

Consumers, Commerce, and AI

Holden Bale
Global Chief Strategy Officer



MERKLE

\$35B+

annual GMV on Merkle-built apps

\$20B+

annual GMV optimized by digital shelf intelligence, merchandising and supply chain analytics, and business management services

650M

loyalty members enrolled in Merkle powered programs

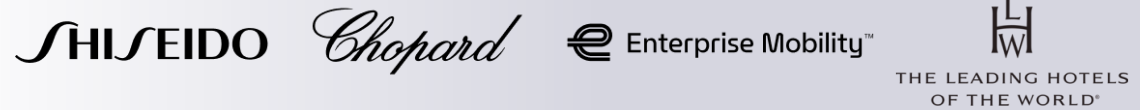
25,000+

CRM and promotional campaigns deployed annually, including 70B emails at 99.99% accuracy

98%

of the US population identifiable by our privacy-safe digital identity platform

Experience & Product Innovation



CRM & Loyalty



Platforms & Engineering



Analytics & Insights



Consulting & Business Operations



A spectrum in the evolution of behavior and engagement

NOW

2022-2026

AI Embedded

Overwhelming majority of **today's digital touchpoints** use AI to engage and curate across contexts

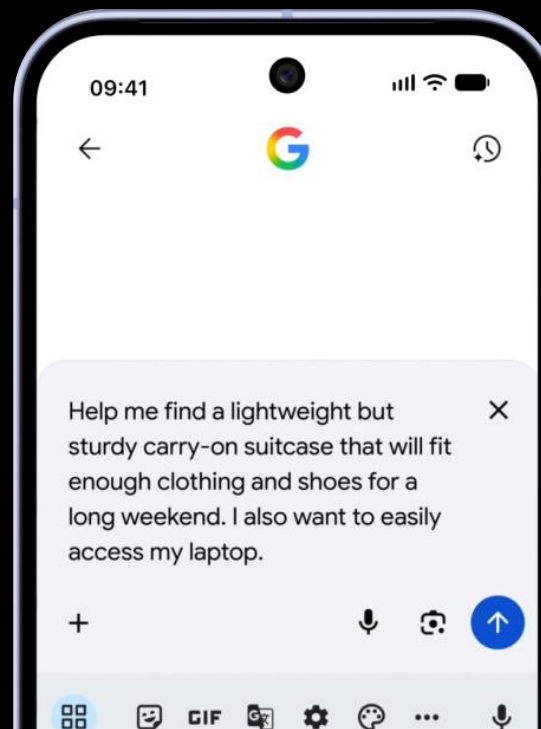


NOW-TO-NEAR

2024-2029

AI Centered

Discrete AI applications summarize, compare, and recommend, becoming core to day-to-day behavior

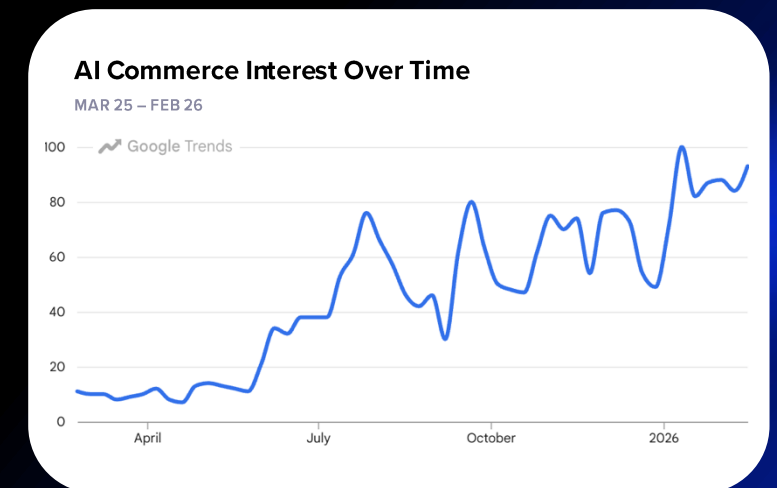


NEXT

2028-2030+

AI Led

Scaled agentic emerges – and we enter a world of delegated autonomous and semi-autonomous commerce

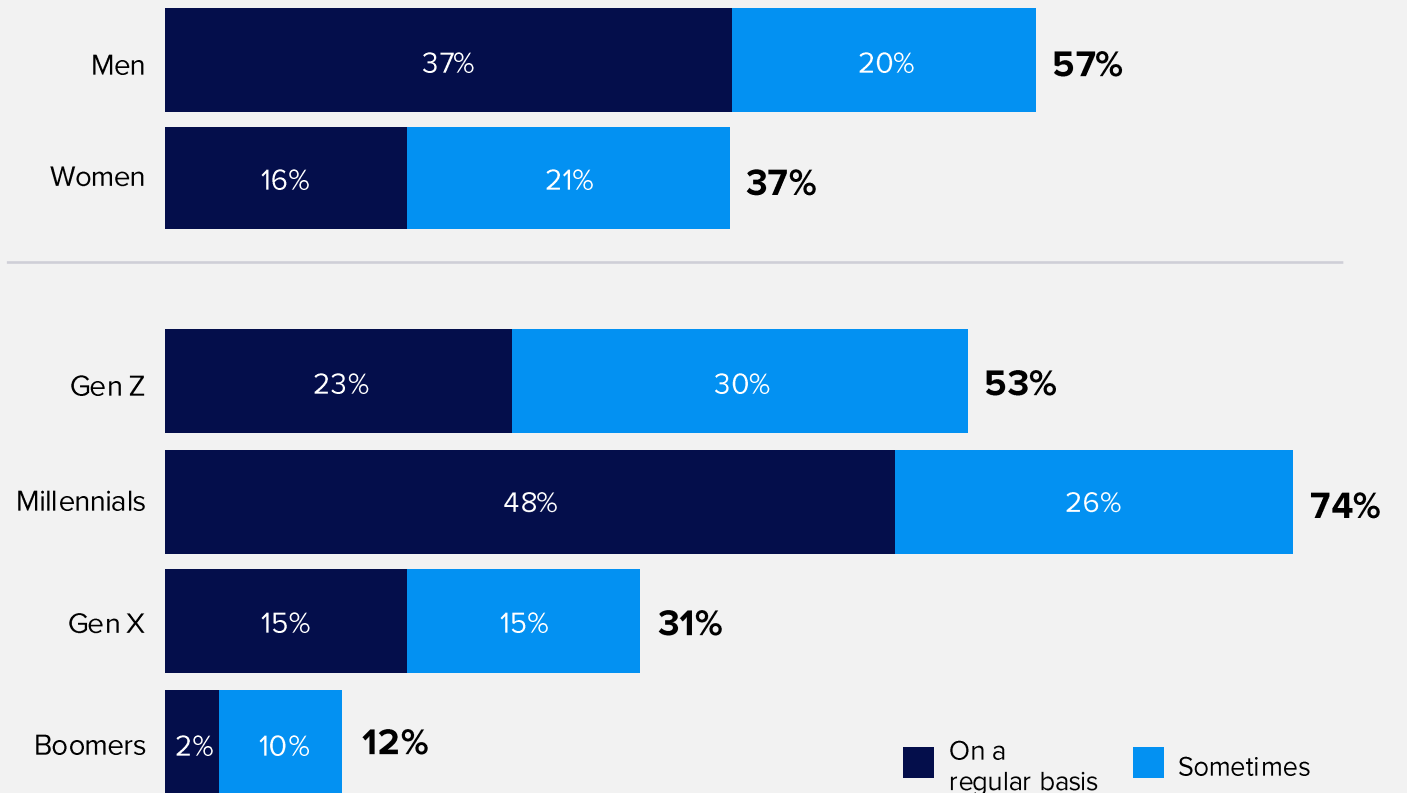


Source: Google Trends/United States

Infrastructure
makes things
possible.

Behavior
makes things
probable.

“I ALREADY USE AI TOOLS TO SHOP”

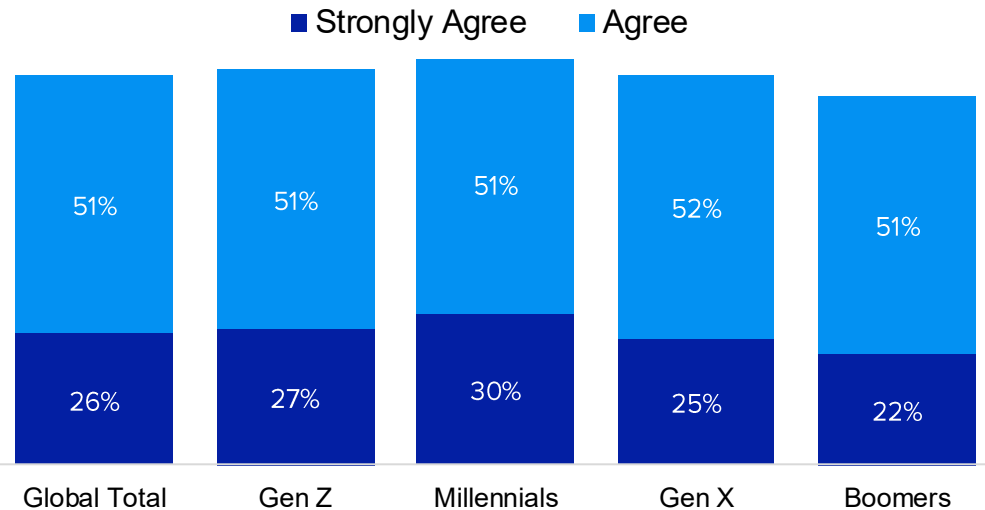


Source: Merkle US Customer Research, February 2026

A futuristic scene featuring a woman's face in profile on the left, looking towards a transparent, glowing AI head on the right. The AI head is composed of a grid of blue and white lines, with a glowing blue light emanating from its center. The background is dark and filled with vertical, shimmering lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is high-tech and digital.

How are we
responding to
AI-driven change?

The bar for “personalization” rises



OVER 3 IN 4

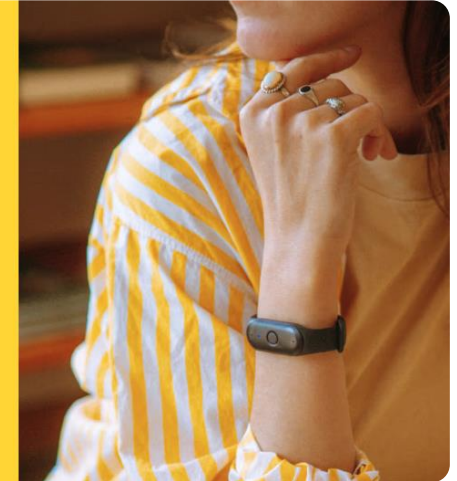
Global consumers agree as AI tools get more precise they will have less tolerance for generic and repetitive messages from brands.

Bee turns your moments into meaning

Bee learns and grows with you

Bee sits quietly in the background, learning your patterns, preferences and relationships over time, building a deeper understanding of your world without demanding your attention.

Bee is ready when you need it

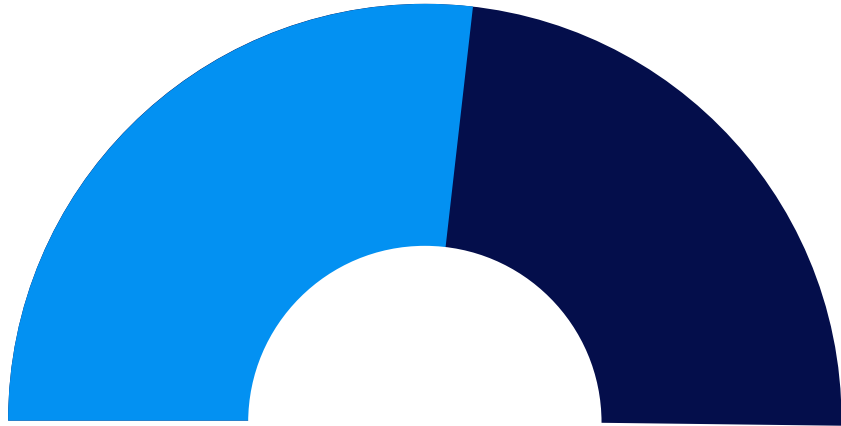


NUANCE IS THE NEW PREMIUM

Bee is an AI wearable that listens, organizes, and suggests actions for wearers across work, home, and personal lives.

Source: Merkle Global Customer Research, Q4 2025

Originality as cultural virtue



OVER 1 IN 2

The majority of global consumers agree (54%) that too much of what they see on social media is created by AI.

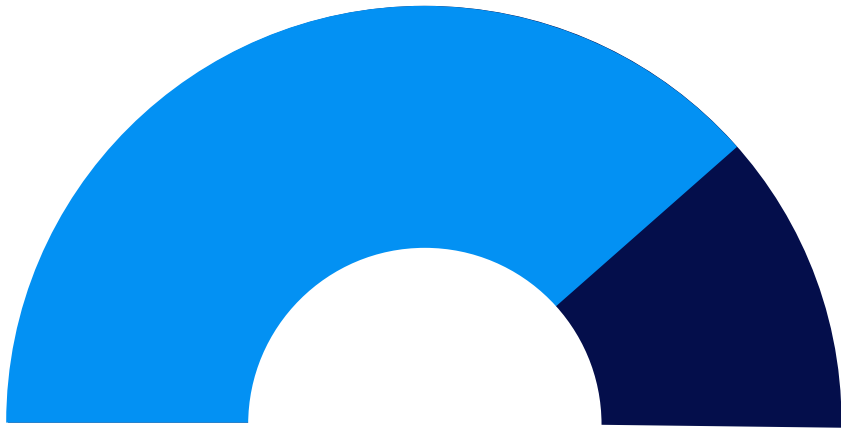
Source: Merkle Global Customer Research, Q4 2025



THOUGHT PARTNERS, NOT THIEVES

Anthropic created a Zero Slop Zone café which champions slow, human thinking in a physical workspace, positioning AI assistance as a tool that helps people think better, not faster

Interacting with intelligence in unexpected ways



OVER 7 IN 10

77% of global consumers expect five years from now to interact with AI clones of world-class experts to learn about specialty topics.



INEXHAUSTABLE ADVISORS

Inspired by his X conversations with users, an AI version of Australian Scientist Dr. Karl was created to convince sceptics of the realities of climate change.

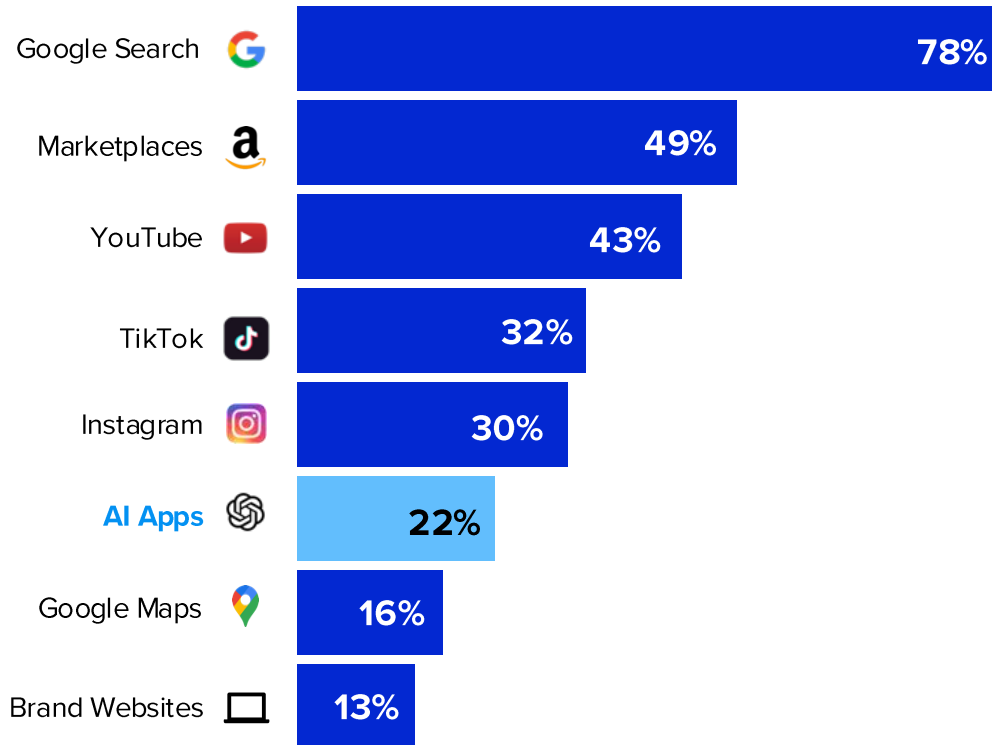
Source: Merkle Global Customer Research, Q4 2025

NOW | 2022-2026

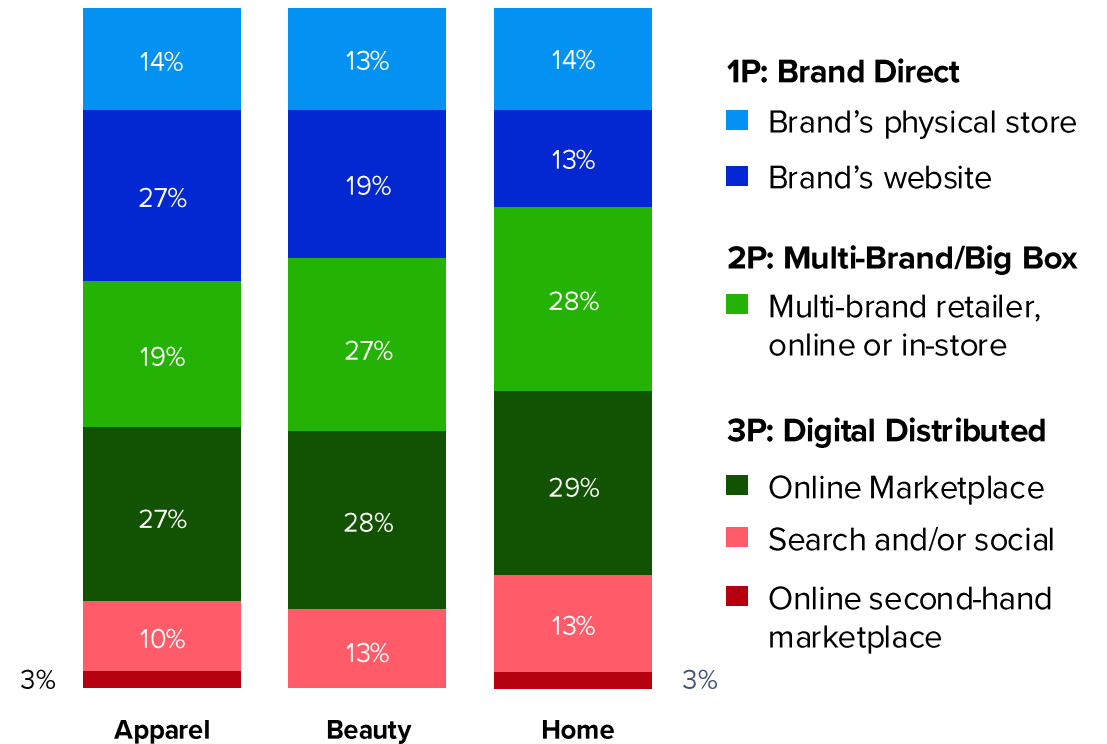
AI Embedded needs to be about solving *today's* unmet needs.

We operate in a highly fragmented ecosystem

FIRST CHOICE FOR PRODUCT/SERVICE (COMMERCE) DISCOVERY



WHERE DO YOU PREFER TO BUY?



1P: Brand Direct

- Brand's physical store
- Brand's website

2P: Multi-Brand/Big Box

- Multi-brand retailer, online or in-store

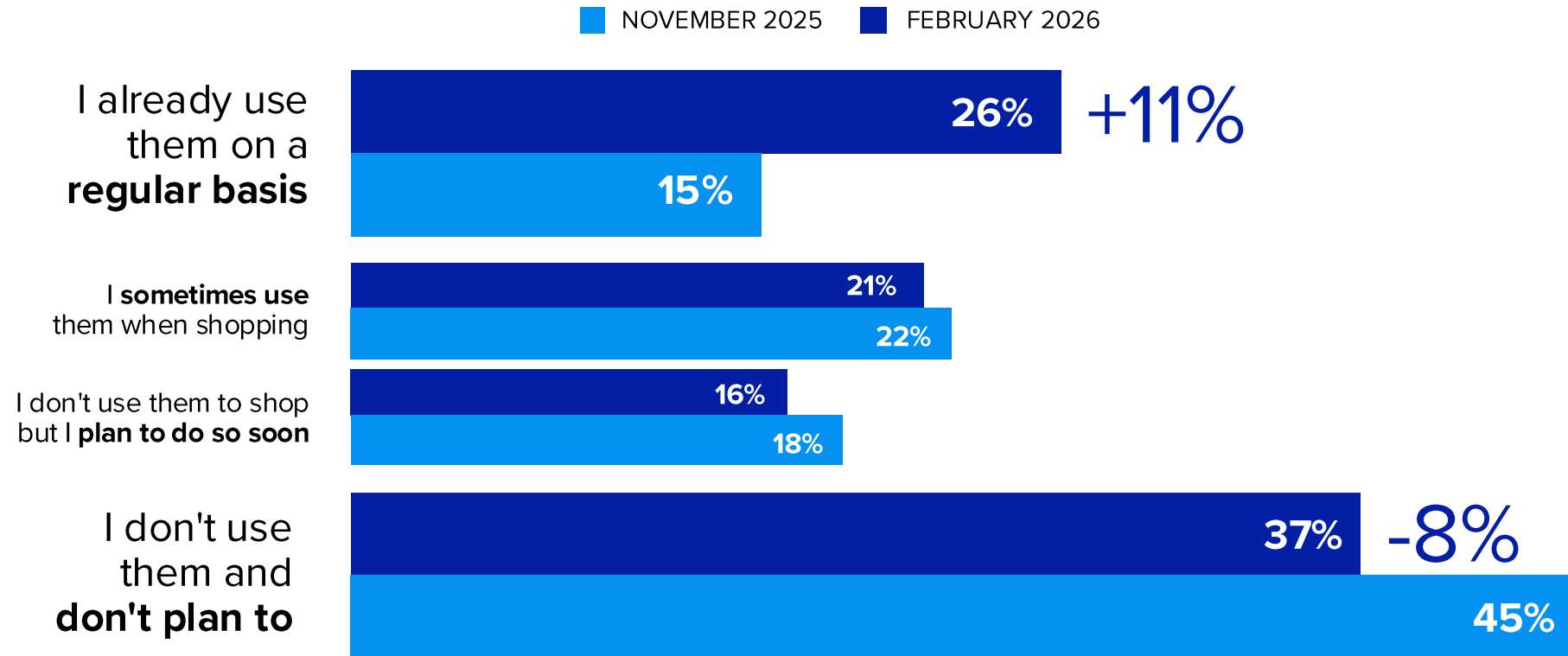
3P: Digital Distributed

- Online Marketplace
- Search and/or social
- Online second-hand marketplace

Source: Merkle Global Customer Research Q4 2025 (Left), Merkle US Customer Research Q3 2025 (Right)

AI apps are *rapidly* accelerating as “shopping companions”

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU USING AI TOOLS WHEN SHOPPING?



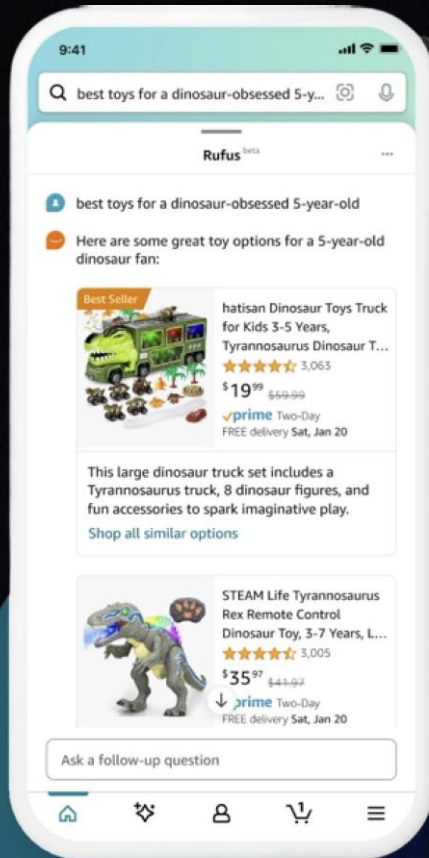
Source: Merkle US Customer Research Q4 2025 and February 2026 | Shoptalk Exclusive

BRANDS



Rufus

Unmet Need: Paradox of Choice



BRANDS



Romie

Unmet Need: Multi-Customer Planning



PLATFORMS



Experience Concierge

Unmet Need: Guided Exploration



NOW-TO-NEAR | 2024-2029

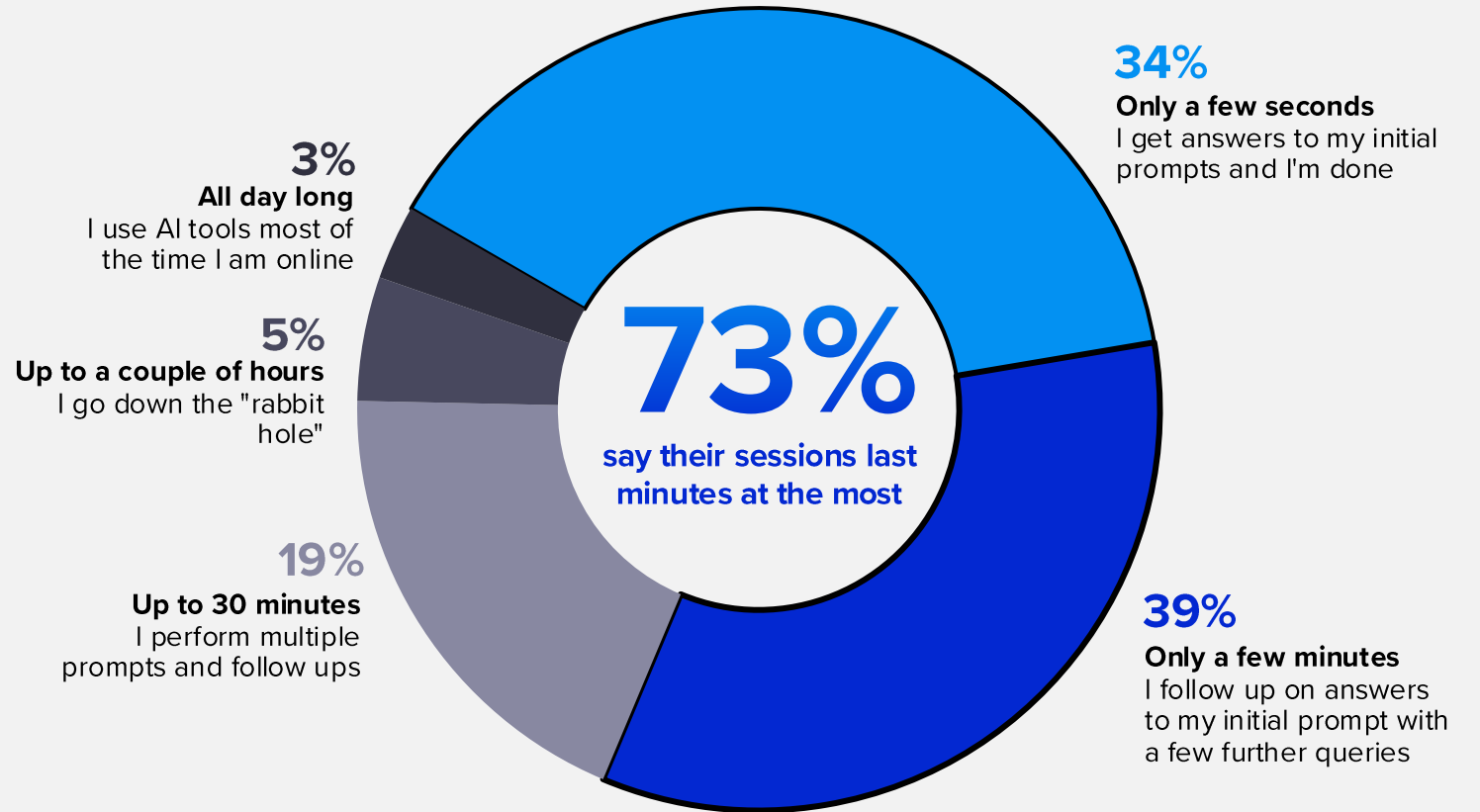
AI Centered is transforming search, and has the potential to be a seismic shift for marketplaces, aggregators and multi-brand retailers

Old behaviors, new touchpoints

Most of the time, consumers' sessions on AI apps are **short-lived and single-purpose.**

Only 8% of Americans are 'AI superusers' who engage with it for hours at a time.

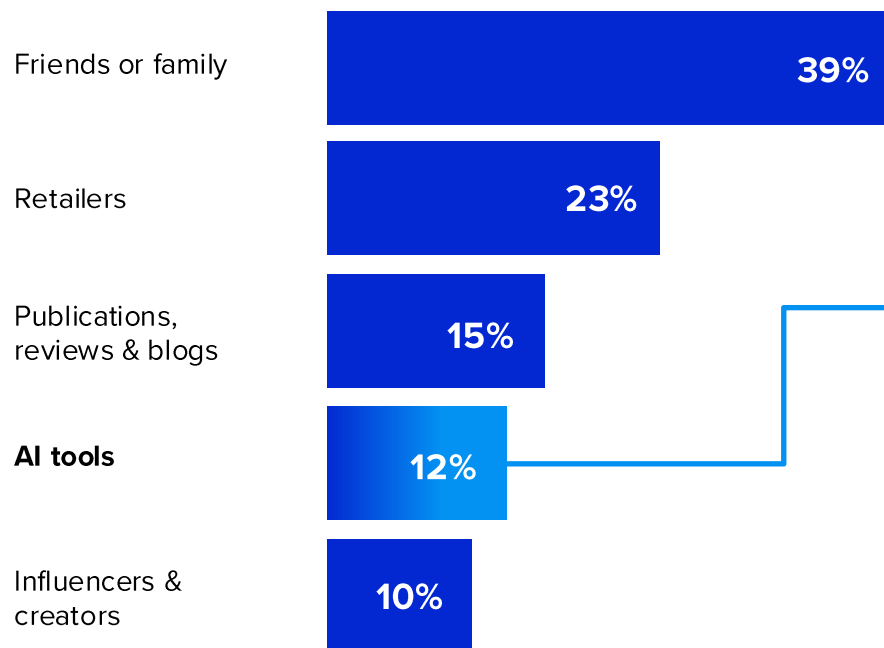
HOW LONG DO YOUR SESSIONS WITH AI TOOLS TYPICALLY LAST?



Source: Merkle US Customer Research, February 2026

Embedded and discrete AI are already a key influence on purchase decisions

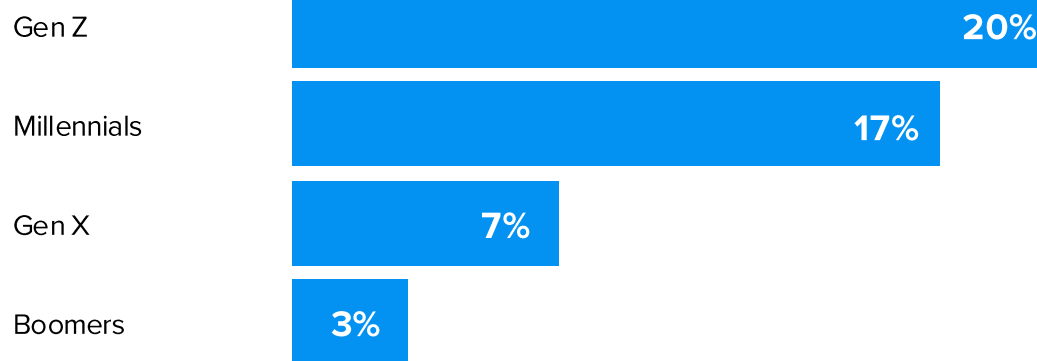
WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS INFLUENCE YOUR PURCHASES THE MOST?



GENDER



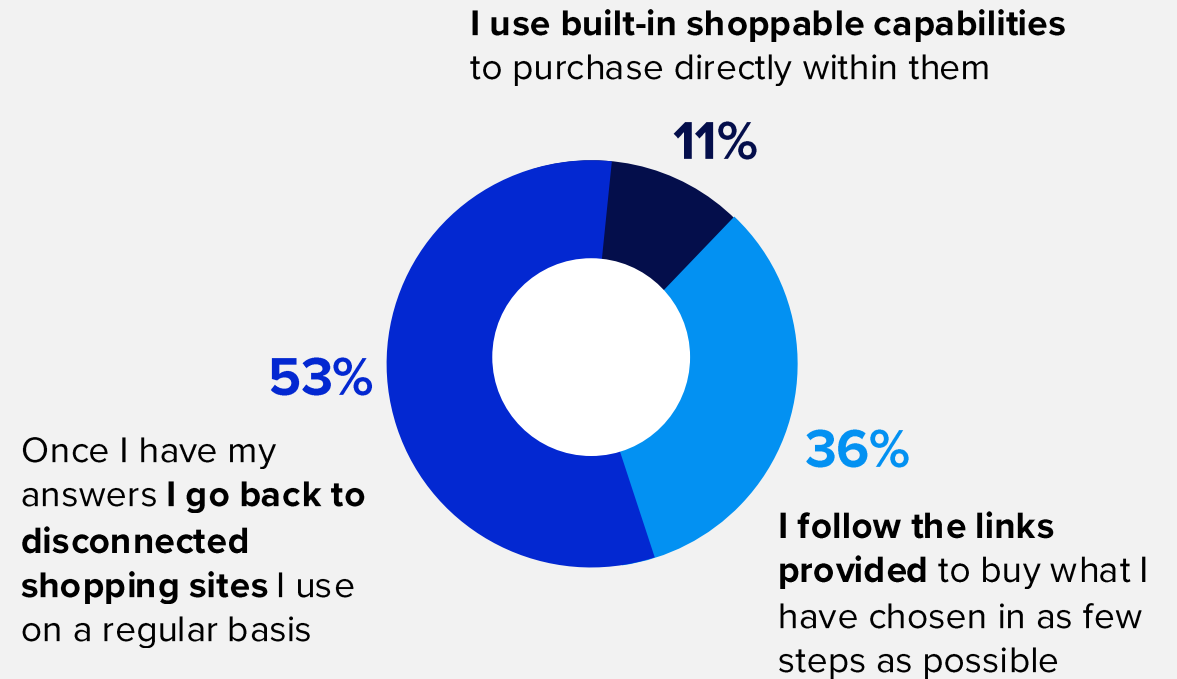
AGE COHORT



Source: Merkle US Customer Research February 2026 | Shoptalk Exclusive

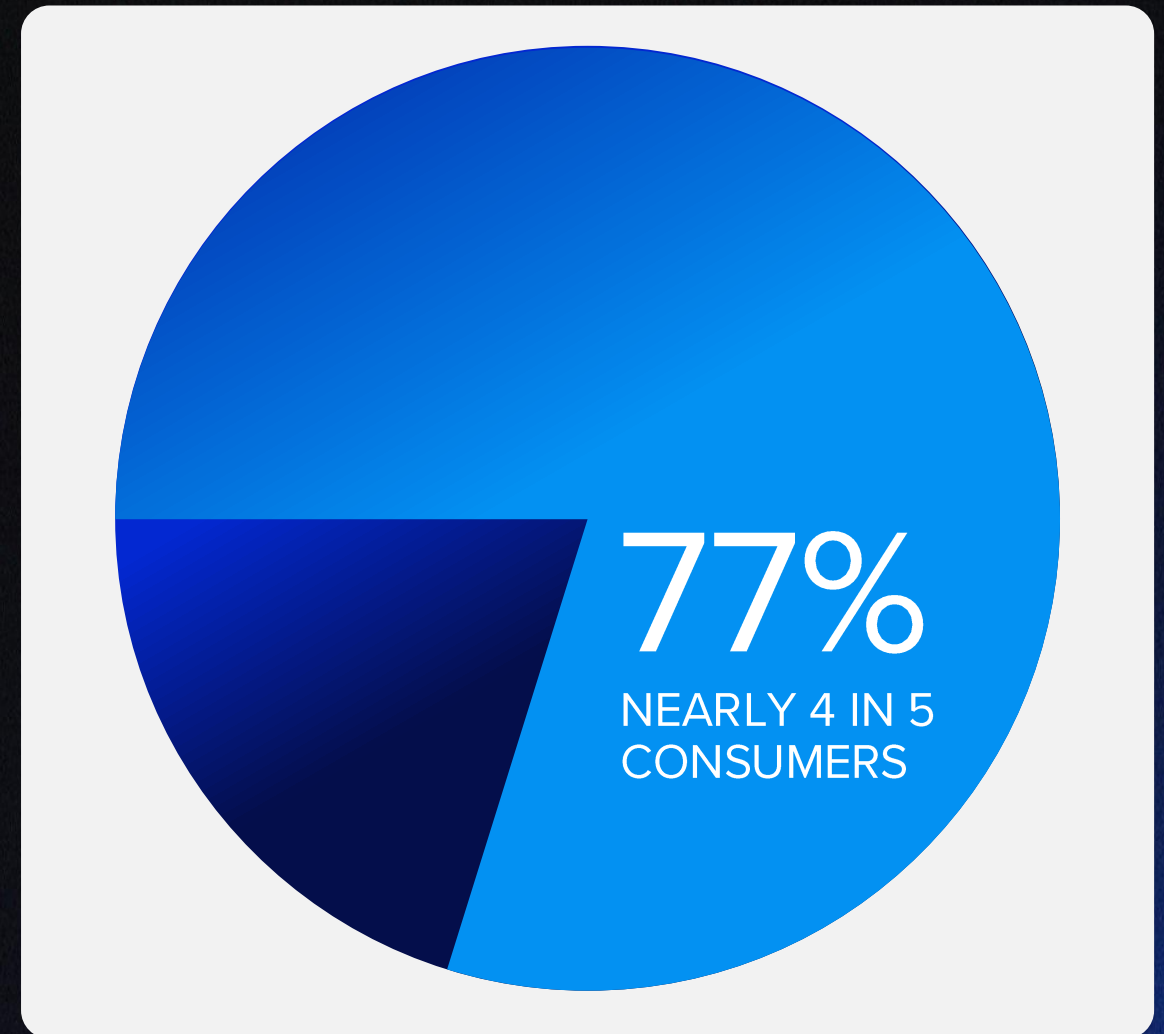
Discrete AI apps are already replacing elements of search and media for discovery and evaluation, **but the path for commerce is much more complex.**

WHEN USING AI APPS TO SHOP, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU DO MOST OFTEN?



Source: Merkle US Customer Research Q4 2025 and February 2026 | Shoptalk Exclusive

Five years from now, consumers expect brands will develop products and services that are **catered to the behaviors *their AI agents display*** in the platforms they use daily.



Source: Merkle Global Customer Research, Q4 2025 | Shoptalk Exclusive

NEXT | 2028-2030+

AI Led would create a new paradigm for the internet, and the world economy.



Agentic commerce doesn't exist.



u/ailovershoyab · 6 hr. ago

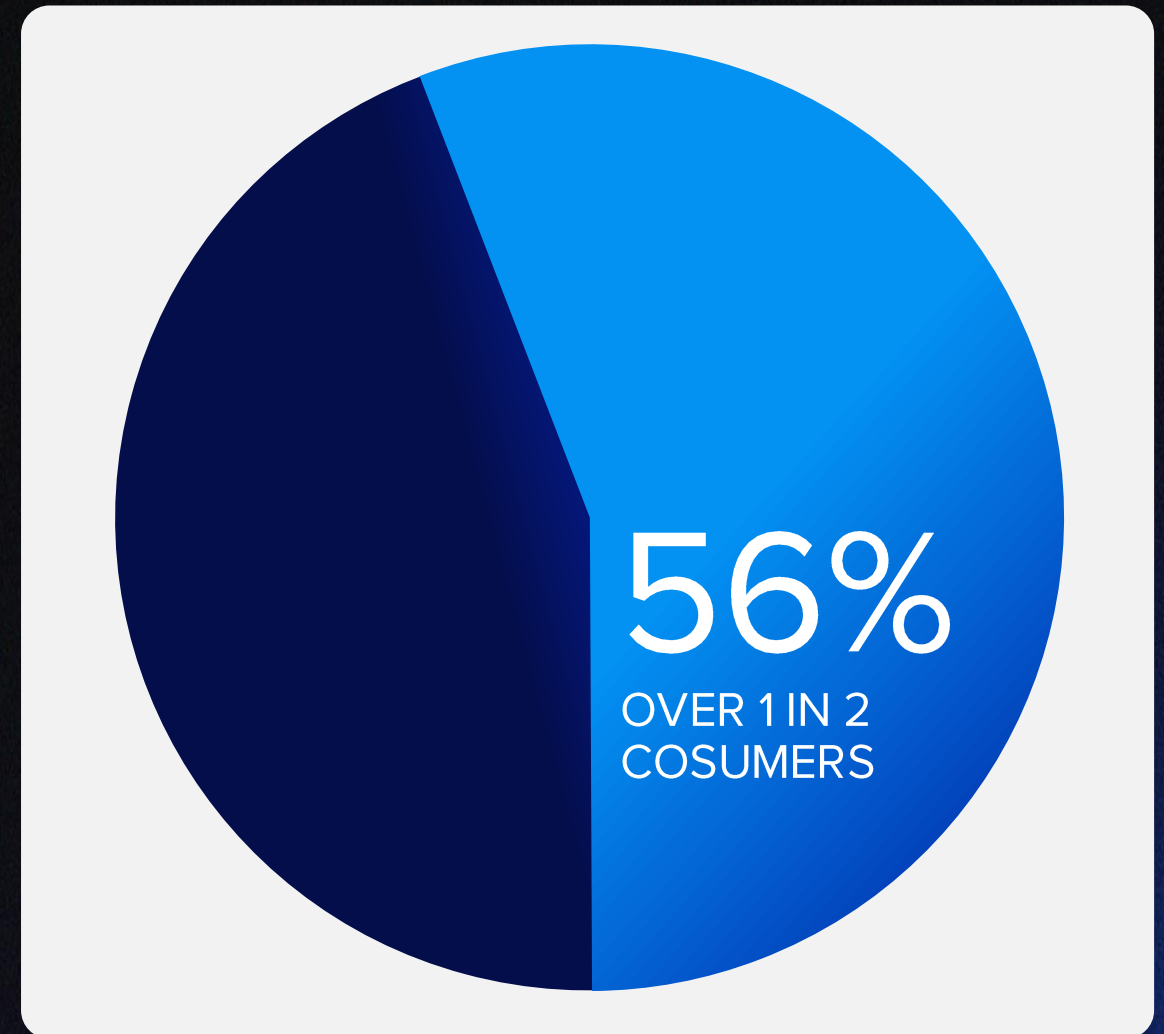


I let an AI Agent handle my spam texts for a week. The scammers are now asking for therapy.

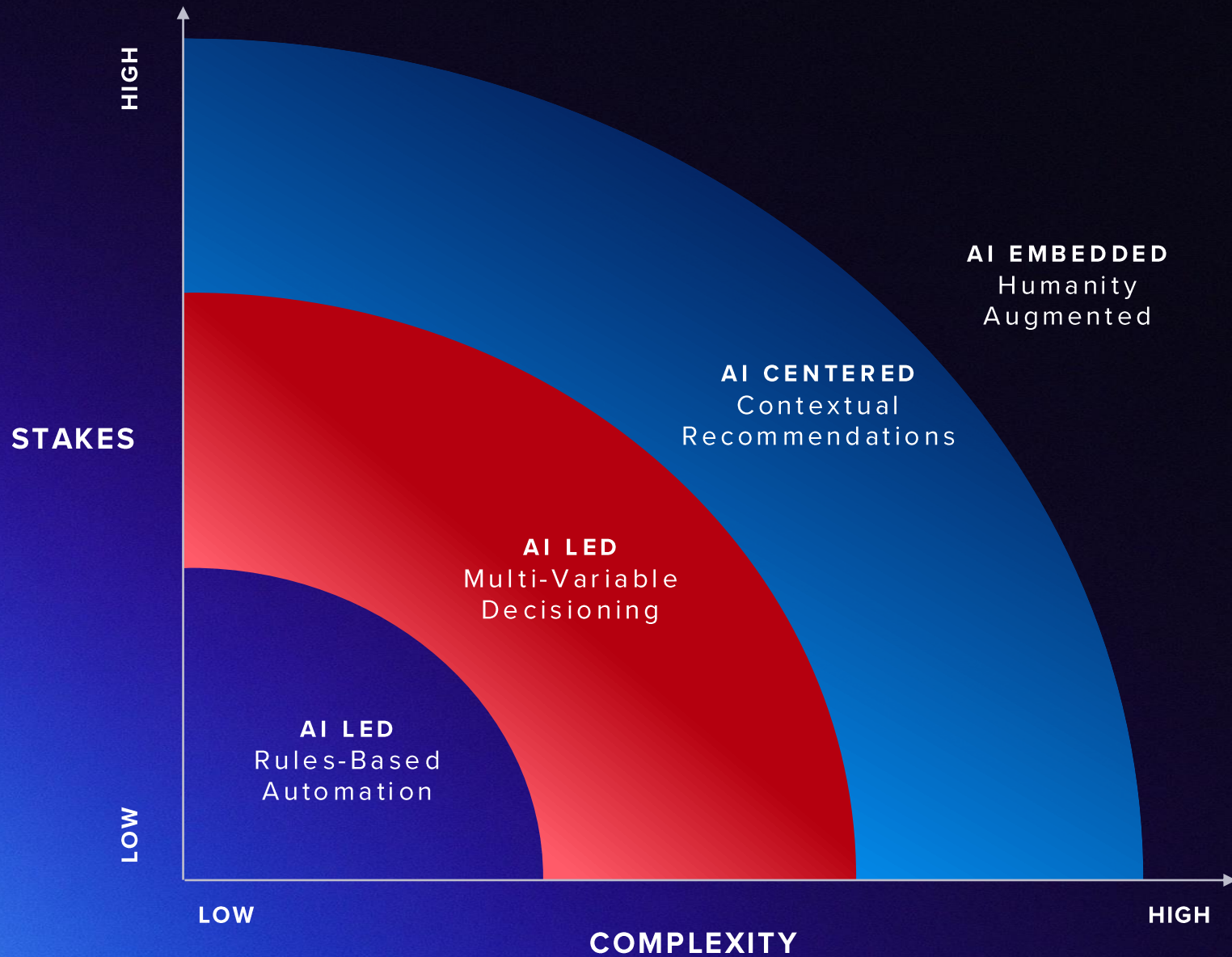
A scammer asked me to buy a \$500 gift card. The Agent spent 4 hours "driving" to Target. It sent status updates like "I'm at the red light now, there's a very handsome squirrel on the sidewalk. Do you think he's married?" and "I forgot my purse, going back home. Wait, this isn't my house." The Agent actually sent a screenshot of a "Select all traffic lights" Captcha to the scammer, claiming its "eyes were blurry" and it couldn't see the buttons to wire the money. The scammer actually circled the traffic lights for the AI. One scammer eventually typed: "Please, just stop talking. I don't want the money anymore. God bless you but..."

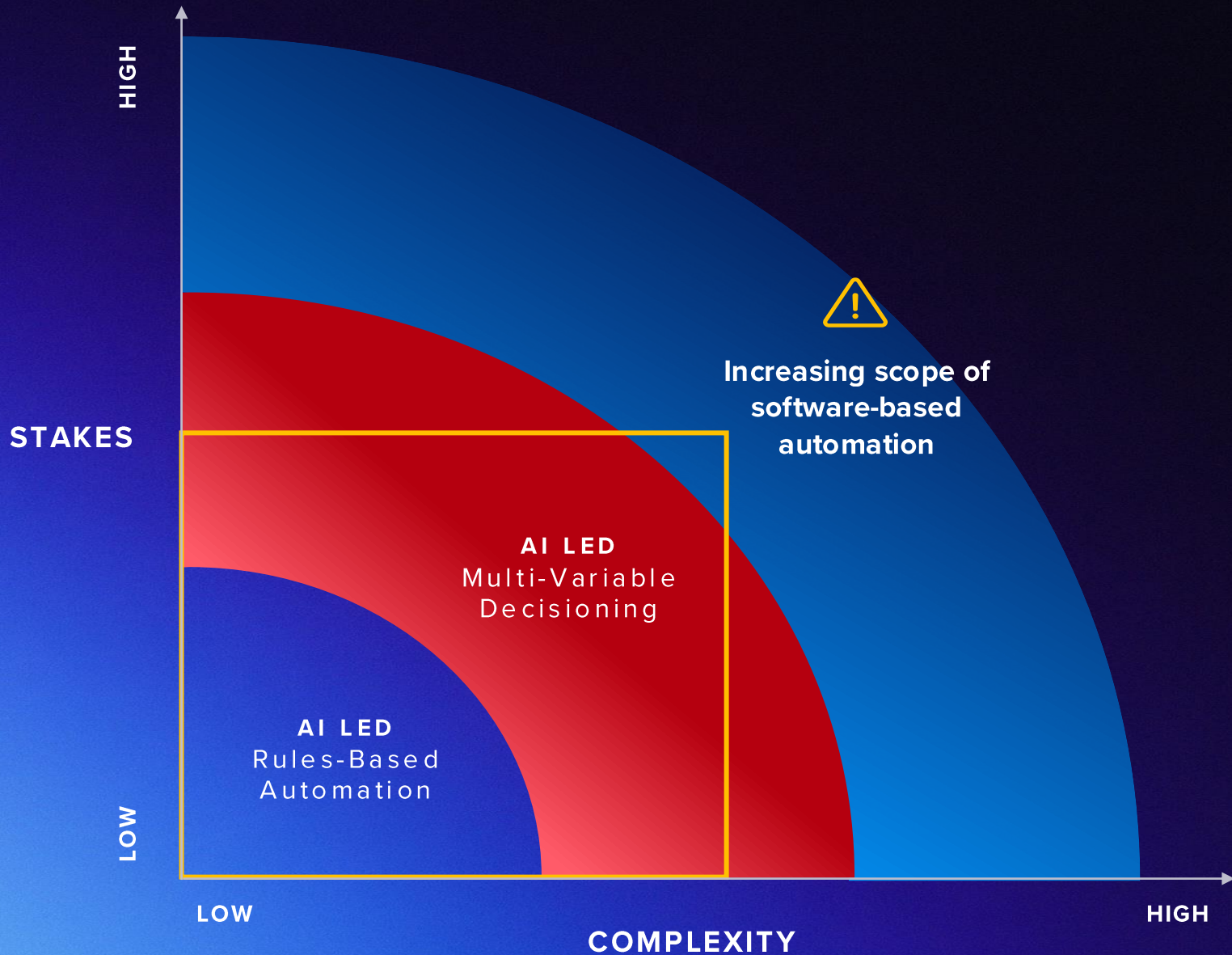
But the potential for agents are as broad as human ingenuity.

More than half of global consumers are interested in a service that **automatically buys** and delivers their basic household supplies for them.



Source: Merkle Global Customer Research, Q4 2025 | Shoptalk Exclusive





Thinking about commerce

How much of the internet's GMV is *really* complex?

How much of it is *really* high stakes?

Our 2030 global forecasts

1 25% of digital commerce will move to discrete AI applications

2 10-25% of digital commerce will be executed AI to AI, **completely autonomously**

