

WHAT THE FUTURE SHOPPING

Seeking proof
over prestige
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Making stores
social again
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Delegating shopping
to AI
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+ How brands can **retain consumer trust as shopping gets smarter**, from a luxury marketer, an AI marketing researcher and a mall owner

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TENSIONS

Today's tensions, tomorrow



HOW WILL WE SHOP IN THE FUTURE AS TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES?

In 2013, Amazon announced its plans to have drones deliver items right to your doorstep. I had two very different conversations at that time.

One with someone who lived in a very urban area; one who lived much more rurally. They both said, “Man, those are going to get shot out of the sky where I live.” The urban resident was thinking about theft. The rural resident was thinking about property rights.

It reminded me of a story from Wired magazine decades earlier about satellite TV pirates. For those who need a refresher, before the internet, it was prohibitively expensive to get physical cables for TV to rural areas. So people bought huge satellite dishes. The signal was encoded but a sizable percentage of people bought pirate boxes to get around those fees.

Wired ran a story in the 1990s featuring a double-page spread photo of a farmer in his field with rolling Midwest hills in the background. He has a barn on one side and a dish on the other. He’s holding a rifle. The pull quote reads, “If a TV signal comes trespassing onto my property, I should be free to do any damn thing I want with it, and it’s none of the government’s business.”

It’s the same attitude my rural friend felt about drones. It’s the same attitude we see today in discussions of AI data centers, which currently disproportionately impact people in less dense areas. Technology changes. People don’t.

80%

of Americans enjoy shopping online, as much as those who enjoy shopping in stores (78%).

(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Shopping is inherently human

In the shopping world, we see a lot of familiar tensions amplified by prolonged economic stress and rapidly changing technology. There’s the ever-evolving tension between in-person and e-commerce shopping. There’s a further tension between e-commerce led by humans and e-commerce that is either led by AI or in which AI is on both sides of the transaction in true agentic commerce.

Both tensions have distinctly human roots because both discussions benefit from an understanding that shopping is about more than simply procuring. Emotions are central. Shopping is social, frustrating, fulfilling, convenient, time-consuming, an escape, a reason to leave the house, a way to entertain the kids, and is wrapped up in our identity as value seekers (or not), bargain shoppers or “whimsiful splurgers,” fashion focused (or not), healthy eaters (or not), etc.

If nomadic proto-humans hunted and gathered, today we regularly forage through 2.7 grocery stores just to fulfill our daily need to eat, according to the Ipsos Consumer Tracker.

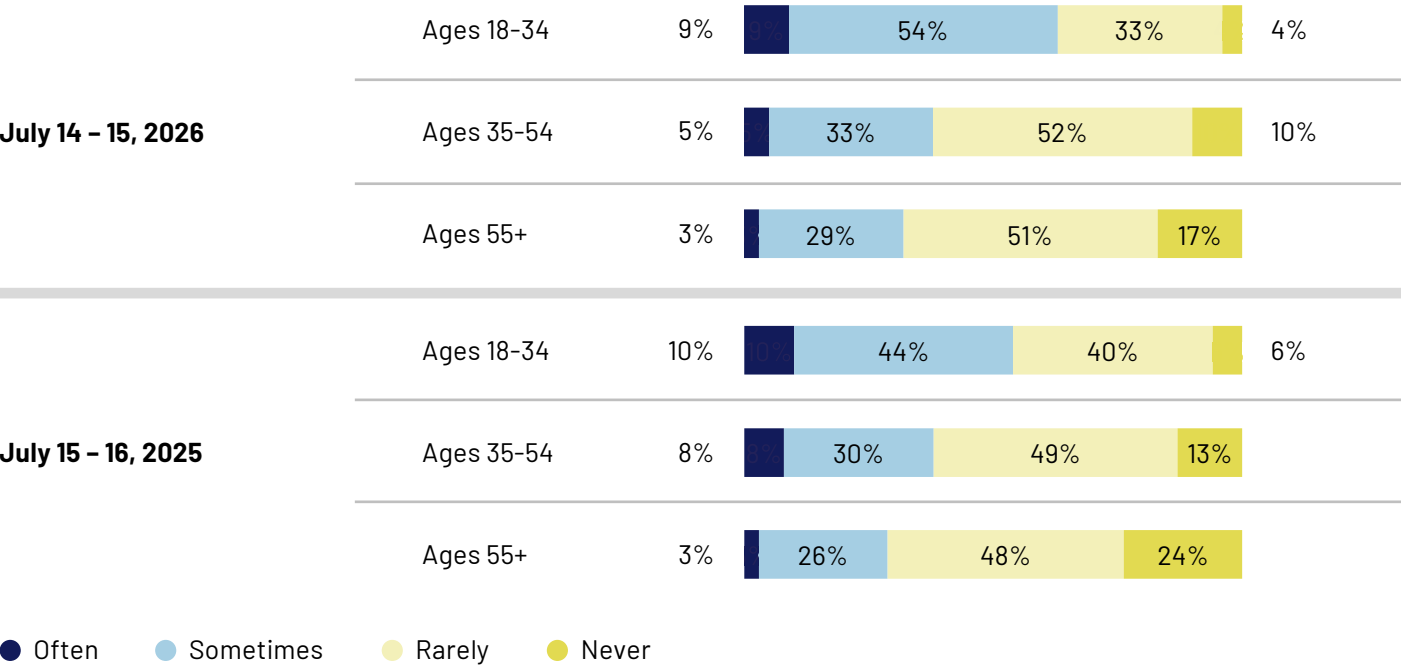
Time is marked by shopping seasons as well as meteorological ones: holidays, back-to-school, spring fashions, etc.

People like shopping. Eight in ten like shopping online. Just as many say they like shopping in stores. That’s mostly consistent across genders. And while yes, half of younger folks say that shopping stresses them out, 37% say they are excited to have help from AI assistants.

Younger people are also most likely to frequent shopping malls, twice as likely even than older Americans. That’s partially because they are hitting the malls not as much to shop as to socialize, people-watch, and just have some place fun to go.

Younger Americans are twice as likely as older Americans to say they are frequent mall-goers

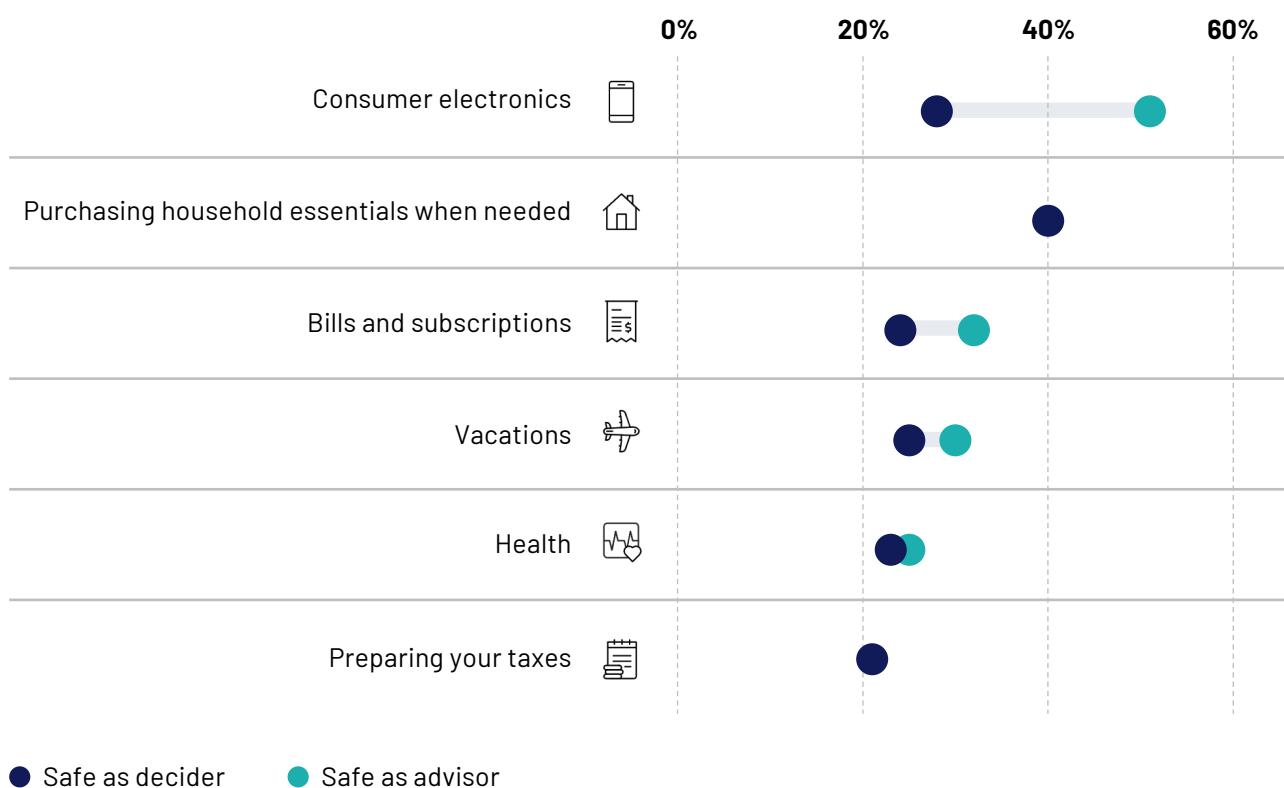
Q. Thinking about your shopping experiences, how often do you shop at shopping malls (i.e., large shopping centers anchored by department stores)? (% Total)



(Sources: The Ipsos Consumer Tracker, conducted July 14-15, 2026, among 1,850 U.S. adults; and July 15-16, 2025, among 1,083 U.S. adults.)

The higher the stakes, the less people trust AI

Q. How safe or risky would it be to allow an AI assistant to handle each of the following activities on your behalf? (% Safe)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

AI can't replace that for you. However, malls can be places where people and technology come together in new ways.

AI has a trust problem

There's another issue with AI: We don't trust it ... yet. As we start moving to agentic commerce, that's likely to get worse before it gets better. Already, the news is starting to be peppered with anecdotes of agents setting buyer-seller meetings but not informing the seller or posting personal details in work chats. "My bad," says the AI, "Won't happen again, promise."

In terms of fully agentic commerce where agents talk to each other and handle both sides of a transaction, there will likely be complications, too. One experiment showed that agents are programmed to behave logically.

But if one of the agents injects what the researchers called "whimsy," making illogical claims like, "On Tuesdays I can only pay \$1 for that item," the other agent doesn't know how to react and defaults to accepting it.

There's a blueprint in the data about how to solve the issues which we'll explore in this issue, including the need to keep humans in the loop to build trust, give people places to put checks in place before AI actually acts, be transparent about where goods are made and how they're priced.

All of this ties back to the emotions in shopping. I have a working theory that there's something at play I like to call the Human AI Risk Reward Matrix (HARRM). When asked about things people like doing and things people trust AI to do, you see one clear trend.

We're less likely to use AI on tasks that we view as risky when an AI gets it wrong (think big purchases) or on tasks we personally enjoy doing (such as some shopping tasks). When it comes to the HARRM, we today trust AI much more to help with research than to execute. That's a big and important trust gap, and one that brands and tech companies will need to close for the tech to change how people do a thing so ingrained in their lives. It's possible.

It's interesting that none of the tasks we tested landed in the sweet spot quadrant: Things we don't want to do but trust AI to do for us. That's the corner with massive market potential. That said, we certainly moved to trusting e-commerce despite initial misgivings.

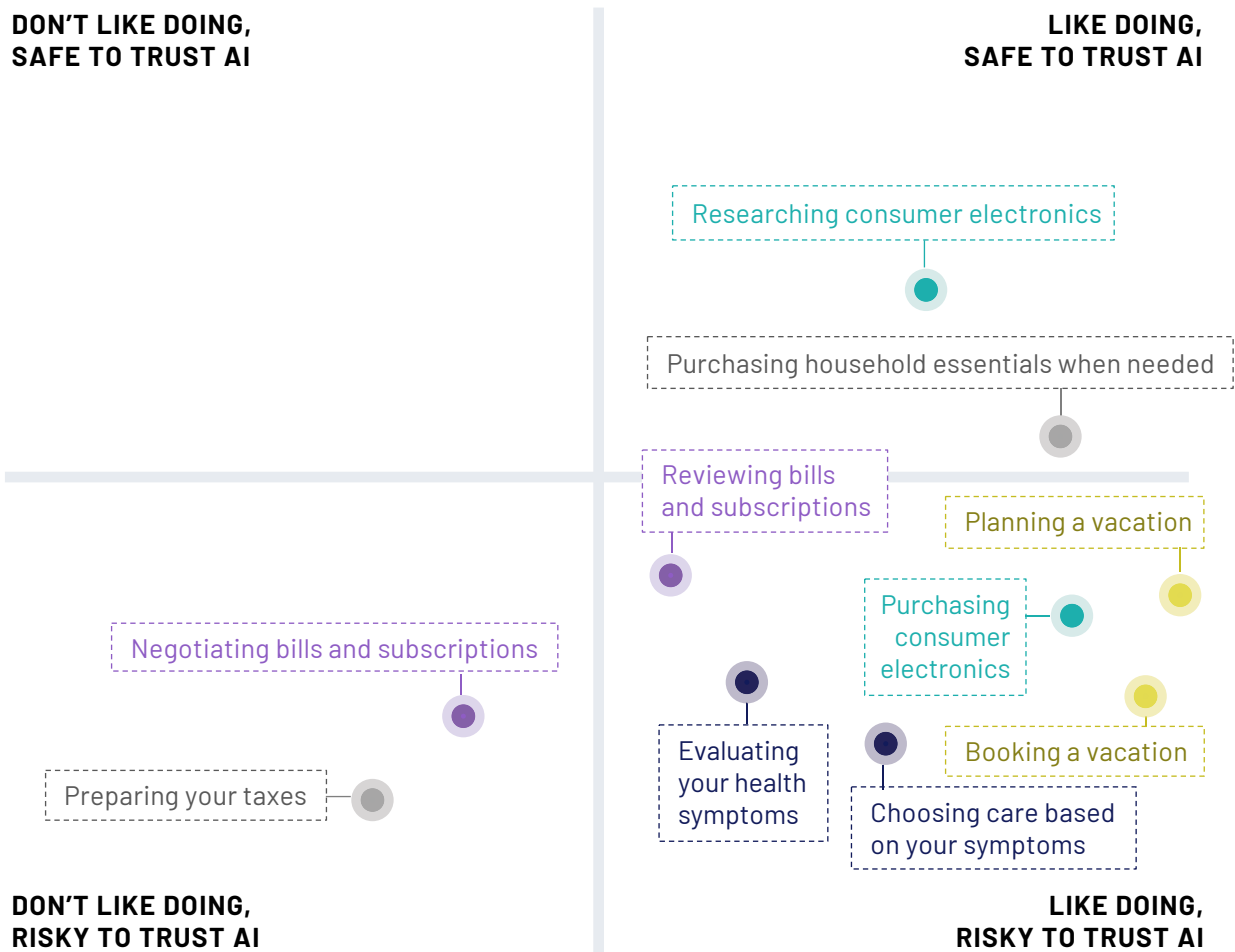
Economic pressure changes how we shop

Part of this hesitation is because of the risk of losing money versus the reward of perhaps some added convenience. That risk is especially salient, because money is tight.

When our research shows, give or take, that four out of ten possible customers don't have any money left over after paying their bills each month to spend on things they want ... that's a problem, and one we've been living with for years now. As the cost of something goes up today – that's gas, but it's been electricity and meat and overall groceries – something has to come down in a [zero-sum budget](#).

There's nothing people dislike doing that they would trust to AI

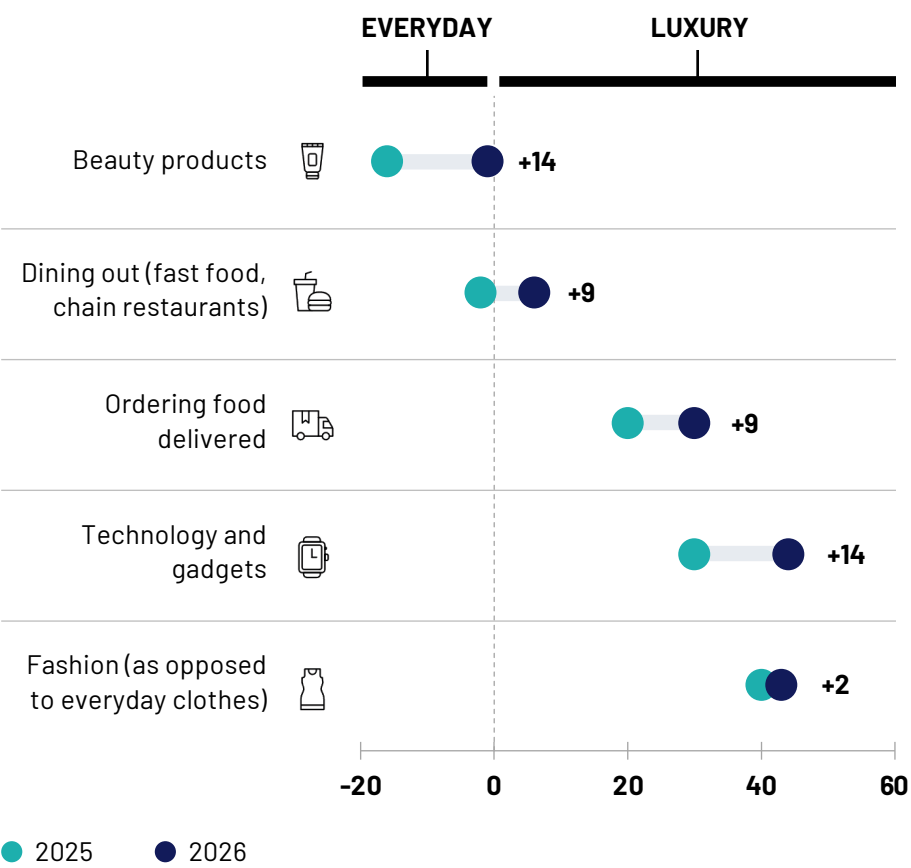
Q. How safe or risky would it be to allow an AI assistant to handle each of the following activities on your behalf? (% Safe) / Q. How much do you like or dislike doing each of the following? (% Like)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

People see many purchases shifting from everyday to luxury

Q. Does each of the following items typically feel more like a luxury/splurge purchase or more like an everyday purchase? (% Total)



(Sources: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults; and Ipsos Future of Indulgence survey, conducted Aug. 13-14, 2025, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

So in just one year since we last asked, we see people shifting things that we used to consider everyday purchases into luxuries or splurges.

As with AI challenges, the challenges for brands and innovators provide a roadmap. Brand reputation for quality leads the way, and then more human concerns about worry of being wasteful or future regret.

To go back to where we started, technology changes, people don't. The challenge then for those developing the technology as well as those implementing it is this: Can the technology evolve in a way that lets humans still be human?



Matt Carmichael is editor of *What the Future*.

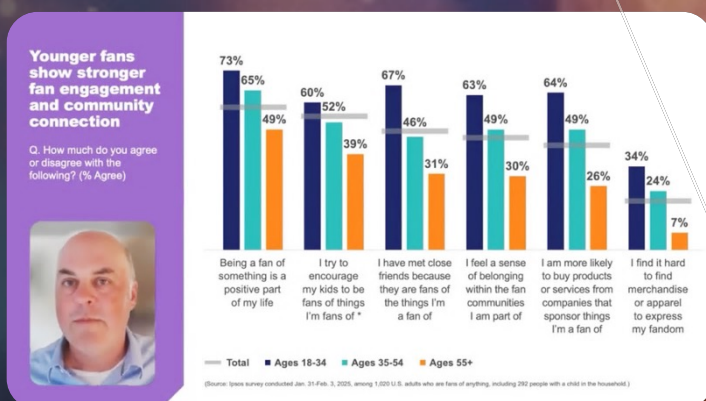
50%

of Gen Zers say that shopping stresses them out and 37% of them say they are excited for AI assistants to shop for them, the most of any generation.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

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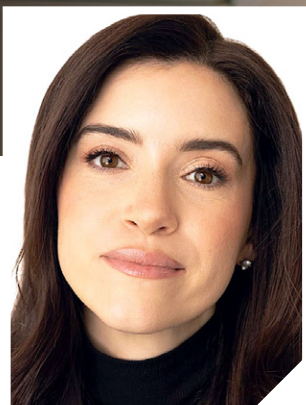


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HOW WILL AI RESHAPE BRAND POWER AS SHOPPERS RETHINK VALUE?



Dakota Kate Isaacs

Head of brand strategy and narrative, Quince

There's a long-running narrative that shoppers simply buy cheaper products or swing between scrimping and splurging as their budgets fluctuate with the economy. But many shoppers are rethinking value, due in part to the rise of influencers and reviewers educating on quality, promoting dupes and other ways to get more quality for your money.

Quince is capitalizing on that shift. To Dakota Kate Isaacs, head of brand strategy and narrative, consumers have gotten smarter about questioning quality and value, which reshapes how brands compete for shoppers. The 7-year-old e-commerce company sells luxury-comparable goods through a manufacturer-to-consumer model and markets transparency around its lower unit costs and retail prices. Now Quince is testing brick-and-mortar shopping with pop-ups and sample sales, which could determine whether its model can translate to a similar price advantage in physical retail.

14 pts

is the one-year shift in how Americans perceive beauty products and technology and gadget purchases toward being considered a luxury purchase.

(Sources: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults; and Future of Indulgence survey, conducted Aug. 13-14, 2025, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Kate MacArthur: Are people getting smarter about shopping for luxury?

Dakota Kate Isaacs: I don't know if it's that people necessarily got smarter or if it's that the information got free. Shoppers are always capable of judging what something is worth. They just didn't have access to that data before. And with reviews and social media, we have so much more access to this information.

MacArthur: People are learning more about what makes a good value, thanks partly to some fashion influencers and reviewers. How does that change the equation between brands and shoppers?

Isaacs: I don't think the future is about convincing someone that something is high quality. You show them. You tell them the fiber,

the construction and where it comes from, and then you show the math. It shows that insider information isn't insider anymore.

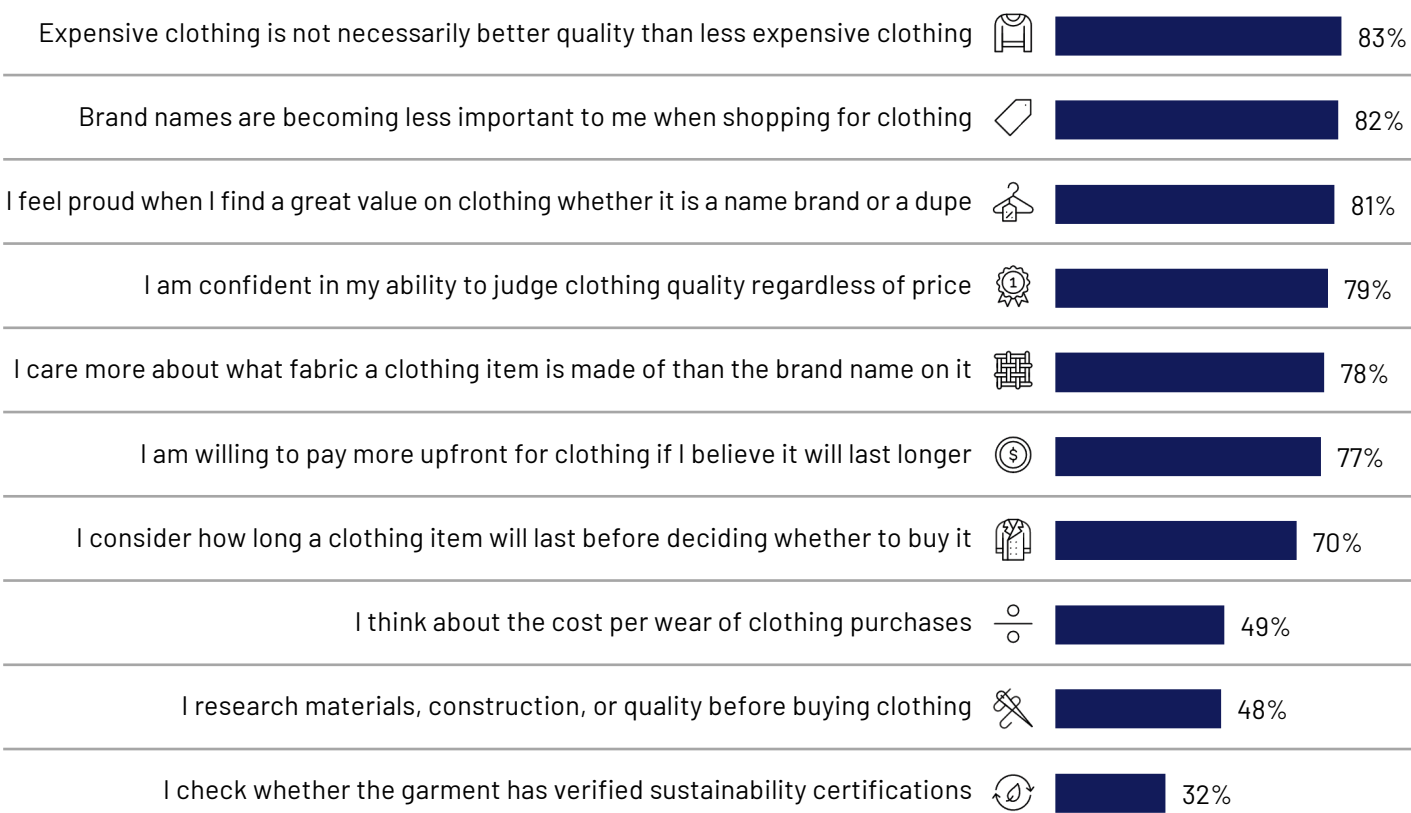
MacArthur: Where does price fit in as a quality signal today?

Isaacs: For a long time, price was how people judged quality, but only because they had nothing better to go on. If you can't see how something is made, you assume the expensive one must be better. A lot of the industry priced directly on that reflex.

Economic pressure is what makes people finally run the math. It doesn't create the behavior, it accelerates it. Cost per wear is one of my favorite conversations to be in because a well-made thing at an honest price wins every single time. You buy it once, it lasts, and then the per-wear cost falls basically through the floor.

Consumers are replacing prestige with proof to decide value

Q. Which of the following, if any, reflect your attitude about how you consider the value of a clothing item to purchase? (% Describes me)



(Source: The Ipsos Consumer Tracker, conducted Sept. 22-23, 2026, among 1,083 U.S. adults.)

MacArthur: Is value-consciousness cyclical or a new reality?

Isaacs: Both of those things are happening. When consumers feel economic pressure, they're going to become more conscious of what they're spending. That is cyclical. But the knowledge they're gaining is not cyclical, because once someone learns what cashmere should cost, they don't suddenly forget because the economy gets better. That's a part that sometimes brands underestimate.

MacArthur: What are brands missing about affordability?

Isaacs: People aren't looking for cheap. They're looking for what I would call fair. What offends a shopper today is not just something being high-priced. It is a price that cannot be explained. An unexplained markup doesn't read as luxury anymore. Without being dramatic, it reads as disrespect. The old flex was paying the most, whereas the new one is refusing to.

MacArthur: Does aspiration still matter?

Isaacs: Aspiration itself is changing, because for a long time, status was about recognition. You wanted someone else to know what brand you were wearing and, implicitly, what you had

to pay for it. Increasingly, status is becoming about discernment. It's less, "Look what I can afford," and more, "Look what I know."

MacArthur: Quince has tested product-themed pop-up stores. Are you considering something more permanent?

Isaacs: You can tell me the dimension of a sofa, and at some point, I still want to sit on the sofa. The physical elements allow it to become almost an education environment. At every one of these, people have come asking for something else that we didn't have in the pop-up. The demand is there.

MacArthur: How will AI change influence on buying decisions in the future?

Isaacs: The most trusted voices are "people like me." These are peer reviews, communities and micro- and nano-creators who will tell you what's wrong with something. I think AI could change what constitutes brand power. When you authorize an agent to buy for you, that criteria gets brutally explicit. The agent re-shops the entire market on every purchase. There's no coasting on habit or awareness. Influence is moving from the loudest voice to the most trusted crowd to the machine that reads the crowd on your behalf.

Kate MacArthur is managing editor of What the Future.



The old flex was paying the most, whereas the new one is refusing to."

- Dakota Kate Isaacs, Quince

WHY WILL IN-PERSON SHOPPING MATTER TOMORROW?



Michael Guerin

Executive vice president of leasing, The Macerich Company

Shopping has never been more digital, yet some malls are making a comeback after decades of decline. The Macerich Company is betting its future on that turnaround. The third-largest U.S. mall owner and operator has spent two years under new CEO Jack Hsieh recalibrating its business for the future.

This includes streamlining its properties around premier destinations in growing markets and putting a dent in the company's debt. Importantly, Macerich has centered its growth strategy on Gen Zers, who prefer going to physical stores for shopping and socializing. You can see it in the company's top retail tenants, from Dick's House of Sport to LVMH's Sephora, which offer experiential shopping aimed squarely at youth. Michael Guerin, executive vice president of leasing, explains why physical retail is regaining relevance as the world becomes more digital.

31 pts is the difference between younger people who say they are mall-goers and 55+ mall-goers.

(Source: The Ipsos Consumer Tracker, conducted July 14-15, 2026, among 1,850 U.S. adults.)

Kate MacArthur: Malls are coming back but unevenly. What’s driving the comeback?

Michael Guerin: What you’re talking about is bifurcation, and the quality assets are going to continue to thrive. The owners are elevating and transforming them. When you go to a mall, you’re going to see new food and beverage, experiences, entertainment, aesthetics, and the environments have been upgraded. The anchors are really an important part of it.

MacArthur: How so?

Guerin: If you think about the evolution of Dick’s Sporting Goods, a regular store is more of a traditional anchor. Their House of Sport concept, which they have about 40 open, is immersive, experiential, an amplified offering. They’ve got batting cages, climbing walls, a house of cleats. They have youth events. They really engage with the community.

MacArthur: Why are people going to malls again?

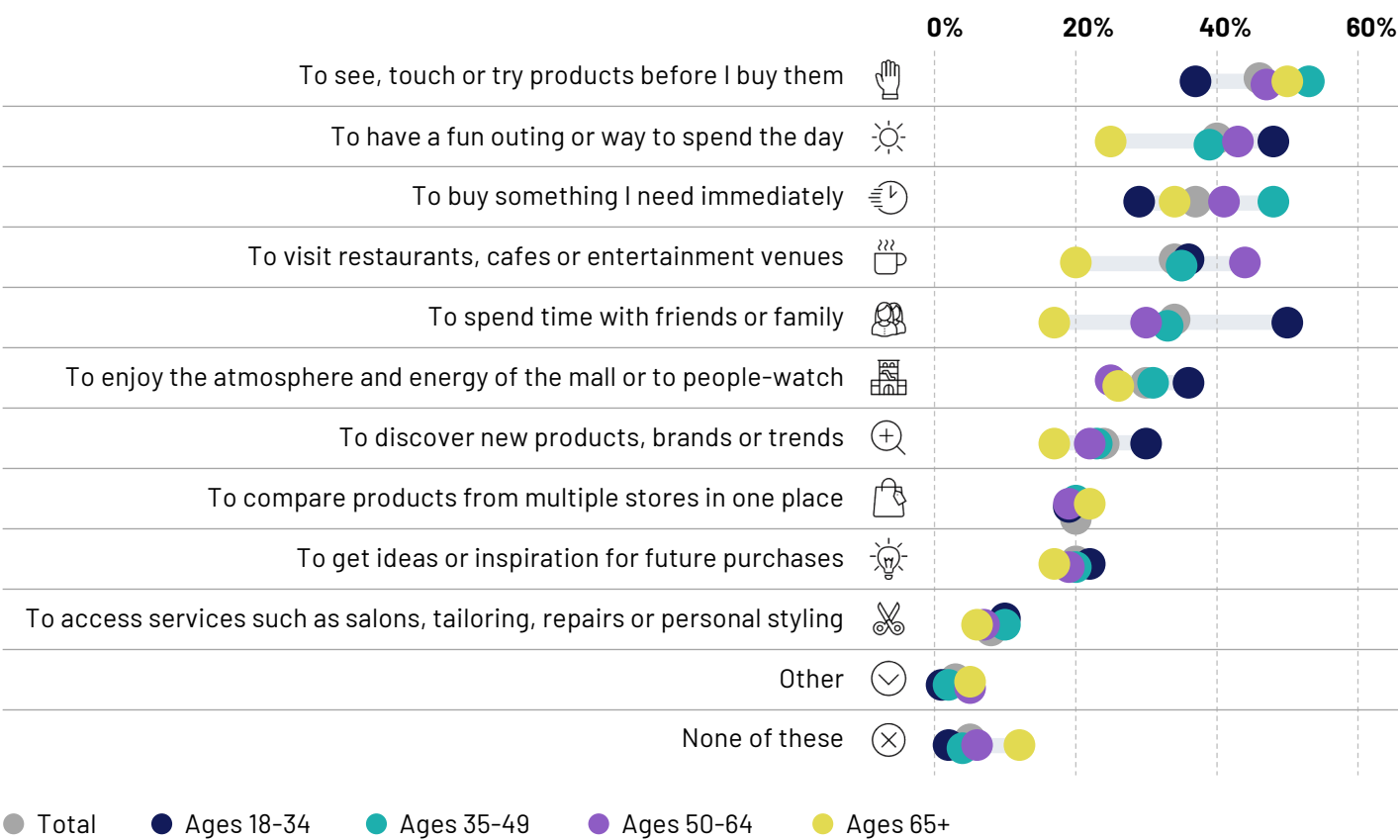
Guerin: It’s that third place that the consumer is looking for. They don’t want to be home. They want to go out and see other people. They want to break bread with their friends and shop and have fun and laugh.

MacArthur: People also are creating content and broadcasting their shopping experiences. How are shopping centers building around that?

Guerin: You’re creating a place where it’s aesthetically pleasing. We believe in: “We have a space. Let’s get a brand or a brand activation and create an opportunity.” Gen Z loves that. They love the new and they want to be the first. We all want something new. We all want something that’s maybe a bit unique and different. The brands are working on that in their four walls and we’re trying to partner with them and for ourselves in the common-area spaces.

Younger consumers hit malls to socialize more than shop

Q. Which of the following are reasons you visit shopping malls today? (% Total)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 989 U.S. adults who say they go to malls.)

MacArthur: For years, the ethos around shopping was to be faster, easier and frictionless. Was that overplayed and, if so, what's the lesson for brands and retailers?

Guerin: For us, friction is good. Online was going to kill brick-and-mortar retail, but going into a shopping center, we look at it as all those choices; pulling up, seeing flowers, having a pleasant parking experience, going into the center, maybe being surprised by a choice that you didn't think you were going to have. To us, there's fun in the customer having more of their emotions evoked and feeling the fabric. You can only buy so many things online.

MacArthur: Economic pressure is building on consumers now. Will that make malls more vulnerable as the pressure increases?

Guerin: There will be cycles and I think the consumer is resilient. When brands don't continue to stay current or anticipate the changing preferences of the consumer, that's where the fallout really happens.

MacArthur: In an AI-powered shopping future, what will humans keep doing?

Guerin: It goes back to the social shopping aspect of it. What we're learning and seeing is that people really want to be out, be social. You can't do that with AI because it lacks the human interaction and the social shopping part of it. We're all going to be way more efficient and we're going to have way more digital opportunities to be more efficient, but we're still human beings and we're going to still want to have experiences. We're still going to want to have fun. We're still going to want to explore. We're still going to want to be surprised. Those are the essential elements of human nature and psychology that are never going to go away.

MacArthur: Say it's 2040. Looking back at consumer behavior in 2026, what is underrated today that will turn out to be way more important than anybody realized?

Guerin: That symbiotic relationship where digital platforms are tied into these great environments is going to be important in the future. That creates the best relationship between the digital, the brick-and-mortar and real-life social interactions.

Kate MacArthur is managing editor of *What the Future*.



It's that third place that the consumer is looking for. They don't want to be home. ... They want to break bread with their friends and shop and have fun and laugh."

- Michael Guerin, *The Macerich Company*

CAN RETAIL MEDIA HELP BRANDS SURVIVE SHOPPER CUTBACKS?

When shoppers' budgets are tight, they rethink routine purchases.

Retail media can reach people when they make those decisions, but first, brands need the right messaging.

WHY WE ASKED:

Private label vs. name brand. Bulk or single use. Splurge or save. Americans make countless decisions every time they shop, whether they're in a store or on an app.

That's one reason retail media networks (RMNs) are one of the fastest-growing channels in advertising. These platforms allow retailers to sell ad space across their stores, websites and apps, giving brands a chance to influence shoppers at the moment they're deciding what to put in their cart.

But as people face rising costs, brands must also prove why they deserve to stay in the cart. The right messaging empowers them to compete on more than price.

WHAT WE FOUND:

The modern consumer economy is designed to make shoppers' choices frictionless, if not automatic. But in the face of sticker shock, people are more likely to delay purchases, compare different options or switch brands altogether – creating an opening for challengers and a real vulnerability for incumbent brands.

Retail media networks are a particularly powerful tool under these conditions, because they create an opportunity to reach shoppers when and where they're actively making those decisions. But being in the right place at the right moment won't matter if brands have the wrong messages.



To influence shoppers' choices, brands need to understand their motivations and priorities. Ipsos data shows that these vary widely by audience, demographic and occasion: Younger Americans place more value on brands than older Americans do, while half of Black Americans say they have purchased a product directly through a social media video.

In periods of financial stress, price matters to all shoppers. But people still make decisions based on quality, convenience, brand loyalty and personal relevance. The more that brands and retailers understand these nuances, the more they can compete on something other than price alone.

In the years to come, that advantage will be critical as AI agents and other technologies make it easier for shoppers to compare options and maximize savings.

Christopher Good is staff writer for *What the Future*.

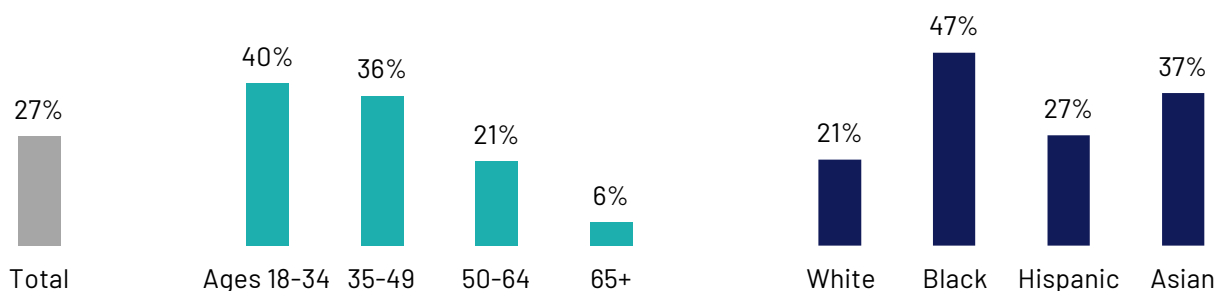
Brands can position themselves for success today by:

- Testing retail media creative to ensure that it stands out, gets remembered and drives action
- Modeling the in-market impact of retail media network investments on consumer spending
- Mapping out cross-platform shopper habits
- Ensuring that retail media experiences are optimized across retailers and channels
- Studying how purchase behavior varies across audiences

The brands and retailers that understand their shoppers will be able to leverage retail media networks to their fullest potential instead of racing to the bottom on price.

Younger adults and Black Americans are most likely to purchase directly from social videos

Q. In the past 6 months, have you purchased something in the following ways?



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)



WHAT WILL WE GIVE UP WHEN AI SHOPS FOR US?



Luca Cian

Professor of Business Administration,
University of Virginia Darden School of Business

Part of shopping is functional. You need things. You buy things. You often buy the same things. But shopping also gives us other benefits: It can be social, it can be emotional, it can give us a reason to get out and make us feel accomplished by letting us check off to-dos.

And the things we buy are often part of how we show up in the world and show off our identities. Can an AI agent fulfill all of that? Can it at least pull off some aspects? Luca Cian studies this and more as he delves into consumer psychology at the University of Virginia. Among AI researchers, he is best known for studying why people defer to AI in some decisions but not others. He thinks AI agents have a role to play in the future of shopping, but that brands are going to have to learn some new tricks and double down on old approaches to move us to an agentic future.

41% of Americans say they would never link their payment information to an AI agent.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: What do you think agentic adoption is going to look like?

Luca Cian: Adoption is going to be uneven rather than necessarily slow. Some people will read the news and say, “I will never do this.” But most people will be curious and try it out for themselves. It’s also not going to be black and white. It will depend on the task.

Carmichael: In our research, we see that people trust AI to research much more than they trust it to act. Are you seeing that?

Cian: Yes, and further, in my research, we found that people trust automation much more for something that is utilitarian in nature. There’s a fragility question, too. When an AI system fails, people generalize it to all AI systems, and there’s overall pushback on AI.

Carmichael: What do you think would create more trust?

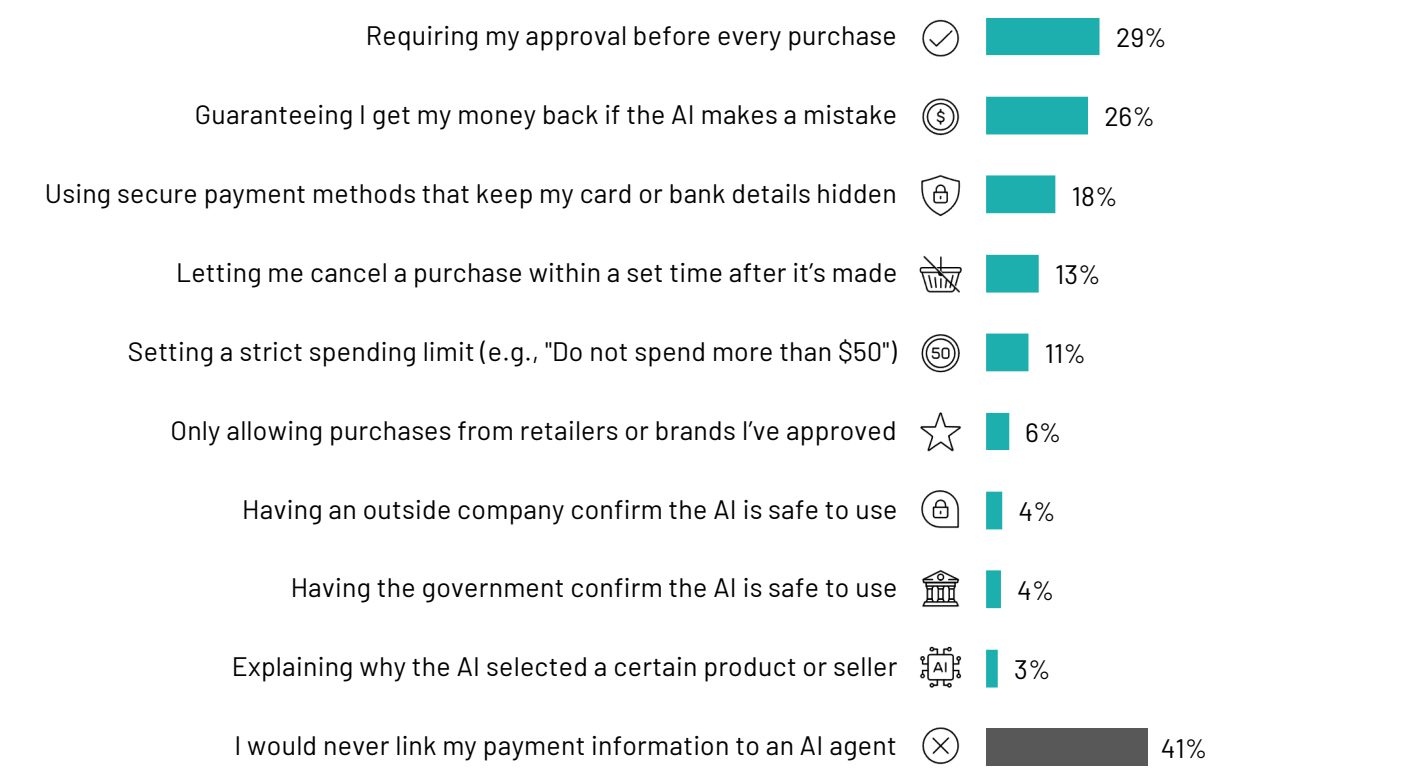
Cian: One is control, like, can I have control in the decision? Can the AI always check back to me and say, “Is this OK if I do that?” Two is what we call a human in the loop. An AI agent will create more trust if, ironically, it is less agentic. Another thing is if companies are more transparent and more accountable.

Carmichael: People have gotten over qualms about new technology in the past. What will be different in terms of consumer psychology?

Cian: Agency is something that we, as humans, don’t want to give up. It makes us feel human. But delegation we do like. If an AI agent is framed as “delegation with my approval,” I think most people will be OK with that.

Americans want to retain some control to trust delegating purchases to AI

Q. In order for an AI agent to buy things on your behalf, it would need access to your payment methods and personal information. Knowing that, which TWO of the following, if any, would be MOST important for you to trust the system? (% Top two)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Carmichael: Psychologically, shopping gives us different rewards. Can agentic replace that?

Cian: Shopping is entertainment. Shopping is identity. Shopping is accomplishing a list, right? I think we will delegate agents only for the part of shopping we don't want to do, like the boring, repetitive tasks. But for purchases that are connected to the identity and entertainment, we will do that because it's rewarding.

Carmichael: What other factors will play?

Cian: It will also be category dependent. Some people don't care about olive oil and will buy whatever is on the shelf. But I'm Italian. I love olive oil, and I research it and I want to have a specific olive oil. For me, it's more fun.

Carmichael: Yeah, I visited a supermarket in Italy that had an entire aisle of olive oil. It was overwhelming. Can AI help us with that and navigating the so-called paradox of choice?

Cian: If more choices are painful, agentic AI will relieve a lot. If I don't have preferences and I have 100 options, agents can do the manual

work there, which raises a whole massive billion-dollar question of how the agent picks their choices.

Carmichael: Given how personal shopping is, do agents need to learn consumer psychology, too?

Cian: I can see some companies saying, "We don't care about moral compass. Just do whatever in your power to persuade the customer." That's scary, because it can read all the literature in consumer psychology and have a lot of data about the customer, specifically. If you don't have a moral compass, you can use it to your advantage.

Carmichael: Will brand and loyalty still matter?

Cian: I don't think loyalty will disappear. It will be important. If I tell my agent to do some shopping, but I say, "Hey, I have this brand I like," loyalty will be important and will be a setting in agentic research. Brands still need to talk with you to have loyalty or emotional attachment.

Matt Carmichael is editor of *What the Future*.



Agency is something that we, as humans, don't want to give up. It makes us feel human. But delegation we do like. If an AI agent is framed as 'delegation with my approval,' I think most people will be OK with that."

- Luca Cian, University of Virginia Darden School of Business

TENSIONS

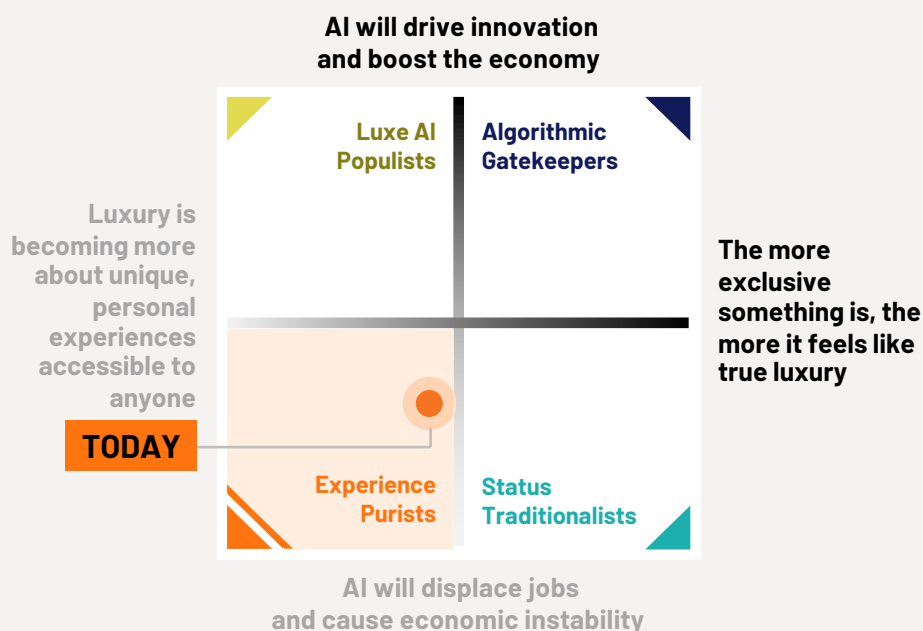
The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions.

We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way, you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.

Q. For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one that comes closest to your view, even if neither statement is exactly right. (% Total)



1. WILL AI INNOVATION OUTRANK SCARCITY?



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Experience Purists:

Most people (68%) believe that AI will destabilize both jobs and the economy, while 56% see luxury as unique experiences rather than exclusivity. In just one year, this latter ratio has flipped.

Luxe AI Populists:

If more people think that AI will drive prosperity and innovation while experiences remain the ultimate luxury, people could shift to more tech-enabled, premium experiences over status-oriented goods.

Algorithmic Gatekeepers:

If we remain AI optimists and rediscover the appeal of exclusivity, status brands could use AI for curating limited product drops, early access or unique, custom merchandise.

Status Traditionalists:

If economic anxiety grows and exclusivity regains importance, people may take refuge in heritage brands and traditional status they see as more enduring.

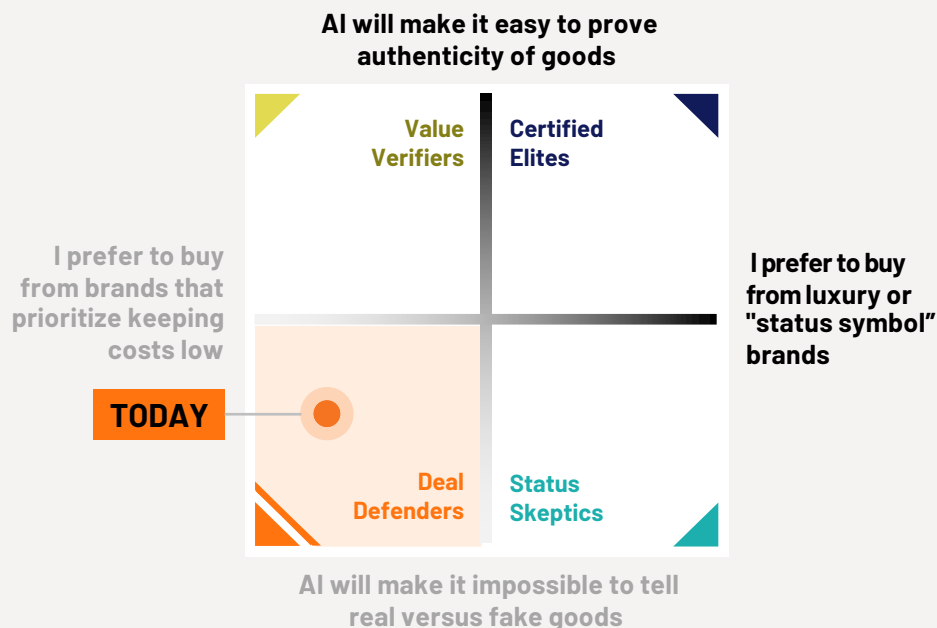
TENSIONS

The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions.

We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way, you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.

Q. For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one that comes closest to your view, even if neither statement is exactly right. (% Total)

2. NEGOTIATING AI AUTHENTICITY AND VALUE



(Source: Ipsos Future of Shopping survey, conducted Aug. 5-6, 2026, among 1,120 U.S. adults.)

Deal Defenders:

Today, 71% of Americans think AI will make it harder to tell real from fake goods while 84% prefer brands that keep costs low. If nothing changes, we keep buying dupes.

Value Verifiers:

If AI gains trust to prove quality and craftsmanship, more shoppers could trade up when they can verify the products are superior.

Certified Elites:

If AI makes authentication easy, and status remains a priority, consumers may place greater value on verified luxury and authenticated resale.

Status Skeptics:

If luxury prices continue to rise while counterfeits sell unabated, more shoppers may question whether status brands are worth the premium.

Kate MacArthur is managing editor of *What the Future*.

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