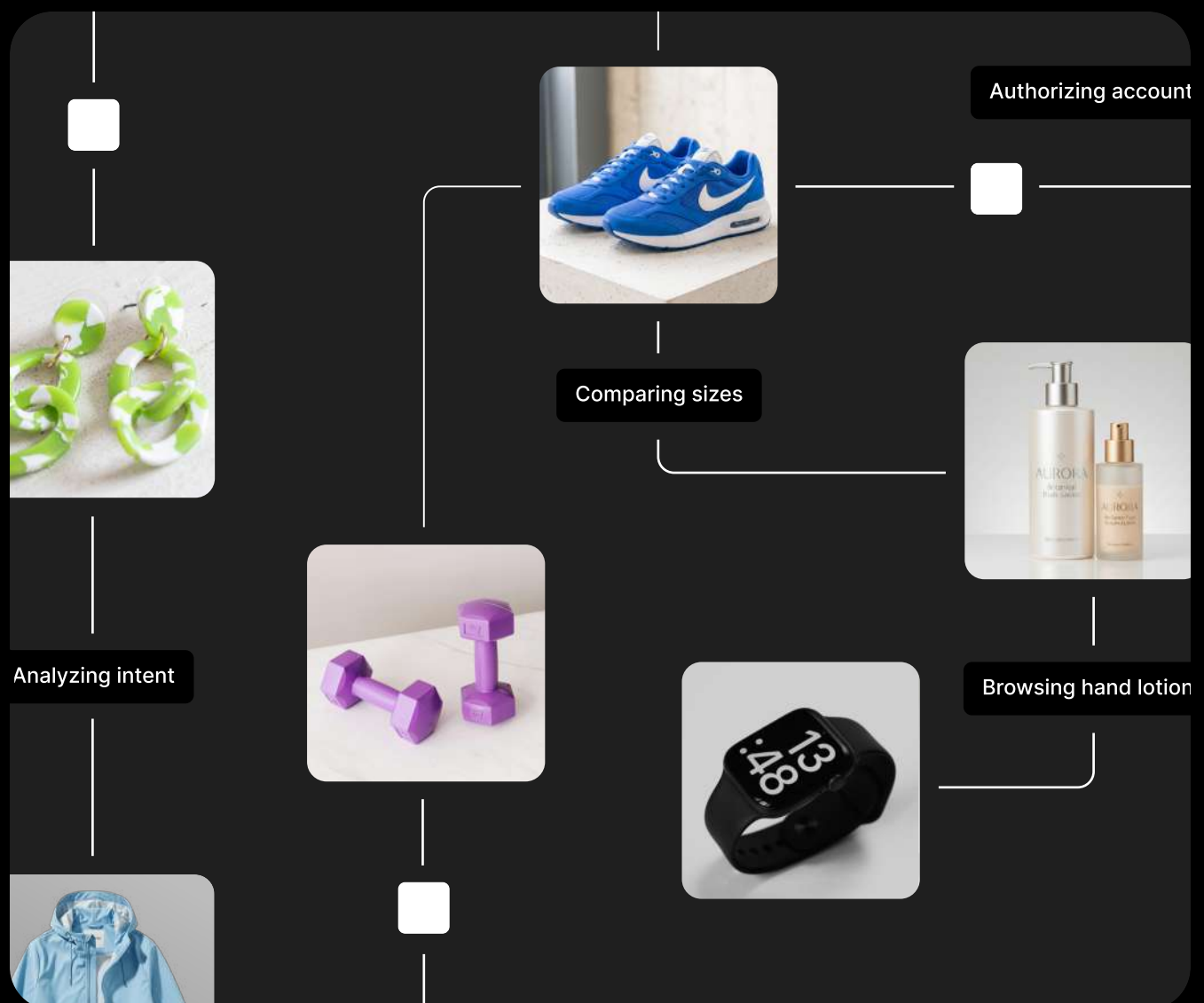


AGENTIC COMMERCE 2026

The State of Consumer Demand
and Merchant Readiness



Foreword



Rory O'Neill

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Agentic is the new frontier of commerce. An inflection point where AI agents are maturing in capability, gaining the authority and capability to search and buy on behalf of consumers. For merchants, that creates a new opportunity to reach customers. For consumers, it offers faster, more convenient, and more personalized services.

But the infrastructure required to support agentic commerce safely and reliably at scale is still developing. The ecosystem hasn't yet established the standards, infrastructure, and safeguards needed to meet the needs of both consumers and merchants, or support agentic commerce safely and reliably at scale. Core questions around identity, authentication, delegated payments, tokenization, liability frameworks, and trust standard remain unresolved.

This is our second report on the space, and the shift over the past year is clear. Consumers are starting to experiment, merchants are preparing, and technology providers are investing and building new services. At Checkout.com, we see this firsthand through our work across payments infrastructure, merchant enablement, and the evolving business models that will underpin agent-led commerce.

The findings in this report point to three clear priorities.

First, agentic commerce is inevitable, and businesses need to prepare now, even if expectations are still running ahead of operational capability.

Second, unresolved questions around liability, consent, identity assurance, and accountability remain the biggest barriers to trust and scale.

Third, merchants need to invest early in the foundations that will determine whether AI agents can discover and transact with them. That includes structured catalog data and clear agent policies.

As a payments provider, we have a responsibility to help shape how this ecosystem develops. That means building the infrastructure that enables agent-led transactions to happen safely, helping merchants stay in control, and supporting the commercial models and standards that will underpin trust across the ecosystem.

Agentic commerce will, when ready, become a meaningful new channel for commerce. As consumers begin to outsource more routine or lower-interest purchasing decisions to AI agents, merchants will need to be ready to transact with the agents consumers trust to buy on their behalf.

This report summarizes the views of more than 12,000 consumers globally and 400 Heads of Payments across the UK and US. Our hope is that it helps merchants understand where the market stands today and navigate the experimentation phase of agentic commerce with greater confidence.

Introduction

AI shopping agents are starting to influence how consumers search and buy. As they begin to play a role in product discovery and purchase decisions, merchants, consumers, and payment providers all face the same question: what needs to happen before this model can work safely at scale?

We surveyed Heads of Payments in the UK and US, alongside consumers globally, to understand how close agentic commerce really is to everyday adoption. The findings point to a market with clear momentum, but also gaps between expectation, readiness, and trust.

Despite the momentum behind agentic commerce, AI agents are barely visible in real-world transactions today. Merchants estimate that agents play a meaningful role in product selection and checkout in just 3% of online transactions across the UK and US.

Key ecosystem players are only beginning to explore and pilot with initiatives such as OpenAI's commerce capabilities and Mastercard's agentic commerce infrastructure, rolling them out in controlled and early-stage environments. Similarly, Google announced its [Universal Commerce Protocol \(UCP\)](#) to support agent-led shopping across surfaces like Search AI Mode and Gemini. Visa is also establishing its own frameworks, including Visa Intelligent Commerce and the Trusted Agent Protocol to securely verify AI agents and process payments within its ecosystem. This tension defines the market today: strong interest and clear momentum, but there is more work to do in the industry before agentic commerce becomes part of everyday life.

Consumers are signalling near-term appetite, and many merchants believe scale is coming fast. Yet most businesses are still working through the practical and commercial challenges of readiness. For agentic commerce to move beyond experimentation, AI platforms, payment networks, and merchants need to define what happens when something goes wrong – including who absorbs the cost of errors. Questions about liability, identity assurance, dispute handling, and permissioning sit at the center of whether the agentic commerce industry can scale with confidence.

If trust can be established, agentic commerce could change how products are discovered and purchased. It could reshape brand loyalty, create new competitive pressure, and reward merchants that are easy for AI systems to understand and act on. But whether it scales will depend on closing the gap between excitement and execution.



SECTION 1

WHEN IS AGENTIC COMMERCE COMING?

Consumers are moving faster than merchants

Consumers expect agentic commerce to arrive quickly. Merchants, however, are progressing at different speeds as they build the foundations needed to support it.

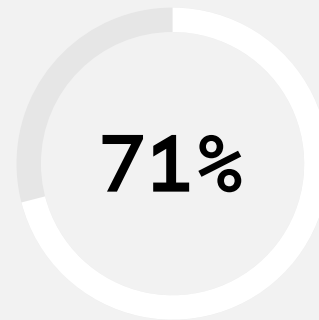
Nearly three quarters (72%) of merchants agree that consumers will adopt agent-led shopping faster than most merchants are prepared for, suggesting the market's expectations are moving ahead of operational readiness.

Consumer timelines reinforce that sense of momentum. Around one in eight (13%) consumers say they already use an AI shopping agent for at least 10% of their online purchases. A further one in three (33%) expect to reach that point within the next 12 months, and another one in eight (13%) expect to do so in one to two years.

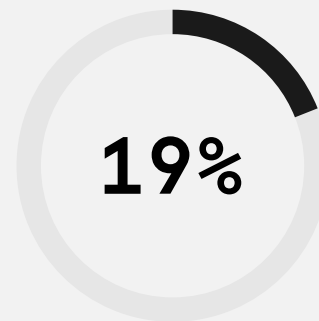
That momentum is being driven disproportionately by younger consumers.

More than seven in ten 18-24-year-olds (71%) are already familiar with AI shopping agents, compared with just 19% of consumers aged 55 and older. And while 64% of the youngest shoppers say they are comfortable letting AI complete a purchase, 63% of shoppers aged 55 and above say they are uncomfortable with it.

Already familiar with AI shopping agents



Consumers aged 18-24



Consumers aged 55+

64%

of the youngest shoppers say they are **comfortable** letting AI complete a purchase.

63%

of shoppers aged 55 and above say they are **uncomfortable** letting AI complete a purchase.

So, adoption is unlikely to be smooth or universal. Nearly one in four (24%) consumers say they would never be willing to delegate purchases to an AI agent, while 8% remain unsure. So although interest is building, there's still a meaningful ceiling on how quickly agentic commerce can become mainstream.

Merchants see scale coming, too, but on a different timeline. Across the UK and US, more than four in five (85%) expect agentic commerce to drive at least 10% of their online transactions within the next two years. Yet only 3% say it already does. This shows strong belief in where the market is heading, but limited current evidence of scaled, consistent deployment across the ecosystem.

Consumer readiness is uneven across markets

Asking consumers worldwide on when they expect to delegate transactions to an agent, responses were split fairly evenly. Nearly 13% of all consumers stated they were already using AI to execute one in 10 of their transactions, while 20% stated this would be the case within six months. A smaller proportion of respondents (10%) stated they didn't expect to delegate transactions to an agent for at least three years. 77% of consumers in the UAE say they are familiar with agentic commerce, compared with 67% in China and 61% in Brazil. For a deeper view of digital commerce and AI adoption trends in the region, see our report, [MENA Digital Commerce 2026: The New Era of AI in Payments](#).

The markets that know agentic commerce best are adopting it fastest. The same pattern appears across age groups, where familiarity and comfort are closely linked.



US markets are moving faster than the UK

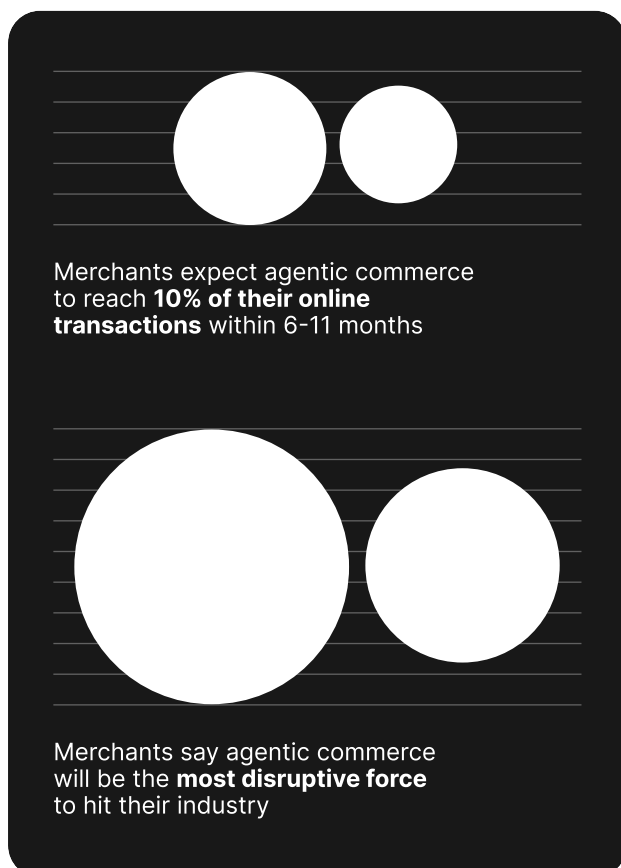
US and UK merchants agree on the direction of travel, but differ in how quickly it will scale and how much risk they are willing to absorb.

In the US, two in five (39%) merchants expect agentic commerce to reach 10% of their online transactions within six to 11 months, compared with three in ten (30%) in the UK. US merchants are also more convinced of the size of the shift ahead, with more than four in five (82%) saying agentic commerce will be the most disruptive force to hit their industry, versus 58% in the UK.

That confidence gap shows up in attitudes to risk. In the UK, over one in four (27%) merchants say increased disputes and chargebacks would most reduce their confidence in agentic commerce, compared with one in five (20%) in the US. UK merchants appear more cautious about the potential impact on disputes and chargebacks, while US merchants appear more willing to move ahead.

US merchants are slightly further ahead in preparation, but only by a narrow margin: 42% are preparing and testing capabilities, compared with 39% in the UK. The bigger picture is the same in both markets – merchants are trying to move fast without taking on risks they don't yet fully understand or control.

Merchant beliefs



Lower-risk sectors are moving first

From a merchant preparedness perspective, agentic commerce is gaining ground fastest in sectors where delegation feels familiar and low risk.

In the **ecommerce and retail** sectors, nearly half (45%) of merchants are actively preparing, testing, and implementing agentic capabilities, with a further 43% currently in the planning and roadmapping phase. These businesses combine high purchase frequency with relatively low decision complexity, making them well-suited to early delegation.

The **grocery and food delivery** sector is close behind, with 42% of merchants actively testing agentic commerce capabilities, and 51% in the planning stages. This sector also expects the fastest path to impact, with merchants predicting agentic commerce will account for 10% of online volume within 15 months. Frequent, lower-stakes purchases make grocery one of the clearest early use cases for delegation.

The **digital goods and services** sector is taking a more cautious approach to execution: only a third (33%) are actively testing and implementing, while the remaining 67% are still in the preparation and planning phase. While these environments are highly digitized, purchases are often less frequent or more considered, which may slow the shift from preparation to execution.

Ticketing and travel shows a clear divide between interest and action. While nearly two in five (38%) merchants are actively testing and implementing, and 47% are planning, this sector also has the highest proportion (14%) of businesses that are merely monitoring the space with no formal plan.

Testing vs. planning agentic commerce capabilities across sectors

Sector	Testing	Planning
	45%	43%
GROCERY	42%	51%
DIGITAL GOODS	33%	67%
	38%	47%

Overall, progress is following a practical pattern. Industries with repeatable, lower-risk transactions are moving fastest from experimentation to execution. Those involving less frequent or higher-consideration purchases are moving more cautiously.

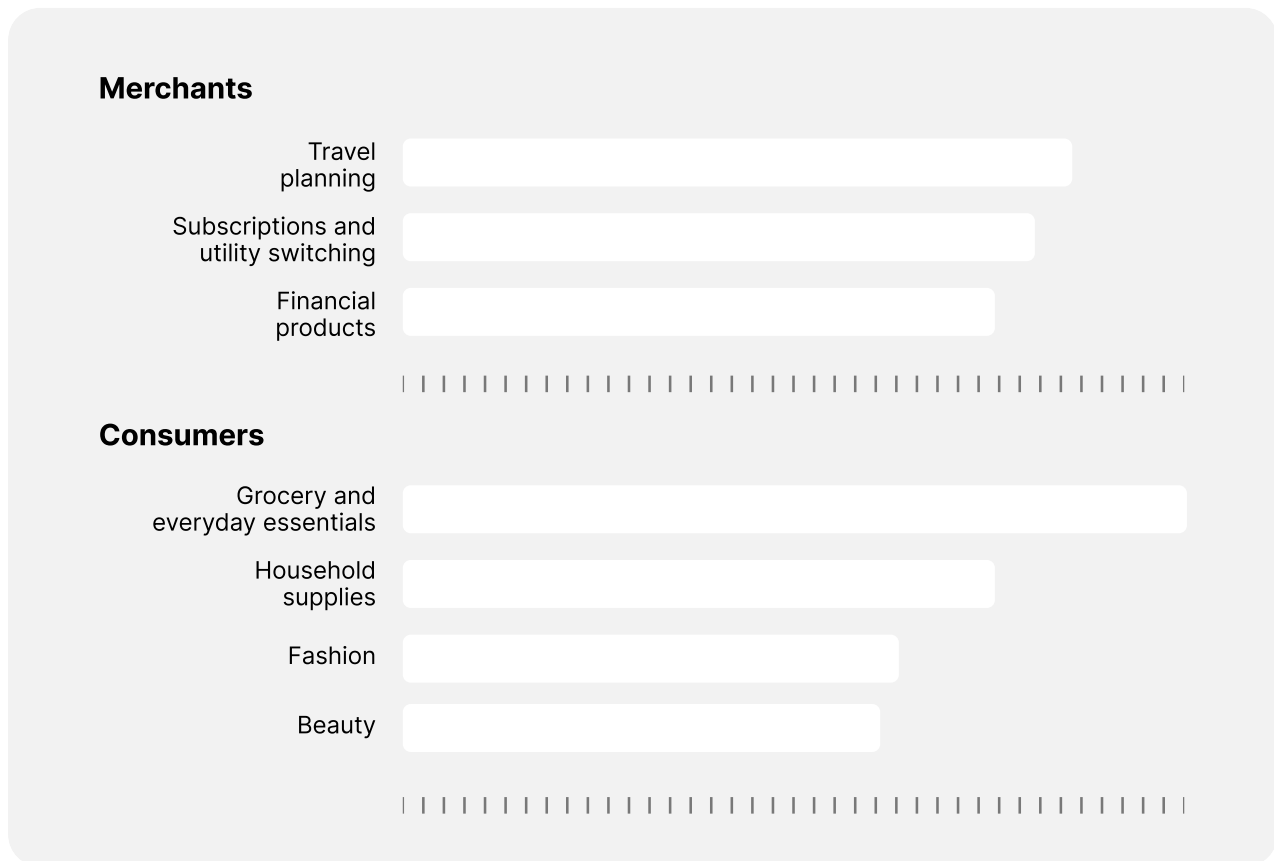


Consumers and merchants disagree on what gets delegated first

Merchants expect delegation to start in more complex, higher-value categories. Travel planning leads at 35%, followed by subscriptions and utility switching (33%) and financial products (31%). That suggests merchants see agentic commerce taking hold first in higher-value, more complex decisions.

Consumers are signalling something else. Their strongest appetite is in everyday, lower-risk purchases, led by grocery and everyday essentials at 41%, followed by household supplies (31%), fashion (26%), and beauty (25%). Consumers want agentic AI to take care of routine purchases before trusting it with bigger decisions.

**Merchants expect delegation to emerge in complex, higher-value categories.
But consumer appetite is strongest in everyday, lower-risk purchases.**



However, there are regional exceptions. Consumers in China and the UAE are more willing to delegate expensive purchases such as travel, and UAE consumers are also more open to using AI agents for financial products. But globally, consumers are more comfortable delegating repetitive purchases than complex ones.

Ambition is still ahead of infrastructure

Seven in ten (70%) merchants say agentic commerce will be the most disruptive force their industry has ever seen. But turning that potential into real-world transactions is still proving difficult.

The hardest part to hand over is the transaction itself – a process that depends on real-time pricing, inventory, delivery options, loyalty rules, returns policies, fraud controls, and regional compliance. Those variables differ across merchants, making fully autonomous purchasing difficult to deliver consistently at scale.

The bigger challenge is whether the ecosystem can prove consent and give both merchants and consumers enough control when something goes wrong. That is why agentic commerce remains in an early, experimental phase across most use cases. The direction of travel is clear, but widespread adoption will depend on how these capabilities mature.

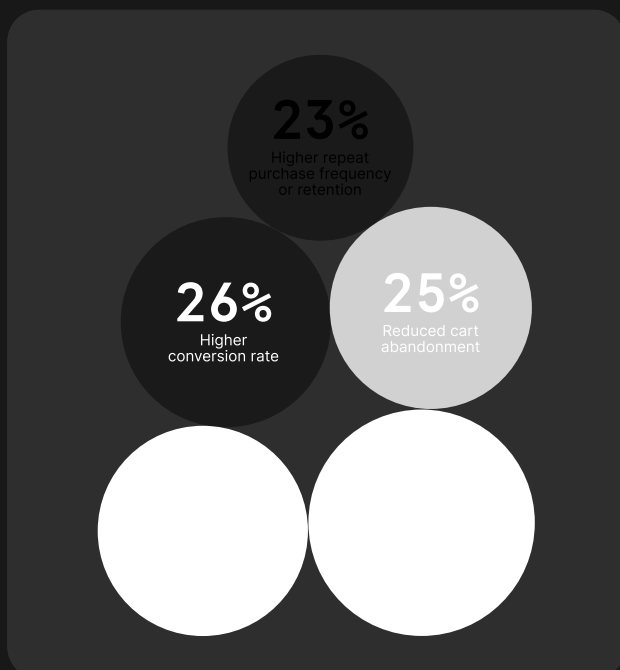
SECTION 2

WHAT DO MERCHANTS NEED BEFORE AGENTIC COMMERCE CAN SCALE?

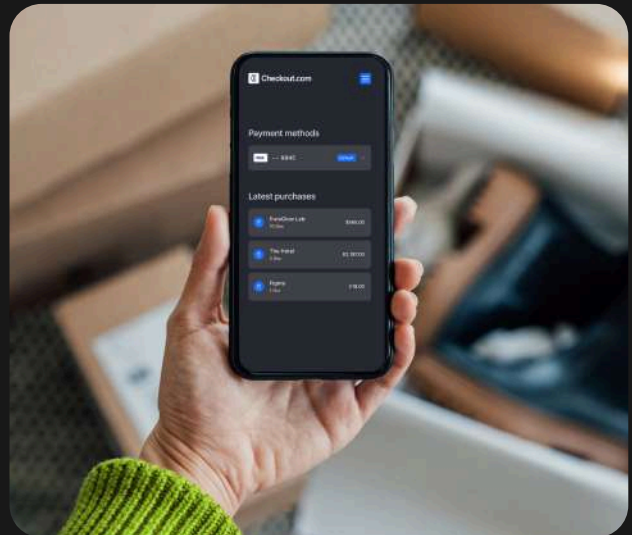
Across the UK and US, nearly nine in ten (89%) merchants say they are actively preparing for agentic commerce. But clear barriers remain – including competing priorities and limited resources (22%), liability and accountability uncertainty (21%), and difficulty proving ROI (19%).

When asked what outcomes matter most in judging the success of agent-led purchases, merchants' top responses were improved customer satisfaction (28%), higher conversion rate (26%), stable or lower chargebacks (26%), reduced cart abandonment (25%), and higher repeat purchase frequency or retention (23%).

**Merchants responses when asked:
What outcomes matter most in judging
the success of agent-led purchases?**



That shows merchants are judging agentic commerce like any other commercial channel – whether it can improve customer experience and drive performance.

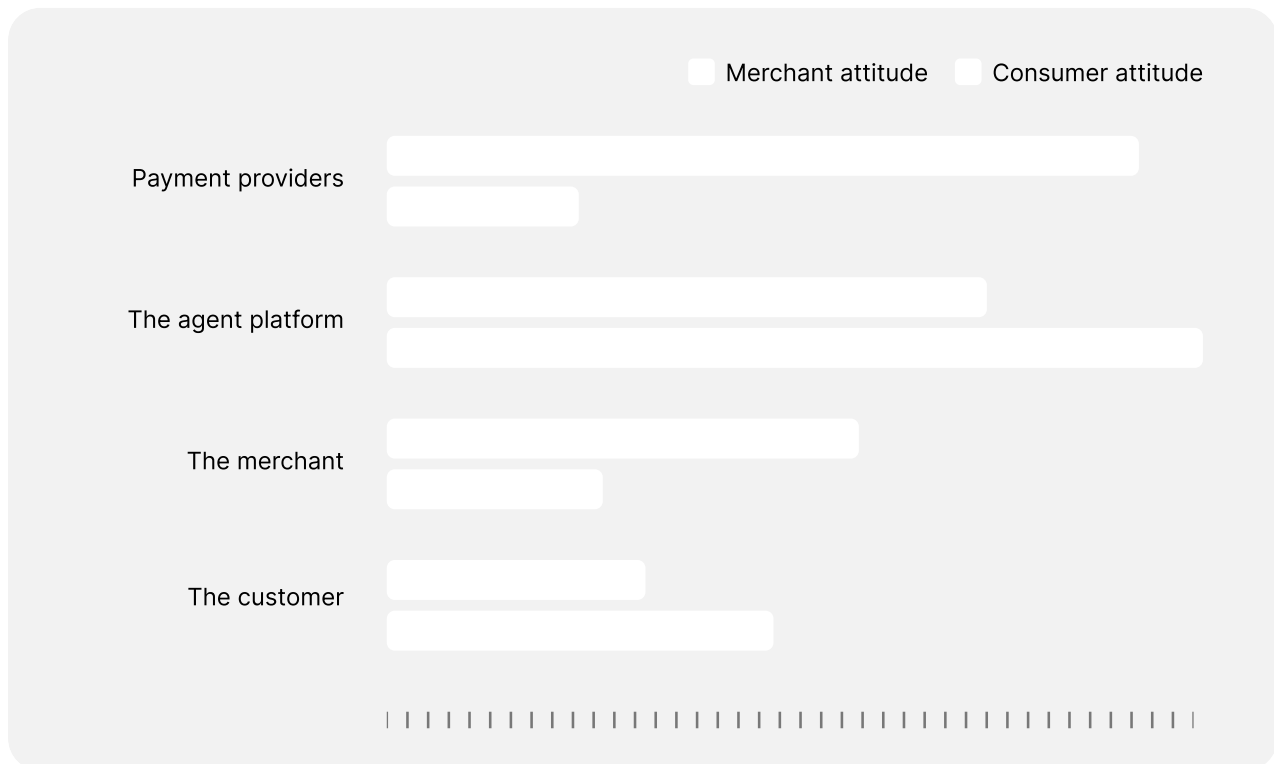


Responsibility remains unresolved

Merchants most often expect payment providers to carry the cost when an agent-led purchase is later disputed (35%), followed by the agent platform (28%), the merchant (22%), and the customer (12%).

Consumers see it differently. When asked who should be responsible for fixing a purchase made by an AI shopping agent they didn't want, the largest share pointed to the agent platform (38%), followed by the customer (18%), the merchant (10%), and the payment provider (9%).

Merchant vs. consumer attitudes: Which party is responsible for fixing incorrect purchases and handling disputes?



Merchants most often expect the payment provider to absorb the cost. Consumers most often expect the agent platform to fix the problem. For a model built on delegated decision-making, responsibility is still unclear across the ecosystem.

This does not mean liability should simply shift to payment providers. It shows why the ecosystem needs stronger proof of consent, clearer accountability frameworks and transaction evidence that can support dispute resolution when something goes wrong.

US merchants want infrastructure, while UK merchants want assurance

US and UK merchants point to different factors that would most accelerate their businesses' readiness for agentic commerce.

In the US, the strongest accelerators are more operational. Better product standards, such as structured catalogs and substitutions rank first at 27%, followed by agentic commerce protocols, including OpenAI's ACP and Google's UCP, at 24%. That suggests US merchants are focused on the practical building blocks needed to enable machine-to-machine commerce.

In the UK, the picture is different. The top factors that would accelerate readiness are clear liability frameworks between parties (28%) and proven customer uptake and conversion upside (28%). Agentic commerce protocols fall to 14%, while better product data standards reach 19%. This suggests UK merchants are looking for stronger protections and clearer evidence of commercial value before moving faster.

US merchants are more focused on the infrastructure needed to support agentic commerce, while UK merchants are more focused on reducing risk and proving the case for investment. This contrast reflects how early the market still is.

Trust depends on consent and liability

The biggest barrier to scale is trust. More specifically, whether the ecosystem can prove consent and assign accountability when something goes wrong. Merchants have been clear about what they need – confidence that a customer really authorized the purchase, clarity on who is liable when they didn't, and enough identity assurance to know the agent is acting for the right person.

This challenge isn't new. Our report, [MENA Digital Commerce 2026: The New Era of AI in Payments](#), highlights the same issue: the ecosystem must redefine what "verified" looks like when the buyer is an autonomous agent. Solving this will require stronger, portable forms of digital identity that can act as a trust anchor in agent-led transactions.

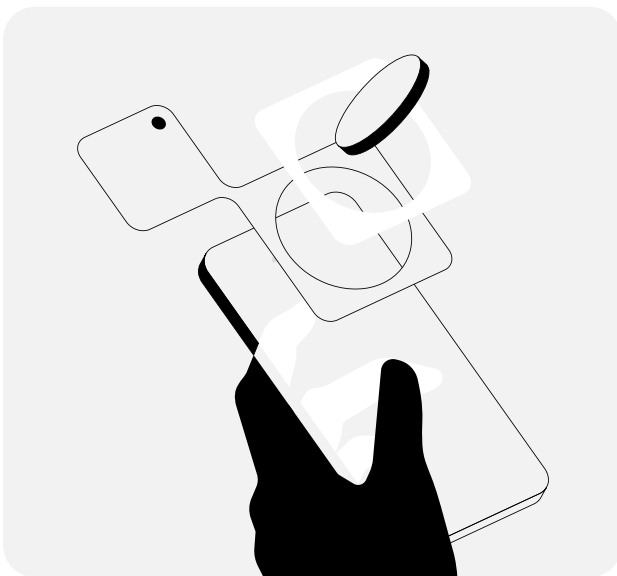
Authentication is a significant factor in agentic commerce viability, because of regulations in various regions. Strong Customer Authentication applies to merchants acquiring funds within the European Economic Area, under the Revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2). Similar legislation limits agentic activity in the United Arab Emirates and Brazil, with even stronger restrictions in China. That said, progress is still being made. In March 2026, Banco Santander and Mastercard completed Europe's first live payment executed by an AI agent within a controlled environment using Mastercard Agent Pay. The transition from PSD2 to PSD3, and the analogous rollout of the Payment Services Regulation this year may enable the expansion of "trusted beneficiaries" to potentially allow AI agents to make repeated purchases without the need for human authentication each time.

Merchants won't solve this alone – and that's where Checkout.com comes in. Across the UK and US, more than three quarters (76%) agree that payment providers will play a decisive role in making agentic commerce safe and scalable.



SECTION 3

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN DOUBT AND OPPORTUNITY?



Consumers want control while merchants want proof

Consumers are hesitating because the risks of agentic commerce feel immediate and personal.

The biggest confidence killers are personal or payment data being misused (38%), falling victim to a scam or compromised account (38%), and buying something they didn't authorize (36%). The main question in consumers' minds is what happens when something goes wrong?

The biggest confidence killers

38%

Personal or payment
data being misused

38%

Falling victim to a scam
or compromised account

36%

Buying something they
didn't authorize

Consumers and merchants are approaching the same problem from different angles. Consumers want protection, and merchants want proof. The shared issue is accountability – who is responsible, and how can that responsibility be evidenced when something goes wrong?

Post-purchase friction matters more than merchants think

That disconnect also shows up in how each side views the purchase journey. Much of the attention today is on authorization and consent, with a quarter (25%) of consumers saying they would stop using an AI agent if a purchase was difficult to return or dispute. Yet merchants place returns, refunds, and post-purchase service complexity close to the bottom of the factors slowing their preparation, at 16%.

Visible safeguards will shape trust

Trust will depend on safeguards consumers can see and use.

Globally, consumers say the most non-negotiable controls before letting an AI shopping agent buy on their behalf are a spending cap (30%), the ability to revoke permission instantly (29%), an easy cancellation or reversal window (28%), approval above a threshold (27%), and a requirement to show options before buying (26%).

Globally, consumers say the most non-negotiable controls before letting an AI shopping agent buy on their behalf are:



Consumers want transparency and the ability to step in. Merchants recognize that too. Three quarters (75%) say giving customers the real-time ability to revoke permissions matters to the success of an agentic commerce program. Consumers also expect clearer boundaries around who should be allowed to use these tools.

And when it comes to age restrictions, more than three quarters (77%) of consumers believe you should have to be over 18 to complete purchases using an AI shopping agent. That points to a broader expectation that agentic commerce should come with clear thresholds and strong controls around who can use it.

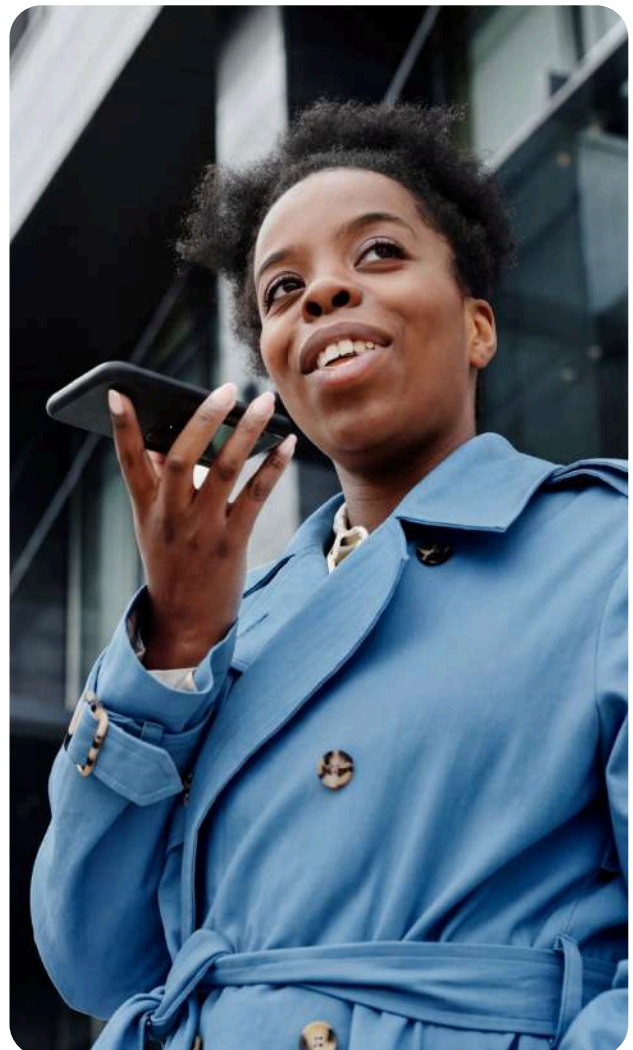
The opportunity for brands if trust is earned

AI has the potential to reshape how brands compete at the point of purchase. More than half (57%) of consumers say they would let AI switch brands for better value, while one in five (20%) want AI to make sure they never miss a better deal. Consumers in the UAE (71%), China (68%), and Brazil (65%) are more open towards AI switching brands on their behalf in search of a better deal, while consumers in the UK (46%) and France (43%) remain more protective of established brand preferences.

This creates a new competitive dynamic. When AI agents begin selecting products on a shopper's behalf, established brand preferences may be deprioritized in favor of factors such as price, product quality, reviews, availability, and returns policies. In agent-led journeys, products that are easier for AI systems to discover and compare may gain an advantage.

For merchants, that creates both risk and opportunity. Businesses that invest early in structured product data and agent-ready infrastructure may be better positioned as consumers begin delegating more purchasing decisions to AI agents. Those that delay may find it harder to compete for visibility as agent-led discovery evolves.

Over time, as agentic commerce matures and adoption becomes more widespread, brand advantage may evolve rather than disappear. In AI-mediated environments, visibility, machine-readable product data, and post-purchase experience may become increasingly important in shaping loyalty and repeat purchase behavior.



Conclusion

Agentic commerce will create new growth opportunities for merchants and new levels of convenience and service for consumers, but the infrastructure required to support it safely and reliably is still developing.

The market remains in an experimental phase, with emerging protocols and platforms exploring different approaches to discovery, delegation, authentication, and transaction orchestration. For merchants, the priority is not choosing a single winning protocol, but operating effectively across a fragmented ecosystem. That means maintaining control, acceptance and conversion, wherever agentic demand originates. As a result, merchants should remain infrastructure and protocol agnostic where possible while standards, commercial models, and interoperability continue to evolve.

Questions around liability and accountability also remain unresolved. As AI agents become more capable of acting autonomously on behalf of consumers, the industry is still defining who is responsible when something goes wrong, how consent should be evidenced, and how trust can be maintained across agent-led transactions. At the same time, the infrastructure supporting agentic commerce remains highly fragmented. Competing protocols are emerging without clear interoperability standards, product data is often inconsistent or not structured for machine consumption, and many legacy commerce systems were not designed for continuous, agent-led purchasing journeys.

As the ecosystem evolves, merchants should avoid locking themselves into a single infrastructure, while focusing on three foundational priorities to prevent being excluded from the consideration set:

- Make your catalog agent-readable with highly structured product feeds, rich metadata, and clear pricing. Both ACP and UCP depend on accurate, machine-readable product data, and merchants that are easier for AI systems to interpret may be easier to recommend.
- Ensure payment infrastructure can support delegated and agent-initiated transactions as new models emerge, including tokenization, secure credential storage, and the ability to support evolving transaction flows without becoming locked into a single protocol or provider during the experimentation phase.
- Define clear policies for agent behavior including permissions, spend controls, category restrictions, dispute handling, and explicit customer consent frameworks. As agentic commerce develops, trust, accountability, and consumer control will become increasingly important to long-term adoption.

Agentic commerce is moving forward, but the ecosystem is still defining what scalable, trusted agent-led commerce will look like in practice. The merchants best positioned for that future may not be those that commit earliest to a single platform or protocol, but those building the flexibility to adapt as infrastructure, standards, and consumer expectations continue to evolve.

Methodology

This report is based on two surveys carried out by Censuswide on behalf of Checkout.com

1) Survey carried out 25.02.26 - 02.03.26 with 400 Heads of Payment at consumer-facing businesses in the UK and USA

2) Survey carried out 02.03.2026 - 09.03.2026 with 12,005 consumers in the UK, US, Brazil, China, France, UAE aged 18+.

