The new discovery engine

How consumers are using AI to find, trust, and choose brands, and what's at risk for those they never see

Rithum™ | **RETAIL DIVE**

Introduction

Consumers across the U.S. and the U.K. have quickly grown to rely on large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Copilot, and Gemini to discover, compare, and decide which products are worth the investment. In seemingly no time, LLMs have become an influential part of the buying journey that retailers and brands must plan, design, and optimize for.

This report, which shares insights from 1,046 U.S. and U.K. online shoppers surveyed by Rithum and Studio's Retail Dive, points to a new consumer-shopping reality that most retailers aren't ready for.

LLMs are powerful tools to attract more customers —as long as your product content, pricing, inventory data, and other details are accurate and consistent across where LLMs look. If you don't control the data story about your products, then AI will make one up for you — whether it's right or not.

THE BIG TAKEAWAYS

Your customers (especially your best ones) already use AI

More than 8 in 10 shoppers under 44 have used an LLM as part of their shopping journey in the last three months, and more than half trust AI tools as much as brand websites. Adoption peaks at 84% among households earning between $100,000 and $150,000.

Not all shoppers use AI the same way

Lower-income shoppers use AI to find the best price. Higher-income shoppers use it to skip research entirely, and they're twice as likely to trust AI without visiting another site.

When AI gets it wrong, your brand takes the blame

Nearly 60% of shoppers say trust decreases when an LLM serves up bad information. Some (16%) won't even complete the purchase.

Shoppers don't come to your site to fact-check AI

When consumers check an AI recommendation, 28% turn to search engines first, 19% go to online reviews, and 17% ask friends and family. Only 5% go to the retailer's site. Because shoppers aren't visiting your site to get answers, the only way to influence what shoppers find is to ensure information accuracy within AI.

AI is telling your best customers to buy from competitors you've never heard of

One in 5 shoppers have bought from a brand they've never heard of simply because AI recommended it, while 13% say they're more likely to switch retailers or products based on AI suggestions. The shoppers most likely to act on those AI recommendations without a second look are power users and high-income shoppers.

The transaction era is closer than you think

Nearly half of AI power users are very likely to hand purchasing decisions over to AI, and 67% of shoppers who fully trust AI accuracy say they're ready to let it buy for them.

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Unpacking the AI Shopping Revolution

To put it plainly, LLM usage among shoppers is high. These tools have found their way into every stage of the buying journey, and are transforming consumers discovery, consideration, and confidence.

Who's Using AI to Shop?

Adoption is widespread, with little variance between U.S. and U.K. shoppers. But there are two factors that do change the picture: age and income level.

Younger Users Rely on AI

In terms of who's using AI to shop, there's a 29-point gap between those who have embraced AI and those who haven't made it part of their shopping routine. While 80% of 18- to 43-year-olds have used AI for shopping in the last three months, only 51% of 60 and older have done the same.

AI shopping adoption by age group

% that used an LLM to shop in the last 3 months

80% 18-27-year-olds

80% 28-43-year-olds

67% 44-59-year-olds

51% 60+ year-olds

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The adoption gap also correlates to attachment.

Younger consumers say they'd definitely miss the benefits these tools provide if they couldn't be used. More than one in four (29%) of 28- to 43-year-olds would feel "a lot" of loss if AI tools were removed from the shopping experience, compared to just 9% of those ages 60 and older. In fact, 34% of the 60+ group wouldn't feel impacted at all.

Gen-Z and Millennials don't think of AI as a nice-to-use option but as essential infrastructure that's woven into how they shop (just like Google Maps has become an inseparable part of navigating daily life for most people).

Who would miss LLMs most for shopping?

% that would miss LLM tools "a lot" for shopping

23% 18-27-year-olds

29% 28-43-year-olds

16% 44-59-year-olds

9% 60+ year-olds
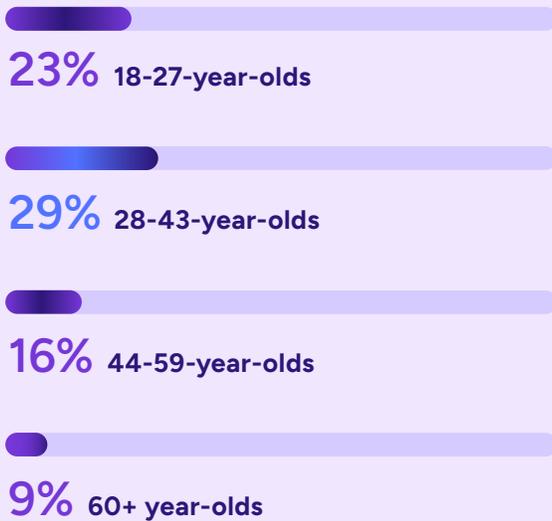
Higher Earners are Faster to Adopt

Household income is the other major AI adoption driver. The shoppers with more purchasing power are already leaning heavily on AI.

Usage peaks at 84% among households earning between $100,000 and $150,000, but it drops to 56% for households that earn under $30,000.

AI shopping adoption by household income

% that used an LLM/AI tool for shopping in the last 3 months

56% Less than $30,000 (£25,000)

70% $30,000 - $49,999 (£25,000 - £40,000)

68% $50,000 - $69,999 (£40,000 - £55,000)

77% $70,000 - $99,999 (£55,000 - £80,000)

84% $100,000 - $149,999 (£80,000 - £120,000)

81% $150,000 or more (£120,000 or more)

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How Are Shoppers Using AI?

While shoppers put LLMs to work in many ways, they're most often used to:

- **Research product information:** more than 90% of AI-active shoppers use LLMs to dig into product details

- **Compare products and prices:** more than 90% use them to compare options side by side

- **Decide where to buy:** more than half (53%) rely on AI to choose the retailer once they've decided what to buy

Instead of putting AI in the driver's seat, the majority of shoppers are using it to narrow the field. What the LLM tool pushes to the top of the results is what guides their next steps: which product pages they open, which retailers they consider, and which brands make it onto the short list.

Different Shoppers Have Different Agendas

Just like how often it's used, age and income also influence what's most important when shoppers turn to an LLM.

- **Lower-income shoppers want to save money:** They rely on LLMs primarily as a price tool to suss out the best deal for the money: 43% of households under $30,000 prioritize "finding the best price" when using AI for shopping.

- **Higher-income shoppers are more likely to prioritize convenience, such as not having to browse multiple sites.**
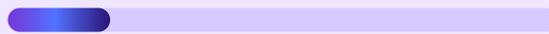
When it comes to shopping, what's most important from LLM tools?
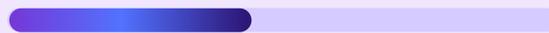
Not having to browse multiple sites

11% **Less than $30,000 (£25,000)**

20% **$150,000 or more (£120,000 or more)**

Finding the best price

43% **Less than $30,000 (£25,000)**

36% **$150,000 or more (£120,000 or more)**
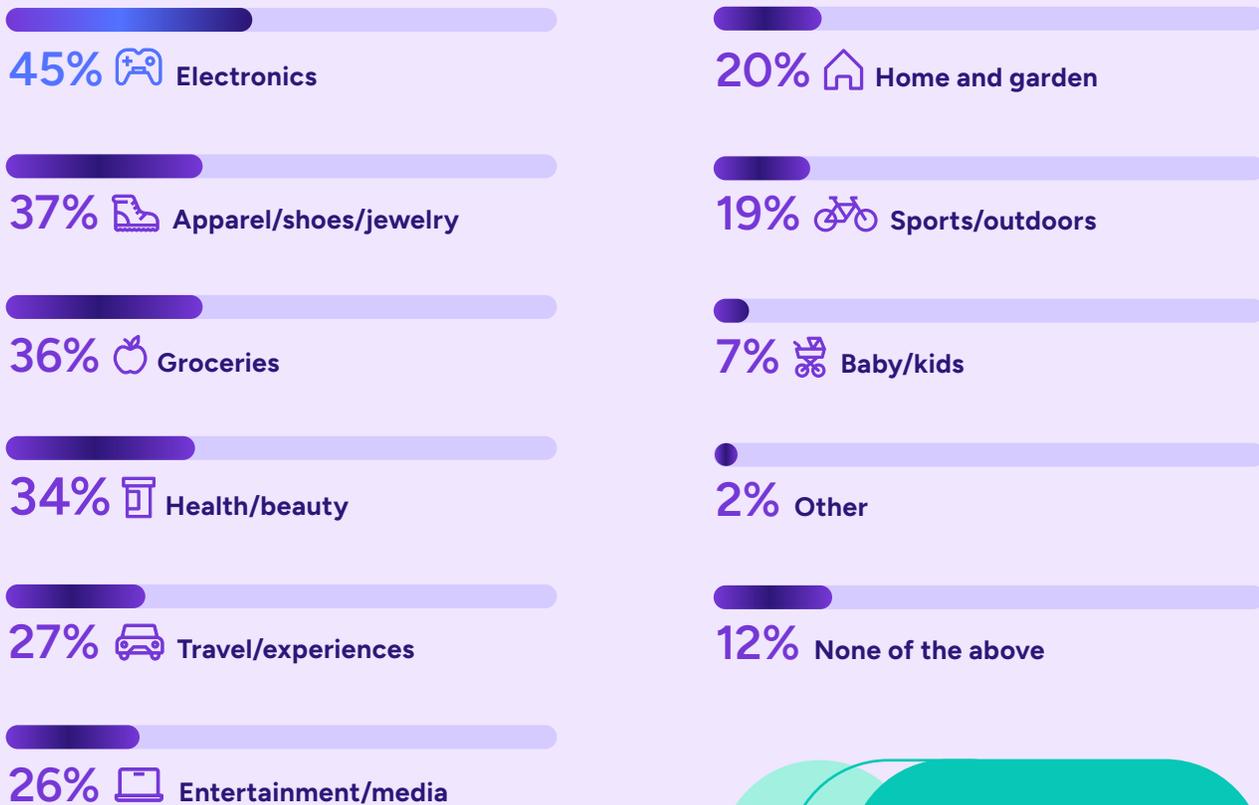
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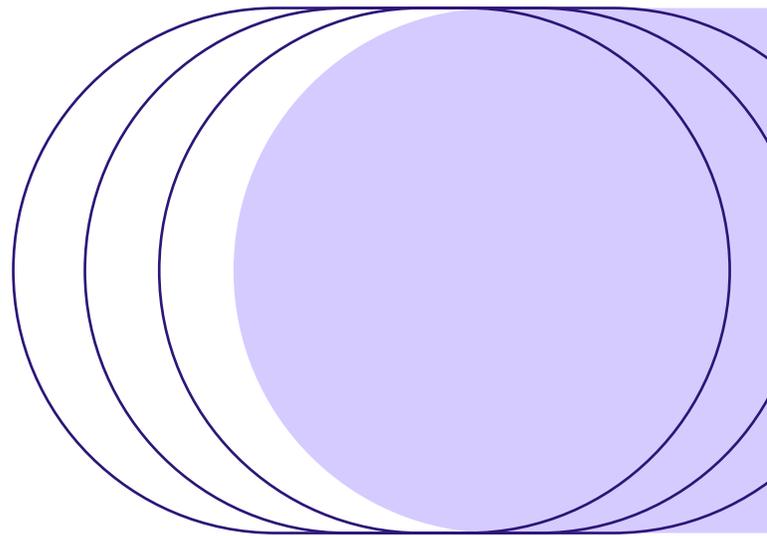# What Do Shoppers Buy with AI's Help?

Electronics leads AI-assisted shopping by a significant margin, with 45% of shoppers using an LLM to help decide on an electronics purchase in the last six months. That makes sense: Electronics purchases tend to be high-cost, high-complexity decisions where an AI can easily compare and break down questions.

Apparel, shoes, and jewelry (37%) and groceries (36%) aren't far behind. These are categories where stakes are lower, so decisions are faster. The need for deep research is minimal, but shoppers have parameters like size, color, dietary needs, etc. to consider.

AI-assisted shopping is becoming the default starting point across the purchase journey.

When shopping online, have you used an LLM/AI tool to help you decide whether to buy items in any of the following categories in the past 6 months?

45% 🎮 Electronics

37% 👟 Apparel/shoes/jewelry

36% 🍎 Groceries

34% 🧴 Health/beauty

27% 🚗 Travel/experiences

26% 💻 Entertainment/media

20% 🏠 Home and garden

19% 🚲 Sports/outdoors

7% 🚼 Baby/kids

2% Other

12% None of the above

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THE TAKEAWAY

**Build the Foundation Now.
Be the Recommendation Later.**

The customers most attached to AI shopping today are the ones with the longest purchasing horizon. And those with the most purchasing power are also those most likely to use AI, especially to skip the browsing and go straight to a decision.

Even among the least enthusiastic adopters (shoppers 60 and older), the majority already use AI to shop: They just aren't as dependent on LLMs yet.

The two groups furthest along in the AI adoption curve — younger shoppers with decades of purchasing ahead of them, and high-income shoppers with the most to spend — represent the shoppers that retailers are competing hardest to win.

Every power user was once a first-time user. The tools will only get better, and shoppers' habits will only get stickier.

Will your brand be ready when it matters?

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LLMs Make Shoppers
More Confident and Less Loyal

What happens when a consumer has a personal AI-powered assistant available around the clock to help them shop?

• **43% compare more options with AI**

• **36% make faster decisions than before**

• **34% feel more confident about their purchases**

Once again, age and income turn the dial up or down on how AI shapes this behavior. For example, 47% of 28- to 43-year-olds say AI makes them faster decision-makers, compared to just 21% of those age 60+. Among households earning $150,000 or more, 20% say "not having to browse multiple sites" (time savings) is what they want most from AI, compared with just 11% of those earning under $30,000.
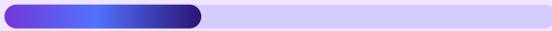
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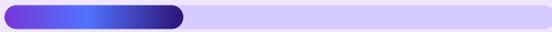# How has your shopping behavior changed as a result of using LLM tools?

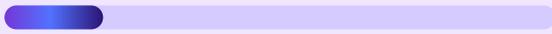**43%** I compare MORE options
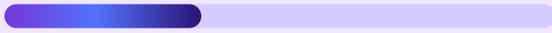
36% I make faster decisions

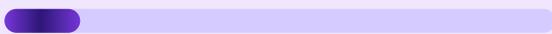**34%** I feel more confident about my purchases

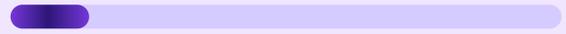**32%** I spend less time browsing other sites

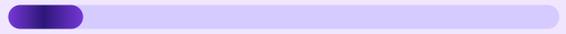**19%** I buy from brands/purchase products I haven't heard of before

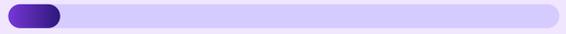**15%** I return FEWER purchases

13% I shop more because I know I'm saving more money

13% I'm more likely to switch retailers or products based on the tool's recommendations
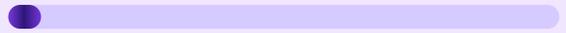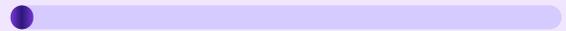
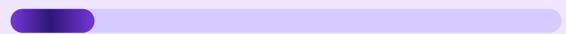**12%** I start my shopping by asking an LLM tool for help

10% I compare FEWER options

9% I shop MORE frequently

4% I return MORE purchases

3% I shop LESS frequently

16% No change

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More Options Means Less Loyalty

LLMs help shoppers feel more confident, while also giving them a lot more options.

They connect shoppers to what they already planned to buy, but they also widen the playing field by making it easier to discover products and brands shoppers never would've found on their own.

- **19% now buy from brands or purchase products they haven't heard about before**

- **13% are more likely to switch retailers or products after using an LLM**

- **32% spend less time browsing other sites**

Those numbers may look modest in isolation. Scaled across millions of customers, however, they represent a significant and continuous reshuffling of consumer visibility market share.

THE TAKEAWAY

You're Losing Share and Can't See It

AI is creating a new kind of ecommerce land grab, and it isn't based on logo recognition or customer loyalty. It's won by the retailer that gives the LLM the clearest, most complete product answers.

A new brand can displace a household name when its product data gives AI better information, and the retailers losing ground often have no idea it's happening. A brand can drop from a top citation to near-invisible in a matter of weeks when a competitor publishes a more structured product page, a Reddit thread surfaces full of complaints, or a pricing inconsistency makes AI stop trusting the data. By the time the pattern shows up in revenue data, the LLM has already formed a recommendation habit. A shopper who's bought from an AI-recommended competitor once has now taught the algorithm what they buy — and the next recommendation builds on the last. The brand that wasn't in the first recommendation is increasingly unlikely to appear in the ones that follow.

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Consumers Trust LLMs, and You Take the Hit When Things Go Wrong

The numbers tell an uncomfortable story when it comes to answer accuracy, and as the competitive field levels, the stakes couldn't be higher.

With LLMs serving as the new discovery layer in retail, the quality of your product data — the prices, availability, materials, sizing, compatibility, ingredients, and specifications that AI pulls when a shopper asks a direct question — has never mattered more.

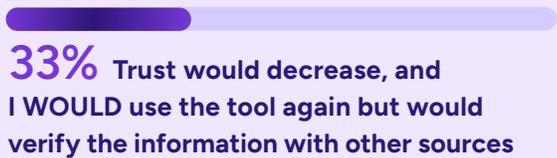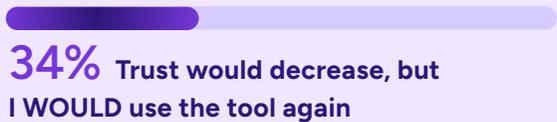What AI says about you is increasingly what shoppers believe. When an LLM quotes a discontinued price, flags an item as in stock when it isn't, or misrepresents what a product does, and shoppers blame the brand.

When an LLM provides incorrect product information, 58% of consumers say their trust in the product or brand decreases. Nearly 1 in 5 (16%) walk away from the purchase entirely.

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How Incorrect LLM Information Impacts Trust In Tools and Brands

58% Trust in the brand would decrease (total)

41% Trust in the brand would not be impacted (total)

When details like price or availability are wrong, what happens to user trust?

16% Trust in the brand would decrease, and I WOULD NOT purchase the brand

20% Trust would decrease, and I WOULD NOT use the tool again

23% Trust in the brand would decrease, but I WOULD purchase the brand

34% Trust would decrease, but I WOULD use the tool again

19% Trust in the brand would decrease, but I WOULD still use an LLM

33% Trust would decrease, and I WOULD use the tool again but would verify the information with other sources

26% Trust in the LLM tool would decrease, but trust in the brand would not be impacted

12% No change in how much I trust the tool

15% No change in trust of the brand or the LLM

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Trust in LLMs Is High

More than half of respondents (53%) already trust AI tools just as much as brand sites.

And when shoppers do decide to verify what they're seeing from AI, only 5% do so by visiting your website. Instead, they turn to search engines (28%), online reviews (19%), or friends and family (17%). These sources don't always carry your latest pricing, availability, or product specs, either.

While the verification step sounds like a second chance, it isn't. Search engines may surface another AI summary. Reviews are out of your control (friends and family even more so). When a shopper makes a purchase decision, your channels were never part of the conversation.

Your only intervention point comes before AI serves up the answer. The best way to ensure it provides an accurate response is to make sure your product pages are in sync with what LLMs pull from.

High-Income and Young Shoppers Trust Most, Verify Least

Higher-income AI users double down on their AI confidence, with 80% of households earning $150,000 or more saying they're "extremely" or "very" confident in AI's accuracy, compared to 63% of those earning under $30,000. These shoppers aren't second-guessing what they're shown. They choose to make a decision and move on.

The shoppers least likely to verify are also the ones using AI the most. More than 6 in 10 (64%) of 18- to 27-year-olds are likely to purchase without verifying an AI recommendation, while only 31% of those aged 60 and older do the same.

Where consumers turn to verify LLM shopping info

28% Search engines

19% Online reviews

17% Friends and family

17% My own experience with the product/brand

8% In-store associates

5% Retailer/brand websites

4% Expert forums/communities (Reddit, Discord, etc.)

2% Social media influencers

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Familiarity further compounds the issue of verification. Compared to those not familiar at all, users who are "very" familiar with AI are three times more likely to purchase a product it recommends without any verification. The more shoppers rely on AI, the more data becomes a deciding factor. And these active, highest-value shoppers won't be slowing down to catch a bad recommendation before it reaches them and, as a result, damages trust and loyalty to your brand.

When It Comes to Trust, Explanation Outranks Accuracy

When deciding whether to act on an AI recommendation, the top trust-building factor is a "clear explanation of why specific products/brands were chosen," which ranks even higher than "information is always accurate" and "user reviews." The shoppers who prioritize this are nearly twice as likely to purchase without any verification compared to those who prioritize "the ability to cross-check."

In other words, consumers are most interested in knowing why a product is being suggested — and why it's right for them — instead of product accuracy itself (although that doesn't make accuracy any less critical, since one often impacts the other). Rich product content gives AI the context to explain a recommendation correctly, with personalization to specific queries. It also gives shoppers the confidence to act.

This connection of explanation to confidence isn't coincidental. When LLMs generate a recommendation, they pull structured product attributes directly from the content they index — materials, dimensions, compatibility, use case — and assemble those details into the explanation a shopper reads. The explanation is your product data, reassembled. Brands that give AI more to work with get more compelling explanations surfaced for shoppers. Brands that don't are more likely to show up with generic responses, or none at all.

Which of the following would most increase your trust in an LLM tool's recommendation?

49% Clear explanation of why specific products/brands were chosen

33% Verified user reviews included

32% Info (price, availability, etc.) is always accurate and up to date

30% Ability to cross-check instantly with the brand/retailer website

27% Products shown match my requirements

26% References or data sources cited

24% Visuals or images provided

20% Tells me where I can buy the product

19% Recommends a range of relevant options, not just a few

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Pricing Data is the Baseline

Although they want to understand why a product or brand was chosen, consumers are also unforgiving about price: They want it to be correct, with 67% saying that accurate pricing is what they most need AI to get right.

Price was nearly twice as likely to be mentioned when compared to accuracy involving reviews, availability, or the best places to purchase the product. Even among the high-income shoppers, nearly half still name it as the thing AI shouldn't get wrong.

THE TAKEAWAY

🤝 Trust Starts with Your Data

AI offers up information about your brand no matter what. The question is: Did you design your story, or did you leave it to chance? By the time a bad recommendation lands, you've already lost credibility.

Consumers already trust LLMs almost as much as brand sites, but they verify inconsistencies through channels you don't fully control — and the shoppers who use AI most are the least likely to double-check what it tells them. This makes accurate pricing and explanation-ready product data one of the first and easiest wins for AI optimization.
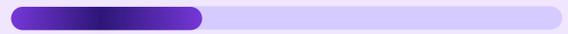
Retailers that feed high-quality, structured, accurate data into LLM ecosystems are the ones positioned to win when shoppers act on what AI tells them.

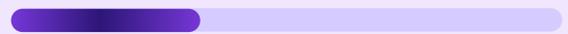## What matters most in an LLM shopping recommendation

respondents could select all that apply
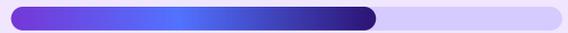
67% Price

35% Product reviews or ratings

34% Product availability

32% The best place to buy it

25% Technical details or specification

24% That all options have been considered

23% Alignment with my preferences

16% That the recommendation is not driven by advertising

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From Discovery Tool to Decision Maker

While LLMs own the information experience today, there's interest in engaging them as personal shoppers in the future, especially as the technology improves.

Over time, as trust and accuracy increase, more of the purchase process will be handed over to AI.

Overall, more than one in four AI-active shoppers say they're "very" likely to hand purchasing decisions to AI

already, with another 38.7% somewhat likely to do so in the near future. Brands and retailers need to be ready: The window to get product data right is closing fast.

If you're operating with incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated product feeds, then you're losing ground with the highest-value, highest-intent shoppers. As the data reflects, these shoppers are also the ones who won't be aware of a bad recommendation and won't take time to visit your site to verify accuracy or details.

How likely are you to use an AI agent that would buy for you?

Responses from the most AI-active shoppers

65% "Very" or "somewhat" likely to use it

28% "Very" or "somewhat" unlikely to use it
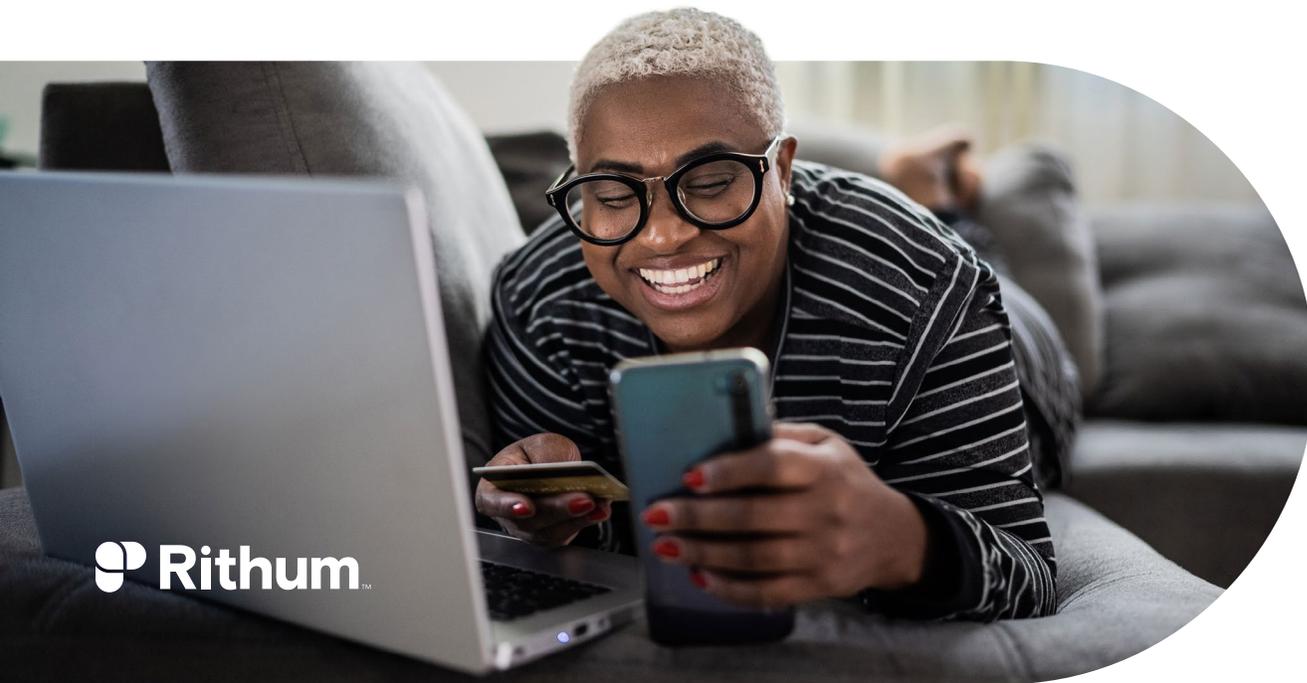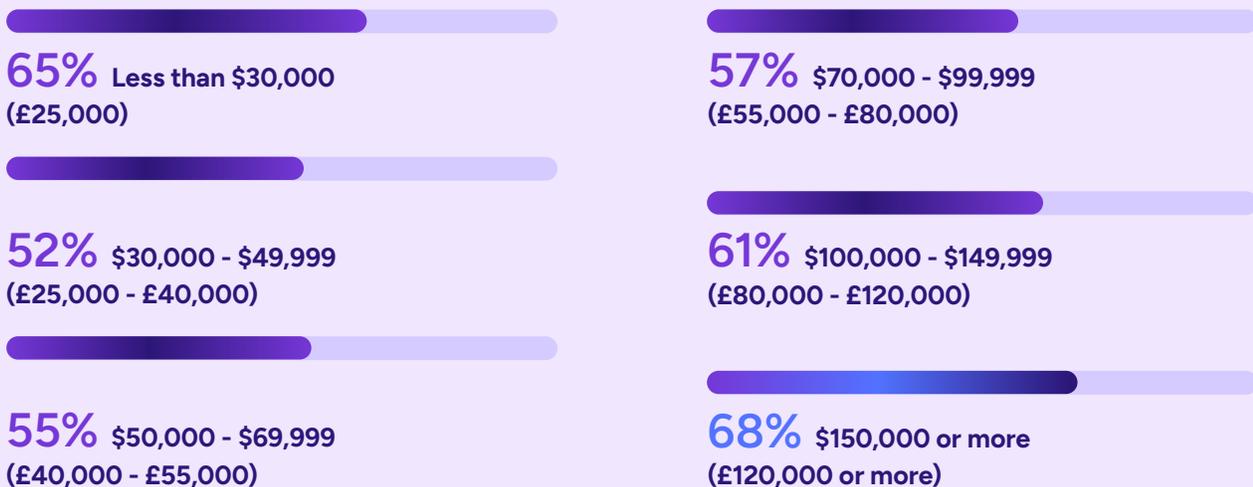
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Who's Ready to Let AI Buy?

Confidence and familiarity move shoppers from research to purchase. Once they trust AI's accuracy, they're more likely to let it make purchasing decisions: 67.1% of users who are "extremely" confident in AI's accuracy are also "very" likely to use it as a personal shopper. Familiarity with the technology deepens that effect, with nearly half of users (49.5%) who are "very" familiar with AI tools also being "very" likely to use one to make purchases on their behalf.

The demographics most ready for agentic commerce look familiar. Younger shoppers are leaning in, with 33.6% of 28- to 43-year-olds and 31.1% of 18- to 27-year-olds saying they're "very" likely to use AI as a personal shopper.

Higher earners are further along in this thinking, too: 35.1% of households earning $150,000 or more are "very" likely to hand off purchasing to an LLM vs. only 16.2% of those with incomes of under $30,000. And nearly three-quarters of households earning $100,000 to $150,000 (73.5%) are already "very" or "extremely" confident in AI's accuracy.

Do you trust AI to shop on your behalf?

Likelihood by household income

65% Less than $30,000
(£25,000)

52% $30,000 - $49,999
(£25,000 - £40,000)

55% $50,000 - $69,999
(£40,000 - £55,000)

57% $70,000 - $99,999
(£55,000 - £80,000)

61% $100,000 - $149,999
(£80,000 - £120,000)

68% $150,000 or more
(£120,000 or more)

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What All This Means for You

LLMs have redefined how shoppers discover, compare, and decide. This data makes the stakes very clear: Your highest-value customers use AI to shop more often, trust it over other options, and verify its accuracy the least. When AI gets something wrong about your brand or product your shoppers move on.

The window to get things right is closing quickly. As AI moves from research tool to personal shopper, the brands with AI-friendly, accurate, structured, and consistent product data will be the ones that LLMs recommend, and shoppers buy. Getting product and inventory data ready now is vital to staying competitive, and it will get you ready for whatever the upcoming transaction era will bring.

To stay competitive, brands and retailers must:

- **Ensure accurate, structured, up-to-date product content, pricing, and availability across all the endpoints that LLMs reference to make recommendations**

- **Optimize content for high-consideration, high-consequence categories where price is steep, options are overwhelming, and the cost of a wrong decision is expensive**

- **Consider verification sources (retailer sites, feeds, reviews) as critical components of the LLM experience**

- **Structure product content so AI can explain why your product is the right choice, not just surface that it exists with specs**

LLMs are already telling your customers what to buy. The only question is whether you're the one who told them what to say.

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Studio

by **informa** techtarget •••

Expert led.
Impact driven.

Studio is Informa TechTarget's global content studio offering brands an ROI rich tool kit: Deep industry expertise, first-party audience insights, an editorial approach to brand storytelling, and targeted distribution capabilities. Our trusted in-house content marketers help brands power insights-fueled content programs that nurture prospects and customers from discovery through to purchase, connecting brand to demand.

Learn more

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Rithum (formerly CommerceHub and ChannelAdvisor) is a leading global commerce solution that supports the entire commerce journey—from product listing and discovery to order fulfillment and performance optimization. By streamlining the path to purchase, Rithum enables brands and retailers to operate more efficiently, so they can maximize profitability.

With AI-powered automation, unified insights, and seamless integration across commerce and media channels, Rithum enables your team to focus on growth strategies while we handle the complexity of omnichannel orchestration. Whether you're launching new products, expanding into new markets, or optimizing retail media campaigns, Rithum helps you turn every customer touchpoint into a revenue-driving opportunity.

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