




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2026 Consumer Research

What Makes Shopping Experiences Matter?





How can you make modern shoppers feel like they matter? Meet them with shopping experiences that matter. Salsify's annual consumer research survey reached nearly 3,000 shoppers across the U.S., U.K., and Canada to find out what makes shoppers tick throughout their buying journeys (or catch the ick) across awareness, consideration, and decision stages.

And when it's all said and done, brands have their work cut out for them to both attract and retain the loyalty of modern shoppers. They expect more from products, product detail pages, and their shopping experiences across digital and physical shelves.

And AI recommendations? They're great for brands, but shoppers need compelling product content to back up what the bots are saying before they purchase, highlighting an AI trust gap.

Here's a brief explainer of what this means and how to make these insights matter.

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01 Awareness

How Shoppers Discover New Products and Brands

Economic shifts affecting price and product availability are likely a major cause of consumers shopping online less often, and the sharp decline in daily online spending. Another cause, however, is the shift in where shoppers like to discover new products and brands.

Shoppers across generations head to physical retail stores in droves, renewing the necessity to accommodate seamless shopping behaviors and experiences like webrooming and showrooming.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ Two to three times as many U.S. consumers reported buying products online daily (**15%**) as those in the U.K. (**7%**) and Canada (**5%**).
- ✓ **60%** of millennials shop online at least once per week, the highest frequency among generation groups.
- ✓ The top three channels where shoppers discover new products are physical retail stores, preferred by **60%** of shoppers; followed by online marketplaces (e.g., Amazon), preferred by **57%**; and social media (e.g., TikTok, Instagram), preferred by **52%**.
- ✓ Gen Zers' (**73%**) and millennials' (**67%**) favorite channel to discover new products is social media, while physical retail stores (**61%**) edged out online marketplaces by **1%** for Gen Xers. Baby boomers (**60%**) prefer online marketplaces over physical retail stores by **2%**.
- ✓ **67%** of shoppers participate in webrooming (researching a product online before purchasing it in store), and **53%** participate in showrooming (checking out a product in person before buying it online).

Q2 Consideration

How Shoppers Research New Products and Brands

Shoppers research everyday essentials like food and beverages, mid-range items like fashion and apparel, and big-ticket items like electronics across a variety of channels before they make a purchase.

To research new products, they most often head to online marketplaces like Amazon, but AI shopping tools continue to gain steam as primary research channels. Some (but definitely not all) shoppers have even shown interest in agentic commerce and autonomous shopping agents that could discover, research, and purchase products on their behalf based on their goals and preferences.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ Shoppers (**51%**) reported online marketplaces as the top channel for them to research new products and brands; however, more Gen Zers (**63%**) and millennials (**55%**) reported their top research channel is social media sites like TikTok and Instagram (which were the fifth most popular among millennials just last year).
- ✓ Shoppers reported using two to three channels to research everyday essentials like food and beverage and household supplies (**52%**), mid-range items like fashion and apparel and personal care and beauty (**54%**), and big-ticket items like furniture and electronics (**39%**).
- ✓ More consumers use AI search tools (**22%**) than product review websites like Wirecutter (**19%**) or online forums like Reddit (**14%**) to research new products and brands.
- ✓ **27%** of shoppers trust AI shopping tools for some purchases, but verify their answers with other sources, highlighting an AI trust gap; just **14%** trust them and use them regularly.
- ✓ **49%** of Gen Zers, **45%** of millennials, **39%** of Gen Xers, and **33%** of baby boomers are somewhat interested in using agentic commerce, saying they would try it for certain purchases.
- ✓ Time savings (**32%**) and convenience (**32%**) are the top reasons why consumers are interested in agentic commerce; 41% of millennial shoppers even see autonomous agents as impartial and knowing more than they do.
- ✓ The top reasons shoppers aren't interested in agentic commerce are a lack of trust for **35%** of shoppers (who wouldn't trust AI's information or decision-making) and a lack of involvement for **31%** of shoppers (who like being in control of their shopping).

Decision

What Drives Final Buying Decisions

Shoppers often reach the end of their buying journey — purchase — with little to no drama, but maybe a few twists and turns, and more than one touchpoint. However, online shopping vertical purchases shift year-by-year, as do popular shopping channels, and the battle of online versus in-store rages on in perpetuity.

This year, too, the impact of global trade policies made shoppers prioritize lower-priced alternatives, and Gen Alpha’s influence on household spending is hitting its stride.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ The top three online verticals for purchases include fashion and apparel (**65%**), followed by food and beverage (**60%**), and electronics (**59%**). U.S. shoppers purchase from many categories almost twice as often as those in Canada, with the U.K. participation falling in the middle.
- ✓ **69%** of shoppers say they purchase new products in physical retail stores (up **11%** from early 2025 data), narrowly overtaking online marketplaces like Amazon (**68%**) as the number one spot.
- ✓ **61%** of shoppers consider product images and videos the most important product page element for completing a purchase, **60%** say pricing and availability, and **57%** say customer ratings, reviews, and user-generated content (UGC).
- ✓ The most popular online shopping trend — buying a product because a social media influencer recommended it — attracted **23%** of shoppers this year overall; however, U.S. shoppers participate in popular online shopping trends at up to double the rate of Canadian counterparts, with U.K. participation falling in the middle.
- ✓ In response to global trade policies, **39%** of shoppers are comparing prices more carefully, **38%** have reduced overall spending in certain product categories, a third are prioritizing domestically made products, and one in five are shopping secondhand.
- ✓ **19%** of parents or guardians of a Gen Alpha child (ages 1–15) reported they regularly influence purchases in certain product categories — predominantly food and beverage, fashion and apparel, and some electronics purchases.



What Breeds Brand Champions (or Brand Abandonment)

Brands have their work cut out for them to both attract and retain trust (and thus, loyalty) from modern shoppers, as they expect more from products and their shopping experiences across digital and physical shelves.

Shoppers treat brands they trust differently, and how shoppers determine this trust, along with product quality and value, varies by demographic; however, many turn to ratings and reviews for guidance. What sends customers packing — with purchases abandoned in their carts — is often due to product page flaws, which also cause higher return rates.

KEY FINDINGS

✓

68%

of shoppers have paid more for a product in the past year because they trust the brand (down almost

20%

 from early 2025 data).

✓

50%

Gen Zers,

49%

 of millennials,

41%

 of Gen Xers, and

33%

 of baby boomers trust brands due to high-quality product content.

✓

Shoppers cite durability and longevity (

54%

) and positive customer reviews and ratings (

47%

) as the top factors that help them determine product quality and value.

✓

High prices (

46%

) and no or low customer ratings or negative reviews (

42%

) drive the most cart abandonment, followed by inconsistent product information across websites (

38%

).

✓

Nearly half (

45%

) of shoppers have returned an item from an online purchase in the last year due to incorrect product content.

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON 2,712 SURVEY RESPONSES FROM 908 SHOPPERS FROM THE U.S., 902 FROM THE U.K., AND 902 FROM CANADA, WITH DATA COLLECTED ON OCTOBER 24–25, 2025, USING A STRATIFIED SAMPLING APPROACH TO ENSURE BALANCED REPRESENTATION ACROSS AGE AND GENDER GROUPS.