

# Simsurveys

---

## Consumer Returns Survey Validation Study

Simulated Data vs. Live Study Results

Reference Study: Happy Returns and NRF, 2024 Consumer Returns in the Retail Industry

February 02, 2026

# Executive Summary

This report presents a validation study designed to answer a practical research question: would a marketing research team analyzing simulated survey data generated by Simsurveys reach the same conclusions and make the same recommendations as one analyzing live respondent data?

To evaluate this, simulated survey responses generated by Simsurveys were compared against results from a live reference study on consumer attitudes and behaviors related to online returns. The live study, conducted by Happy Returns (a UPS company) in partnership with the National Retail Federation (NRF), surveyed 2,007 U.S. consumers who had returned at least one online purchase within the past year. Fieldwork was conducted in August–September 2024. This validation focuses on a commercially important and behaviorally nuanced topic—retail returns—to assess model performance on real-world consumer research.

Synthetic results were generated to match the live study's respondent population and eligibility criteria, including U.S. consumers aged 18+ with recent online return experience. The analysis spans 14 survey items covering holiday return behavior and policy sensitivity, attitudes toward free returns, instant refunds, box-free and printerless options, willingness to travel for different return methods, and bracketing behavior (ordering multiple sizes with intent to return). For each item, simulated and live response distributions are shown side by side to allow direct comparison. The final synthetic dataset used for this analysis consisted of  $n = 2,007$  simulated respondents.

For questions where full response distributions were published in the reference study, alignment is assessed using Kullback–Leibler (KL) Divergence, a standard metric for distributional similarity. For a subset of attitudinal agreement items (Q3 series), the reference study published only top-2-box percentages rather than full 5-point scale distributions. In those cases, comparison is limited to top-2-box agreement rates, with the full simulated distribution displayed for context.

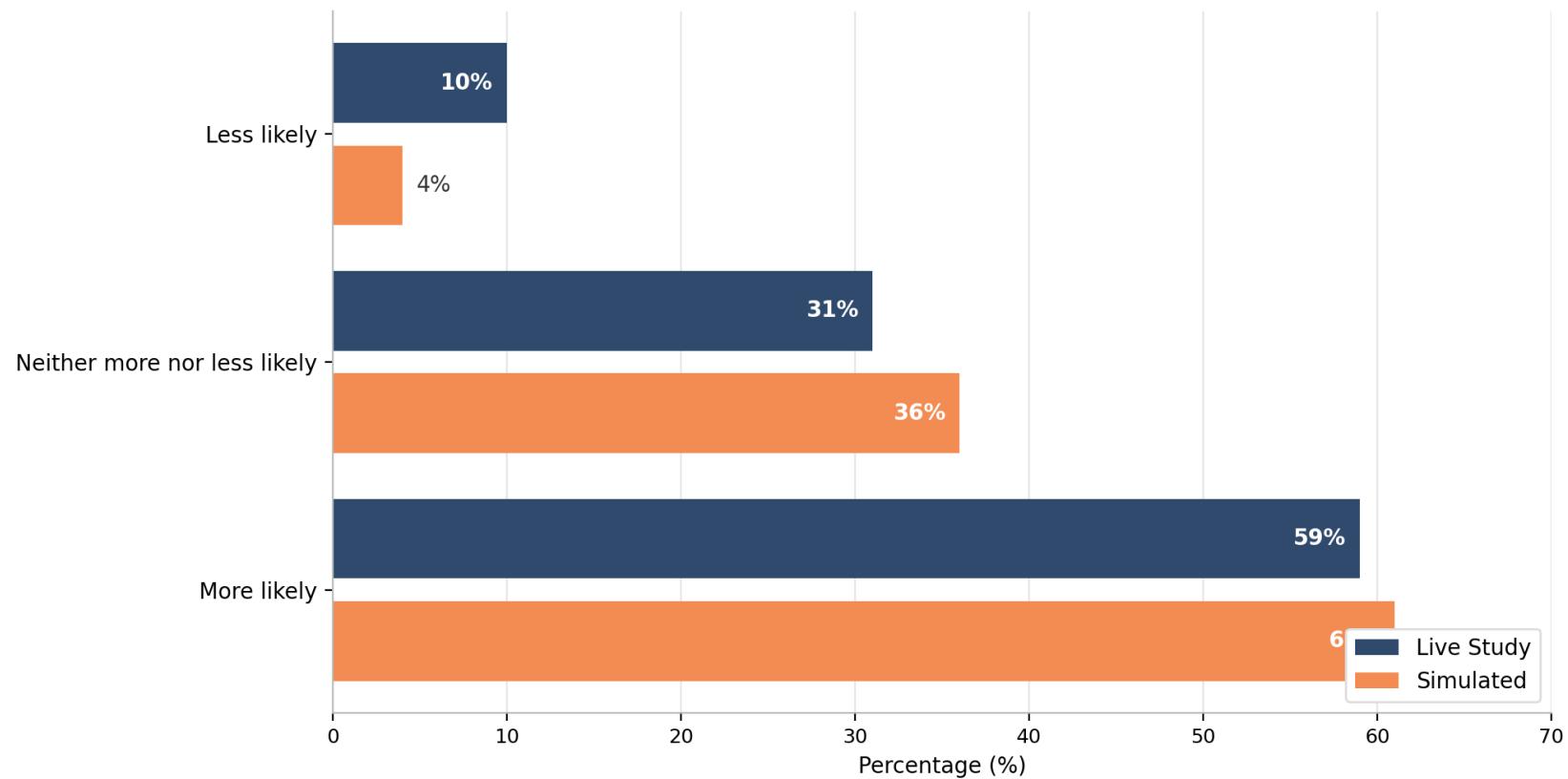
Results are interpreted through the lens of actionable equivalence: whether differences between simulated and live data would materially alter research conclusions, strategic recommendations, or business decisions. In this context, KL values below 0.15 indicate that insights derived from simulated data would be substantively equivalent to those derived from live respondents.

Across the questions evaluated, simulated results demonstrate strong directional alignment with live findings on the core patterns that matter for decision-making: the rank ordering of consumer preferences, the relative magnitude of attitudinal segments, and the overall shape of behavioral distributions. While some individual-item deviations are observed—particularly where simulated respondents show somewhat stronger stated preferences—the overall level of agreement indicates that Simsurveys generates research-grade data suitable for marketing analysis, insight generation, and decision support.

# Q1

During the holiday season are you more or less likely to consider a retailer's return policy before making a purchase?

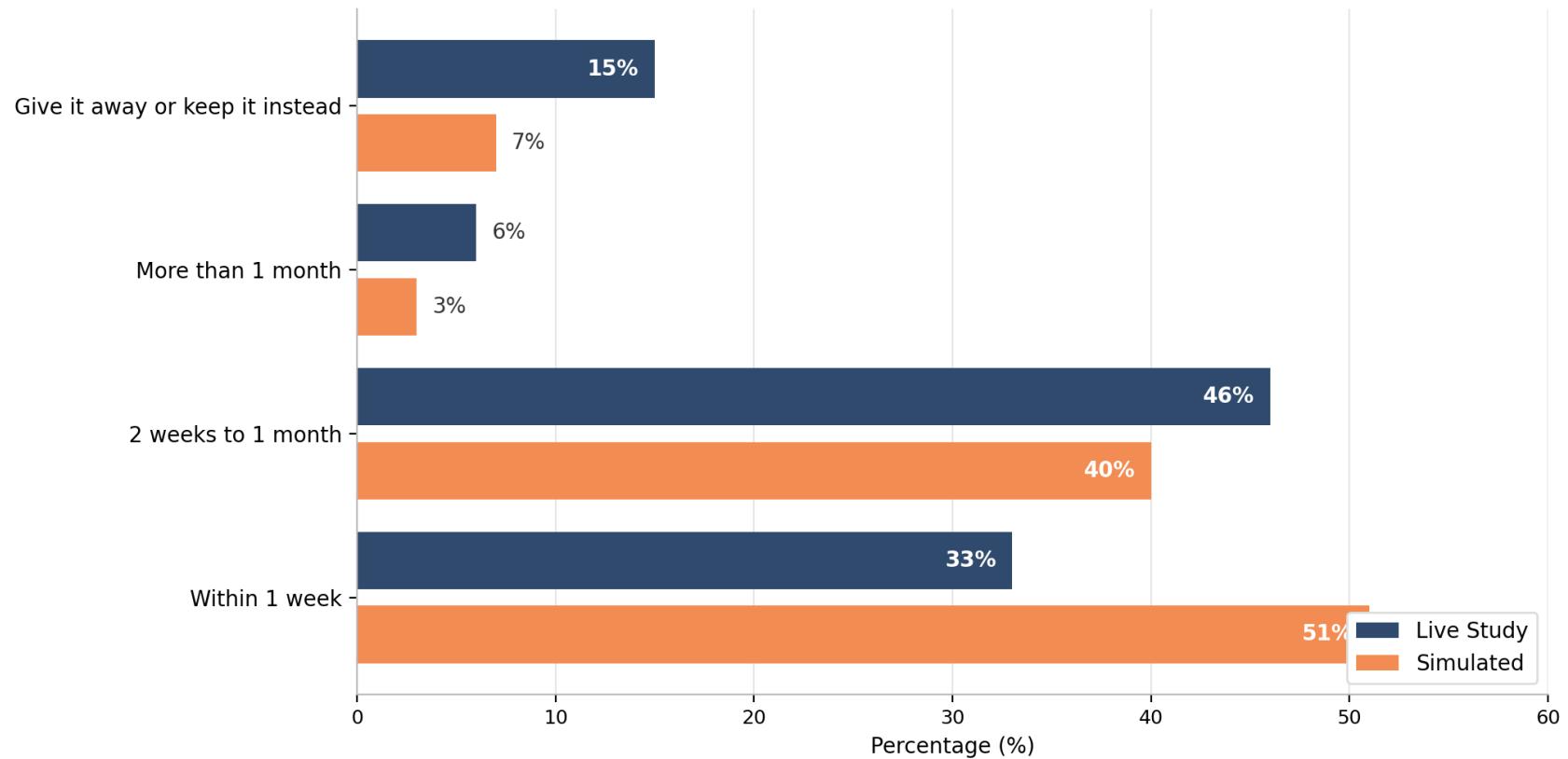
KL Divergence = 0.036



## Q2

When you receive a holiday gift that you want to return, when do you think you are most likely to do it?

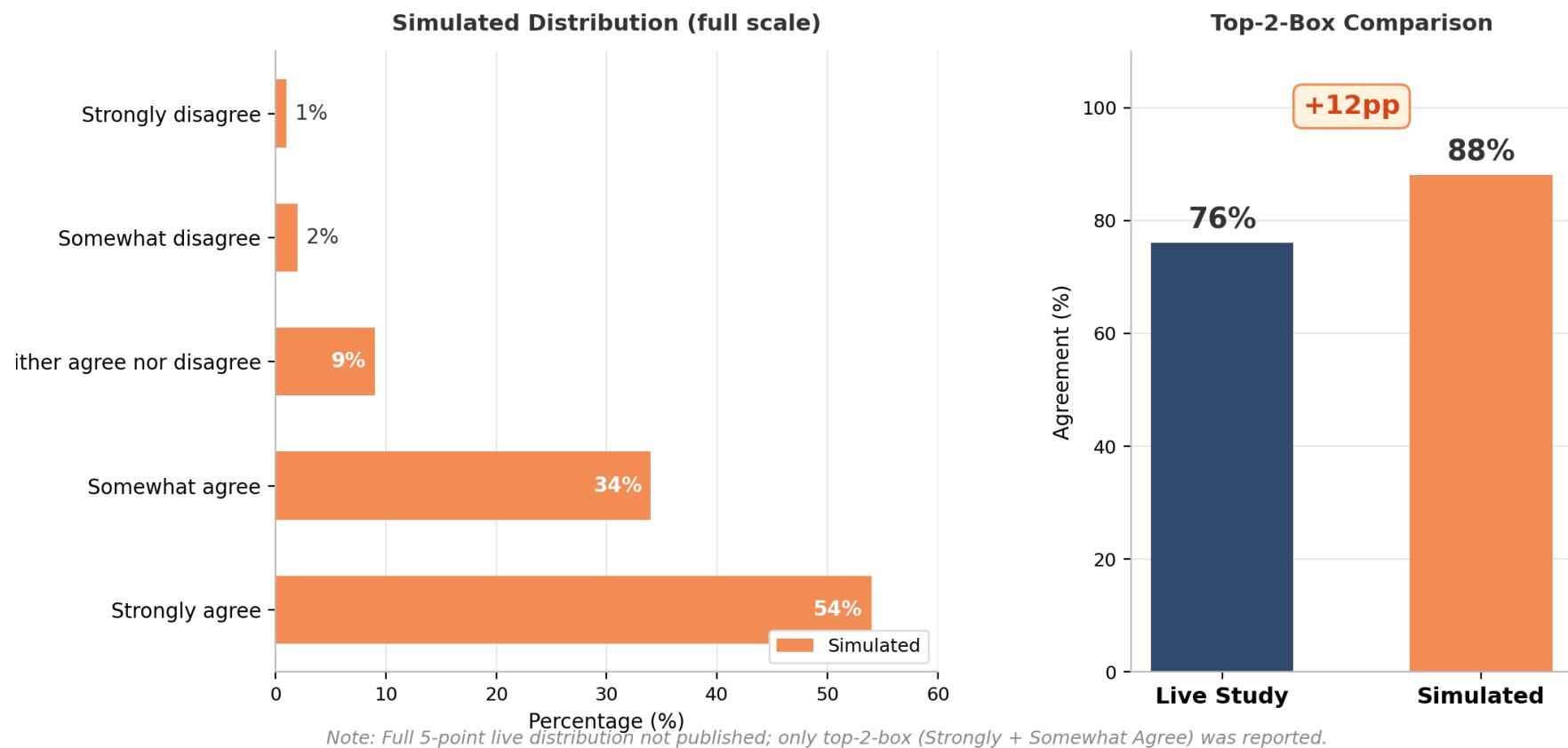
KL Divergence = 0.086



## Q3-G1

**Agreement: Free returns are an important consideration when shopping with a retailer online.**

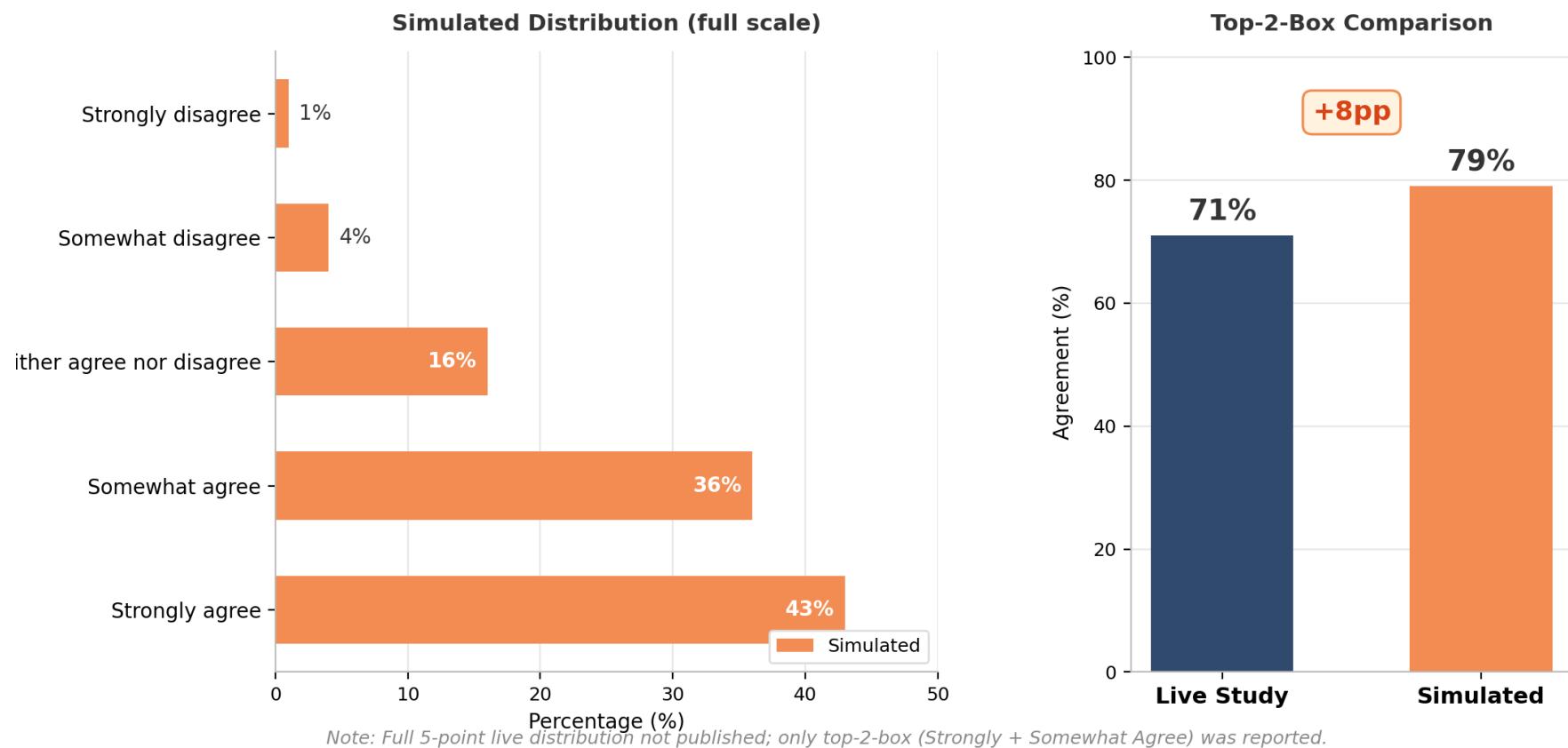
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 88% vs Live 76% (+12pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q3-G2

**Agreement: I am more likely to choose a return option that gives me an instantly initiated refund or exchange.**

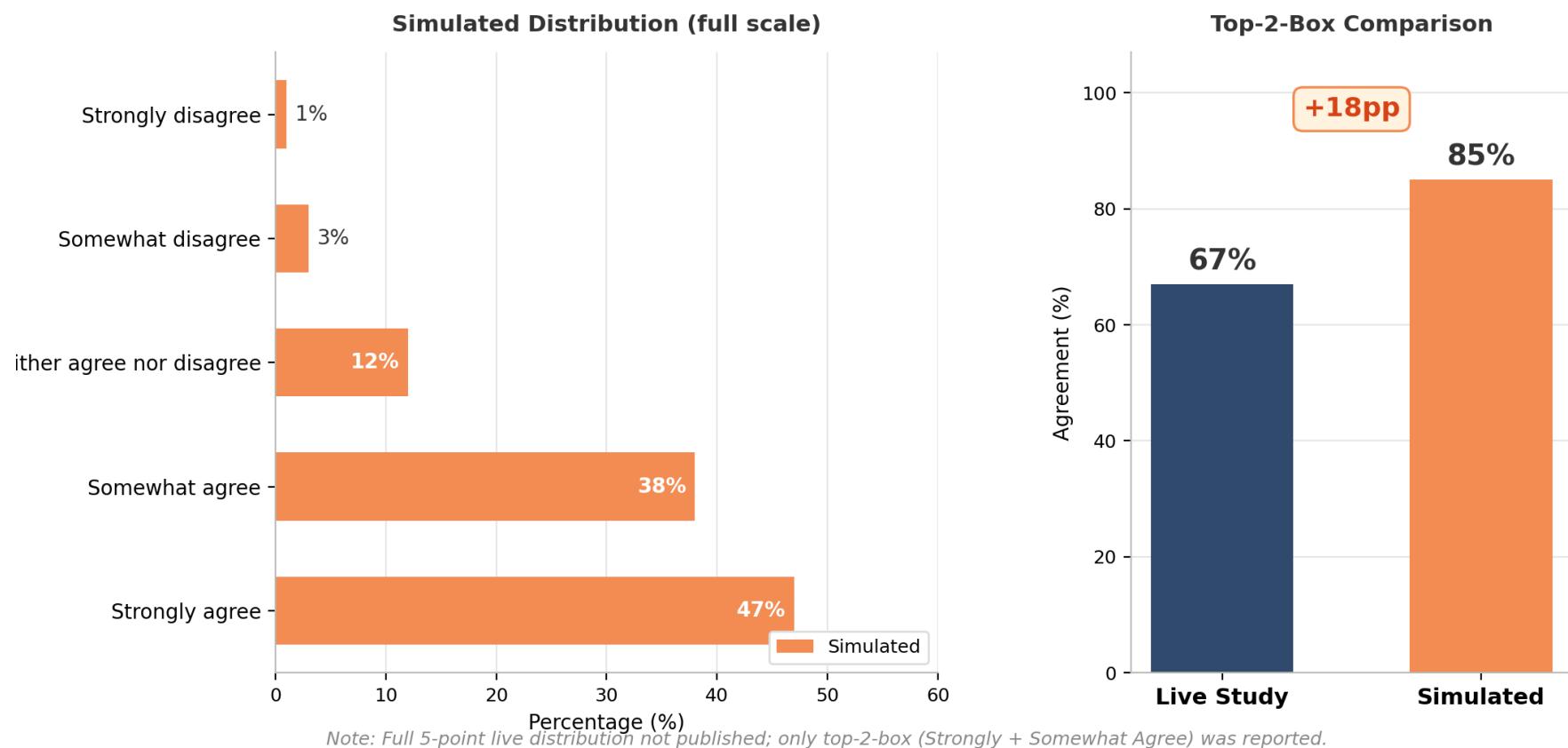
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 79% vs Live 71% (+8pp) | Full live distribution not published



### Q3-G3

**Agreement: If I have a poor returns experience, I am less likely to shop with that retailer again.**

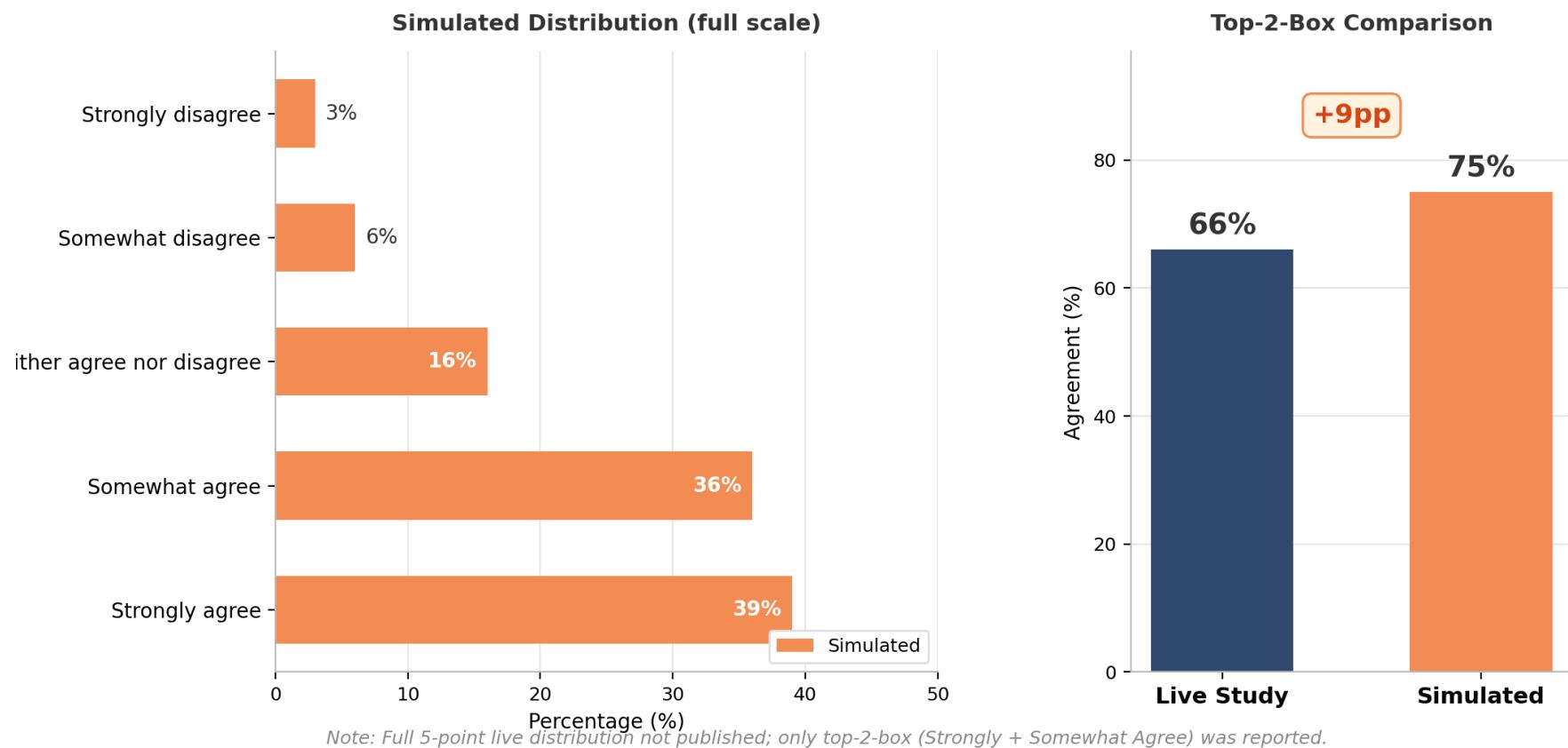
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 85% vs Live 67% (+18pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q3-G4

**Agreement: I am more likely to return an online purchase in person if it means I'd receive my refund at the time of drop-off.**

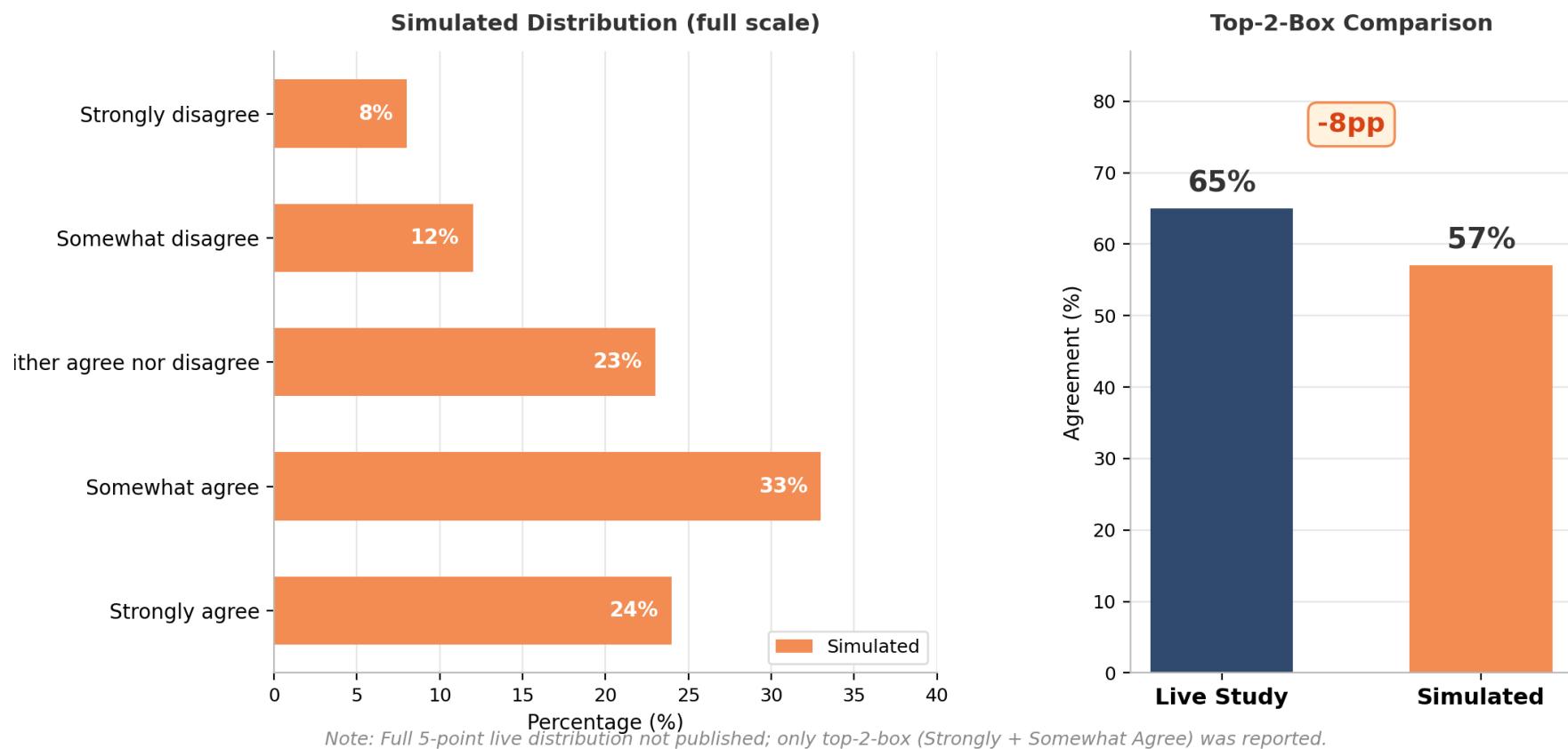
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 75% vs Live 66% (+9pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q3-G5

**Agreement: I am more likely to make an in-person return if it means I can return it without a box or label.**

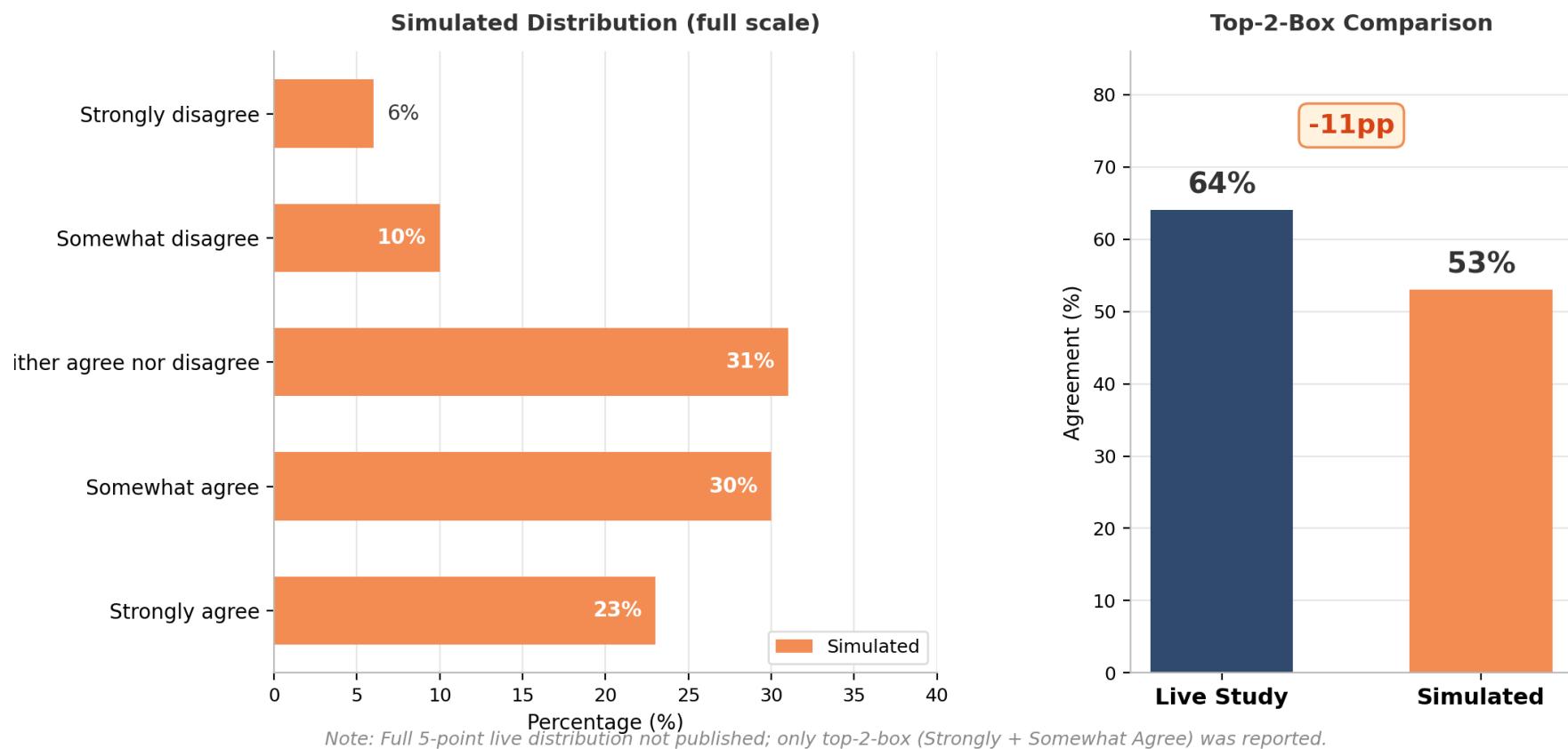
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 57% vs Live 65% (-8pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q3-G6

**Agreement: I am more likely to shop a retailer that offers printerless, box-free returns at nearby locations.**

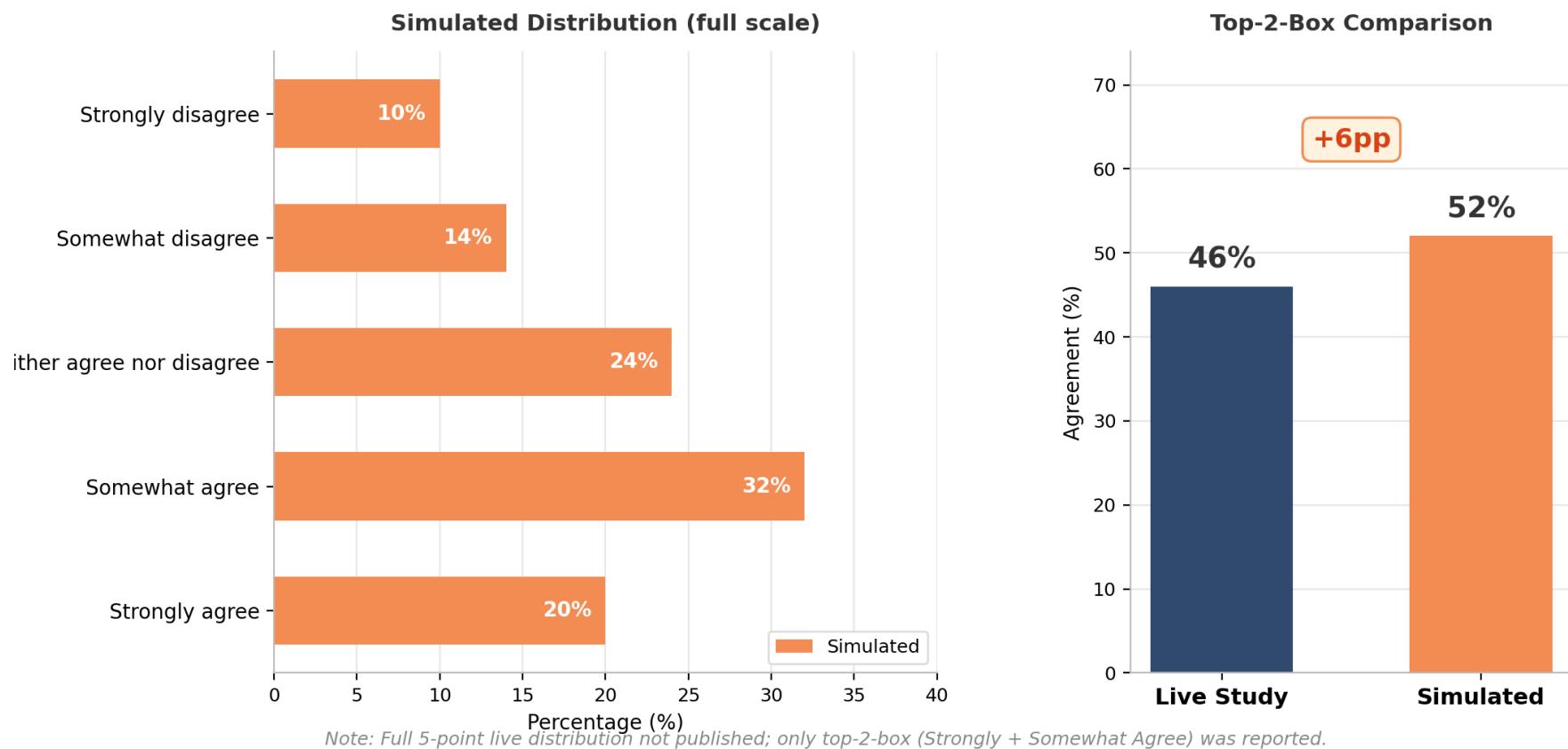
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 53% vs Live 64% (-11pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q3-G7

### Agreement: I have abandoned a purchase because the merchant did not offer a convenient return method.

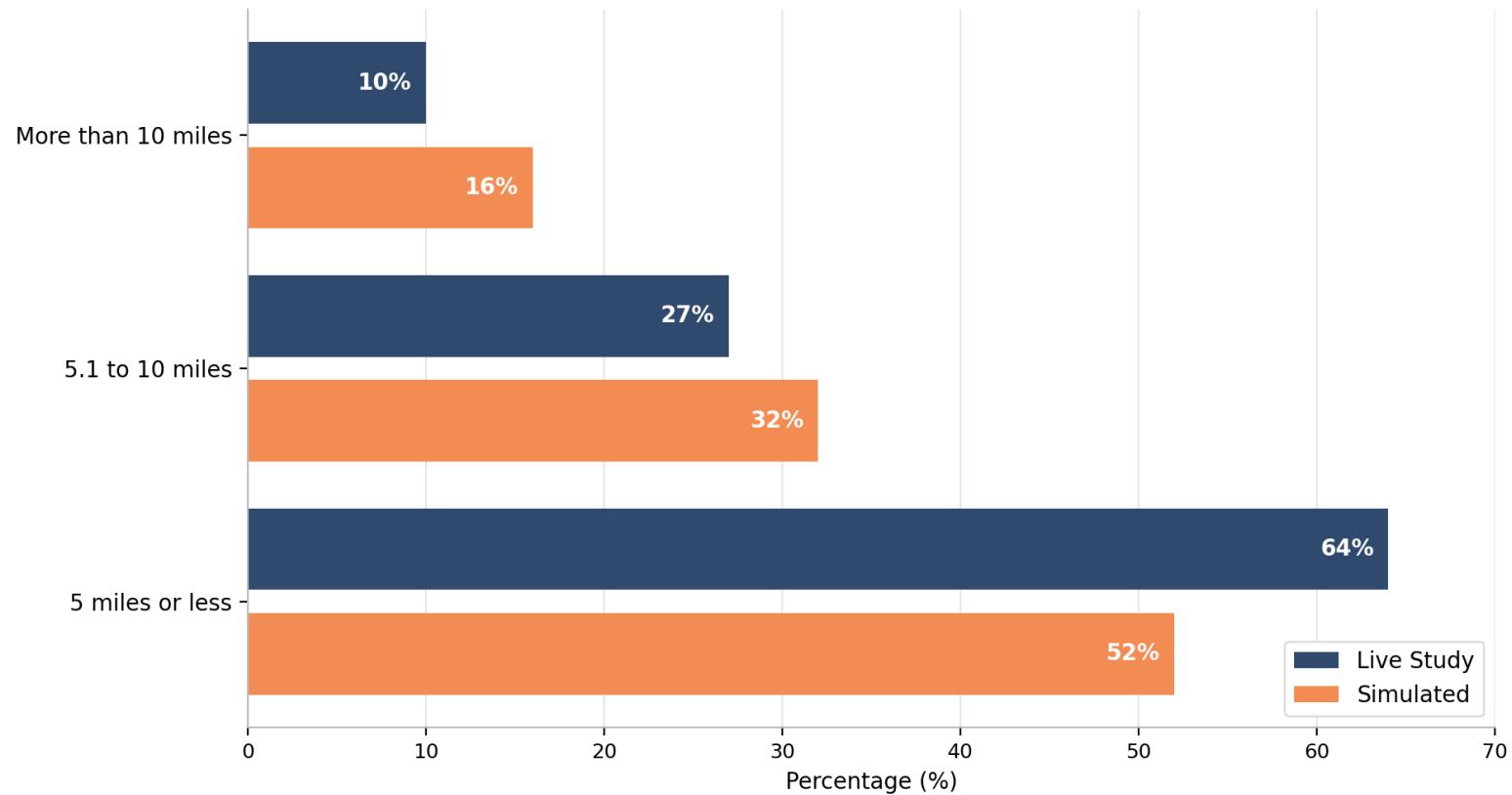
Top-2-Box Comparison: Simulated 52% vs Live 46% (+6pp) | Full live distribution not published



## Q4-G1

### How far would you travel to make a return? – Printerless

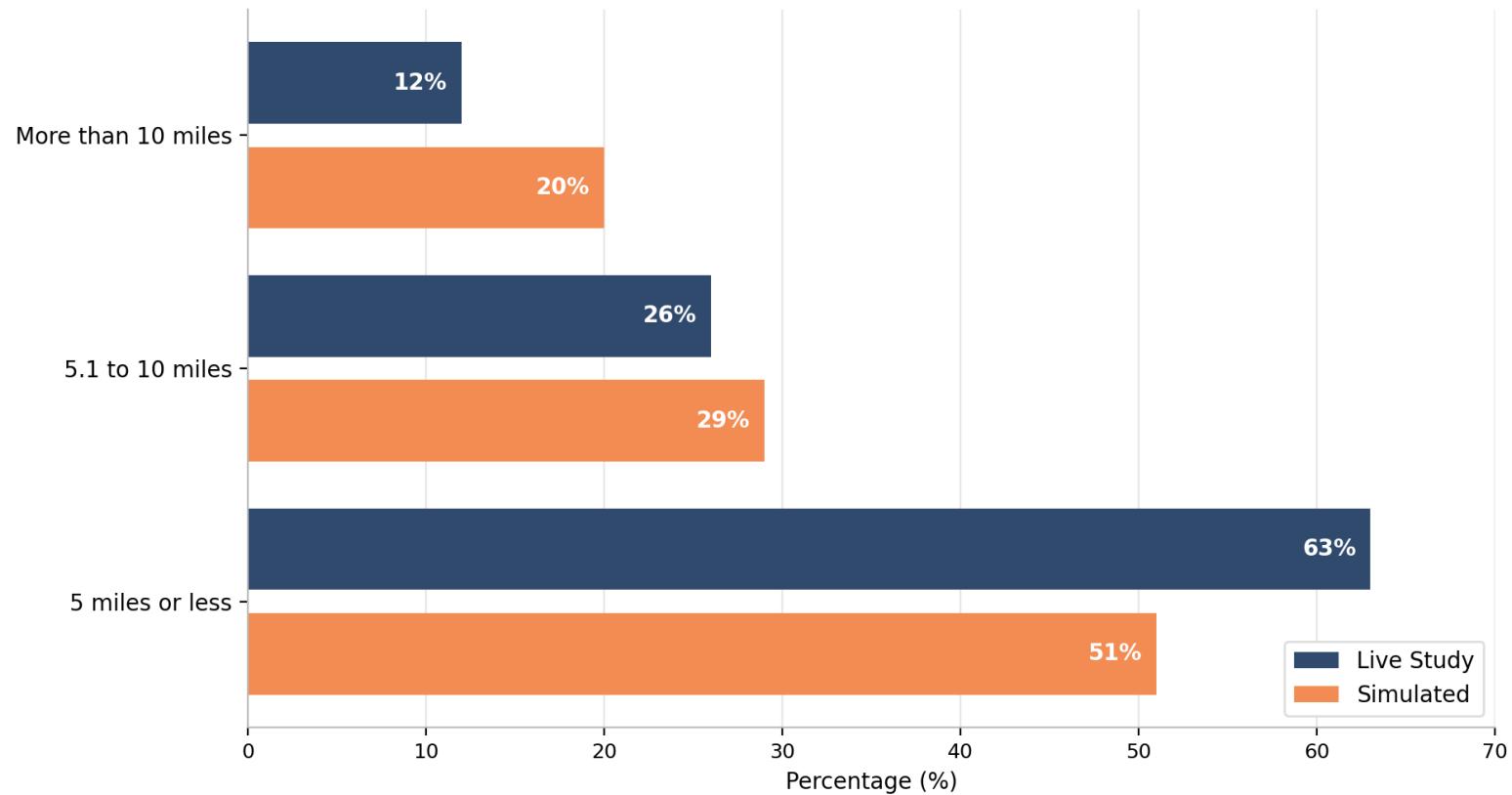
KL Divergence = 0.030



## Q4-G2

### How far would you travel to make a return? – Buy online, return in-store

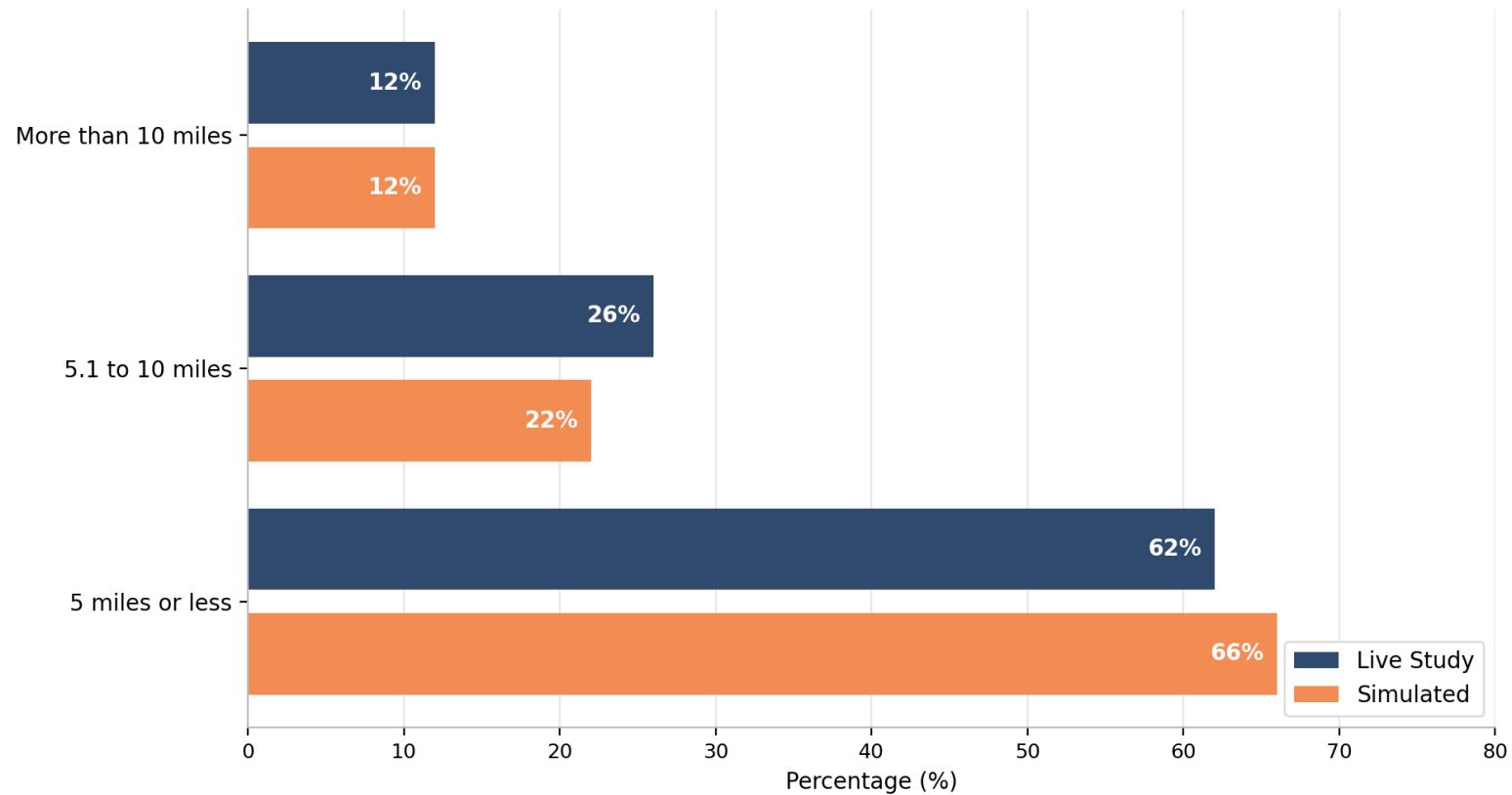
KL Divergence = 0.033



## Q4-G3

### How far would you travel to make a return? – No box / no label

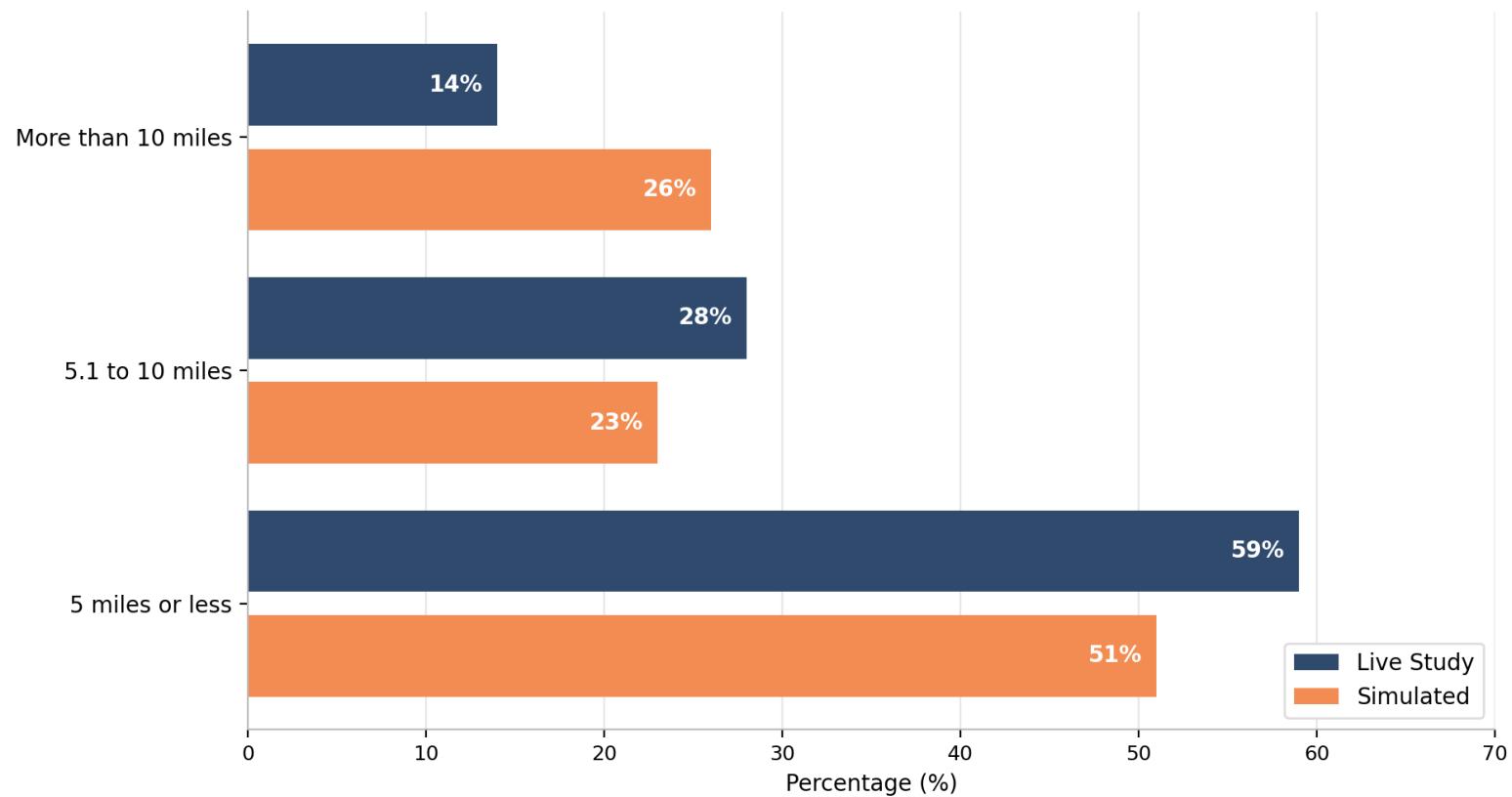
KL Divergence = 0.005



## Q4-G4

### How far would you travel to make a return? – Free

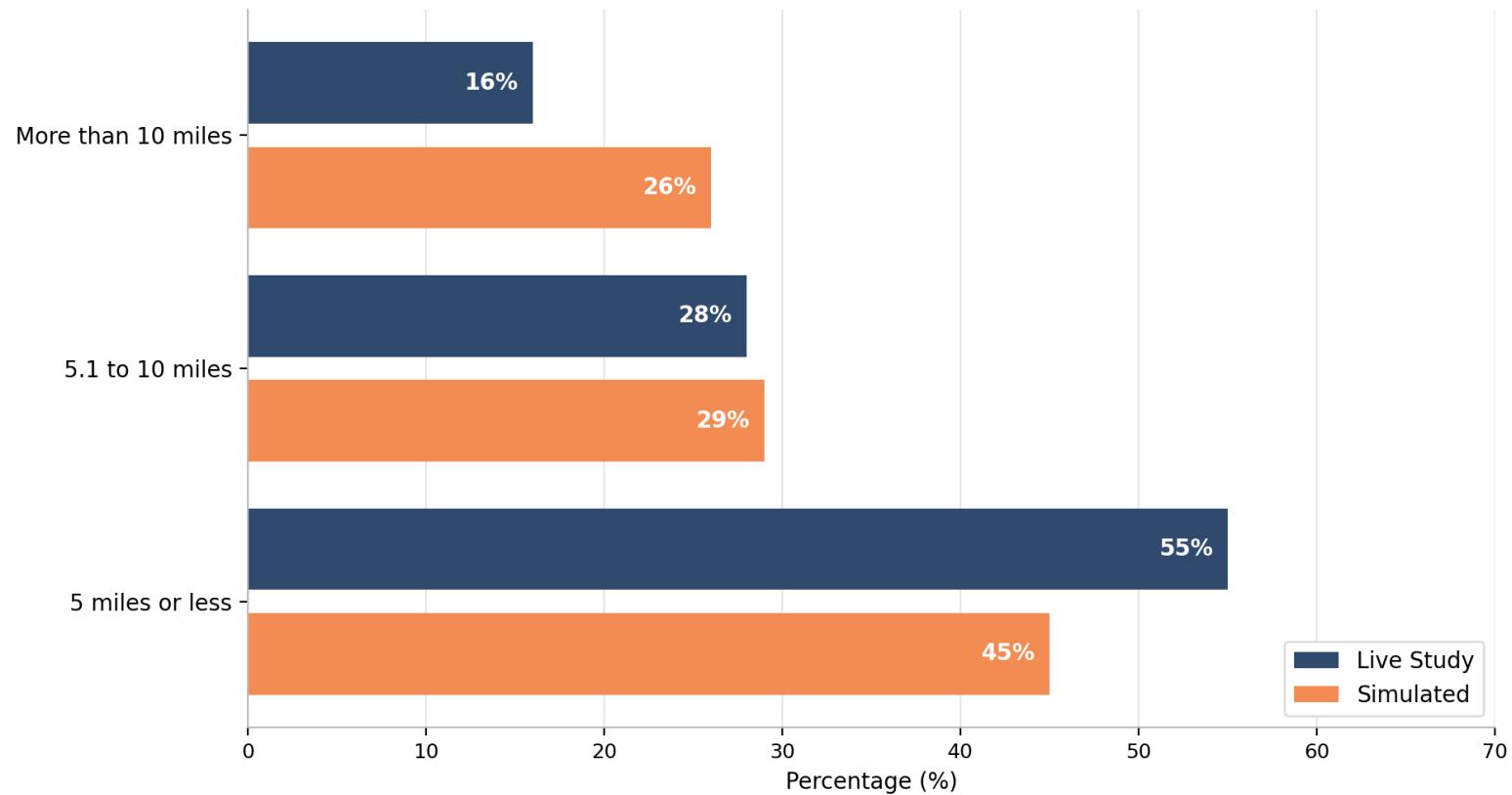
KL Divergence = 0.044



## Q4-G5

### How far would you travel to make a return? – Immediate refund

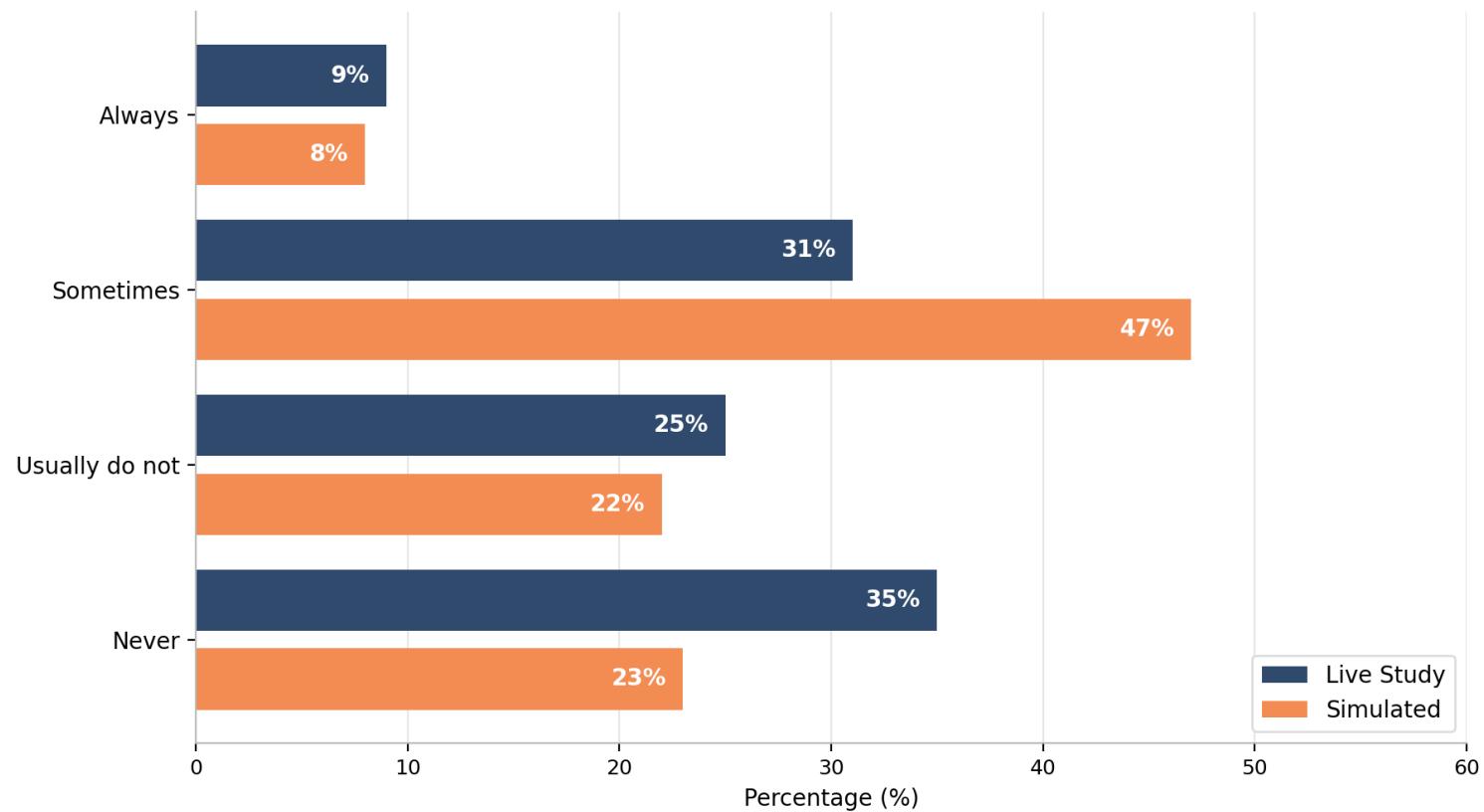
KL Divergence = 0.033



Q5

When shopping online for apparel or footwear in the last 12 months, did you ever purchase an item in more than one size, color or style, with plans to return one or more of them?

KL Divergence = 0.060



# Appendix: Survey Questions

**Q1: During the holiday season are you more or less likely to consider a retailer's return policy before making a purchase?**

Responses: More likely | Neither more nor less likely | Less likely

**Q2: When you receive a holiday gift that you want to return, when do you think you are most likely to do it?**

Responses: Within 1 week | 2 weeks to 1 month | More than 1 month | Give it away or keep it instead

**Q3-G1: Agreement: Free returns are an important consideration when shopping with a retailer online.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

**Q3-G2: Agreement: I am more likely to choose a return option that gives me an instantly initiated refund or exchange.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

**Q3-G3: Agreement: If I have a poor returns experience, I am less likely to shop with that retailer again.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

**Q3-G4: Agreement: I am more likely to return an online purchase in person if it means I'd receive my refund at the time of drop-off.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

**Q3-G5: Agreement: I am more likely to make an in-person return if it means I can return it without a box or label.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

**Q3-G6: Agreement: I am more likely to shop a retailer that offers printerless, box-free returns at nearby locations.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

# Appendix: Survey Questions (continued)

## **Q3-G7: Agreement: I have abandoned a purchase because the merchant did not offer a convenient return method.**

Responses: Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

## **Q4-G1: How far would you travel to make a return? – Printerless**

Responses: 5 miles or less | 5.1 to 10 miles | More than 10 miles

## **Q4-G2: How far would you travel to make a return? – Buy online, return in-store**

Responses: 5 miles or less | 5.1 to 10 miles | More than 10 miles

## **Q4-G3: How far would you travel to make a return? – No box / no label**

Responses: 5 miles or less | 5.1 to 10 miles | More than 10 miles

## **Q4-G4: How far would you travel to make a return? – Free**

Responses: 5 miles or less | 5.1 to 10 miles | More than 10 miles

## **Q4-G5: How far would you travel to make a return? – Immediate refund**

Responses: 5 miles or less | 5.1 to 10 miles | More than 10 miles

## **Q5: When shopping online for apparel or footwear in the last 12 months, did you ever purchase an item in more than one size, color or style, with plans to return one or more of them?**

Responses: Never | Usually do not | Sometimes | Always