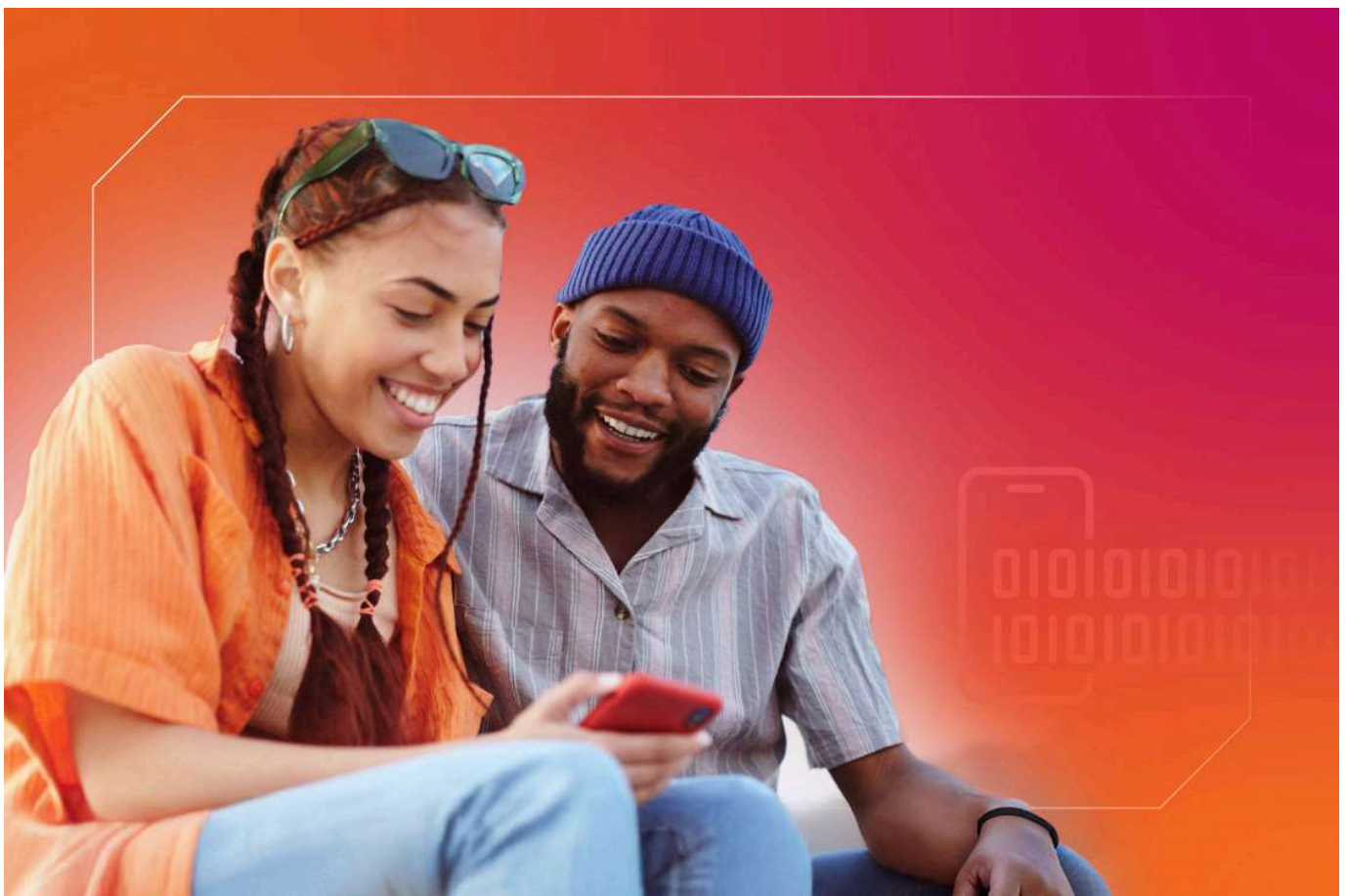




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SEP 24, 2025

AI is Retail's New Gatekeeper: Personalization and Precision Marketing are Competitive Table Stakes



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New Research Reveals How AI is Influencing Purchase Decisions, Trust, and Expectations in Grocery & Retail

Jacksonville, Fla. – Acosta Group has released the results of its new artificial intelligence shopper study in advance of **Groceryshop 2025**, reflecting that the AI revolution is well underway in reshaping how consumers shop. Brands and retailers who lean in are poised to lead, while brands that are slow to adopt are at risk of losing credibility and market share.

The study, based on a survey of over 1,000 U.S. shoppers in Acosta Group’s proprietary Shopper Community, shows that AI has quickly moved from novelty to routine. **Shoppers are using tools like ChatGPT**, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini to discover, evaluate, and even purchase products.

“Generative AI tools are becoming the new gatekeepers of the shopper journey,” said **John Carroll**, President of **Connected Commerce** at Acosta Group. “Retailers and brands have to rethink and evolve how they show up in AI-powered environments, build trust with consumers, and prepare for a future where voice assistants and autonomous agents drive purchase decisions.”

Consumers Are Adapting and Adopting

The new study found that a staggering 99% of shoppers are aware of AI, and 70% have used one or more AI tools or features to assist with shopping, with ChatGPT leading in usage and recognition. The key attributes of the tools, according to consumers, are to save money and time, and to compare or learn about products.

Interestingly, despite extensive innovation from retailer-specific assistants such as Walmart’s Sparky and Amazon’s Rufus, fewer than 15% of shoppers have actually used those tools to date, highlighting the need for retailers to bridge these awareness gaps.

Younger shoppers, especially Gen Z, are embracing the change. Fifty-three percent of Gen Z AI users find generative AI more trustworthy than traditional sources, reflecting a meteoric adoption of the new technology.

Still, most retailers and brands are not yet optimized for this evolution in shopper behavior which requires a move away from broad marketing tactics toward precision strategies that resonate with individual shoppers across content and channels.

Grocery Leads AI Adoption

“Our research confirms that AI is transforming the way consumers shop, and consumers are embracing AI in grocery shopping faster than in any other category,” said **Kathy Risch**, SVP of **Shopper Insights** and Thought Leadership at Acosta Group.

Grocery leads in AI-assisted shopping with 36% of shoppers having used an AI tool to help with tasks like researching, browsing, and buying. Other categories aren’t far behind: 28% of

respondents have used AI to help shop for health and wellness products, 27% for electronics, and 25% for beauty and personal care items.

This data points to a significant opportunity for brands to influence consumer decisions earlier in the path to purchase, but only if discoverable and trusted in AI ecosystems.

“Space is limited with AI shopping tools,” said Carroll. “Shoppers are seeing only the top two-to-three options in their searches based on context and trust, in contrast to the digital shelf of over 25 items or the physical shelf of over 100 items that they’ve seen in the past. Brands need to understand the new retailer algorithms and revise their marketing strategies to earn a top spot in the digital consideration set.”

Building Trust

As AI gains traction, trust remains a barrier. While 58% of shoppers trust AI to find the best deal on a product and 50% trust it for product reviews, only a small fraction (12%) of shoppers currently trust AI to make purchases autonomously. Concerned shoppers cite worries over privacy (60%), fraud (56%), and making purchases without approval (56%). Notably, however, nearly one-third of shoppers are open to allowing a generative AI agent make grocery purchases on their behalf.

Brands need to prioritize transparency, data protection, and consistent value delivery to build consumers’ trust and be positioned to support ongoing AI-assisted shopping adoption.

Key Opportunities: Optimizing to Drive Conversion, Close the Sale

“Today, brands and retailers need to optimize digital content across all platforms for AI-driven discovery and actively promote these tools to create demand,” Carroll said. “At the same time, we can’t overlook the fundamentals in the shopper journey: the worst case scenario is for AI to highlight your brand on the shortlist, and then miss the sale because your product is out of stock or not listed on the app.”

A few key insights for gaining visibility and credibility in AI-powered discovery:

- Shift from keyword to conversation – using real language to optimize content

- Product detail pages and trust signals are essential currency – include shopper context, full attributes, and quality visuals

- Ad strategy shifts from spend to substance – design zero-click and agent-friendly strategies

- Understand that AI recommendations drive what makes it into the shopper’s cart

- Audit AI recommendations – prompt ChatGPT, Gemini, or another tool to monitor your brand presence

Strengthen brand and retailer collaboration – share AI demand signals to refine joint forecasts

“In the near future, AI agents will be making at least some of our purchase decisions,” said Carroll. “The retail and brand winners will be those who build trust, show up in AI-powered environments, and make it easy for shoppers to say ‘yes.’”

The Acosta Group study was conducted June 13 – 17, 2025, with 1,074 shoppers who are part of the company’s proprietary Shopper Community and had shopped at least one retail channel in the prior three months. The Acosta Group Shopper Community is comprised of over 40,000 demographically diverse shoppers across the U.S. and is the company’s proprietary community for survey engagement.

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