



Dark Patterns Nomenclature

Mixed Methods

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04.23.2025

Agenda

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Objectives & Methodology

Business Context:

The Content Strategy team is currently building out a glossary of commonly used terms in offers, with the goal of **developing standardized nomenclature guidelines** that improve offer transparency and customer understanding. This study aims to discover how current/prospect customers conceptualize the terms **credit/bill credit, discount**, as well as related marketing phrases. Study findings will **inform guidance** that will be shared with working teams across VCG Shop and Digital Unity.

Research Objectives:

- Develop a foundational understanding of customer and prospect mental models related to the redemption of “credits,” “bill credits,” “discounts,” and other related offer phrases.
- Identify considerations that inform appropriate usage of offer terms in varying contexts.

Methodology Overview:

- Mixed methods study; consisting of remote, unmoderated concept testing select marketing phrases with closed and open-ended questions AND remote, qualitative in-depth interviews
- **Remote, unmoderated concept testing (n=120)**
 - 59 customers, 61 prospects
- **Remote, qualitative in-depth interviews (n=10)**
 - 5 customers, 5 prospects
- Mix of gender, age (20-65 years), race, and income level

Evaluated Stimuli: Unmoderated Concept Testing

Save \$XX

Save \$419.99.



Apple iPhone 14

★★★★★ (119)

Starts at \$5.00/mo
\$16.66/mo [Details](#)
for 36 months, 0% APR
Retail price: \$599.99

● ○ ○ ● ○ ● +4

Compare

Save \$41.99



Incase ICON Woolenex Case with
MagSafe for iPhone 16

☆☆☆☆☆ (0)

\$18.00
[\\$59.99 Details](#)

\$XX off

\$419.99 off



Apple iPhone 14

★★★★★ (119)

Starts at \$5.00/mo
\$16.66/mo [Details](#)
for 36 months, 0% APR
Retail price: \$599.99

● ○ ○ ● ○ ● +4

Compare

\$41.99 off



Incase ICON Woolenex Case with
MagSafe for iPhone 16

☆☆☆☆☆ (0)

\$18.00
[\\$59.99 Details](#)

XX% off

Get 25% off
Samsung Galaxy
S25 Ultra

With select 5G Unlimited plans. Online
only.^①



Phone - Bill Credits

Accessory - \$
Markdown

Phone - Bill Credits

Accessory - \$
Markdown

Phone - Bill Credits

Accessory - \$
Markdown

Evaluated Stimuli: Unmoderated Concept Testing pt2

Save XX%

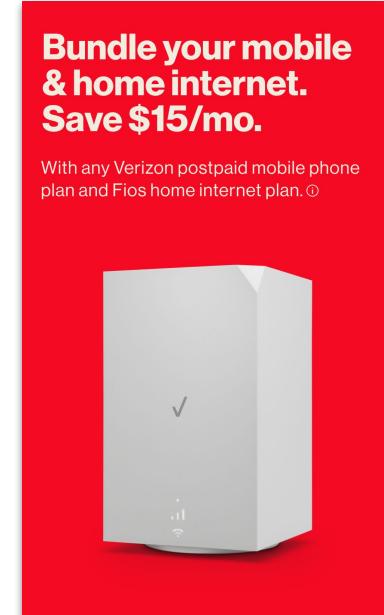


Perk - \$ Markdown

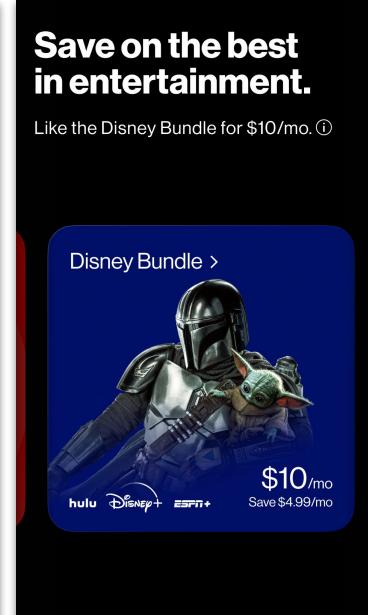


Accessory - \$ Markdown

Save \$XX/mo

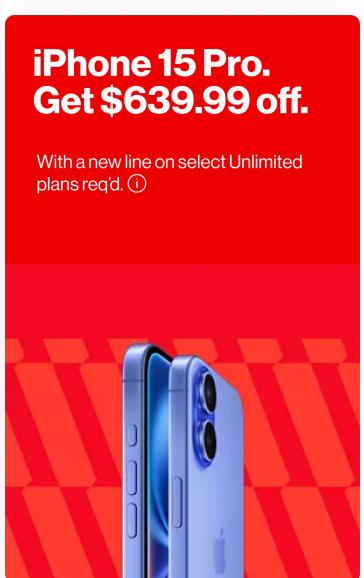


Plans - Bill Credits



Perk - \$ Markdown

Evaluated Stimuli: Qualitative In-Depth Interviews



Home / Smartphones / Apple

Apple iPhone 15 Pro

★★★★☆ Reviews (235)

128 GB, White Titanium

Play videos

Color Color name

Storage 128 GB

New or existing customer Are you a new or existing customer?

New customer

Existing customer

Available offers Which offer would you like to select?

Save \$639.99. Online only.
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Details

Trade in and save \$855.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save
 Show me options for this offer next



Control

Available offers Which offer would you like to select?

Save \$639.99 after 36 monthly bill credits. Online only.
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Details

Trade in and save \$855 after 36 monthly bill credits.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save
 Show me options for this offer next

V1

Available offers Which offer would you like to select?

Get \$639.99 back over 36 months. Online only.
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Details

Trade in and get \$855 back over 36 months.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save
 Show me options for this offer next

V2

Available offers Which offer would you like to select?

Get \$17.78/mo back for 36 months. Online only.
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Details

Trade in and get \$23.75/mo back for 36 months.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save
 Show me options for this offer next

V3

Terminology sets the stage, but clarity is achieved primarily through supporting details.

Customers and prospects have **varied working definitions** of offer terminology, such as “credits,” “bill credits,” and “discounts.” However, they **rely on provided offer details** to **contextually adapt** their initial understanding to specific scenarios.

Regardless of terminology used, when these key details are missing, they struggle to understand the most critical parts of the offer and feel misled.

Key Takeaways

- 1 Generally, "credits" are perceived as future value and "discounts" as immediate price reductions, but both are too vague.**
Exceptions exist, such as trade-in credits and commonly named offers (ex. military discount), which can be perceived as both future, ongoing monthly reductions and/or immediate reductions at the time of purchase. In the absence of details, assumptions are made based on working definitions.
- 2 "Bill credits" are clearly understood as future monthly bill reductions, but still need clarification.**
While the term itself adequately conveys *where* the credits will be applied, other questions remain, such as whether the bill credits are applied automatically or manually, recurring or one-time, how long they will last, and impact on the bill once they end.
- 3 Offer language can be misleading when savings mechanisms are oversimplified and pricing details are omitted.**
"Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% Off" are perceived as better suited for instant discounts vs. offers that involve credits over time. "Save XX%" and "Save \$XX/mo" make sense in the context of monthly perk subscriptions and accessories, but raise questions about original/due now/future pricing.
- 4 Customers and prospects value transparency throughout the entire process, from browsing to post-purchase.**
Lack of readily available information can lead to mistrust and inaccurate interpretations, such as assuming discounts are applied upfront unless otherwise specified.

Detailed Findings

“Credit”

“Bill Credit”

“Discount”

Customers and prospects have varying interpretations of "credit," "bill credit," and "discount" that **depend on contextual details to provide clarity.**

Customers and prospects encounter a wide variety of credits in their daily lives that impacts how they understand the term.

Credits

Account Credits

Customers/prospects expect to receive credits on their accounts, potentially usable for accessories or future purchases, sometimes issued by customer service.

Credits towards Bills

Many associate credits with monthly subscriptions or bills, reducing their overall cost, and expect these to be applied consistently over time.

One-Time Credits

Some expect credits to be applied immediately in the cart for a purchase, especially when paying in full.

Redeemable Credits

Customers/prospects anticipate being able to redeem credits such as miles and credit card points for cash back, gift cards, or rewards.

Store Credits

Credits are also seen as potential store credits for purchasing other devices or products from the same company.

Trade-In Credits

Trade-in credits are expected to be applicable to down payments, bills, or payment plans, often distributed over time.

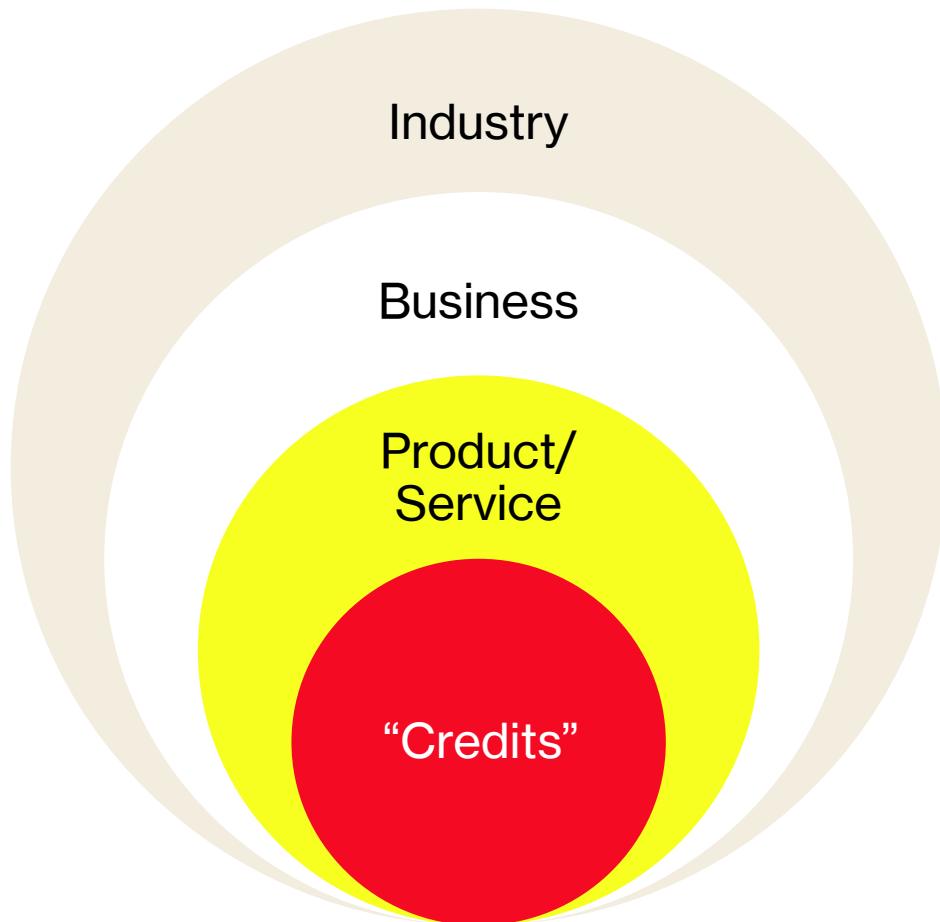
Credits for Third-Party Services

Customers/prospects mention receiving credits for third-party services like apps, streaming subscriptions, or international roaming.

Statement Credits

Some customers/prospects are familiar with statement credits that reduce what's owed on a credit card statement.

While they generally understand “credits” as something earned and used later, the term is ambiguous without further context.



Customers/prospects generally perceive **credit** as something that can be **earned**, **accumulated**, and **redeemed later**.

“

*I'm thinking it'll be like a store credit. I can **use it on a later purchase** or a later bill or something like that. -P1*

*Something you can **eventually use**. -P2*

*Percentage off and credit - two different things. Percentage off is you're paying less initially. When a credit is applied, you're paying up front and then being **reimbursed**. Or **receiving some value after the fact**. -P8*

However, because of the **wide range in application** of “credits,” they find it **difficult to fully interpret** how the term is being used with further context and/or discovery work.

“

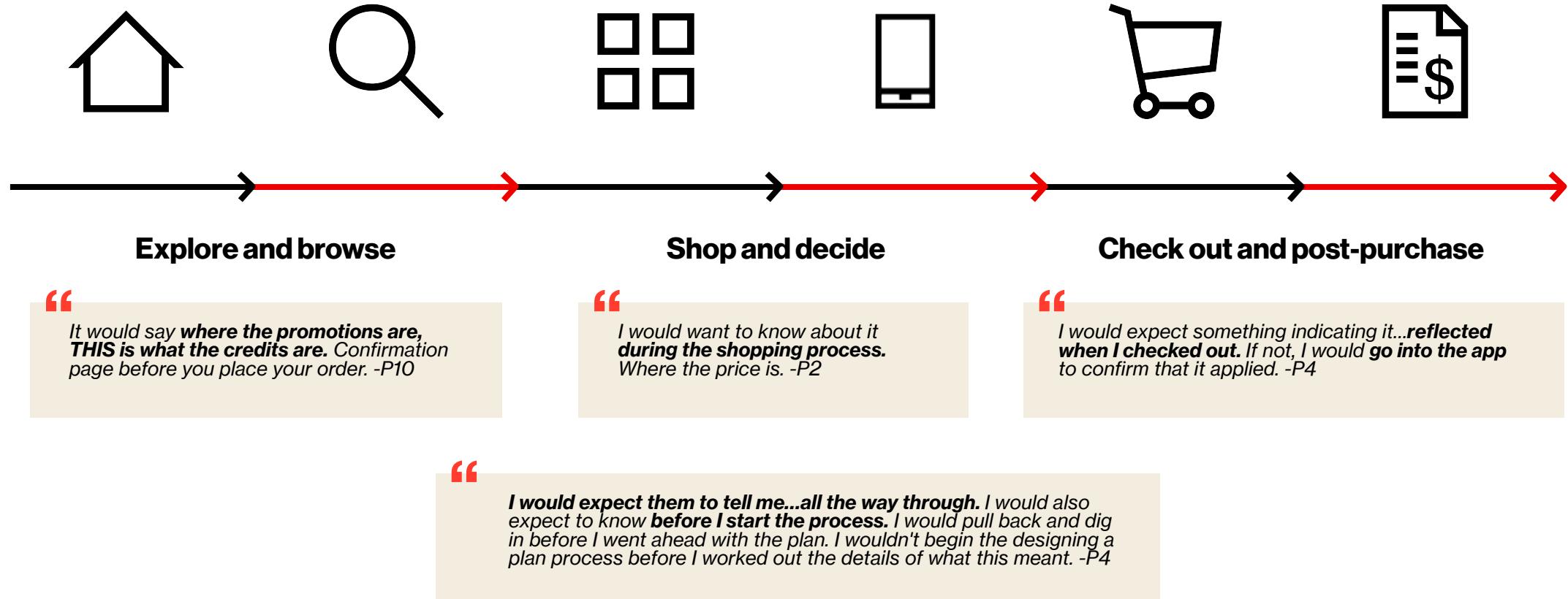
For different companies, credits can mean different things. I would want to do the research in regards to what the credits can be used for. -P8

*I wouldn't be sure. I would go and look up what it means. Depends on the wording. I **would go digging before I went any further**. -P4*

Could be a lot of things. Credits towards getting cash back. Or if they have their own denomination for buying other things on the website. -P3

It's going to depend on what store. -P10

Because of this ambiguity, customers/prospects expect to see credits defined throughout their customer journey.



As a part of defining credits, details about how long they'll be valid and usage restrictions help determine usefulness and desirability.



Customers/prospects are **wary of the limitations associated with credits**, such as restrictions on usage and time limits for redemption.

“

For HelloFresh, if something goes wrong with the delivery, they'll give me **credit to my account but I can't apply that credit** to a future box, I'd have to do an add on which is usually more than a credit. - P1

Certain amount of time to redeem the credits or use them. **Restriction would be not being able to convert the credits** into U.S. dollars or being able to use the credits for whatever I want. -P8



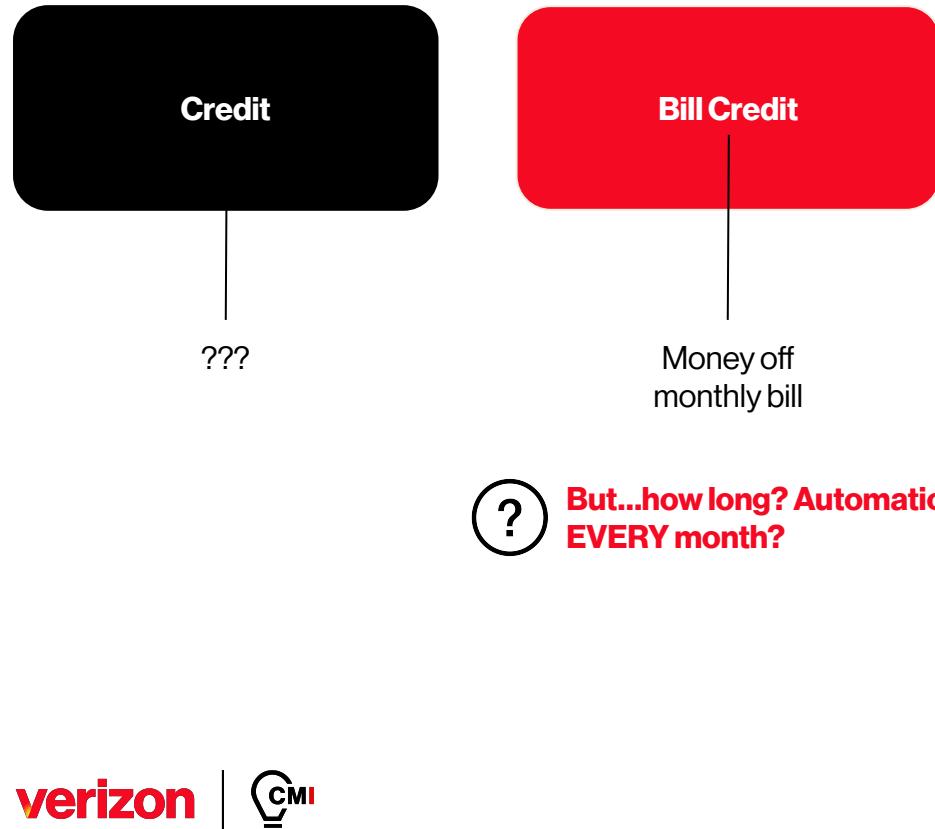
These limitations can lead customers/prospects to perceive "credits" that are not directly specified as cash discounts or refunds to be **less useful**.

“

I don't expect them to be very useful. Usually for something I wouldn't buy otherwise. **I kind of find that a pain.** If they want to give me a discount or refund, that's more useful. Credits, like points on my credit card, I'll take them and use them but they're **not as useful.** -P4

If I have \$20 in credit and something that I want is \$18, then I need to buy something else or **let it sit there** until I get another credit. -P1

While customers/prospects immediately understand "bill credits" as a reduction in their monthly bill, they still expect clarity on the terms.



Customers and prospects immediately understand that **bill credits** will be applied to their monthly bills, reducing the amount they owe.

“

*I would assume that it **would come off the bill every month**. -P2*

*When it says that, I would assume that it would be a **credit towards the phone bill**. What I'm paying for the **phone plan**. -P5*

However, they still expect to receive clear info on the **terms of the bill credits**, including:

- **Timeframe** (e.g., immediate lump sum or spread over time; immediately or next bill),
- If the credits will be applied **automatically** or if they have to **manually opt in**, and
- Whether credits will be **applied regularly** or if there may be **conditional delays**.

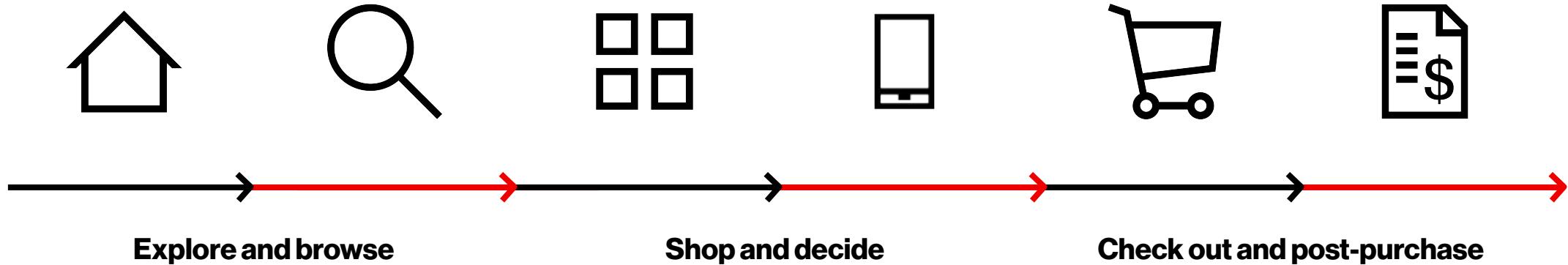
“

*I don't know that I ever see just credit without **something indicating amount or scope, timeframe**. -P4*

*If it's a **one time bill credit** or if it's **monthly**, I want to see exactly what it's going to be so I can see if it's reflected in the bills going ahead. -P10*

*I'm assuming it would **say something in the fine print**, whether it's a lump sum or deducted over time. -P1*

Similar to “credits,” customers/prospects expect to see potential bill credits surfaced throughout their customer journey.



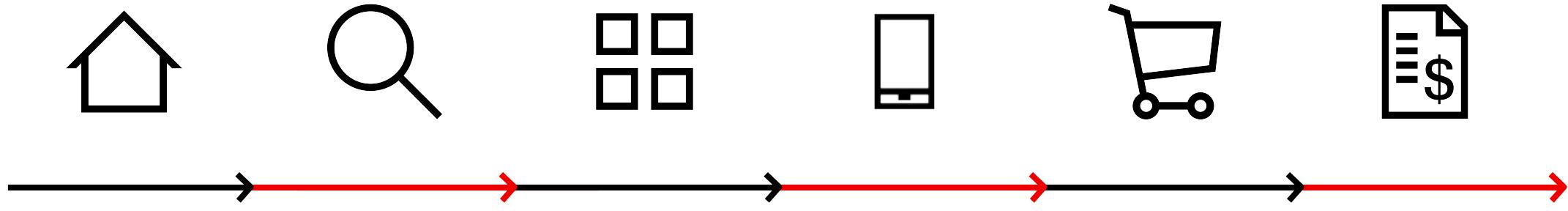
“
I would assume “bill credit” would be on the **main [page]**, whatever makes me click the visual. That’s what is going to make me click. -P1

“
A lot of times I’ll be **comparing different phones**. Sometimes there will be two that are pretty similar but if one has that [bill] credit, **it’ll help me decide**. -P3

“
In the **checkout** screen, it should be more obvious there...it is important throughout the rest of the process...but I’m **more nervous at checkout**. -P2

“
You receive a monthly **billing statement** letting you know that the credit was applied. -P8

Customers/prospects worry about bill credits & related terms being hidden or not disclosed upfront, leading to mistrust.



Early disclosure is important...

“

It would always be important to be as transparent and forthcoming as possible. In every scenario, if it's just a bill credit and you can't apply it to anything else, then you should use that term. -P8

It would mention it beforehand. Before the process of doing the whole thing. And then right before you confirm it. It needs to show in all those steps. -P10

...To prevent loss of trust.

“

They don't tell you until you're fairly far in. All this lead in stuff. To me it's a delay tactic to avoid telling me what the actual cost is. -P4

I am mistrustful of corporations...We're going to shove it in here where you're not going to see it. -P5

When comparing between terms, "credit" is seen as broader and requiring more clarification than "bill credit."



When considering the relationship between "credit" and "bill credit," customers/prospects identify "**credit**" as an **umbrella term** with **more unknowns** that need to be clarified.

“

Credit can be applied to other things. Credit towards paying for other apps or paying for another phone. Something you don't own or haven't purchased yet. -P3

A credit could be a lot of different things and I'd have to look for more details. -P4

Credit would be the more vague term...a bill credit or a refund or...redemption. -P7

One time credit is one time offer. Bill credit is for a certain period of time, you get a credit on your bill. Credit is when you sign up, you get free installation, one time credit. You just get it one time. but not continuously. -P9

On the other hand, they understand "**bill credits**" as **more specific** and more clearly tied to reducing monthly bill amounts.

“

When I see bill credits, I'm less skeptical than when I see credit just because it's clear how I can use it. There's less restrictions, money off money instead of money off an item. -P1

I think it's a more specific type of credit. Applied to your monthly bill...for your service or if you're paying monthly for the device. -P3

Customers and prospects generally view discounts as a one-time, instant price reduction applied at the time of purchase.

Discounts

Saving Money

Fundamentally, a discount is understood as a way to save money and pay less than the full price.

Reduction in Price

Customers and prospects see a discount as a decrease in the original price, either a specific dollar amount or a percentage off.

One-Time, Instant Saving**

Discounts are often viewed as a one-time event, not a recurring benefit like a monthly credit, *unless otherwise specified*.

Limited Time Frame**

Some customers and prospects associate discounts with a specific period or an ending time, rather than a continuous benefit, *unless otherwise specified*.

Applied at Time of Purchase**

There's a strong expectation that discounts are applied immediately during the transaction, not as a credit or later reduction. Many associate it with a "lump sum off" or an "instant" saving, *unless otherwise specified*.

****Note: There are exceptions to these associations when the details specify otherwise and for some offers that are commonly named "discounts."**

Recurring discounts need clear and explicit terms regarding scope and duration to avoid ambiguity.



“...Unless otherwise specified”



Without further clarification, customers and prospects assume that “**discounts**” on **immediate purchases** are **one-time, immediate savings** applied at the time of purchase.

“

Would assume an instant first. I'm thinking the lump sum off when you're paying it. -P3

If I see the word discount and it ends up being a statement credit, it's technically the same but it's vague. When I think about the word discount, I think it's instant. -P7

I would expect that to be applied whenever I pay. I wouldn't expect that to be a credit if I was buying it outright. I think of it as applying to the immediate purchase that I'm making. -P4

However, for **recurring services and payments**, there is **ambiguity** around whether a “discount” is applied once or repeated monthly.

Customers and prospects **emphasize the need for clarity**, wanting the terms of the discount to be explicitly stated.

“

Something that I would look more into. If it's a billing discount, it's on a monthly basis. But if it's on a one-time purchase, it would be a one-time discount. Applied at the time of purchase unless it specifies applied in your next payment or in your next bill. -P1

It would have to be spelled out. If they said one time discount, this would only happen once. If I'm getting a discount on a phone plan, then that I would assume it would be ongoing. -P5

If they use that kind of language and I thought it was a discount and it was actually a statement credit...Just being more clear would be a better option rather than finding out later. -P7

Due to how they are named, targeted offers are also thought of as "discounts," even if not always immediate or one-time.



When asked about offers tailored to characteristics such as **occupation** (first responder, military, veteran), **student status**, **age** (elderly), or **corporate affiliation**, customers and prospects describe thinking of and searching for these offers using the term "**discount**."

“

[Discount] That's just the word I associate with being able to save because you qualify or because of a program. -P7

I see it all the time. At brick and mortar places. -P3

It is the primary word that comes to mind for [these]. I do think of “discount.” -P10

However, they have **different expectations** for how these offers are applied, **depending on the specific transaction and the product/service involved**, even when named “discounts.”

“

It depends on what the deal would be. It could be an overall deduction off the bill or a lump sum that comes off over time. \$15 every payment for every payment. -P1

Percentage off the monthly subscription price or a set dollar amount off a set price. -P6

If you're going to the phone example, it would be a one time if you're buying a phone or if it's a service that you're doing monthly, it could be a monthly discount -P3

Inconsistent differentiation between “discount” and “discounted pricing” suggests caution is needed when deciding between terms.

	Availability	Application	Nature	Timing	Scope
Discount	May be specific to eligible individuals	Can require a coupon or code	Sometimes associated with sales events	Can sometimes be applied after a purchase	General reduction off the total amount
Discounted pricing	Available to everyone	Automatically applied	Suggests an ongoing, permanent reduction (ex. discounted pricing store)	Applied before a purchase	A discount on a specific item

Differentiation between “discount” and “discounted price/pricing” can be challenging

While customers and prospects can come up with possible differentiators, **there isn’t a clear consensus**. The only one mentioned more than once is the **nature** of the discount.

Customers and prospects believe that premium brands should present discounts as rewards or incentives, instead of bargains.

“Premium”
=

Enabling quality of life

Popular, recognized

Reliable

Expensive

Quality

Exclusive

Customers/prospects define “**premium**” in several ways, listing example brands and services such as:

- Kindle Unlimited (for **access to things that enhance life**),
- Verizon and American Express (for **dependable**, consistent service and **value**),
- Nike, Apple, and Netflix (for being **well-known**),
- Apple (for **high quality** products), and
- Chanel and Mercedes (for **high price points** and **being difficult to obtain**).

Some who associate “premium” with high prices and exclusivity feel that the **use of the word “discount” can cheapen the brand**. Others who equate “premium” with quality service **do not perceive “discounts” as indicative of reduced service quality**.

Regardless of the actual word used, customers/prospects believe that **premium brands should frame discounts as reward-like and make them sound like incentives, not bargains**.

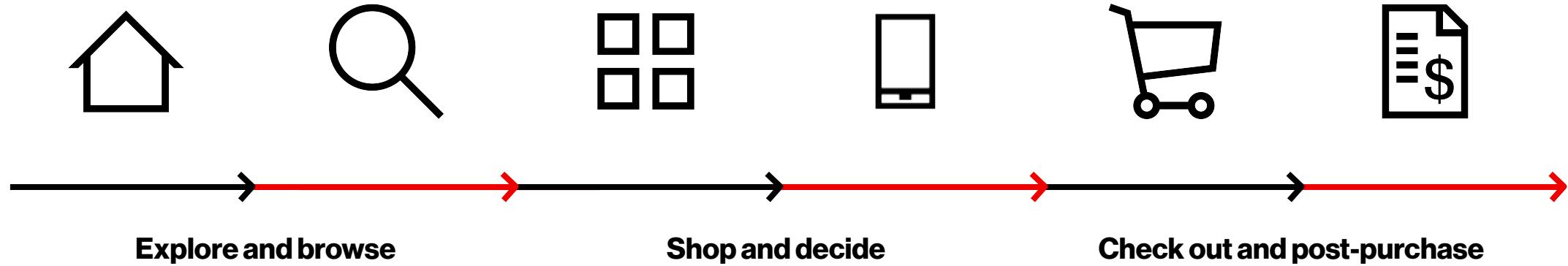
“

It seems like it'd be beneath the premium side of it. -P6

In my mind, discount is just a loyalty thank you type thing...Especially if premium is a brand or service that I can trust, I know that I'm not going to get lesser quality. -P1

I still like discounts, so it doesn't dissuade me. But if you're trying to give the customer the feeling that it's exclusive..using the word discount makes it sound like a bargain. But a premium brand would want to make it sound like a reward. -P7

Similar to “credits” and “bill credits,” customers/prospects expect to see discounts surfaced throughout their customer journey.



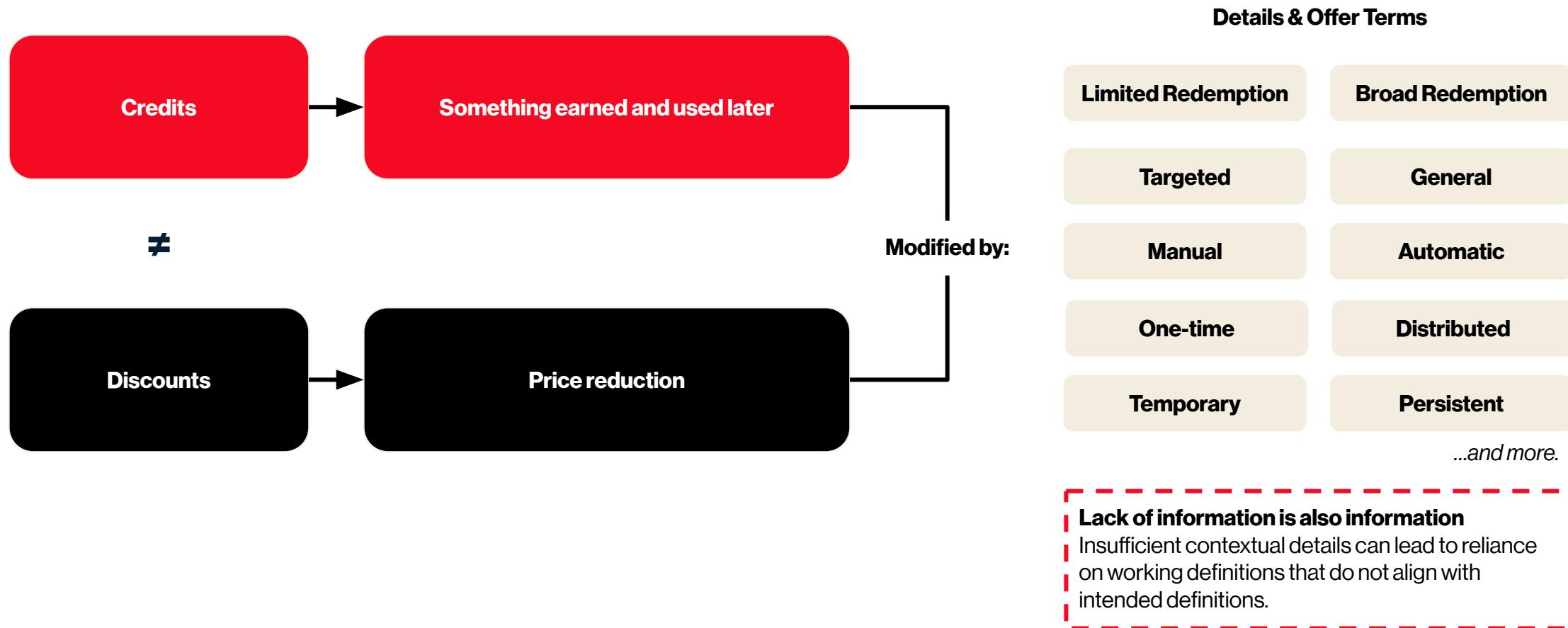
In the beginning as a way to let you know this is what's going to happen before you start the process. This is why I'm picking this option because I'm getting this at the end. -P10

Ideally I would want to know about it as the top. **Banner at the top** and **bottom** of the page while I'm going through the **shopping process**. Want to let people know about it to encourage that decision. -P4

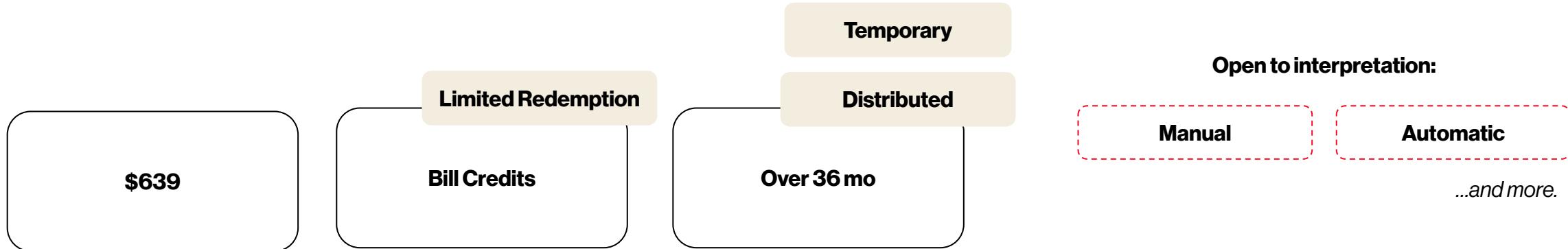
I would take a look on the **summary page** and I'd like to see it be shown. This is what the original price was and this is what it is applied. A line through the old price, something that makes it easy to identify. -P6

First page when you land on the website. At the top. **When you pick a product** and you're looking at the description, you'd see it there too. In the **shopping cart**. **Checkout process**. -P9

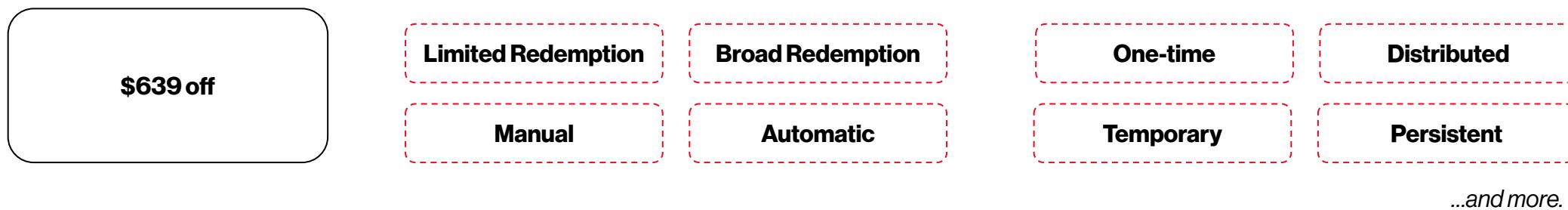
In summary, customers and prospects hold working definitions of “credits” and “discounts” that are *contextually adapted*.



Leaving out critical details creates opportunities for customers and prospects to misinterpret these details.



VS.



Design Evaluations

Discount language can be seen as oversimplified, especially when referring to bill credits over time.

Monthly/total credit, total cost, and how the savings are applied are all crucial and expected details.

On the Home tile, customers/prospects feel that simply stating "\$XX off" without clarifying details is insufficient and misleading.

Based on the limited copy on this tile, customers and prospects are still left confused about:

- what the discount applies to,
- whether it's a one-time or monthly discount, and
- what the actual total cost of the phone is.

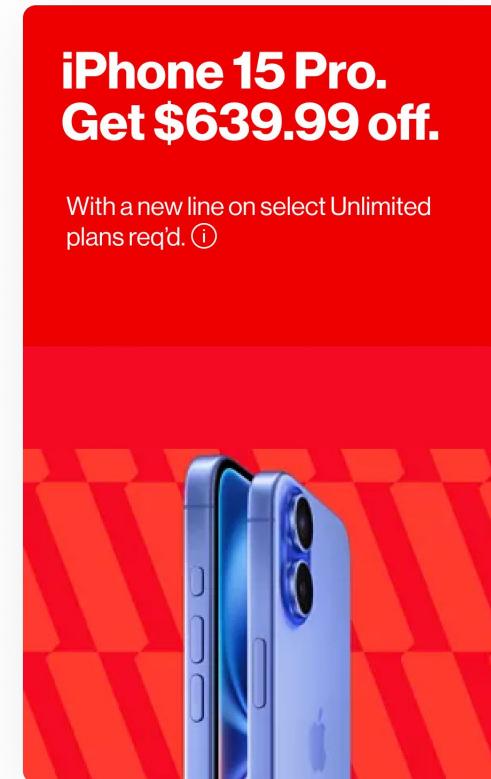
“

\$639 off of what? It's a nice large number but the **phone could cost double that**. I **need more info** before deciding if I'm interested. -P4

I'd like to see it here...discount is going to be applied as \$x for certain amount of months or \$x at purchase... Helps me determine my budget and how I can plan it. -P6

I wouldn't move forward without trying to learn what the parameters are. -P7

These details are **critical to deciding whether they want to move forward** with the offer.



Many expect the discount to be **applied immediately** in the cart, based on the **lack of additional clarifiers**.

This leads to **disappointment** and **frustration** when they actually discover it's a credit spread over time (e.g., 36 months).

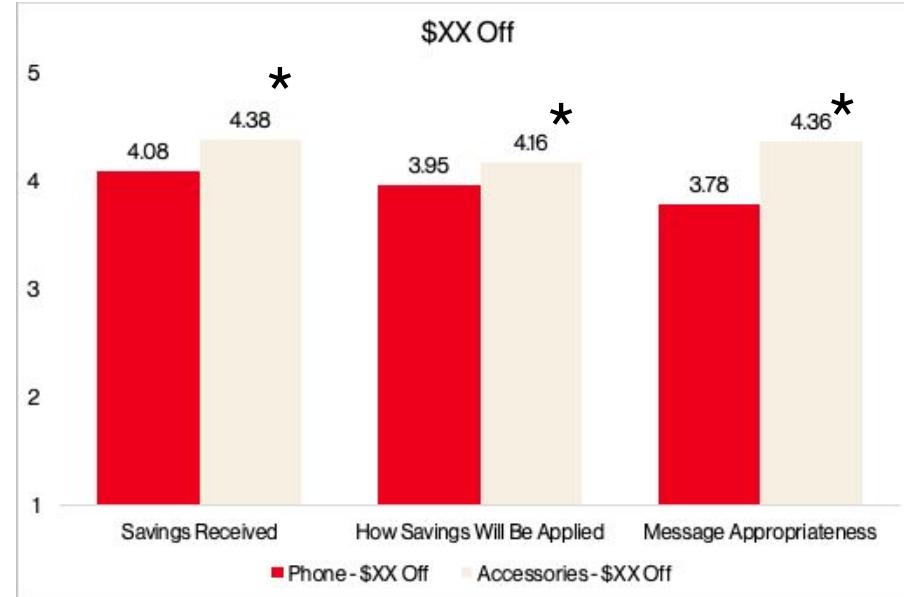
“

If I see this and I see that I don't get it all in one go, I would get annoyed. They should have fine print somewhere. I've seen those offers. It should say it's a bill credit somewhere. If you get it back over 36 months, it's not an instant discount. **That should have been said on the first page.** -P9

Looking at this ad, it would come off as a one time discount being applied at checkout. -P2

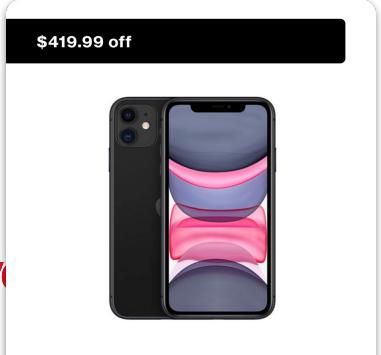
Right off the bat, if you're buying the phone at full price, you're getting that \$639 off from the start. It's my assumption based on the way it says it. -P3

"\$XX off" is not naturally associated with bill credits, and is more frequently thought of as a price markdown applied in the cart.

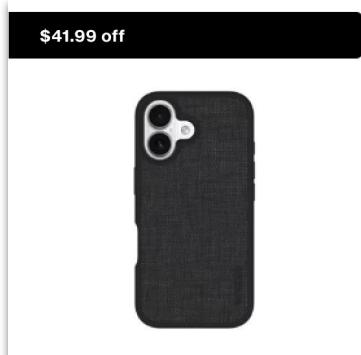


Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Phone - Bill Credits



Accessory - \$ Markdown



Customers/prospects **do not consider "\$XX off" to be reflective of bill credits over time** and feel this simplification is misleading. They also find the required math **burdensome**, instead preferring to see the monthly cost in place of a total credit.

“

I just don't think a bill credit and money off are the same, even if ultimately you still save the same amount.

I'm not actually getting that off. It's a month discount. Wouldn't get if I ended contract

It requires too much math

I prefer to see how much it would cost per month as opposed as a total credit

This verbiage is confusing to the consumer. It could easily be explained by stating the total charges of \$5 per month for the next 36 months equaling \$180.

However, when "\$XX off" is used to describe a **price markdown** in cart, they understand it is a one-time discount at purchase, especially when paired with the original price crossed out.

“

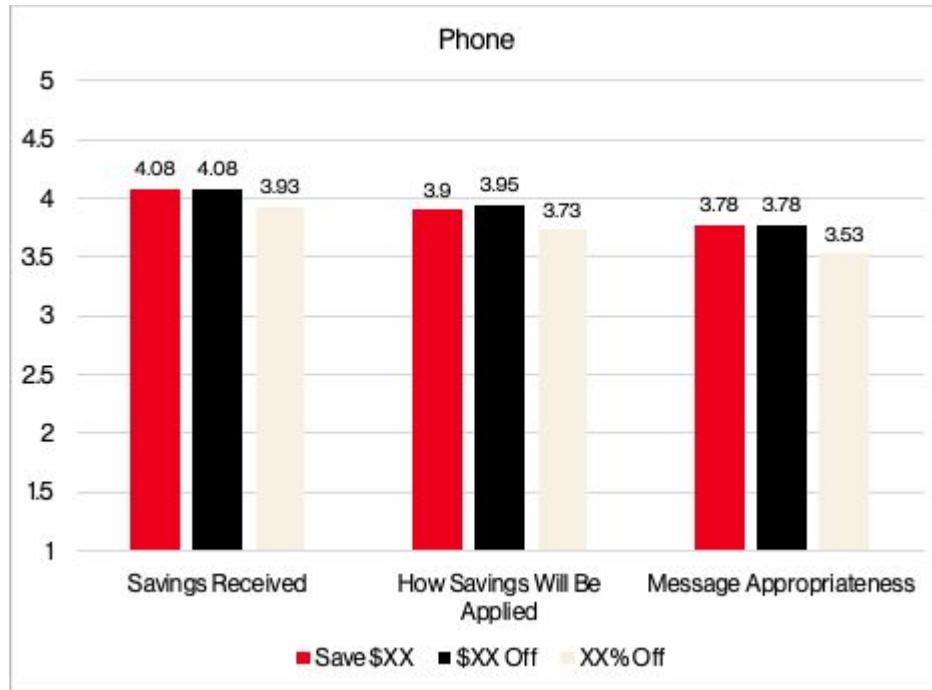
The deal is clear as is because it's simply a one off discount.

This is the expectation one has with that wording. You'll take it off when I purchase it

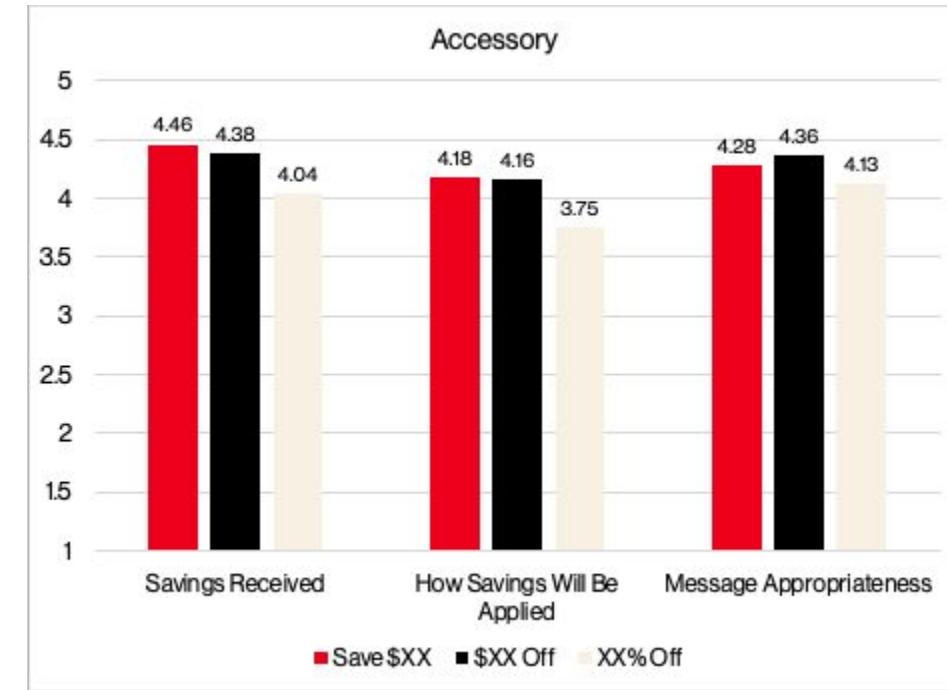
That's exactly how a consumer would think you're saving money that exactly

If that amount is subtracted from the final cost then it is appropriate

"Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% Off" are better suited for instant discounts vs. more complex offers that provide credits over time.



Using phrases like "Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% Off" can over-simplify complex savings, such as bill credits on a phone payment plan. This leads customers to **misunderstand the offer**, perceive it as **deceptive**, and ultimately **lower their trust in the brand**.



While it's simpler to understand in-cart, one-time discounts on smaller purchases, such as accessories, by using phrases like "Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% off," it's crucial to remember that the **original price is still vital information** and shouldn't be omitted.

Customers/prospects find "Save \$639.99" to be insufficient, misleading, and requiring too much effort on their part.

When evaluating the control design, customers/prospects immediately feel the **wording is too vague** and doesn't provide enough details about how the savings are applied.

“

It says I would save money but it's not clear if it's going to be applied to the cart.-P7

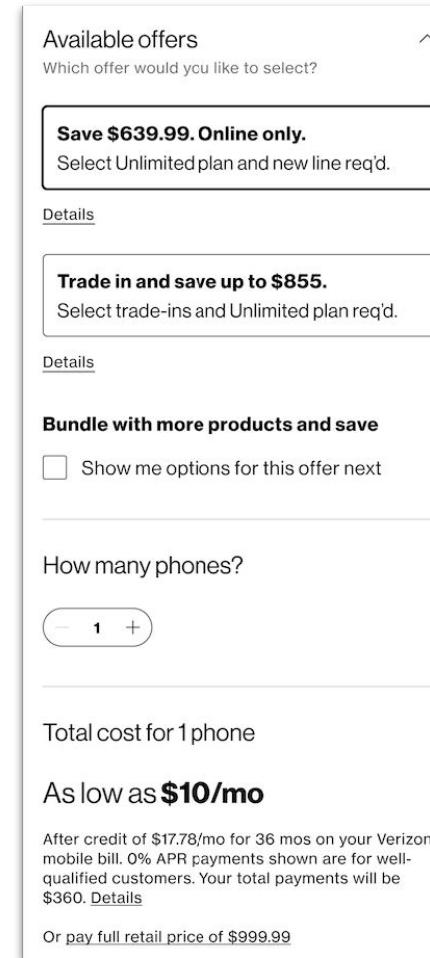
It doesn't say how I'm saving. Is it over a period of time? Is it instant? It needs more detail. -P9

The ambiguity **forces customers to do extra work** to understand the offer. They need to click through and search for details, which is seen as inconvenient and frustrating.

“

I'd have to do a lot more clicking and searching around to figure out the details of this one. Versus the other ones I felt more confident clicking and proceeding with the next step. -P2

It's not clear how payment is going to work...It might make me slightly more hesitant. Ultimately I'm still going to do the research. This does viscerally have a little less appeal. -P4



Control

The phrasing also leads customers to believe the \$639.99 will be deducted upfront at checkout.

This creates a **disconnect** when they later discover it's a credit spread over a longer period, leading to feelings of being **misled**.

“

I would think that I just select that and pay \$999.99 minus \$639.99 and that's just it...I would be annoyed if it didn't just automatically come off. Just because I do think it's misleading. -P1

It should explain that it's not today you're saving \$639. If it's save \$50 I would be less concerned. But it's a large amount, explaining that it's going to be in smaller increments over 3 years would feel the most clear. -P7

I would assume oh I'm getting \$639 instant discount. But if it's over 36 months, I would get annoyed. At this page it should say that. -P9

"Save \$639.99 after 36 monthly bill credits" creates concerns about the use of "after" and the lack of monthly details.

Many customers/prospects interpret "after 36 monthly bill credits" to mean they only receive the \$639.99 discount after making 36 months of payments.

This phrasing implies that **they have to wait three years before getting any savings**, which is absurd and off-putting.

They suggest replacing "after" with "over" to clarify that the savings are spread throughout the 36 months.

"At first it made me think I have to stick with it for 36 months before I get my money back. That's absurd. I would never do that. -P1

You wouldn't be seeing that until the end of 36 months. -P3

"After" make it sounds like you make your 36 payments and THEN get it all back. The word "after" makes me think that this is a discount that applies after that time has passed. Then I would go that doesn't make sense. -P4

"After" sounds like not a good idea. Over 36 months then ok, but after? I have to wait for 3 years? -P9

Available offers
Which offer would you like to select?

Save \$639.99 after 36 monthly bill credits. Online only.
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Trade in and save up to \$855 after 36 monthly bill credits.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save

Show me options for this offer next

How many phones?

- 1 +

Total cost for 1 phone

As low as **\$10/mo**

After credit of \$17.78/mo for 36 mos on your Verizon mobile bill. 0% APR payments shown are for well-qualified customers. Your total payments will be \$360. Details

Customers/prospects are also more concerned about the **practical implications** of the offer on their monthly bills.

They want to know the **exact monthly credit amount and the cost** of the phone, not just the overall savings.

"If it's going to be a monthly credit, it needs to tell me monthly what I'm going to save. I'm more concerned about what will be coming off every month. -P2

Ideally I would love to have the monthly rate. In practice I would be taking out my calculator and doing the math. The total cost of the phone would be the big thing. I would want to know my total cost and monthly cost on that phone...I had to dig a ways down to find that. -P4

I don't think it's the best way to see this. What does that trickle down to? More people are on the monthly idea of how much is this going to cost me? Having the price would be much better and easier to understand -P6

While "Get \$639.99 back over 36 months" is clearer, it still needs more details on how and where the savings will be applied.

Customers/prospects find the large "\$639.99" figure impactful and attractive, highlighting the total savings.

The use of "over 36 months" **clarifies that the savings are distributed over time**, addressing confusion about immediate discounts.

"

Has a **bigger number** so it's **more attractive**...has a bigger impact because the number is bigger. -P9

I'd rather the word **over** rather than the word **after**. That makes me understand it's getting taken from each of those monthly bills. -P1

The fact that it says you get the \$639 **over** 36 months. It was **more obvious** to me that it was going to be a credit vs a one time discount. -P2

Available offers
Which offer would you like to select?

**Get \$639.99 back over 36 months.
Online only.**
Select Unlimited plan and new line req'd.

Trade in and get up to \$855 back over 36 months.
Select trade-ins and Unlimited plan req'd.

Details

Bundle with more products and save

Show me options for this offer next

How many phones?
- 1 +

Total cost for 1 phone

As low as **\$10/mo**

After credit of \$17.78/mo for 36 mos on your Verizon mobile bill. 0% APR payments shown are for well-qualified customers. Your total payments will be

However, customers/prospects are **still uncertain about where the \$639.99 will be applied**. They want explicit confirmation of where they will see this "money back."

It's also **unclear how the \$639.99 will be applied** to the bill (e.g., exact monthly credit amount, even distribution).

Customers and prospects express a desire for **more specific details and calculations**.

"

There needs to be something there that says it's applied to the bill. I like the clarity of HOW I'm going to get my money. **But I need to know WHERE I'll see the money.** -P1

This one I still find it to be misleading...**still have to do the math**. Some people don't realize that it averages to \$15 a month. -P6

It could be more specific with the details. My next question would be - **how am I getting it back?** Getting applied to a billing cycle? Is it evenly distributed across those billing cycles? Could be more specific. -P8

Customers appreciate the monthly rate in “Get \$17.78/mo...” for budgeting and verification, but miss the total savings amount.

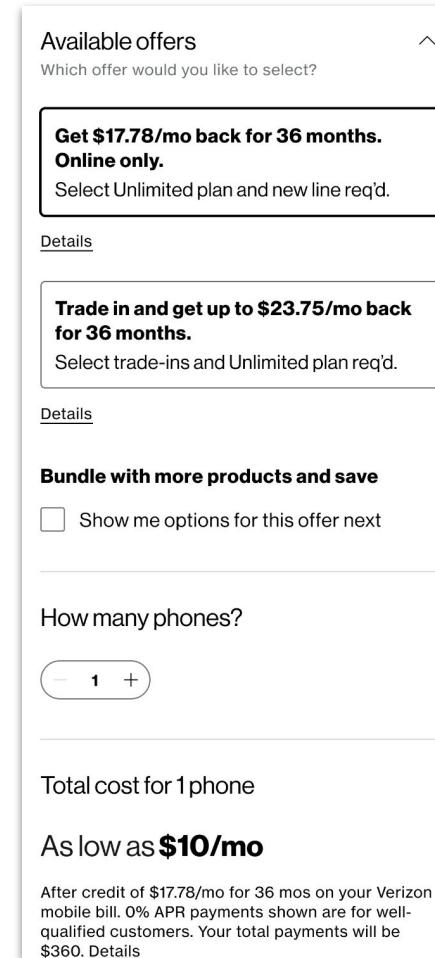
Customers/prospects appreciate the inclusion of the monthly rate as it's the actual number they'll see on their bill.

This makes it **easier to verify the credit and for budgeting** purposes. The monthly rate also eliminates the need for them to do calculations themselves.

“
\$17.78 is something that makes sense because **that's how I'm going to see it come to me**. Or get credited. So it's very transparent. -P1

It's **more usable for budgeting** and thinking ahead how much I'm going to pay. The total I would have to calculate it out and figure out what the credit would be every month. This **does all the work for me**. -P2

It's easier to understand how the discount is going to be applied. It's telling me the price per month and the [time] period...It's **better when consumers don't have to do their own math**. -P6



However, the **original total savings amount** (\$639.99) from the home tile is **missing** in this design, causing confusion.

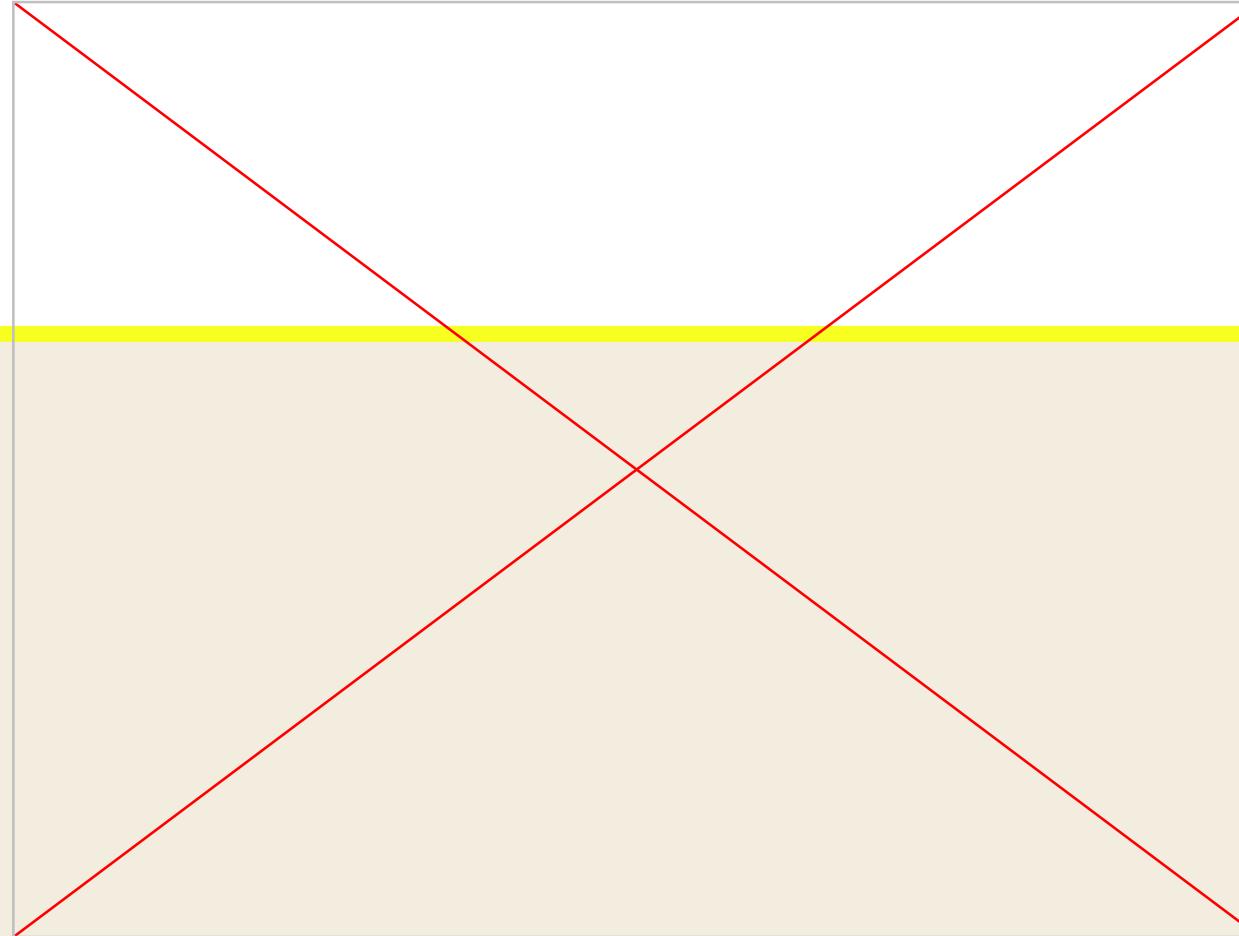
The **smaller monthly amount** (\$17.78) is also seen as **less visually impactful** than the larger overall savings.

“
I would say the monthly rate is more elucidating than the total rate. It **might also be good to include both**. Get \$17.78/mo for a total of \$639. So the full impact of it is clear. This is what you're getting per month, this is the total. Look at this offer! -P5

While customers and prospects appreciate that the monthly credit is shown, the **actual total monthly cost of the phone is still missing**, making it difficult to fully understand the financial implications of the offer.

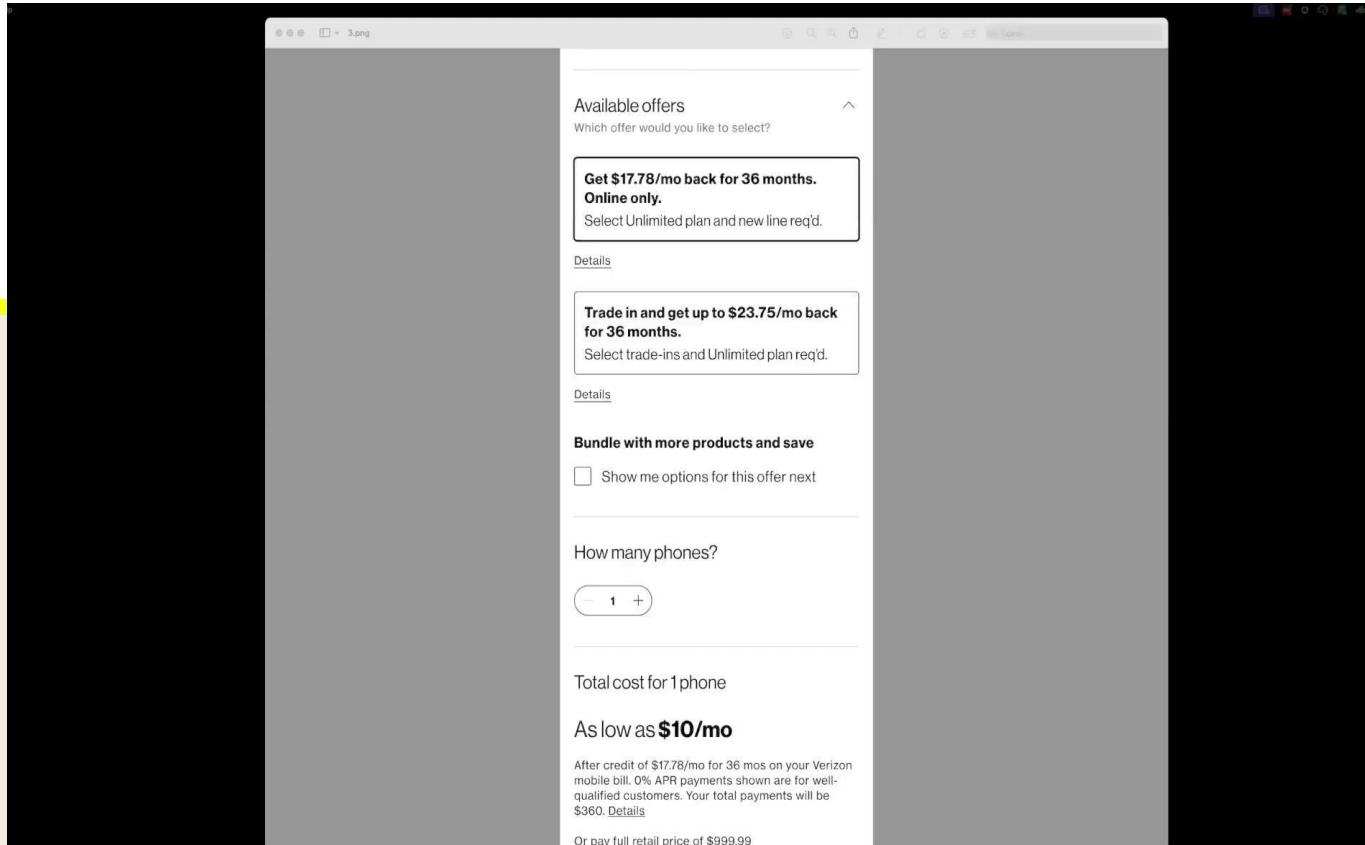
“
I would put something about the total amount. **\$17.78 out of a \$23 monthly payment**. I would want to know what the actual payment is because the **discount could mean anything in terms of the cost**. I'm estimating based on what my knowledge of the phone is but **without the cost of the actual product, the info is not completely useful** for me. -P4

"Save \$639.99. Online only" is perceived to be the least clear and most misleading by all.



[Click here for link to video](#)

"Get \$17.78/mo back for 36 months" is perceived to be the most clear, but has opportunity for improvement.



[Click here for link to video](#)

Nomenclature aside, customers just want clarity on the actual cost of products/services and how offers will help them afford it.

What customers get



What customers actually want

WHAT DOES THIS OFFER INCLUDE?

- Amount, time frame, terms & conditions

IS THIS A GOOD OFFER?

- How much does this cost usually? How much will I save?

CAN I AFFORD IT?

- How much am I actually paying?

i.e., This offer will give me a \$1000 iPhone for \$400, if I enroll into a 36 month payment plan.

That saves me \$600 over the 36 months that I will be paying for this phone.

Because I will be paying \$11.11 every month, instead of \$27.78.
(I can double check for this number on my bill later.)

We need to prioritize helping customers understand the answers to these key questions, regardless of which terminology we use.

Considerations

Provide Clear Supporting Details

Customers have varying working definitions of offer terms, but **rely on supporting details** to adapt this initial understanding and **grasp the true value** of the offer. Without these details, they are left to make assumptions, which can often be incorrect and lead to disappointment or mistrust.

Ensure all offer language is accompanied by **comprehensive supporting details** to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretations.

Prioritize Monthly Details

While total savings amounts can be eye-catching, customers are **primarily concerned** with how the offer will impact their **monthly budget**. Providing only the total savings can feel vague and require them to do extra math, which is burdensome.

When discussing bill credits or discounts spread over time, **provide specific monthly credit amounts and the total monthly cost** of the product or service, not just the overall savings.

Surface Information Consistently

Customers expect **transparency** and **clarity throughout their entire journey**, not just at a single point. Consistent surfacing of this information **reinforces understanding, builds trust**, and prevents customers from feeling like important details are being hidden or withheld.

Present information about credits, bill credits, and discounts at **multiple touchpoints** throughout the customer journey.

Frame Offers as Rewards, Not Bargains

Customers perceive "premium" brands in different ways, such as quality, reliability, and exclusivity. Using the word "**discount**" can sometimes feel like it **cheapens** brand image by suggesting a "**bargain**." Instead, discounts should be strategically positioned to **feel celebratory** and **appreciative**.

To align with brand image, discounts should be positioned as a **rewarding experience**.

Be Explicit About Terms

Vague or **oversimplified language** is a major source of **confusion**, especially when dealing with recurring benefits like bill credits or discounts spread over time. Being explicit avoids assumptions and ensures everyone is on the same page.

Clearly and explicitly state the terms of offers, including the **timeframe, application, recurring nature** (if applicable), and any **restrictions**.

Summary

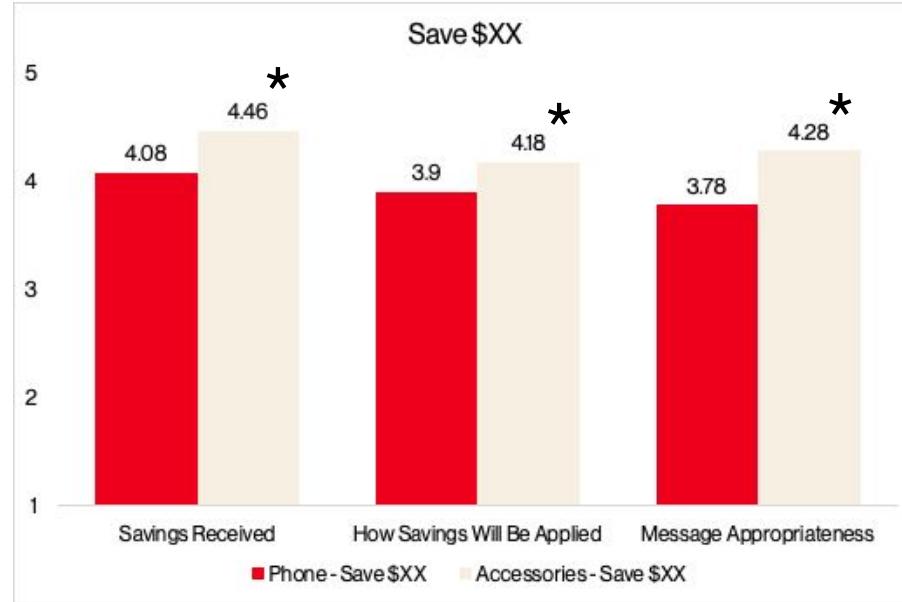
Term/Concept	Key Learnings & Customer Perceptions	Important Considerations
Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally seen as <i>something earned and used later</i>. - Ambiguous without context; can mean various things (store credit, account credit, etc.). - Customers expect details about usage, restrictions, and time limits. - Perceived as less useful than cash discounts if not clearly defined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always provide specific details about the type of credit. - Explain how it can be used, any restrictions, and expiration dates. - Define "credits" consistently throughout the customer journey.
Bill Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immediately understood as a <i>reduction in the monthly bill</i>. - Still requires clarity on terms: timeframe, application (automatic/manual, especially if one-time), and recurring nature. - Customers want to know the monthly credit amount and total impact on their bill. - Concerns about hidden or undisclosed terms leading to mistrust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearly state the duration, application, and recurrence of bill credits. - Provide the exact monthly credit amount along with total savings amount. - Ensure transparency and early disclosure of all terms.
Discounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally viewed as a <i>one-time, instant price reduction at purchase</i>. - Often associated with a limited timeframe. - Recurring discounts require explicit terms about scope and duration. - Targeted offers (e.g., military, student) are still seen as "discounts," but application expectations vary. - "Discounted pricing" vs. "discount" has inconsistent understanding; clarify details instead of focusing on this distinction. - "Discount" language can sometimes cheapen "premium" brand image if perceived as a "bargain." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use "discount" primarily for immediate, one-time price reductions. - For recurring discounts, clearly state the frequency and duration. - For targeted offers, use "discount" but clarify the specific application. - Avoid nuanced distinctions between "discount" and "discounted pricing"; focus on clear details. - Messaging around discounts should feel celebratory and appreciative.
General Offer Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Terminology sets the stage, but clarity comes from supporting details. - Customers have "working definitions" that are contextually adapted. - Leaving out critical details leads to misinterpretations and mistrust. - Transparency throughout the customer journey is crucial. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always provide comprehensive supporting details with offer language. - Surface offer information consistently throughout the customer journey. - Avoid oversimplification of complex savings mechanisms. - Include monthly details for credits and discounts over time.
Design Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% off" are best for instant discounts, not credits over time. - "\$XX off" on the home tile without details is insufficient and misleading. - "Save \$639.99" is vague and requires too much effort to understand. - "Save \$639.99 after 36 monthly bill credits" creates confusion with "after." - "Get \$639.99 back over 36 months" is clearer but still needs more details. - "Get \$17.78/mo..." is appreciated for monthly budgeting but misses the total savings amount. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid vague language like "\$XX off" without context. - Provide specific monthly credit amounts and total costs. - Use "over" instead of "after" when describing credits spread over time. - Include both total savings and monthly details for maximum impact.

Appendix

Unmoderated Concept Testing

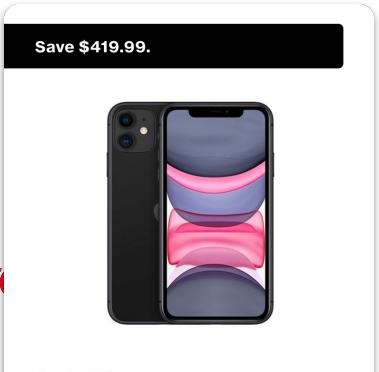
Offer language can be **misleading** when complex savings mechanisms, like bill credits, are **oversimplified** and original/due now/future pricing **details are omitted**.

"Save \$XX" is easily understood as a price markdown, but is perceived as misleading when describing bill credits over time.

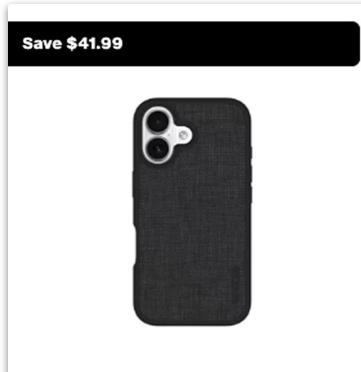


Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Phone - Bill Credits



Accessory - \$ Markdown



Customers and prospects find "**Save \$XX**" to be **lacking in transparency** on the payment plan required for redemption and requiring manual calculations. They feel the **savings should be clearly stated as being applied over time**.

“

*The offer makes it seem like I should save \$419 on the smartphone **all at once**.*

*This seems **sneaky**, since the savings is **over 36 months**. It should say that first*

*The deal **needs added information** about the fact that it will be **applied over time** as a **bill credit**.*

*I am saving 419.99 but I think the **bill credits should be clearly stated**.*

*In my opinion it's **more understandable** if says \$180 at only \$5 for 36 months*

*You gotta do some real math to come up with **what you would really be paying** for the total price of the phone for 3 years and it's not obvious to most people*

However, when "**Save \$XX**" is used to describe a **price markdown** in cart, it is easily understood by customers/prospects. They find this application of the offer to be **more clearly reflected by the statement**.

“

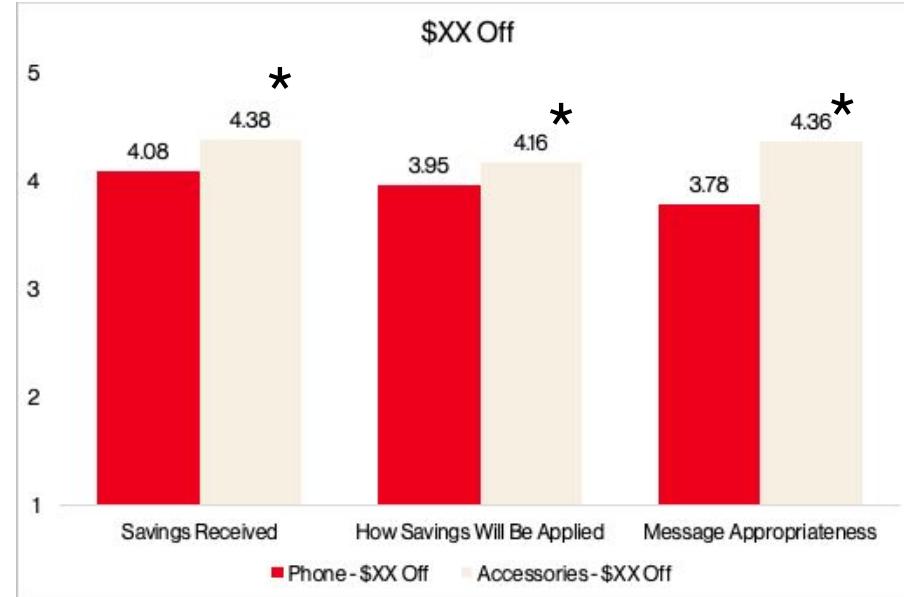
*This is super easy to understand. It **tells me the amount exactly. I don't have to calculate***

*It shows the “**instant**” **savings reflecting the price at checkout***

*It's actually **easy to understand** where the savings are, how they're gonna be applied, and what the actual savings will end up being*

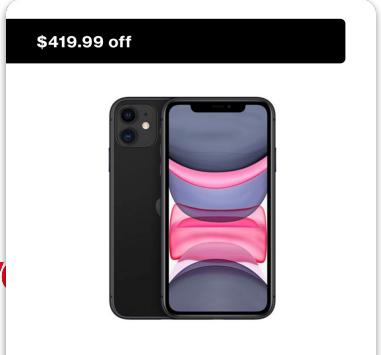
*This is **direct** and people will **see how much they pay** and what they do not pay.*

"\$XX off" is not naturally associated with bill credits, and is more frequently thought of as a price markdown applied in the cart.



Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Phone - Bill Credits



Accessory - \$ Markdown



Customers/prospects **do not consider "\$XX off" to be reflective of bill credits over time** and feel this simplification is misleading. They also find the required math **burdensome**, instead preferring to see the monthly cost in place of a total credit.

“

I just don't think a bill credit and money off are the same, even if ultimately you still save the same amount.

I'm not actually getting that off. It's a month discount. Wouldn't get if I ended contract

It requires too much math

I prefer to see how much it would cost per month as opposed as a total credit

This verbiage is confusing to the consumer. It could easily be explained by stating the total charges of \$5 per month for the next 36 months equaling \$180.

However, when "\$XX off" is used to describe a **price markdown** in cart, they understand it is a one-time discount at purchase, especially when paired with the original price crossed out.

“

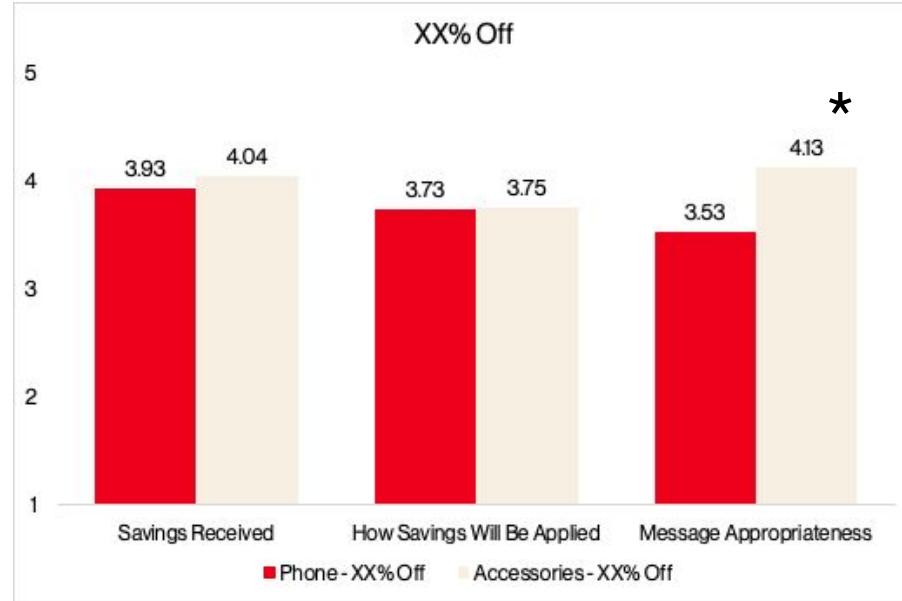
The deal is clear as is because it's simply a one off discount.

This is the expectation one has with that wording. You'll take it off when I purchase it

That's exactly how a consumer would think you're saving money that exactly

If that amount is subtracted from the final cost then it is appropriate

"XX% off" is perceived as deceptive when used to describe bill credits and incomplete without details about original pricing.



Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Phone - Bill Credits

**Get 25% off
Samsung Galaxy
S25 Ultra**

With select 5G Unlimited plans. Online only.^①



Accessory - \$ Markdown

**Get 25% off
Powerbeats Pro
wireless earbuds**

Only at Verizon. Limited-time offer. ^①

Customers/prospects find "XX% off" to be **deceiving**, because they understand it as an immediate discount. They find it **hard to grasp the full value of the offer** and prefer to see the **percentage discount applied**, with the **monthly payment calculated**.

“

Deceiving. Since you **only get the full amount if you stay for 3 full years**.

As a consumer, I would expect a 25% discount to immediately come off the original price instead of receiving a monthly credit of \$9 dollars. It truly feels like a bait and switch game that Verizon is playing with its consumers...

Without mentioning how the discount will be applied, it's a little hard to grasp the full value of the offer.

People will not understand how much they are actually paying for the phone

It's misleading. It would be better to take 25% off and then calculate the monthly payment.

However, when "XX% off" is used to describe a **price markdown** in cart, customers and prospects find it **clear** as a one-off discount applied directly to the purchase. Some still want to see **the original cost, savings, and final cost upfront** however.

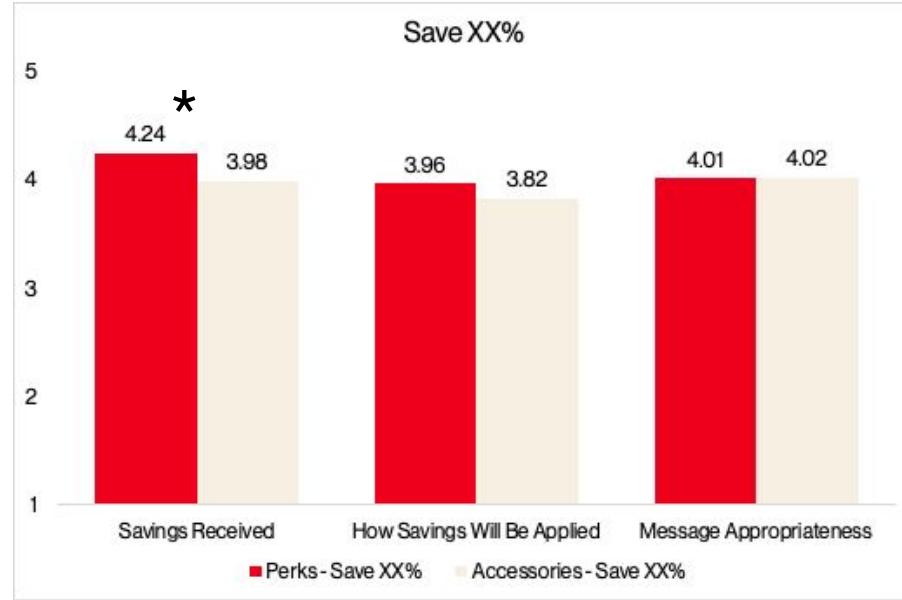
“

The offer is very clear since it's a one-off discount applied directly to your purchase.

This is easy to understand and since the savings will be provided automatically in the cart, there should be no confusion

It's clear the percentage off I'll be receiving. It's not clear how it will be applied. I would like to see upfront the original cost, the saving and the final cost.

"Save XX%" is generally understood for subscription AND accessory offers, but raises questions about original/future pricing.



Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Perk - \$ Markdown

Save 40% on an NFL+ Premium Annual subscription.

That's \$59.99 for the full season.
For a limited time only. ⓘ



+play

Accessory - \$ Markdown

Save 20% on select Apple adapters and chargers

When you buy 3 or more.



When "Save XX%" is used to describe a **temporary markdown** on a perk subscription, customers/prospects understand the initial discount. However, they want to know the original price and the duration of the discounted rate, as well as potential price changes.

“

It is pretty clear what the final annual price would be

I understand my first year is 40% off at 59.99 it would take me awhile to figure out what I would be paying [after] a year and that rate could change

I think it's okay to promote the 40 percent off, but somewhere in the fine print during the process, the regular price should also be referenced.

The price should state the original price before % off because people might think they are getting 40% off 59.99

I want to know the original price and I also want communication [that] it lasts for a year and then goes up to a certain price

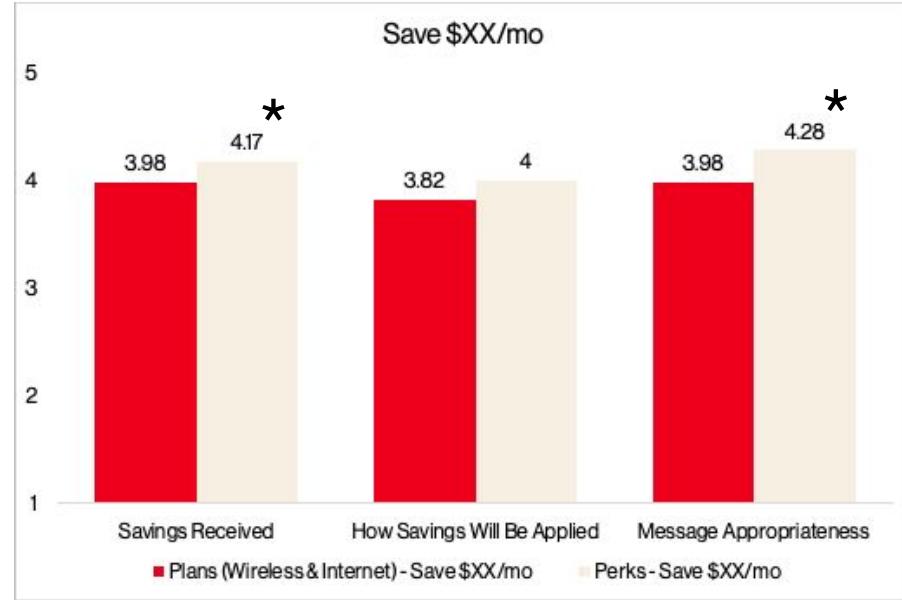
When "Save XX%" is used to describe a **price markdown** in cart, customers/prospects find it appropriate. However, some still want to know the original price for the exact savings.

“

It's appropriate as long as that is the deal they are receiving at checkout

I wish I knew the original price so I knew exactly how much I will save.

"Save \$XX/mo" is mostly clear for both bundled plans and perk subscription offers, although some still want to see starting pricing.



Note: Asterisks (*) reflect statistically significant differences ($p < .05$)

Plans - Bill Credits

Bundle your mobile & home internet. Save \$15/mo.

With any Verizon postpaid mobile phone plan and Fios home internet plan. ⓘ

Perk - \$ Markdown

Save on the best in entertainment.

Like the Disney Bundle for \$10/mo. ⓘ

Disney Bundle >

When "Save \$XX/mo" describes **bill credits on bundled plans**, customers/prospects find it clear and understand they will save the stated amount per month. However, some want to see the starting price of the plans to fully grasp the value.

“

*The way it's spelled out makes it **clear when and how you'll get the 15 off**.*

*Understanding the value of bundling can sometimes be tricky, but this messaging is pretty **straightforward**.*

*It is **very clear** and **understandable** that if you have both of these plans, you will receive \$15 off of the total for both.*

*It clearly states you will save \$15 per month. I would like to see plans starting at **whatever they start at listed**.*

*initially just saying, say **\$15 a month doesn't mean anything unless it is in the context of the actual previous price amount***

When "Save \$XX/mo" describes **savings on monthly prices** for perks, customers and prospects find it clear, especially when it shows both the discounted and original price.

“

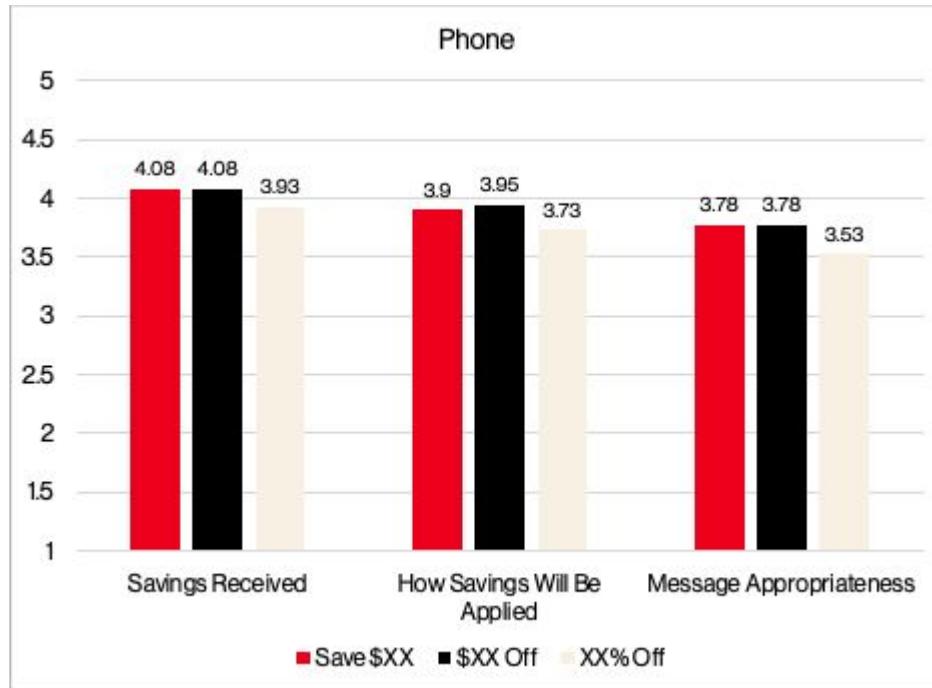
*It lets me know I'm **saving 4.99 from 14.99** so super clear*

*This is very **comprehensive** and **includes all of the key information**.*

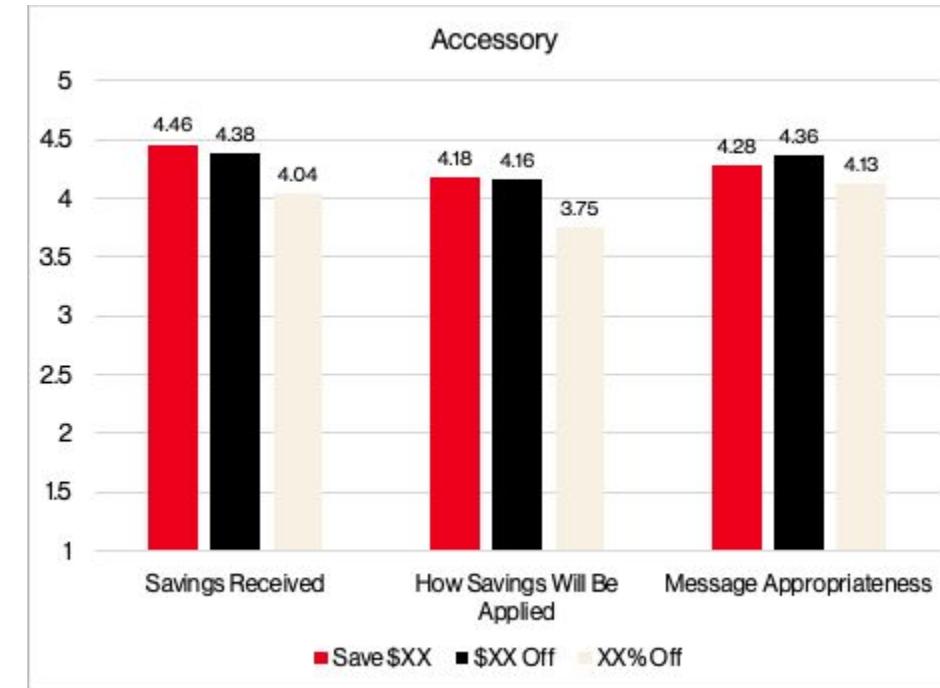
***It couldn't be more clear.** It states how much you are paying per month and how much you save.*

*I like that it shows the **monthly fee** and also **how much you save**, so you can see that without the discount the price would be 14.99*

"Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% Off" are better suited for instant discounts vs. more complex offers that provide credits over time.



Using phrases like "Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% Off" can over-simplify complex savings, such as bill credits on a phone payment plan. This leads customers and prospects to **misunderstand the offer**, perceive it as **deceptive**, and ultimately **trust the brand less**.



While it's simpler to understand in-cart, one-time discounts on smaller purchases, such as accessories, by using phrases like "Save \$XX," "\$XX off," and "XX% off," it's crucial to remember that the **original price is still vital information** and shouldn't be omitted.

Demographics

Unmoderated Concept Testing - Demographics (N=120)

Gender	%
Man	32%
Woman	68%
Non-binary/gender fluid	0%

Disability	%
Yes	15%
No	85%

Industries	%
Banking	3%
Education	13%
Food or beverage manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor	3%
Government	5%
Healthcare/medical	9%
Public Relations	1%
None of these	67%

Age	%
20-35	8%
36-50	33%
51-65	58%

Race/ethnicity	%
Native American or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	5%
Black or African American	8%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	7%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
White or Caucasian	83%
Other	1%

Income	%
\$30,000-\$49,999	21%
\$50,000-\$79,999	29%
\$80,000-\$119,999	25%
\$120,000 and above	25%

Wireless Provider	%
Verizon	49%
AT&T	18%
T-Mobile	19%
Other	14%

How often use website/app to purchase/research products?	%
Multiple times a day	24%
Once a day	5%
A few times per week	21%
Once a week	7%
A few times per month	10%
Once per month	10%
Less than once per month	16%
Once per year	2%
Less than once per year	6%

Qualitative In-Depth Interviews - Demographics (N=10)

Gender	#
Man	4
Woman	6
Non-binary/gender fluid	0

Disability	#
No	9
Yes	1

Age	#
20-35	3
36-50	5
51-65	2

Race/ethnicity	#
Asian	1
Black or African American	1
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	1
White or Caucasian	7

Income	#
\$20,000 - \$39,999	2
\$40,000 - \$59,999	1
\$60,000 - \$79,999	1
\$80,000 - \$99,999	2
\$100,000 - \$124,999	2
\$175,000 - \$199,999	2

Wireless Provider	#
Verizon	5
T-Mobile	5

Industries	#
Consumer Packaged Goods	1
Education	2
Government	1
None of these	6

Overview of Research Methods

Survey

A generative, iterative or evaluative method for collecting self-reported information from respondents about their characteristics, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or attitudes, often using quantitative measures.

Good for:

- Collecting information from people, typically from large samples in a short amount of time.
- Understanding your audience's attitudes and perceptions of your brand, product, or new feature.
- Quantifying trends gleaned from qualitative research

Not good for:

- Measuring actual behavior, since all responses are self-reported (and not observed)
- Uncovering deep mental models or the true 'why's behind survey responses

How to interpret findings:

- Quantitative surveys with statistically significant findings may be used to inform decisions as they are not due to chance; insights from the sample are representative of people in the population not surveyed
- Open-ended responses can be analyzed to identify trends, which can inform decisions

Interviews

A generative method to uncover deep insights regarding participant mental models, motivations, and attitudes toward an experience, brand, or topic in order to inform design. This is often run in person or remote moderated—it is not suitable for remote unmoderated.

Good for:

- Uncovering deep mental models around a particular journey, product, or brand
- Identifying opportunity areas for innovation, experience strategy or design intervention
- Identifying areas for understanding scale / impact using quantitative studies

Not good for:

- Identifying where a specific design needs refining and how to improve it
- Tracking metrics or KPIs for statistical significance or benchmarking
- Understanding or measuring actual behavior

How to interpret findings:

- Each insight reflects a category of thought in relation to participant past experiences, expectations, attitudes and motivations. These should be read in full to understand the information collected.
- Generally, the more frequent the feedback comes up across participants, the stronger an insight may be

verizon

