



LOOKBOOK

Behaviors, benefits, and technology shaping 2026 retail marketing

Retail marketers face a complex path to purchase as AI reshapes discovery, grocery moves beyond the aisle, physical stores compete on experience, and creators become trust brokers in an AI-saturated landscape. This Lookbook highlights the consumer behaviors, retail technologies, and media strategies that will redefine how retailers attract, convert, and retain shoppers in 2026 and beyond.

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With AI's help, consumers will upend personalization and discovery

As agents and generative tools become more embedded in consumer routines, shoppers will reshape the discovery journey, forcing retail marketers to rethink customer connections.

Dive deeper

AI becomes a dominant discovery engine

Most (57.3%) US online shoppers have used genAI tools in the past six months to research products, with about one-third of US adults now using AI agents for brand discovery at least regularly, per July 2025 surveys from Omnisend and Cordial/Dynata.

Personalization's new tools

Marketers want to sharpen personalization strategies. Some 47% of worldwide marketers plan to use genAI tools in the next six to 12 months in audience targeting, according to July 2025 data from SAS and Coleman Parkes Research.

Meanwhile, 44.6% of US online shoppers have used genAI tools for product recommendations, per Omnisend.

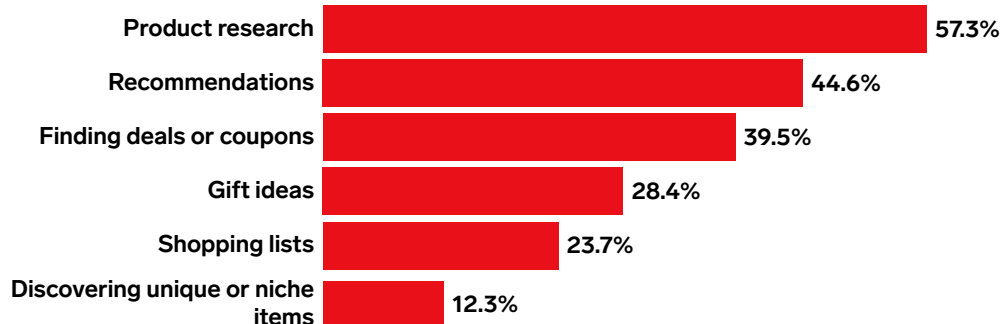
Bottom of the agentic funnel

AI-enabled agents are collapsing the lower funnel. Some 40% of US consumers use an agentic shopping assistant regularly, per September 2025 data from Criteo. Trust is also shifting: One-fourth of US shoppers trust retailers' AI tools most to execute their entire shopping experience, according to a September 2025 survey from Bain & Company.

Consumers Are Using GenAI Tools for Research and Discovery

% of US online shoppers who use genAI tools to help with shopping-related tasks, July 2025

Q: In the past 6 months, have you used genAI for any of the following while shopping online?



Note: n=1,225 ages 18+
Source: Omnisend, Aug 21, 2025

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What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

"The nonlinear path to purchase is now a given, but AI is amplifying that complexity as shoppers grow accustomed to the speed and ease of using LLMs and other AI tools to make decisions. For marketers, this reshaping of behavior means embedding AI across the journey is becoming foundational to meeting customers where they are—and how they choose to shop."



Justin Garvin

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, MEDIA STRATEGY,
RISE, A QUAD AGENCY

"The consumer decision journey has always been nonlinear, but AI has fundamentally disrupted it. For the first time, people can move from zero awareness to purchase in a single query. This collapse of the funnel forces brands to optimize for AI-driven visibility and discovery. Marketers must now focus on fueling these systems with richer data and sharper intelligence, ensuring their brands surface at the moment of intent and securing an advantage over competitors."

Grocery goes beyond the shelf

Grocery is continuing its digital transformation, with delivery apps, intermediaries, and retail media networks reshaping customer acquisition and loyalty.

Delivery platforms now command a bigger share of grocery activity. Uber's grocery sales will grow 47.2% in 2025 to reach \$5.97 billion, according to our October 2025 forecast.

Some 62% of US adults will order food for delivery this year, including groceries and frozen food, up from 30% in 2016, according to a July 2025 report from AlixPartners.

Dive deeper

Retail media reshapes reach

The growth of these platforms makes retail media networks vital to reaching consumers. US omnichannel retail media ad spend is set to reach \$69.33 billion in 2026, a growth of 17.9%, according to our September 2025 forecast.

Even with the growth of delivery, in-store activation is critical, with 70% of grocery retailers planning to activate in-store media within 18 months, per a Grocery Doppio report.

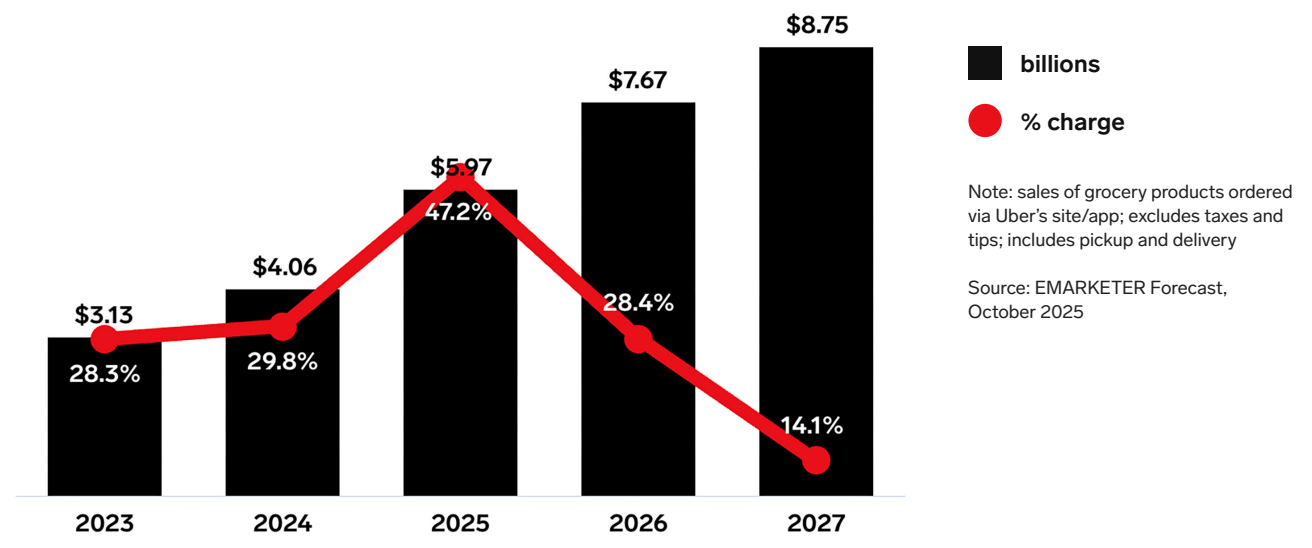
Loyalty persists through shifts

Loyalty remains central. Some 79% of US adults use a physical loyalty card or use a loyalty digital/mobile app with their primary grocery store, according to a July 2025 survey from VTEX and Dynata.

Some 65% of marketers believe repeat buyers return because of brand love, found a November 2025 report from Razorfish and GWI.

Uber Grocery Sales

US, 2023-2027



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What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

"Grocery is a margin-tight, highly competitive business where loyalty is driven by execution: delivering the right products, at the right price, in the right moment. Retailers that consistently meet customers where they are—whether through instant delivery, a seamless app experience, or a dependable store visit—will keep shoppers coming back regardless of channel."



Kevin Bridgewater

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
STRATEGIC RETAIL SOLUTIONS, QUAD

"In-store is becoming the most precise form of retail media. When you reach shoppers at the exact moment they decide what to buy, you influence both need and inspiration. Mid-market grocers can use this advantage to create measurable value for brands and build loyalty that no delivery platform can replicate."

Omnichannel utility and new experiences draw visitors in-store

As AI changes behaviors, stores still deliver something consumers can't find online: physical confidence, sensory evaluation, and emotional reassurance.

Dive deeper

Consumers crave in-person certainty

Most US consumers trust their in-store experience more than online for product quality (72%) and avoiding buyer's regret (70%), according to September 2025 Quad and The Harris Poll data.

Gen Z is more likely than the average consumer to prioritize in-person shopping, with 68% saying they want to touch products before buying.

Experiences become a competitive advantage

Some 35% of global consumers say store atmosphere is the reason for choosing physical retail, found a February 2025 Criteo survey.

Experiences also drive conversion: 77% of US adults say branded in-store experiences prompted immediate in-store purchases, according to February 2025 data from Quad and The Harris Poll.

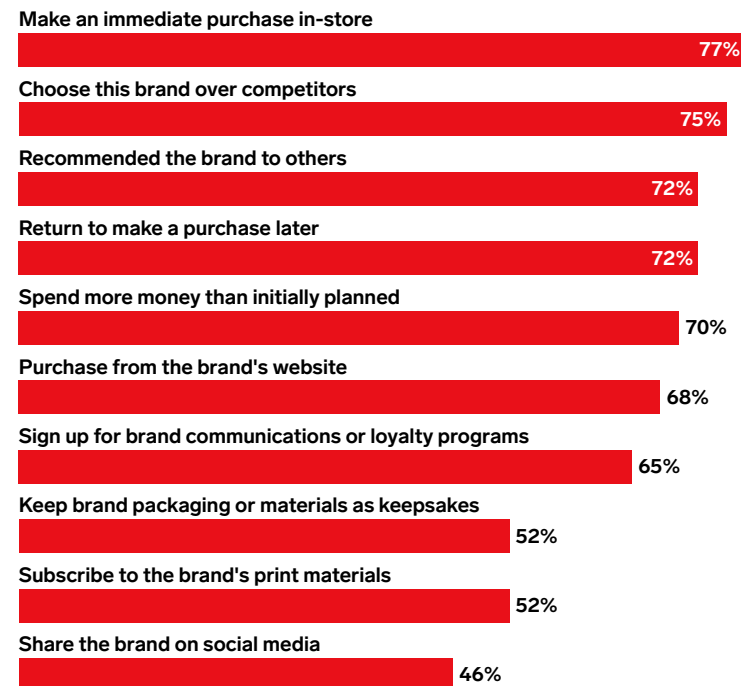
Mobile shapes the path to purchase

Some 73.5% of US adults at least sometimes check prices or inventory online before visiting a store, per Locala and EMARKETER data from May 2025.

Digital tools drive in-store interest: 51% of US adults would shop in-store if a retailer offered downloadable coupons or a loyalty program, SPAR Group data from June 2025 found.

How In-Person Branded Store Experiences Influenced US Adults' Purchase Decisions in the Past Year, Feb 2025

% of respondents



Note: top 3 responses (sometimes/often/always)

Source: Quad, "The Return of Touch: Reimagining Consumer Engagement in 2025" conducted by The Harris Poll, May 13, 2025

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What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT,
CONTENT, EMARKETER

"Digital layers and in-store app features are a continuation of what shoppers already expect in physical spaces. But with AI's growing influence in the customer journey, retailers will need to double down on getting people into stores to preserve the one-to-one human connections that AI is increasingly intermediating."



Heidi Waldusky

VICE PRESIDENT,
BRAND MARKETING,
QUAD

"AI is rewriting how people discover and compare, but it hasn't replaced how they feel and decide. Marketers should treat AI as the accelerant and stores as the amplifier. Use AI to anticipate intent, then let the store deliver the emotional proof. That's where modern loyalty is actually built."

Marketers deepen creator relationships

Creators and influencers counterbalance AI's discovery challenges by offering authentic, human-led recommendations that consumers trust.

Dive deeper

Creator partnerships fuel discovery

Marketers view creators as essential for inspiration, with 67% planning to boost their influencer budgets in 2026, according to a September 2025 survey from Emplifi.

Discovery is widespread: 52% of US consumers have recently discovered a product through a creator or influencer, per a March 2025 impact.com and EMARKETER survey.

Brand safety becomes a top priority

With rising AI-generated content, brands are becoming more cautious about who represents them. Some 77.8% of marketers say brand safety influences their willingness to invest in the industry, per a July 2025 survey from EMARKETER and Viral Nation.

Yet even with concern, vetting remains inconsistent: 22.2% of marketers vet only up to 25% of influencer content, and 18.0% don't know how much they vet, per EMARKETER and Viral Nation data.

Brands build tighter ecosystems

To maintain trust and quality, brands are internalizing more functions. Walmart and Pacsun have launched in-house creator programs to monitor their influencer marketing efforts as discovery, authenticity, and safety become more tightly intertwined.

Share of Influencer Content Reviewed During Vetting by US Marketing Professionals, June 2025

% of respondents



Note: n=117; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: EMARKETER and Viral Nation, "Brand Safety and Influencer Marketing Survey," Aug 1, 2025

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What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

"As AI floods the market with synthetic content, human creators are becoming even more valuable as shoppers look to see themselves in the brands they choose. Brands are already expanding their creator and influencer ecosystems because authentic, credible voices remain one of the most trusted ways for shoppers to discover products—and that authenticity ultimately strengthens trust in the brand."



Ani Fonte

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
BUSINESS & BRAND LEADERSHIP,
BETTY, A QUAD AGENCY

"As AI accelerates hyper-curated content, creators become a brand's most human counterbalance. Authenticity will come from marketers—alongside their creative agencies—deepening relationships with influencers who express a brand's reasons to believe with honest nuance. The future isn't algorithmic perfection, but thoughtful curation of voices that keep brands feeling real."

The experts



Suzy Davidkhanian

Vice President, Content, EMARKETER

Suzy Davidkhanian is a principal analyst, covering retail and ecommerce. Suzy has nearly 15 years of experience in retail—from store level to buying and planning—and marketing, where she most recently led the consumer insights and market trends team at Macy's. Suzy earned her MBA at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and prior to that was an in-house public relations executive for five years.



Justin Garvin

Senior Vice President, Media Strategy, Rise, a Quad agency

Justin Garvin is responsible for developing and leading strategy and operations for all of Rise's media channels with a heavy focus on integration. Starting out on the Search team, Justin innovated Rise's approach to drive business outcomes for clients, eventually scaling the approach to all of Rise's performance marketing channels.



Kevin Bridgewater

Senior Vice President, Strategic Retail Solutions, Quad

Kevin Bridgewater leads strategic engagements with Quad's key retail clients. He is responsible for leading Quad's go-to-market efforts for In-Store Connect by Quad, a new retail solution that elevates the shopping experience via an in-store retail media network using digital screens and kiosks to deliver engaging messages and targeted promotions at the store shelf.



Heidi Waldusky

Vice President, Brand Marketing, Quad

Heidi Waldusky has helped architect Quad's transformation as a marketing experience company. Before going brand-side, Heidi spent over 15 years in the agency world, using her creative and strategic skills to create ownable business ideas and help clients win over audiences.



Ani Fonte

Senior Vice President, Business & Brand Leadership, Betty, a Quad agency

With over 25 years of experience in breakthrough, brand-building programs that move hearts, minds and wallets, Ani Fonte is a commerce-driving powerhouse. Her experience spans both client and agency leadership, bringing an approach to client partnership that is strategic, empathetic and results driven.

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