

May 2026 Playbook

Digital Currency at the Credit Union:

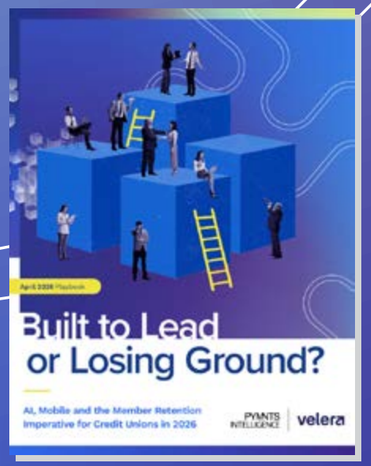
The Gap Between Interest and Access

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DIGITAL CURRENCY AT THE CREDIT UNION:

The Gap Between Interest and Access

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Digital Currency at the Credit Union: The Gap Between Interest and Access was produced in collaboration with Velera, 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.

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What's **at Stake**

A 28-year-old millennial walks into her credit union to ask about buying bitcoin. The teller hesitates: There's no product, no brochure, no clear answer. Minutes later, the credit union member opens her Coinbase app in the parking lot and completes the transaction before driving away.

It's a small moment that reflects a larger reality. Roughly one in three millennials express strong interest in using cryptocurrency for payments. Yet half aren't sure whether their financial institutions offer the asset, and another 27% believe they don't. The gap between consumer appetite and institutional supply is striking.

1/3

About one-third of millennials express strong interest in using cryptocurrency for payments.

Millennials and Gen Z have come of age in a financial world where digital assets feel ordinary. Crypto isn't exotic to them; it's just another asset to hold, track and potentially use. If credit unions can't meet those members where they are, they risk gradual disengagement. By the time younger members make long-term financial decisions about wealth planning, such as where to save, borrow or invest, they may already be aligned with other financial institutions that better reflect how they think about money.

At the same time, rushing headlong into volatile, speculative products carries its own risks for credit unions, from regulatory and compliance obligations to balance sheet concerns. The challenge is to engage with member interest without overcommitting.

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The most practical path forward may be locking down a core component of the infrastructure. The data points to digital wallets as the most practical on-ramp, a familiar interface that reduces the friction of engaging with digital currency without requiring a full-scale build. Digital currency isn't the future of financial services: it's already there, for the members willing to go find it. The question credit unions face now is how they want to be found.

"Digital Currency at the Credit Union: The Gap Between Interest and Access," based on a survey of nearly 14,000 U.S. consumers conducted by PYMNTS Intelligence in collaboration with Velera, underscores a critical distinction: interest in digital currency is real, especially among younger generations, but adoption remains limited. That gap is where strategy lives. Now, it's less about whether to offer digital currency and more about how to make accessing it feel effortless. Crypto demand is concentrated among younger consumers who represent the future of any financial institution's membership base. Ignoring their preferences entirely is a long-term retention risk. But overinvesting in digital currency as a strategic priority is equally misguided. This report offers data on how and why to find a balance.

By **the Numbers**

67%

Two-thirds of credit union members don't know whether their institution supports cryptocurrencies, not because credit unions have failed to communicate, but because most members aren't looking.

70%

Seven in 10 credit union members don't know whether their institution offers receipt, storage and transactions using stablecoins.

54%

Younger consumers are seeking digital currencies. Among millennials, just over half express at least moderate interest in digital currencies. They're also the most willing to take their business elsewhere.

22%

Digital wallets are the most promising on-ramp. Nearly one in four credit union members say they're interested in using cryptocurrency through a digital wallet to make purchase or payments.

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Key **Findings**

01 The Great Crypto Search

Two-thirds of credit union members are unsure whether their institutions allow cryptocurrency use. Nearly half of millennials and Gen Z know, likely because they're already looking for it.

02 Crypto is often framed for investments and stablecoin for payments, but neither drives choice of a financial institution.

Credit union members across all age groups lag non-members in digital currency interest. Millennials are the most eager for digital currency, but their needs are often met elsewhere.

03 Digital wallets are the gateway to digital currencies.

Adding a digital wallet layer lifts crypto and stablecoin interest by 2–7 percentage points among younger consumers.



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I. The Great Crypto Search

Two-thirds of credit union members are unsure whether their institution allows cryptocurrency use. Nearly half of millennials and Gen Z know, likely because they're looking for it.

Consumers who know whether their institution supports cryptocurrency are, almost without exception, the ones who went looking for it.

Just 7% of credit union members say their financial institution allows them to receive, store and send crypto (versus 18% of non-credit union members). Two-thirds aren't sure. Among baby boomers and seniors, that uncertainty climbs to nearly 80%, but the figure says less about institutional opacity than it does about where older members' financial priorities lie.

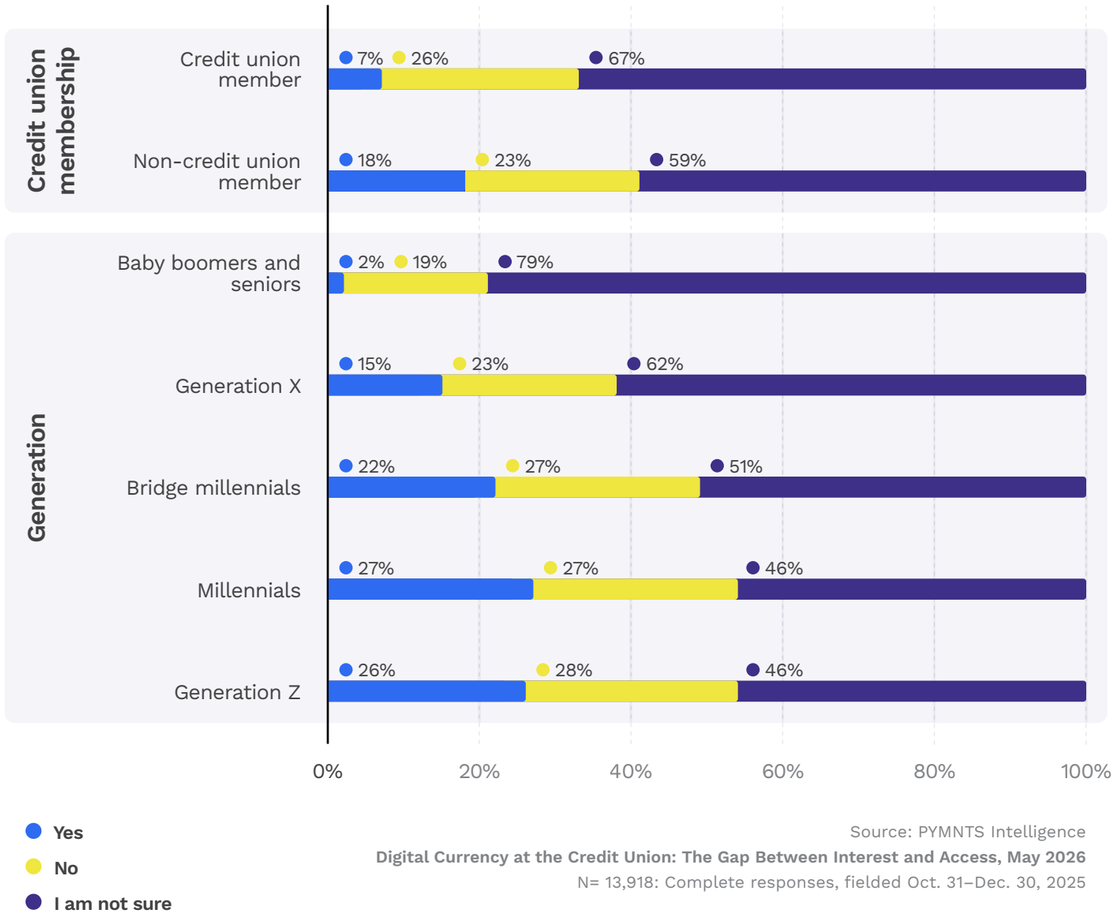
Meanwhile, 27% of millennials and Gen Z are aware that their financial institution offers crypto. For gen Z, that's four times the rate of older credit unions members; for millennials, it's four times the rate of all bank customers. That's not because these institutions are communicating more effectively with younger members. It's because younger members are actively checking, and when the answer isn't readily available—or turns out to be no—they already know where else to look.

The awareness gap isn't primarily a marketing problem; it's a product problem. Younger, digitally engaged members are actively evaluating their institution on this dimension, and if the answer isn't readily available—or the answer is no—they're already finding alternatives.

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FIGURE 1:

Consumer awareness of cryptocurrency availability
Share of consumers citing to what extent their financial institution offers receipt, storage and transactions using cryptocurrency



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Digital Currency at the Credit Union: The Gap Between Interest and Access, May 2026
N= 13,918: Complete responses, fielded Oct. 31–Dec. 30, 2025

Stablecoin awareness is even lower than crypto, with one key exception.

While cryptocurrency awareness at credit unions is low, stablecoin awareness is lower still. Just 7% of credit union members say their primary financial institution allows stablecoin transactions—nearly identical to the crypto figure, despite stablecoin being a fundamentally different kind of asset with a distinct value proposition around price stability. Among non-credit union consumers, 13% report stablecoin availability, nearly double the credit union member rate.

Generationally, millennials lead stablecoin awareness at 19%, followed by Gen Z at 18%. But even among the youngest cohorts, the majority remain uncertain. Among baby boomers, 81% don't know whether their institution supports stablecoin at all.

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19%

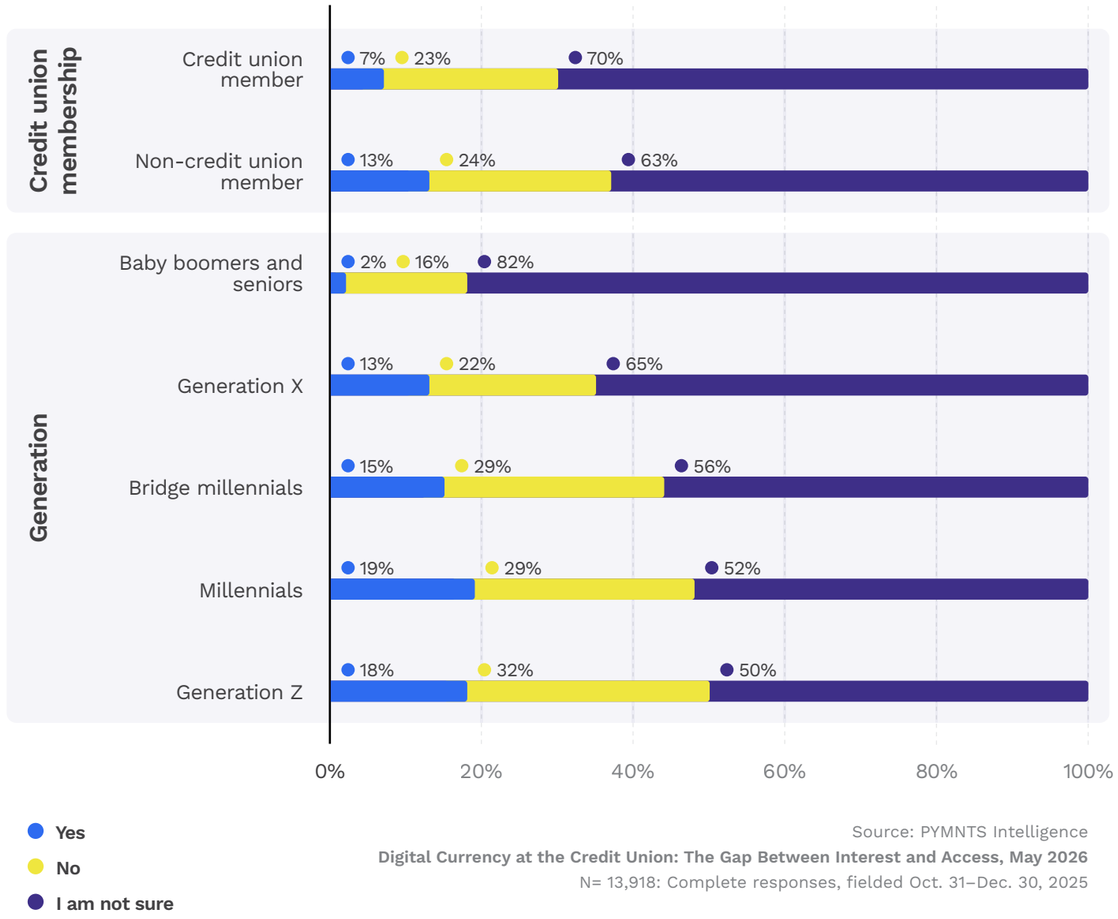
of millennials and 18% of Gen Z
say their financial institutions offer digital currencies.

The parity between crypto and stablecoin awareness among credit union members (7% for both) reveals that consumers don't distinguish between these asset classes the way the industry does. Despite stablecoin's design advantages for payments, awareness and interest track almost identically to crypto. The industry's conceptual distinctions haven't yet translated into consumer understanding.

For stablecoin, this creates a particular challenge: The asset hasn't been able to establish its own identity in the consumer imagination. For credit unions, there's not much to do until consumer use cases for stablecoin payments develop more traction.

FIGURE 2:

Consumer awareness of stablecoin availability
Share of consumers citing whether their financial institution offers receipt, storage and transactions using stablecoin



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II. Crypto Is Framed For Investments, Stablecoin For Payments

There's a gap between perceived supply and demand. Credit union members are considerably more likely to say they're at least somewhat interested in using cryptocurrency for payments than say their credit union offers that service.

Among millennials, 31% describe themselves as very or extremely interested in crypto payments, with another 15% expressing moderate interest. Gen Z isn't far behind, with 24% reporting strong interest. These numbers represent a substantial portion of the cohorts that will define credit union membership for the next several decades. Those numbers may be even higher for non-payment uses of crypto: Prior PYMNTS Intelligence research shows that the most common reason consumers purchase these currencies is as an investment.

Once again, a gap emerges between members and non-members. Only 7% of credit union members are very or extremely interested in crypto, compared to 19% of non-credit union consumers. The demographic composition of credit union membership—older, on average, than the general population—explains part of this gap. But it also signals something about expectations: Consumers who want crypto exposure have already learned to get it elsewhere, through platforms such as Coinbase, Robinhood and Cash App, rather than through their financial institution. The credit union simply isn't where they're looking.

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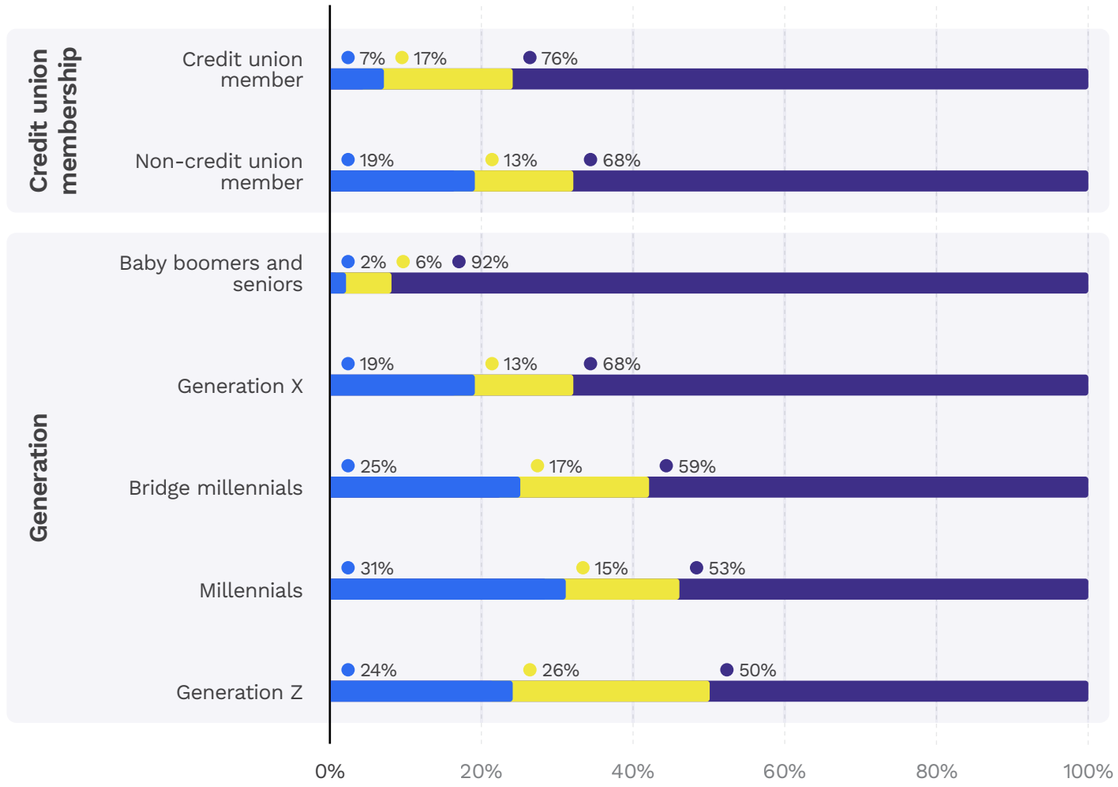
Understanding what younger consumers want from crypto is important. Most aren't asking their institution to help them pay for a matcha latte in bitcoin. Instead, they want access to a fast-moving asset class. The question for credit unions is whether they want to be part of that shift—and if so, how.

31%

of millennials want to **use cryptocurrencies to make purchases or payments.**

FIGURE 3:

Interest in using cryptocurrency
Share of consumers citing level of interest in using cryptocurrency to make purchases or payments



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
Digital Currency at the Credit Union: The Gap Between Interest and Access, May 2026
N= 13,918: Complete responses, fielded Oct. 31–Dec. 30, 2025

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Consumers don’t see much difference between crypto and stablecoin, despite key distinctions.

The payments industry has spent considerable energy distinguishing cryptocurrency from stablecoin. Crypto is volatile, speculative and investment-driven. Stablecoin is pegged to a traditional fiat currency such as the U.S. dollar, redeemable for that currency, designed for transactions and theoretically better suited for everyday payments. The distinction is obvious to industry practitioners, but for most consumers, it barely registers.

Across every demographic group, stablecoin trails cryptocurrency in payment interest, but only by a few percentage points. Among millennials, 28% express strong interest in stablecoin payments versus 31% for crypto. Gen Z shows 17% strong stablecoin interest compared to 24% for crypto. Baby boomers and seniors are almost entirely disengaged: 94% show slight or no interest in stablecoin payments, versus 92% for cryptocurrency.

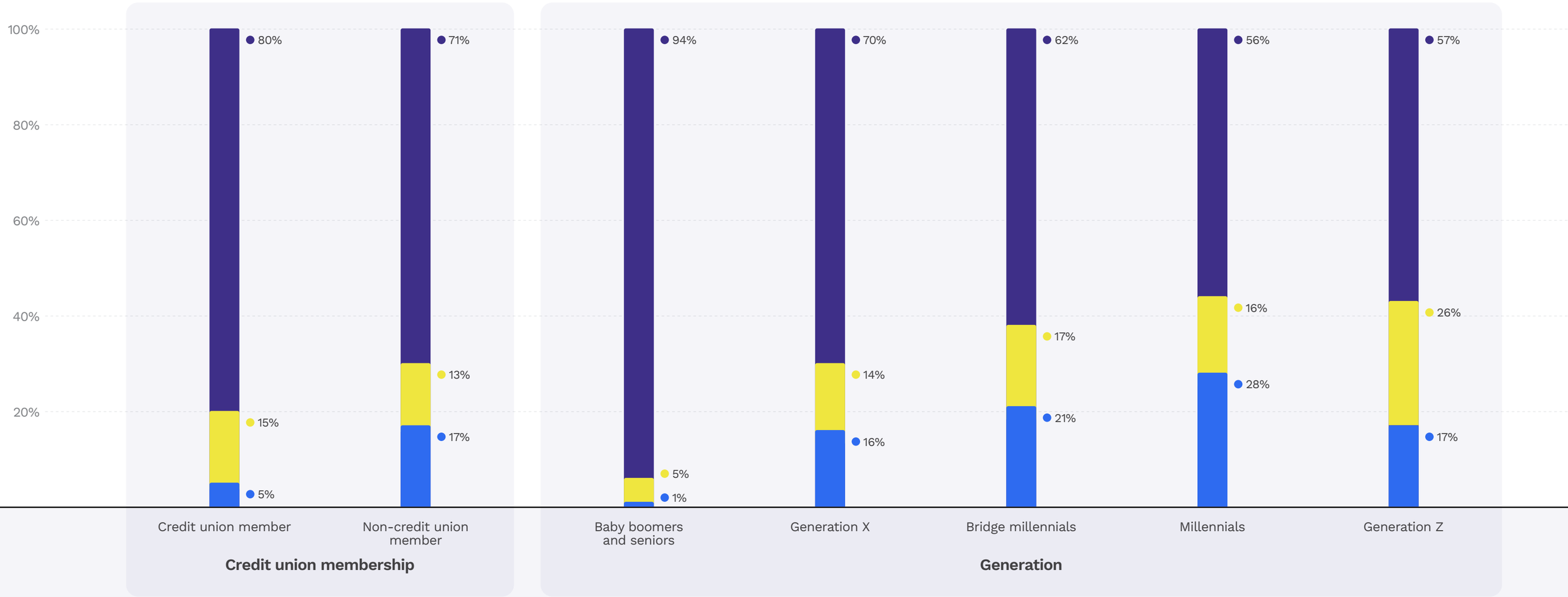
The gaps are consistent and modest, which itself is informative. If consumers genuinely understood stablecoin’s stability advantage—it’s redeemable at any time on a one-to-one basis for its underlying fiat currency—one might expect either notably higher interest (it’s safer) or notably lower (it’s less exciting). Instead, the numbers move almost in lockstep.

But while stablecoin’s value proposition of price stability would seem to be a natural selling point for payments, it hasn’t yet found its audience. Consumers aren’t distinguishing between crypto and stablecoin in any meaningful way; to the extent they’re interested in digital currency at all, they’re interested in both, roughly equally, and for similar reasons.

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FIGURE 4:

Interest in using stablecoin
Share of consumers citing level of interest in using stablecoin to make purchases or payments



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
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III. Digital Wallets Are The Gateway To Crypto And Stablecoin.

There's a temptation for credit unions to treat the digital currency question as binary: either offer it or don't. The data suggests the reality is more interesting—and more fluid—than that framing implies.

Enter the "wallet effect": When consumers are asked about using cryptocurrency through a digital wallet rather than as a standalone product, interest rises across the board. Among millennials, the share expressing strong interest climbs from 31% to 35%—a modest but meaningful lift, given the size of the cohort. Among bridge millennials, the jump is more pronounced: from 24.7% to 30.6%, a 5.9 percentage point increase. Credit union members, who tend to be relatively subdued in their digital currency enthusiasm, show a bump, too, with interest rising from 6.8% to 10.7%.

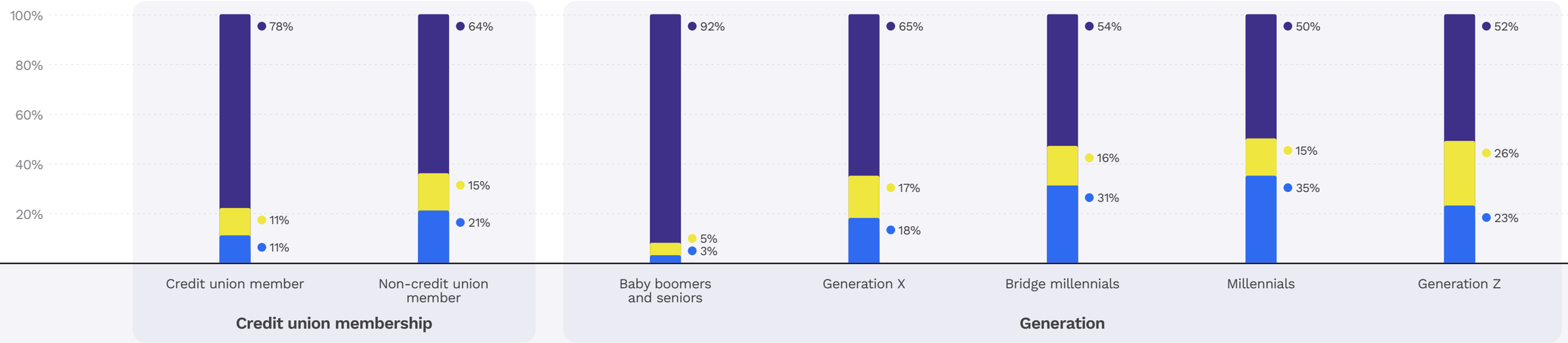
The most plausible explanation for the wallet effect is familiarity. A digital wallet is an interface consumers already understand and trust. When crypto is presented within a familiar interface alongside debit, credit and peer-to-peer transfers, rather than as a new and unfamiliar financial product, the perceived risk and complexity may drop. Consumers don't have to learn a new mental model. They just have to tap a new button.

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That means credit unions don't necessarily need to build a crypto product. They may need to build—or find the right partner for—wallet infrastructure that enables crypto in a way that feels native and effortless. The interface is doing most of the work. Offering a compelling digital wallet experience may unlock demand that a direct crypto offering, no matter how well designed, would not.

FIGURE 5:

Interest in digital wallet cryptocurrency
Share of consumers citing level of interest in using cryptocurrencies through a digital wallet to make purchases or payments



22%

of credit union members are **very or somewhat interested in using cryptocurrencies through digital wallets for purchases or payments.**

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
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This wallet effect is even stronger for stablecoin: Credit union member interest nearly doubles when a digital wallet is involved.

The wallet effect is even more powerful when it comes to stablecoin, and the shift among credit union members is striking. Among members, 12% express strong interest in accessing stablecoin through a digital wallet, more than double the 5% who are interested in direct stablecoin payments.

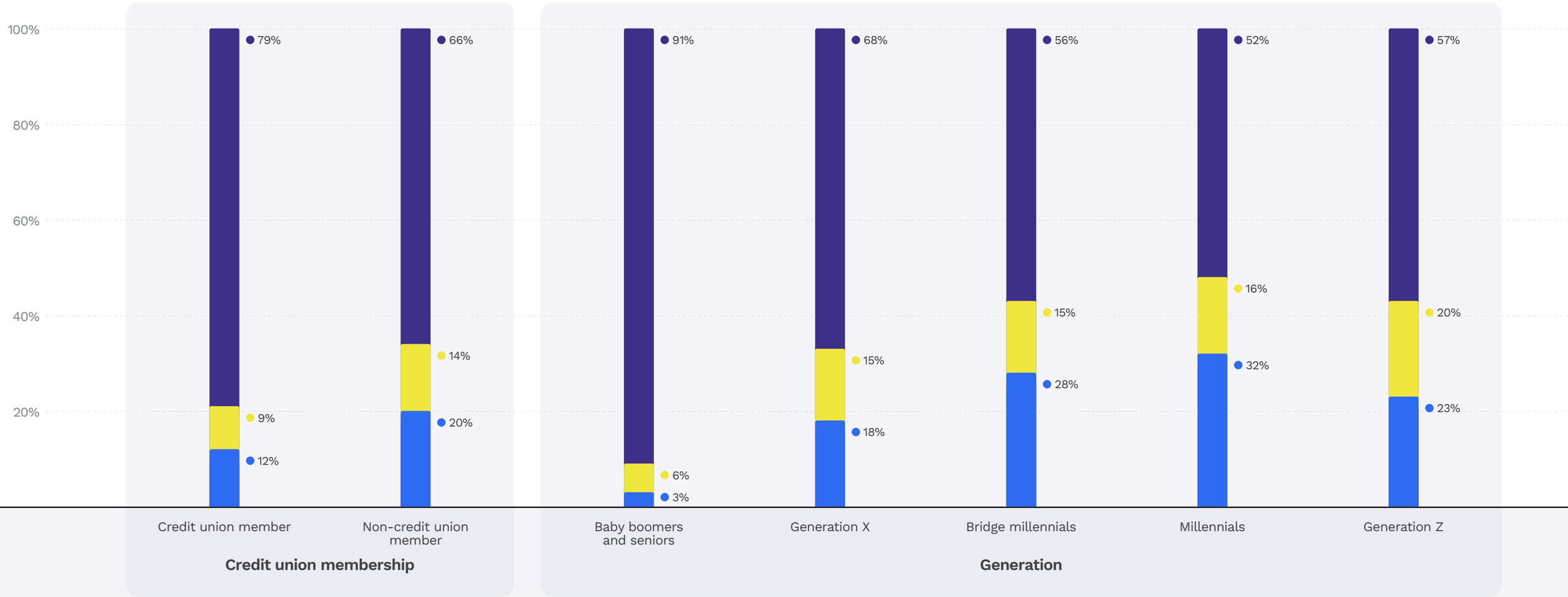
Millennials move from 28.4% to 32% strong interest. Bridge millennials show the sharpest jump of any group: from 21.3% to 28.5%, a 7.2 percentage point increase. Even Gen X, which has largely sat out the digital currency conversation, shifts from 16.4% to 17.5% when a wallet is part of the equation.

Why the extra-strong effect? Unlike cryptocurrency, which at least benefits from cultural familiarity and media coverage, stablecoin is a relatively unfamiliar concept. It may be too much novelty all at once for consumers to engage with an unfamiliar asset through an unfamiliar channel. A digital wallet removes one layer of that uncertainty. The asset may still be new, but the interface is known, and that familiarity appears to do a lot of the work to persuade consumers. Wallet infrastructure might be the make-or-break factor in having a viable stablecoin strategy when the time comes.

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FIGURE 6:

Interest in digital wallet stablecoin
Share of consumers citing level of interest in storing and using stablecoin through a digital wallet to make purchases or payments



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
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Conclusion

There's real consumer demand for digital currencies, but it's far from universal. For now, it lives almost entirely among younger consumers, who are more likely to hold crypto and more likely to want access to it through their financial institution. These aren't fringe customers. They're the future of the credit union membership base.

That said, there's a case for restraint. Most consumers aren't looking to crypto as a new way to buy groceries. Stablecoin, despite its theoretical advantages as a payment tool, hasn't found its footing with everyday consumers. The use cases aren't clear yet. Moreover, the consumers most enthusiastic about digital assets are already using Coinbase, Robinhood or Cash App—they're not waiting for their credit union to catch up.

What the data supports is a middle path: not a full-scale digital currency strategy, but not inaction either. The most consistent finding across every demographic group is that a digital wallet interface, familiar and trusted, reliably increases consumer interest in digital currency. For credit unions, that points toward wallet infrastructure, likely through a FinTech partnership, as the most sensible near-term investment. It signals relevance to younger members without requiring a fundamental shift in what a credit union is.

The goal isn't to become a crypto platform. It's to make sure that when younger members look around and ask whether their institution understands them, they're met with more than silence.

METHODOLOGY

Digital Currency at the Credit Union: The Gap Between Interest and Access is based on a survey of 13,918 U.S. consumers alongside credit union decision-makers, conducted between Oct. 31–Dec. 30, 2025. The consumer sample was balanced to reflect the U.S. adult population by age, gender, education and income. The report examines consumer demand for cryptocurrency and stablecoin services, as well as credit unions' plans to meet that demand.

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