCE WITH A
CARD APP **DRIVES CHURN.**

Nearly one in four
cardholders say a poor app
or digital experience with the
tool contributed to reduced
card use.

A poor app experience reduces card use for 24% of cardholders and nearly half of Gen Z (45%).

Nearly one in four cardholders say a poor app experience has already led them to use a card less frequently.

Eight percent say it was the primary reason they stopped using the card entirely, signaling that digital experience is directly tied to wallet share.

The generational gap is dramatic.

Just 4% of baby boomers say a poor digital experience affected their card use, compared with 45% of Gen Z, meaning younger cardholders are more than 10 times as sensitive to app quality.

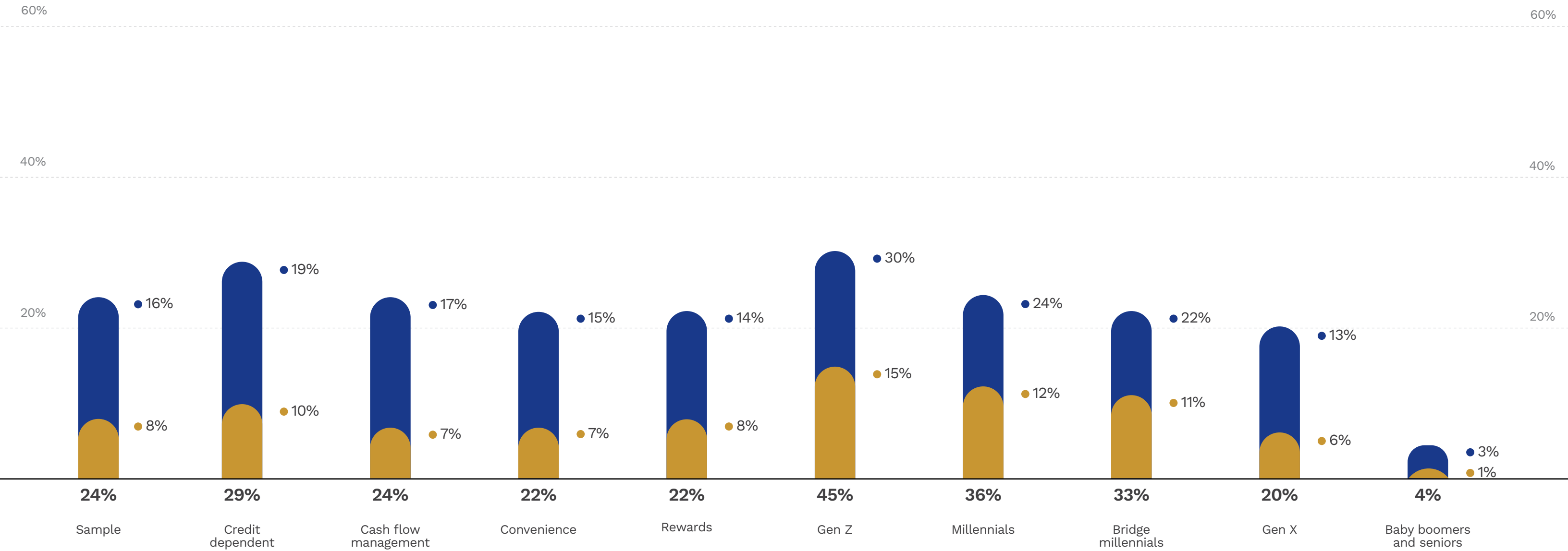
App experience affects every type of cardholder.

Attrition risk from poor digital experiences is evident across all motivations, from 22% among rewards and convenience users to 29% among credit-dependent cardholders.

Nearly one in four cardholders (24%) say a poor app experience has already reduced their card use—and 45% of Gen Z report the same. Digital experience is now a driver of card retention.

FIGURE 9
Whether poor app/digital experience ever led to reducing or stopping credit card use

- Stopped using card primarily because of app
- Contributed but was not main reason



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice
N = 3,198; survey conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

**01**

Shift focus from adoption to activation. Seven in 10 cardholders already use your app. The remaining opportunity is getting users to install, set up and build habits early. For Gen Z, the gap is awareness; for older users, it's resistance. These require different strategies.

**02**

Design for two distinct user behaviors, not one average user. Boomers use the app to stay in control; Gen Z uses it to automate and step away. A single experience will underserve both.

**03**

Make payment management the foundation of the experience. More than half of users say reminders or autopay helped them avoid missing a payment. No other feature comes close. If this breaks, everything else can become irrelevant.

**04**

Surface rewards when they can influence behavior. Four in 10 users say app features increased their spending, with rewards doing most of that work. Rewards only drive spend when they're visible and easy to act on.

**05**

Align the app experience to why the card is used. Rewards users, credit-dependent users and cash flow users are solving different problems. Designing for the average user misses the mark; tailoring the experience to motivation is where the gains are.

**06**

Treat digital experience as a retention lever, not a support function. Nearly one in four cardholders have already reduced card use due to a poor app experience. When the app fails, consumers don't troubleshoot; they shift spending to another card.



CONCLUSION

Credit card mobile apps are emerging as one of the most important competitive layers in the credit card ecosystem. While the card itself remains the financial product, the digital experience surrounding it increasingly determines how consumers choose, use and remain loyal to that card.

The data shows that mobile apps now influence the entire card lifecycle. App quality shapes top-of-wallet decisions, engagement with the app reinforces spending behavior and the digital experience can determine whether consumers continue using the card or leave it gathering dust. For a meaningful share of cardholders, the app has become the primary interface for managing their credit and interacting with their issuer.

The app's influence is especially pronounced among younger credit-reliant consumers, segments that are both the most digitally engaged and the most sensitive to digital friction. These users are more likely to increase spending when the app delivers value and more likely to reduce card use when the experience fails.

For issuers, this shift carries both opportunity and risk. Mobile apps that deliver clear financial visibility, seamless payment management and relevant engagement features can reinforce spending and strengthen wallet share. At the same time, poor digital experiences can accelerate disengagement in a competitive multi-card environment where consumers can easily shift activity to another card.

As consumers continue managing more of their financial lives through mobile interfaces, credit card apps will increasingly shape the dynamics of card competition. Issuers that treat the mobile experience as a core part of the product, rather than a supporting channel, will be best positioned to secure and maintain top-of-wallet status.

April 2026 Report

WINNING TOP OF WALLET: HOW CREDIT CARD APPS SHAPE CHOICE



METHODOLOGY

Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice,” the newest installment of the Digital Engagement Pathways series, a PYMNTS Intelligence exclusive series, is based on a survey of 3,198 U.S. adult consumers who hold at least one general-purpose credit card. Conducted Feb. 27–March 3, 2026, this report examines how credit card mobile apps influence card choice, consumer engagement and spending behavior. It also probes how digital experiences shape long-term card usage and retention. The survey sample was balanced to reflect the U.S. adult population by age, gender, education and income.

THE PYMNTS INTELLIGENCE TEAM THAT PRODUCED THIS REPORT:

Lynnley Browning
Managing Editor

Daniel Gallucci
Senior Writer

Lauren Copeland, Ph.D.
Senior Research Manager

Franco Coraggio
Analyst

ABOUT

PYMNTS INTELLIGENCE

[PYMNTS Intelligence](#) is a leading global data and analytics platform that uses proprietary data and methods to provide actionable insights on what's now and what's next in payments, commerce and the digital economy. Its team of data scientists include leading economists, econometricians, survey experts, financial analysts and marketing scientists with deep experience in the application of data to the issues that define the future of the digital transformation of the global economy. This multi-lingual team has conducted original data collection and analysis in more than three dozen global markets for some of the world's leading publicly traded and privately held firms.



Elan is the leading agent credit card issuer trusted by more than 1,300 financial institutions. With over 50 years of industry experience, Elan's comprehensive program empowers financial institutions to focus on deepening cardmember relationships while Elan manages all aspects of card issuance — including underwriting, marketing, compliance, and customer service. By fully funding program operations and providing advanced digital servicing tools, Elan helps partners streamline operations, reduce administrative burdens, and drive sustainable portfolio growth. Visit elancreditcard.com to learn more and explore additional payment solutions.

Winning Top of Wallet: How Credit Card Apps Shape Choice may be updated periodically. While reasonable efforts are made to keep the content accurate and up to date, PYMNTS MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, REGARDING THE CORRECTNESS, ACCURACY, COMPLETENESS, ADEQUACY, OR RELIABILITY OF OR THE USE OF OR RESULTS THAT MAY BE GENERATED FROM THE USE OF THE INFORMATION OR THAT THE CONTENT WILL SATISFY YOUR REQUIREMENTS OR EXPECTATIONS. THE CONTENT IS PROVIDED "AS IS" AND ON AN "AS AVAILABLE" BASIS. YOU EXPRESSLY AGREE THAT YOUR USE OF THE CONTENT IS AT YOUR SOLE RISK. PYMNTS SHALL HAVE NO LIABILITY FOR ANY INTERRUPTIONS IN THE CONTENT THAT IS PROVIDED AND DISCLAIMS ALL WARRANTIES WITH REGARD TO THE CONTENT, INCLUDING THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, AND NON-INFRINGEMENT AND TITLE. SOME JURISDICTIONS DO NOT ALLOW THE EXCLUSION OF CERTAIN WARRANTIES, AND, IN SUCH CASES, THE STATED EXCLUSIONS DO NOT APPLY. PYMNTS RESERVES THE RIGHT AND SHOULD NOT BE LIABLE SHOULD IT EXERCISE ITS RIGHT TO MODIFY, INTERRUPT, OR DISCONTINUE THE AVAILABILITY OF THE CONTENT OR ANY COMPONENT OF IT WITH OR WITHOUT NOTICE.

PYMNTS SHALL NOT BE LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGES WHATSOEVER, AND, IN PARTICULAR, SHALL NOT BE LIABLE FOR ANY SPECIAL, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES, OR DAMAGES FOR LOST PROFITS, LOSS OF REVENUE, OR LOSS OF USE, ARISING OUT OF OR RELATED TO THE CONTENT, WHETHER SUCH DAMAGES ARISE IN CONTRACT, NEGLIGENCE, TORT, UNDER STATUTE, IN EQUITY, AT LAW, OR OTHERWISE, EVEN IF PYMNTS HAS BEEN ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

SOME JURISDICTIONS DO NOT ALLOW FOR THE LIMITATION OR EXCLUSION OF LIABILITY FOR INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES, AND IN SUCH CASES SOME OF THE ABOVE LIMITATIONS DO NOT APPLY. THE ABOVE DISCLAIMERS AND LIMITATIONS ARE PROVIDED BY PYMNTS AND ITS PARENTS, AFFILIATED AND RELATED COMPANIES, CONTRACTORS, AND SPONSORS, AND EACH OF ITS RESPECTIVE DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, MEMBERS, EMPLOYEES, AGENTS, CONTENT COMPONENT PROVIDERS, LICENSORS, AND ADVISERS.

Components of the content original to and the compilation produced by PYMNTS is the property of PYMNTS and cannot be reproduced without its prior written permission.

We are interested in your feedback on this report. If you have questions, comments or would like to subscribe, please email us at feedback@pymnts.com.