RESEARCH REPORT · AI IN CPG & ECOMMERCE MARKETING

The 2026 State of AI Adoption in CPG and eCommerce Marketing

In consumer categories, AI stopped being a production tool and became a sales channel: assistants and agents now sit between brand and shopper, deciding what gets seen and, increasingly, what gets bought. This report compiles what the 2026 data says about AI across CPG and ecommerce marketing: adoption, personalization, creative at scale, retail media, agentic commerce, and consumer trust. Every figure is linked to its source and dated; where sources disagree, we show the disagreement.

84%
of ecommerce businesses rank AI as their top strategic priority; 78% already use it in at least one function

$67B
in Cyber Week 2025 online sales influenced by AI, roughly 20% of all digital orders (Salesforce)

5–15%
typical revenue lift from AI personalization, with top performers reaching 25% (McKinsey)

$69.3B
US retail media spend in 2026, up 17.8% year over year; the channel where CPG AI budgets concentrate

57% → 46%
consumer comfort with brand AI use fell in a single year, even as shopper use of AI climbed

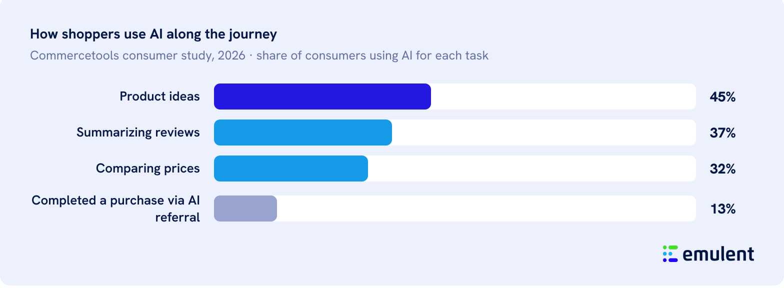
25%
of online spending projected to flow through AI shopping agents by 2030 (Morgan Stanley)

- The buying journey is being re-intermediated: AI assistants and agents now sit between brand and shopper. Being **selectable by machines** is the new shelf placement.
- Creative volume exploded while consumer trust fell. The big CPGs generate hundreds of localized ad versions; shoppers reward the ones that don't feel like it.
- Personalization moved from delighter to profit center: 5–15% revenue lift is the documented norm, and conversion roughly quadruples when AI guides the session.
- Retail media is where AI and budgets meet: closed-loop purchase data feeds the models, and the channel is growing faster than search or social.

01 · ADOPTION BENCHMARKS

Consumer categories lead the adoption curve

Among US industries, e-commerce leads AI marketing adoption at 87%, ahead of B2B SaaS at 82%. On the merchant side, 84% of ecommerce businesses rank AI as their top strategic priority and 78% already use it in at least one function; among companies with a personalization strategy, 92% now use AI-driven personalization. The consumer side is keeping pace: 73% of consumers already use AI somewhere in their shopping journey.

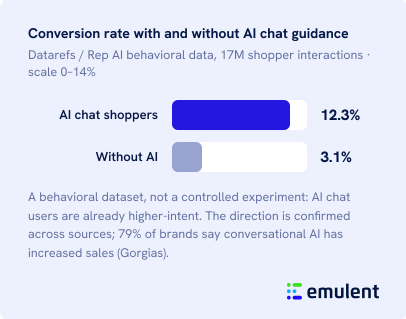


The gap between the top and bottom rows is the story: discovery and research are already AI-mediated at scale, while AI-completed purchases remain early. That gap is exactly where agentic commerce (section 05) is aimed, and 70% of consumers say they're at least somewhat comfortable letting an agent buy on their behalf.

02 · PERSONALIZATION & LIFECYCLE

The most proven money-maker in the stack

The expectation baseline is old news: 71% of consumers expect personalized interactions and 76% get frustrated when they don't happen (McKinsey). What's new is the documented economics. McKinsey puts the revenue lift from AI personalization at 5–15%, with top performers reaching 25%, and 67% of marketing and sales teams report revenue increases from AI in the past 12 months, the highest documented impact of any business function.



up to 31%
of ecommerce revenue driven by product recommendations alone; shoppers who click one are 4.5× more likely to add to cart

6×
higher transaction rates from personalized email; automated flows generate 41% of email revenue from 5.3% of sends

~40%
of marketing budgets now go to personalization, up from 22% in 2023; 87% of brands plan to increase the spend in 2026

03 · CREATIVE AT SCALE

How the biggest CPGs actually deploy it

The pattern across the majors is the same: encode the brand system once, then generate localized variations at a volume no production pipeline could match. 67% of the top 500 advertisers now use AI-generated creative in at least one campaign format, and 4 million advertisers use Meta's generative AI tools, with Advantage+ AI campaigns past a $20B annual revenue run rate.

Coca-Cola · design intelligence
Project Fizzion (with Adobe) encodes designers' creative intent as a StyleID that auto-applies brand rules across formats and markets, generating hundreds of localized campaign versions. After the 2024 holiday-ad backlash, the 2025 AI-generated spot "scored off the charts" with consumers.

PepsiCo · platform play
Built an in-house generative AI platform, PepGenX, and partnered with AWS to add multimodal and agentic models across the company rather than buying point tools per brand.

Unilever & Nestlé · digital twins
Digital twins of products accelerate content creation and adapt packaging shots for local markets, making hyper-targeted content variations economical at portfolio scale.

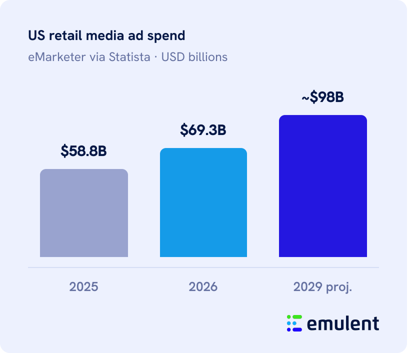
Clorox · personalization at scale
60% of marketing efforts are now personalized with the help of generative AI, moving from one national campaign to 10-20 targeted groups, with one-to-one marketing as the stated goal.

Down-market, the same tools spread fast: 46% of DTC brands used AI-generated product visuals in 2026, and personalized creative lifts CTR 22–40% on paid social. The performance case is consistent; the trust case is not (section 07).

04 · RETAIL MEDIA & PAID

Where AI and CPG budgets meet

Retail media is the fastest-growing ad channel and the natural home for AI optimization, because closed-loop purchase data gives the models a clean signal. US spend is projected at $69.3B in 2026, up 17.8% year over year, heading to nearly $98B by 2029 (eMarketer; global estimates range from ~$165B to $190B+ depending on definition). For CPG brands the reallocation is dramatic: retail media now takes 20–35% of total ad budgets, up from under 5% in 2020.



4.2×
Retail media ROAS for CPG brands, the closed-loop measurement case in a privacy-first landscape

2.8×
Higher conversion when CPG advertisers target with retailer first-party data, now used by 67% of CPG advertisers

87.7%
of 2025 US retail media spend held by Amazon and Walmart combined; concentration is the channel's open risk

On the creative-plus-media side, AI optimization compounds: AI-generated creatives increase CTR by 47% and cut CPA by 29% in paid campaigns. The caveat for CPG: overall category ad spending growth slowed to 4.6% in 2025, so retail media's rise is funded by cuts elsewhere, and every dollar is under measurement pressure.

05 · AGENTIC COMMERCE

The shelf is becoming an API

In 18 months, agent-mediated shopping went from demo to operating reality, driven by a rapid series of protocol launches. The economic signal is already measurable: Adobe recorded 805% year-over-year growth in AI-driven retail traffic during Black Friday 2025, AI-referred visitors complete purchases at a 38% higher rate than search visitors, and retailers with agent integrations saw roughly 7× the Cyber Week sales growth of those without (Salesforce).

How agentic commerce arrived
Protocol and platform milestones, November 2024 to January 2026

Nov 2024	**MCP launches.** Anthropic's Model Context Protocol becomes the first open standard connecting AI agents to external systems.
Sep 2025	**ACP and ChatGPT Shopping.** Stripe and OpenAI release the Agentic Commerce Protocol; ChatGPT Shopping launches with Etsy, Glossier, SKIMS, Spanx, and Vuori. Google announces AP2 for agentic payments the same month.
Nov 2025	**First AI holiday season.** $67B in AI-influenced Cyber Week sales, ~20% of digital orders; AI-driven retail traffic up 805% year over year.
Jan 2026	**UCP debuts at NRF.** Google unveils the Universal Commerce Protocol, co-developed with Shopify, Etsy, Wayfair, and Target, covering discovery through post-purchase with 20+ partners.

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It has not been a straight line: OpenAI's Instant Checkout inside ChatGPT converted 3× worse than redirecting to merchant sites, and OpenAI pivoted away from in-app checkout by March 2026. The forecasts still point one direction: McKinsey estimates agentic AI will influence $3–5 trillion in global retail commerce by 2030, and Morgan Stanley expects nearly half of online shoppers to use AI shopping agents by 2030, covering about 25% of their spending. The practical takeaway is "agent legibility": agents skip offers with unclear pricing, delivery windows, or returns terms without a human ever seeing them.

06 · THE NEW SHELF: AI SEARCH

Findable in answers, not just results

Before an agent can buy, an assistant has to recommend. AI Overviews now appear on 48% of Google queries, reaching 2 billion monthly users (up from 31% in February 2025), and AI-native answer engines already drive 11–18% of discovery traffic for some publishers. For CPG the framing is blunt: treat AI like the new retail shelf and earn a spot on it.

What gets a brand recommended
Structured, complete product data (attributes, real pricing, live inventory), review depth that survives verification, and consistent claims across retail listings. The same feed hygiene that wins the retail media auction wins the AI answer.

How to check where you stand
Ask ChatGPT or Google AI Mode to find products in your category and see if you appear; then audit whether your platform exposes carts, checkout, and orders via API or supports UCP.

07 · CONSUMER TRUST

Shoppers use AI and distrust brands that flaunt it

The same consumers using AI to shop are cooling on brands' use of it: consumer comfort with brand AI fell from 57% to 46% in a single year. Coca-Cola's trajectory shows both sides: the 2024 AI holiday ad was panned as "soulless" and "devoid of any actual creativity", while the reworked 2025 version "scored off the charts". The difference wasn't the technology; it was the craft.

73%
of consumers already use AI in their shopping journey; usage isn't the barrier

70%
are at least somewhat comfortable with an AI agent purchasing on their behalf

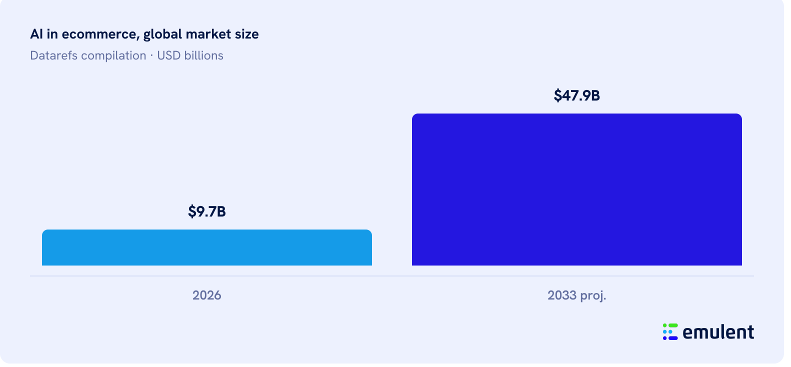
46%
comfort with brands using AI, down from 57% a year earlier; trust is the constraint

For consumer brands the operating rule that emerges from the data: use AI aggressively in the plumbing (feeds, personalization, media, variants) and conservatively in the emotional core of the brand, with human craft and review where the audience can feel it. EU AI Act disclosure duties, in force since August 2, 2026, make transparent labeling of realistic AI-generated creative a legal floor for anything reaching EU audiences (covered in depth in our companion report on AI adoption in marketing).

08 · MARKET OUTLOOK

Where the money and forecasts point

The dedicated AI-in-ecommerce market is sized at $9.7B in 2026, projected to reach $47.9B by 2033 (25.7% CAGR). The bigger structural number sits next to it: eMarketer projects US commerce media, the umbrella over retail media, will reach $142B, or 23.9% of all US digital ad spending, by 2030.



Three developments to watch through 2027: protocol consolidation (whether UCP, ACP, or platform-specific rails win merchant integrations); the shift of measurement from clicks to agent selections, which rewards structured data over persuasion; and margin pressure as Amazon and Walmart's grip on retail media (nearly 90% of incremental 2026 dollars) collides with CPG budgets growing under 5% a year.

09 · IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

A 12-month path for consumer brands

The sequence the data supports: fix the data layer first (it feeds personalization, retail media, and agent selection alike), prove ROI where the evidence is strongest, then earn a place in AI answers before agents start deciding.

MONTHS 1–2
Product data & baseline
Audit feeds for structured attributes, accurate pricing, live inventory, and consistent claims across retailers. Test your visibility in ChatGPT and Google AI Mode. Agree success metrics with finance before new spend.

MONTHS 3–5
Personalization pilots
Start where documented lift is highest: recommendations on PDP and cart, triggered email flows, and AI-assisted retail media bidding. Measure against the pre-agreed baseline.

MONTHS 6–9
Creative system, not tools
Encode brand rules once (the Coca-Cola StyleID pattern, at whatever scale fits) so variants stay on-brand without review bottlenecks. Add human-in-the-loop review before anything customer-facing ships. Kill pilots that missed targets.

MONTHS 10–12
Agent readiness
Expose carts, checkout, and orders via API; evaluate UCP/ACP support in your platform; make pricing, delivery windows, and returns terms machine-readable. Agents skip ambiguity, and no human sees what they skip.

SOURCES

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Datarefs: AI marketing / AI Overviews data · 2026
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PYMNTS: global CPGs join the GenAI rush · 2025
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Consumer Goods Technology: CPG AI roadmaps (Clorox)
Statista / eMarketer: US retail media ad spend · 2026
Improvado: ad spend by industry (CPG retail media share) · 2026
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AI Business Weekly: AI marketing statistics · Jun 2026
Technology Checker: consumer comfort data · 2026
Cool Nerds: consumer product digital 2026

Compiled August 11, 2026 by Emulent. Most figures are practitioner-reported survey data or platform-reported analytics rather than controlled experiments, and are labeled as such where the distinction matters; case-study numbers are illustrative single-organization results, not benchmarks. Behavioral conversion comparisons carry selection effects, noted inline. This report is informational and not legal advice.