

What's stopping consumers from buying refurbished: United States

Country-level qualitative findings from Apkudo's market research with FDM CCS Insight

United States Findings at a Glance

Category understanding

Strong grasp of refurbished vs. used, but severe confusion around grading labels ("Excellent," "Grade A") across channels

Top consumer concern

Battery health; Skepticism toward automated AI diagnostics, with a strong preference for human inspection

Pricing power

Highest willingness to pay (around \$20 premium) for verified device transparency

Defining market nuance

Direct conflict-of-interest concern: buyers question the objectivity of diagnostics paid for by the seller

The local trust gap: grading confusion across channels

US consumers understand the value of refurbished devices over simple used stock. What they cannot consistently interpret is the grading label attached to it, and the absence of standardized definitions creates hesitation to purchase and forces buyers to rely on retailers' brand reputation as a proxy for condition.

"T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T [are] kind of all the same. I think Amazon is a bit different, but eBay — I would definitely not trust [eBay] out of all of them."

— US focus group respondent

In the US market, this uncertainty triggers four clear buyer behaviors:

Purchase hesitation and delay: Buyers stall at checkout to research seller credibility or seek forum validation.

Forced trade-ups: Unsure of what "Good" or "Fair" means, risk-averse buyers overspend on top-tier "Like New" units, leaving mid-tier inventory trapped on shelves.

Channel switching: Lacking a standardized grading definition on open marketplaces, buyers gravitate toward carrier stores and established retailers such as Apple, Best Buy, and T-Mobile, whose brand reputation serves as a proxy for trust.

Abandonment for new: When the discount-to-risk ratio feels unfavorable, buyers walk away from refurbished entirely and buy new instead.

What resonated: technical proof plus brand authority

When presented with a mockup of the Device Passport™, an itemized breakdown of functional diagnostics, battery health, and history, US respondents reacted immediately to the elimination of guesswork.

"I'm actually thrilled with this. This is the kind of data I want before I jump in on a refurbished phone."
— US focus group respondent

The passport provides the technical proof, but a brand name layered on top, such as Samsung Verified Resale, adds a distinct kind of confidence:

"I like the brand name on it. That makes me feel... reassured, so it's definitely something I'd pay more for." — US focus group respondent

US buyer caveats: automation with integrity

US consumers flagged three specific areas where transparency needs to go deeper.

The conflict-of-interest gap. Buyers explicitly questioned seller's objectivity in who's actually behind the diagnostic:

"I mean, if I run a service that gives you a device passport, I'm not gonna say my seller's phones suck. It's not gonna probably be very objective."
— US focus group respondent

AI vs. human inspection. US respondents voiced a strong preference for human inspection over AI-powered diagnostics:

"The only thing that gives me cause for concern is the AI-powered robotic diagnostics. I prefer human inspection." — US focus group respondent

This isn't a rejection of automation itself. It's a sign that buyers don't yet know what human grading actually looks like at scale, or why a documented, source-backed machine result is more verifiable than an unexplained human judgment call. That's a consumer-education job the industry needs to take on, not a reason to hide the technology behind it.

Real photos over graphics. Buyers were direct about wanting to see the actual unit for sale, not stock photos of the device model:

"I wouldn't pay anything more for [Device Passport] if I don't get photos of the phone."
— US focus group respondent

Commercial impact for enterprise partners

Out of all research participants, US buyers demonstrated the highest willingness to pay for verified condition data, around a \$20 premium.

"I mean, \$20 is not a lot of money."
— US focus group respondent

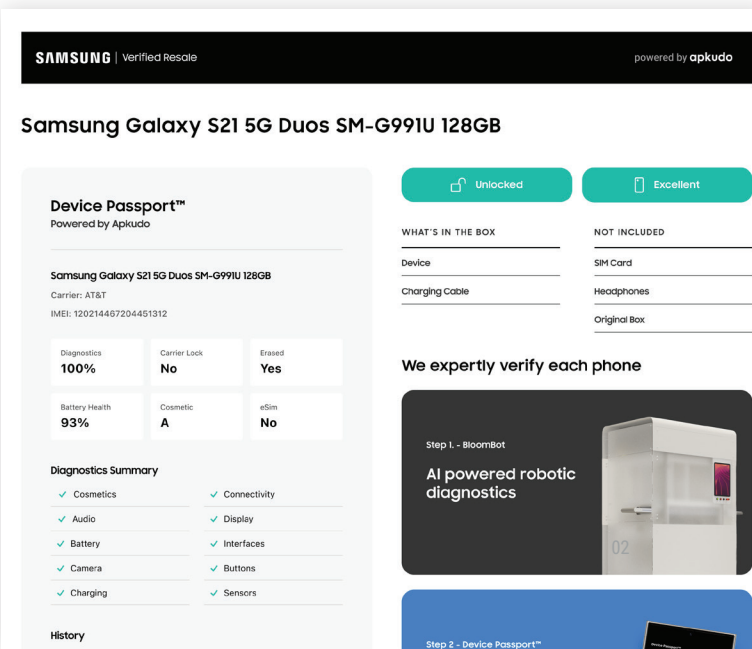
This isn't a recommendation to add a line-item consumer fee. It's proof that verified transparency unlocks measurable pricing power and operational savings for enterprise operators:

Carriers and retailers eliminate checkout hesitation, increase conversion on refurbished listings, and reduce post-purchase grading disputes and return costs.

Marketplaces and wholesalers give buyers the confidence to purchase mid-tier ("Good" or "Fair") inventory, improving turn rates and stabilizing seller margins.

OEMs combine brand verification with objective technical proof to capture secondary market value and protect brand equity.

The Device Passport™ mock-up is for illustrative purposes only.



What's next

This executive summary reflects phase one qualitative research across US consumers. Phase two is a quantitative study now underway to measure the exact size of the trust premium and validate these findings at scale. [Refer to the qualitative summary findings across four markets to compare the US to the UK, Germany, and Japan.](#)

[Sign up to receive the full quantitative report when it publishes.](#)

About Apkudo

Apkudo is the Device Passport Platform for the connected device ecosystem. We capture and unify data from every program, transaction, and touchpoint across the device lifecycle, creating a single, trusted Device Passport™ for every asset. For companies that manage, sell, or buy devices, this means a verified record they can act on: restore buyer confidence, maximize value, and reduce risk at every decision point. Our unique advantage is data fidelity and veracity, built on precision-automated robotics that have processed millions of devices, generating objective, machine-verified data that no competitor can match. To learn more, visit apkudo.com.