2026

Global Digital Shopping Index

The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive

Payment Infrastructure and the Path to Trust for Merchants

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Payment Infrastructure and the Path to Trust for Merchants

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2026 Global Digital Shopping Index: The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive was commissioned by Visa Acceptance Solutions, a Visa company, and PYMNTS Intelligence is grateful for the company's support and insight. • This report draws on three parallel surveys fielded across the United States, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates in early 2026: 5,241 consumers, 1,185 merchants, and 150 acquirers. To learn more about our data, refer to the methodology at the end of this report. • PYMNTS Intelligence retains full editorial control over the following content, findings, methodology, and data analysis. • Neither PYMNTS nor Visa makes representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied, regarding the correctness, accuracy, completeness, adequacy, or reliability of or the use of or results that may be generated from the use of the information.

What's at Stake

Two years ago, ChatGPT barely registered as a shopping tool. Today, 30% of consumers use it to research products before buying, and nearly two-thirds of shoppers expect to use AI agents within two years.

This rapid shift to AI-centered shopping is rewriting the rules for digital commerce. Merchants must prepare for a world in which AI agents search, choose, authenticate, and transact on consumers' behalf across channels. The good news is that existing payments infrastructure is proven, secure, and adaptable. The question is how merchants and payments providers can build on that foundation with the governance and trust frameworks needed to scale agent-led transactions safely.

This report draws on three parallel surveys fielded across the United States, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates in early 2026: 5,241 consumers, 1,185 merchants, and 150 acquirers. Together, they offer the most detailed cross-ecosystem view of agentic commerce readiness available. The overall picture that emerges is one of shared expectations. Every player in the payments stack expects AI agents to reshape how commerce works. The data reveals a window of opportunity for early movers who prioritize integrating agentic commerce into their omnichannel strategies.

The central tension is not primarily technical. Acquirers report 92% confidence in their ability to adapt their existing infrastructure. Merchants are investing in AI capabilities. Consumers are already using AI-powered discovery tools at scale. The remaining gap is more structural. Liability, certification, and governance standards are emerging but remain far from consistent across the ecosystem. Merchants need a technology stack that supports existing best practices while remaining flexible enough to adapt as the ecosystem develops and coalesces around common frameworks.

What consumers are willing to delegate—and what they are not—is the clearest signal in the data. More than half (56%) will let an agent search and compare products on their behalf. Fewer than 40% will let one touch their payment credentials. The trust gradient drops steeply as the task moves from discovery to transacting. Understanding that spectrum is a critical starting point for every merchant, acquirer, and payment network building for the agent era.

Key Findings at a Glance

AI is already the front door.

Nearly half (48%) of online shoppers used AI as part of researching their most recent purchase. Three in 10 used ChatGPT or another OpenAI tool, 19% used Google's Gemini, and 22% used a merchant AI assistant. Yet only 23% of merchants can distinguish AI-driven traffic from human traffic. Few acquirers (32%) currently offer machine-learning fraud detection.

Consumers will delegate discovery but guard their wallets.

Consumers already delegate to AI agents, but the amount of trust they extend varies sharply by the task at hand. More than half will let an agent search and compare products (56%) or manage their loyalty program (51%). Fewer than four in 10 will grant an agent access to their saved payment credentials. Still, most consumers say they would let agents make purchases for them if the right guardrails are in place.

Merchants see opportunity in personalization, threat in competitors.

Merchants see clear opportunity in the capabilities that deepen customer relationships, including loyalty personalization and rules-based ordering. But they draw firm lines around giving AI control over pricing, fraud liability, and competitive switching. These areas will define their agentic commerce participation.

Merchants want solutions embedded in existing payments infrastructure.

Merchants widely plan to upgrade their capabilities for agentic commerce, including 31% that are investing in upgrades to loyalty, personalization, and search within the next 12 months. Embedded capabilities within existing commerce and payments infrastructure stand out as merchants' preferred solutions.

Liability frameworks are critical.

What happens when agentic transactions go wrong is a central issue for both consumers and merchants. Consumers look for certified AI agents (22%) and clear liability assignment (28%). Merchants want strong protection against unauthorized transactions (44%).

Key Findings

01

Where AI in commerce stands today

AI-centered shopping is already here, **but consumers are moving more quickly than merchants and acquirers.** This is a central challenge that will determine how rapidly agentic commerce scales.

Overall consumer usage of AI-powered shopping tools roughly doubled between mid-2024 and early 2026. Nearly half of online shoppers (48%) used some form of AI to research their most recent purchase: Thirty percent used ChatGPT or another OpenAI platform, 19% used Google's Gemini, and 22% used a merchant-integrated AI assistant. These strong adoption levels reflect an emerging default for product discovery that our consumer survey shows is spreading across age groups and income levels.

Most merchants agree that AI will fundamentally reshape how they operate. This is especially true among larger enterprises, at 65%, but small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) are also convinced, at 58%. Merchants in Brazil lead with 68% in agreement, followed by the UAE at 62% and the U.S. at 56%. Merchant readiness is developing quickly but remains uneven. Today, 23% can clearly distinguish AI-driven traffic and 15% have structured data ready for agents, giving early movers a clear opportunity to take the lead in visibility and agent-readable commerce foundations.

Acquirers are also building for the transition. About one-third (32%) already deploy machine-learning fraud detection tools, 43% use rules-based algorithms for fraud management, and 37% offer compliance tools for agent-initiated transactions. These results show progress, but they also mean that **most acquirers have not rolled out critical systems needed for agentic commerce.** Many are watching for clearer demand signals before committing resources.

A closer look at the data shows that merchants expect AI to redefine key areas of the customer experience. A big part of this will happen behind the scenes: Seventy-one percent agree that AI will be increasingly important for knowing customers and their preferences. About six in 10 concur that AI platforms like ChatGPT and Gemini will influence purchases more than traditional search (61%) and that agents will manage loyalty programs across multiple merchants (59%).

Nearly as many think agents will automate returns, refunds, and resolutions, choose payments based on rewards, fees, and costs, and complete transactions for customers.

Figure 1:

The state of play: AI in commerce across the ecosystem

Selected indicators by ecosystem role, 2026

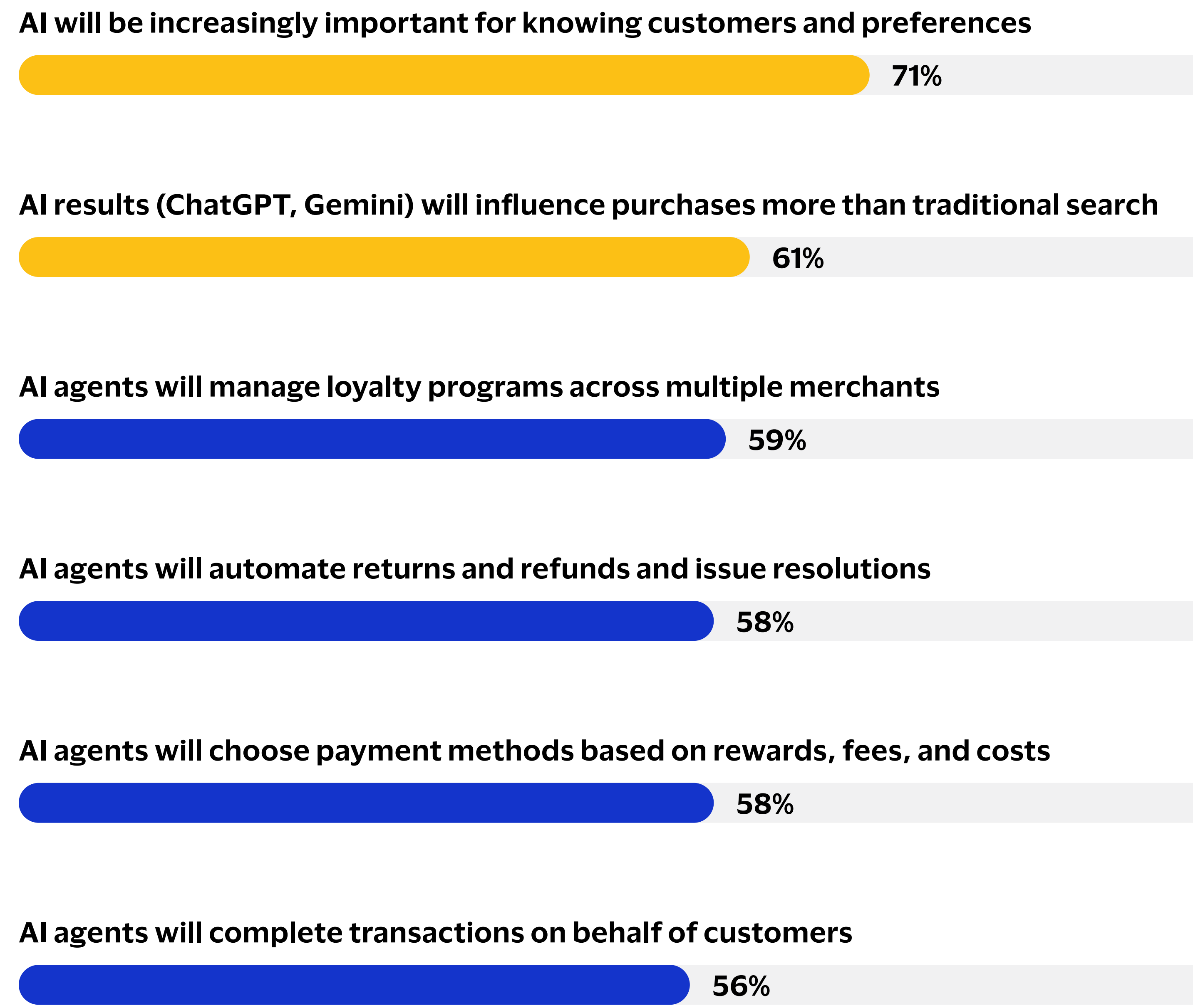
Consumers	Merchants	Acquirers
30% use OpenAI (ChatGPT) for product search.	**23%** can clearly identify AI-driven traffic and purchases.	**43%** use rules-based algorithms to combat fraud.
19% use Gemini for product search.	**15%** have structured data ready for AI agents.	**37%** offer compliance tools for agent-initiated transactions.
11% used a standalone AI platform in last purchase.	**20%** are actively planning AI-agent readiness.	**32%** use machine learning-based fraud detection.

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses; 1,185: Merchant responses; 150: Acquirer responses, fielded January–March 2026

Figure 2:

Merchants believe AI will reshape commerce

Merchants that agree at least somewhat with selected statements



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

There is no question that the AI change will accelerate going forward. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of consumers expect to use AI shopping agents within two years, including 30% who expect to use them frequently or always. **About one in six merchants predict that AI agents will generate more than 30% of their sales within two years, and 67% think agents will account for at least 5%.** Acquirers almost unanimously agree that consent and data-governance frameworks will be important to supporting agentic commerce in the same timeframe.

These datapoints are just a few snapshots from our full surveys of consumers, merchants, and acquirers. **All three studies continuously show that AI is rapidly moving to the center of the retail industry and will largely define the shopping experience in the near future.**

Best practices:
What defines good agentic payments?

Leadership in agentic commerce requires best practices in agentic payments. This means a payment tech stack that meets industry standards for authentication, tokenization, acceptance, and rules-based fraud protection and that works fluidly across channels—agentic, mobile, website, and in-store.

Figure 3:

Where agentic commerce is headed
Selected forward-looking indicators by ecosystem role, 2026

Consumers

64% expect to use AI shopping agents at least occasionally in two years.

30% plan to use them frequently or always.

Merchants

15% expect more than 30% of sales from agents.

67% expect 5%+ of digital sales to come via AI agents in two years.

Acquirers

93% rate consent and data-governance frameworks as important to support.

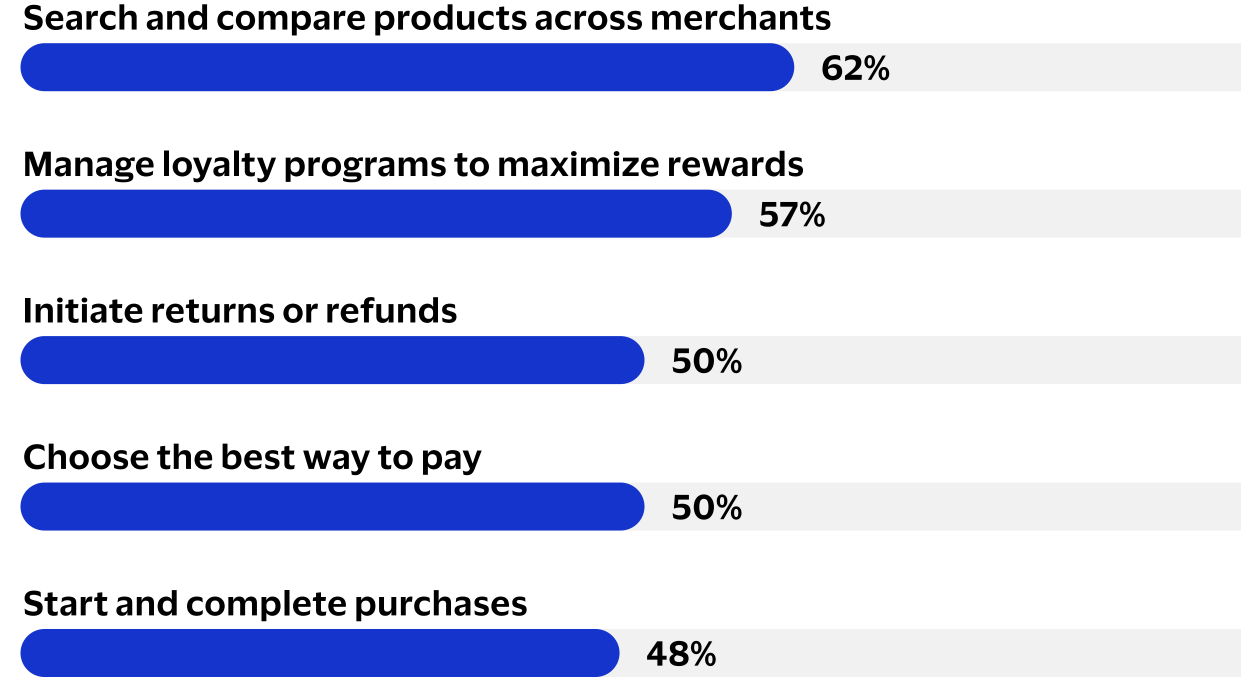
Agent governance (96%) tops the importance list.

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses; 1,185: Merchant responses; 150: Acquirer responses, fielded January–March 2026

High-income shoppers want agent-enabled shopping experiences

High-income consumers are leading the shift to AI-based shopping. For merchants, this makes ramping up for agentic commerce even more critical, since the biggest spenders are the most likely to choose agent-enabled shopping experiences.

What high-income shoppers are most willing to hand off to agents



Consumers earning more than $100,000 per year are

1.12x more likely **to have used AI** in their most recent purchase.

1.20x more likely **to expect to frequently use an AI agent** to shop within two years.

1.08x more likely to **let an AI agent choose the payment method.**

1.10x more likely to **let an AI agent complete a purchase.**

1.10x more likely to **give an AI agent ongoing access to payment data.**

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses

02

The consumer trust gradient

The term “agentic commerce” covers a spectrum of purchasing behaviors and decisions, from search assistance to fully automated purchases. Where consumers are ready to hand over control depends on the stakes involved. The pattern across all three countries surveyed makes clear that the willingness to delegate drops as the task moves from research toward payment. **Over half of consumers will let an agent search and compare products on their behalf (56%) or manage their loyalty program (51%).** But only 35% will grant an agent access to their saved payment credentials. That is a 21-percentage-point gap between the most basic and the most sensitive forms of delegation.

56%

of consumers in the U.S., Brazil, and UAE **will let an agent search and compare products on their behalf.**

Merchants understand the broad contours of this trust gradient, even if not all the pieces are in place to achieve it. When asked what level of autonomy consumers would grant AI agents, 48% of merchants said consumers would allow agents to build a cart but require final approval. Only 7% of merchants expected consumers to grant full autonomy—close to the actual 6% of consumers who said they would.

Yet the finer-grained reality is more complex. Consumers do not think in terms of autonomy tiers. They simply allocate trust task by task. A consumer who happily delegates product search might resist letting the same agent touch their payment method. **Building for this reality means designing for a stack of conditional permissions, not offering a single dial between “suggest” and “act.”**

Figure 4:
What consumers are ready to delegate to AI agents

Discover
Agent searches, consumer chooses

30% will use agents frequently or almost always.

Will let agents search and compare
56%

Will delegate loyalty management
51%

Share shopping data case-by-case
40%

Decide
Rules set, approval required

40% want human support if something goes wrong.

Will allow rules-based ordering
45%

Let agent start, approve to finish
44%

Want approval before purchase
37%

Pay
Human stays in the loop on spend

34% require strong data protection guarantees.

Want no AI choosing payment for a purchase of $300
52%

Accept AI payment recommendation, let it approve
25%

Cap autonomous spend at a set amount
36%

Manage
Post-purchase agents gain trust more quickly

33% need an on/off toggle to feel comfortable.

Will let agents initiate returns
46%

Will delegate subscription management
41%

Auto-order if 24-hour cancellation is guaranteed
22%

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

Asking consumers about data access tells us more about the trust gradient. **For shopping data—such as purchase history, browsing behavior, and preferences—consumers are most comfortable with case-by-case access (40%), meaning they want to approve each instance rather than grant standing permission.** Another 25% would allow limited continuous access, 17% would grant full access, and only 18% would never grant approval.

Consumers guard payment data more tightly: Forty-one percent do so purchase-by-purchase, 26% offer limited continuous access, 20% give no access, and just 13% allow full access. The gaps between shopping and payment data are modest but significant, highlighting that consumers need more reassurance around the latter.

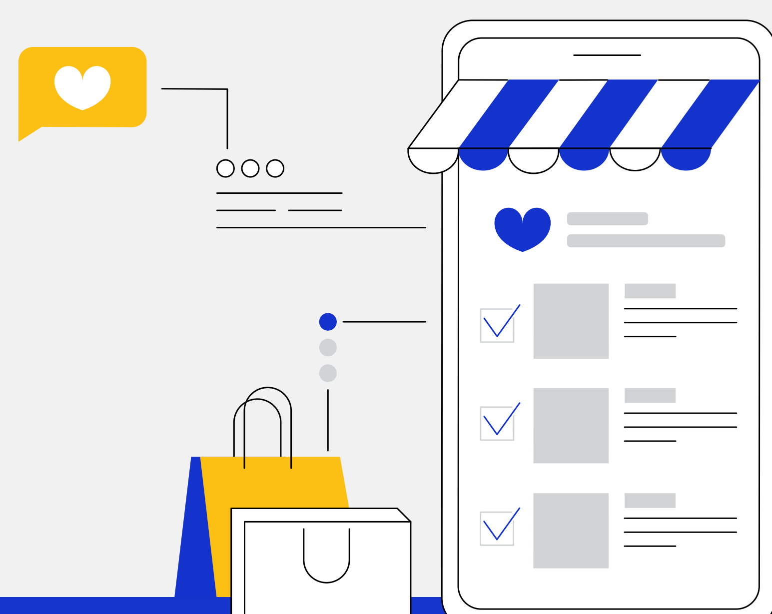
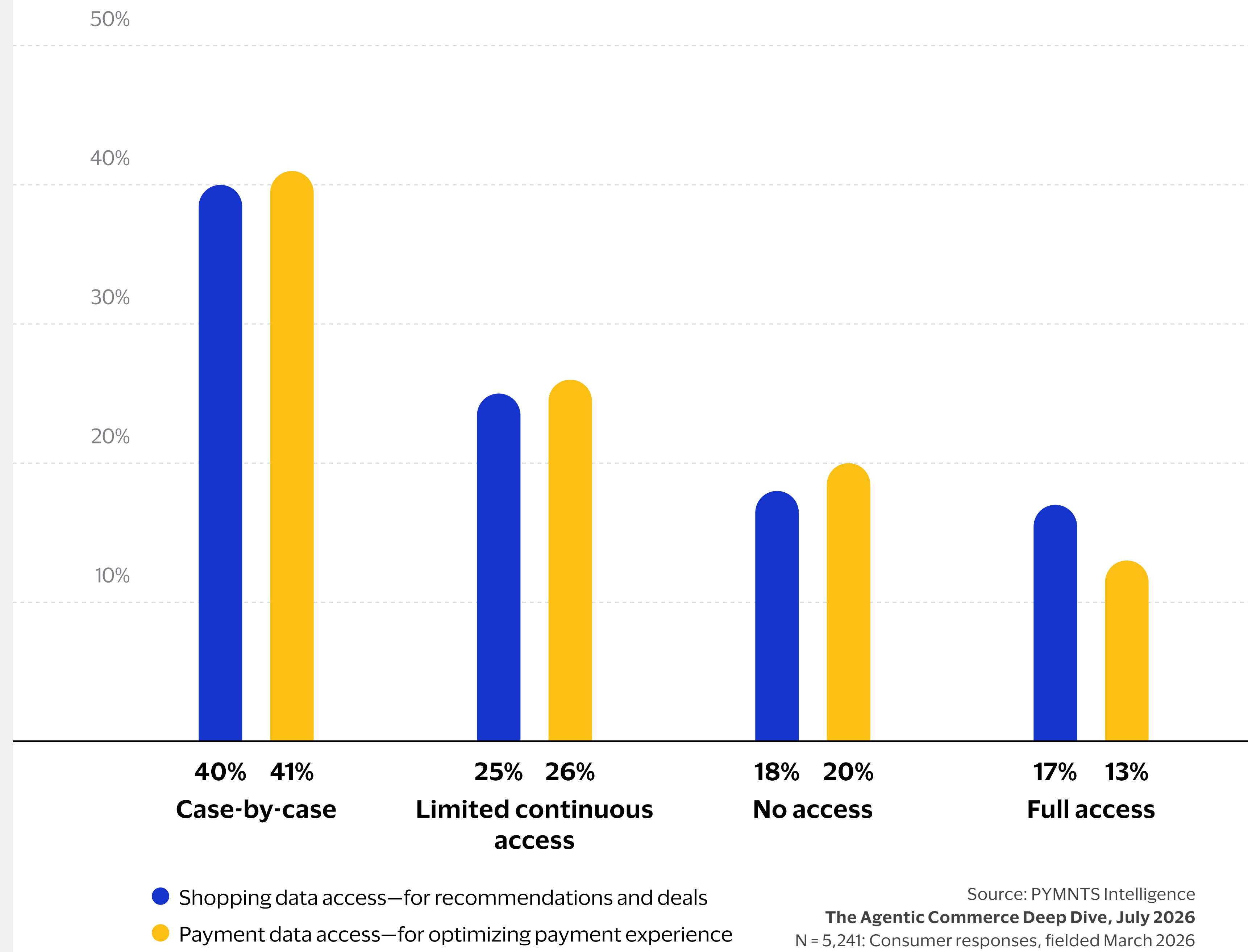


Figure 5:

Consumers prefer granting merchant AI features access case-by-case

Level of access consumers would grant merchants | All countries, 2026



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

Consumers look for a set of guardrails before they are willing to trust AI agents. Human-led customer support if something goes wrong during a purchase tops the list at 40%, followed by purchase approval before any transaction completes (37%), and strong data protection (34%).

Any agentic commerce system that can’t satisfy them will struggle to reach consumers. The 26% overall who say no conditions would win them over—rising to 31% in the U.S.—represent a meaningful ceiling on near-term adoption. The UAE (9% refusing to grant access to AI agents under any conditions) and Brazil (12%) show that consumer openness is higher in markets with stronger embedded-commerce habits.

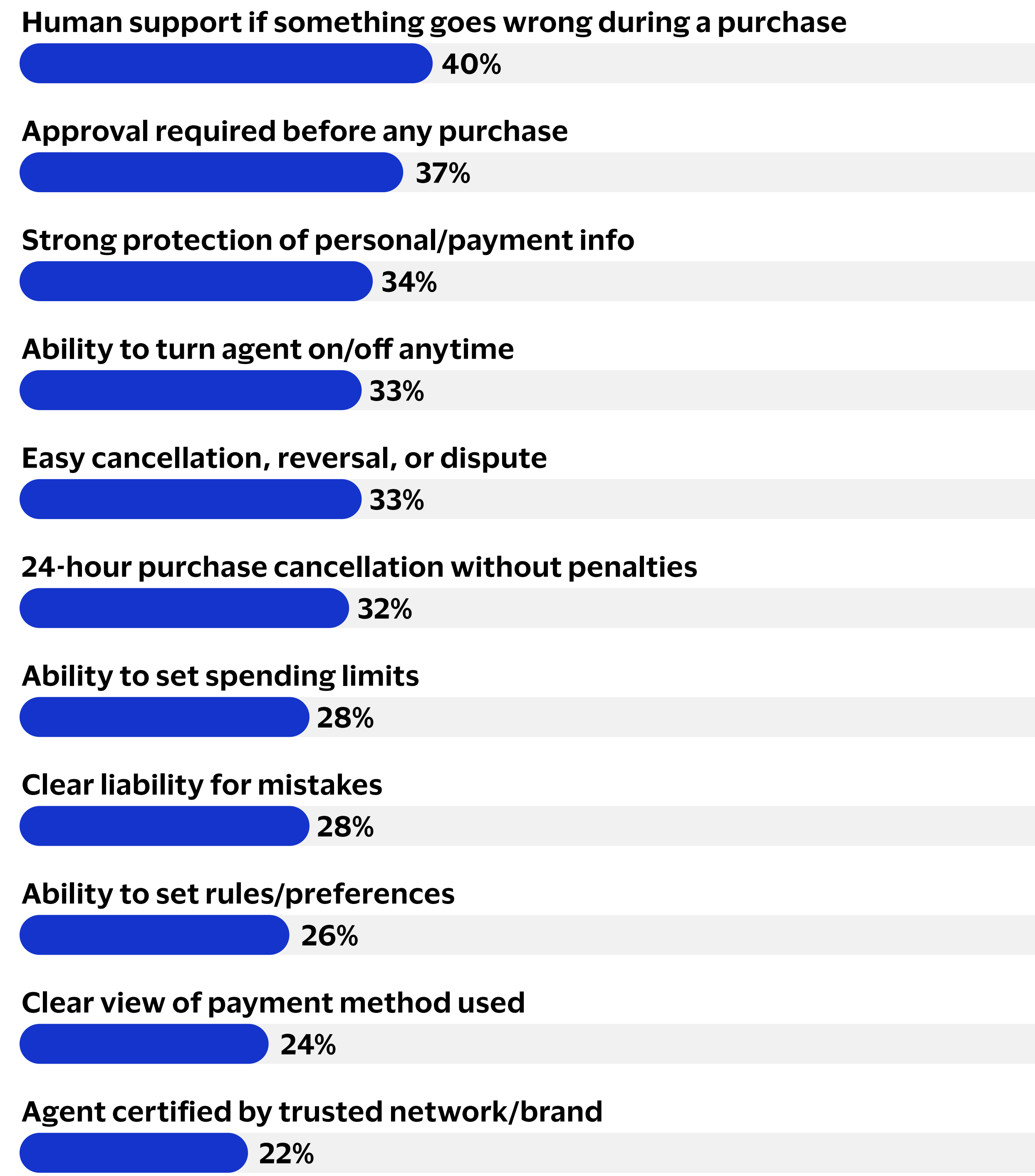
40%

of consumers in the U.S., Brazil, and UAE **want human support if something goes wrong when using an AI agent** to make a purchase.

Figure 6:

Human support and purchase approval top the list of consumer requirements for trusting AI agents

Conditions for comfort with autonomous AI agents



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026

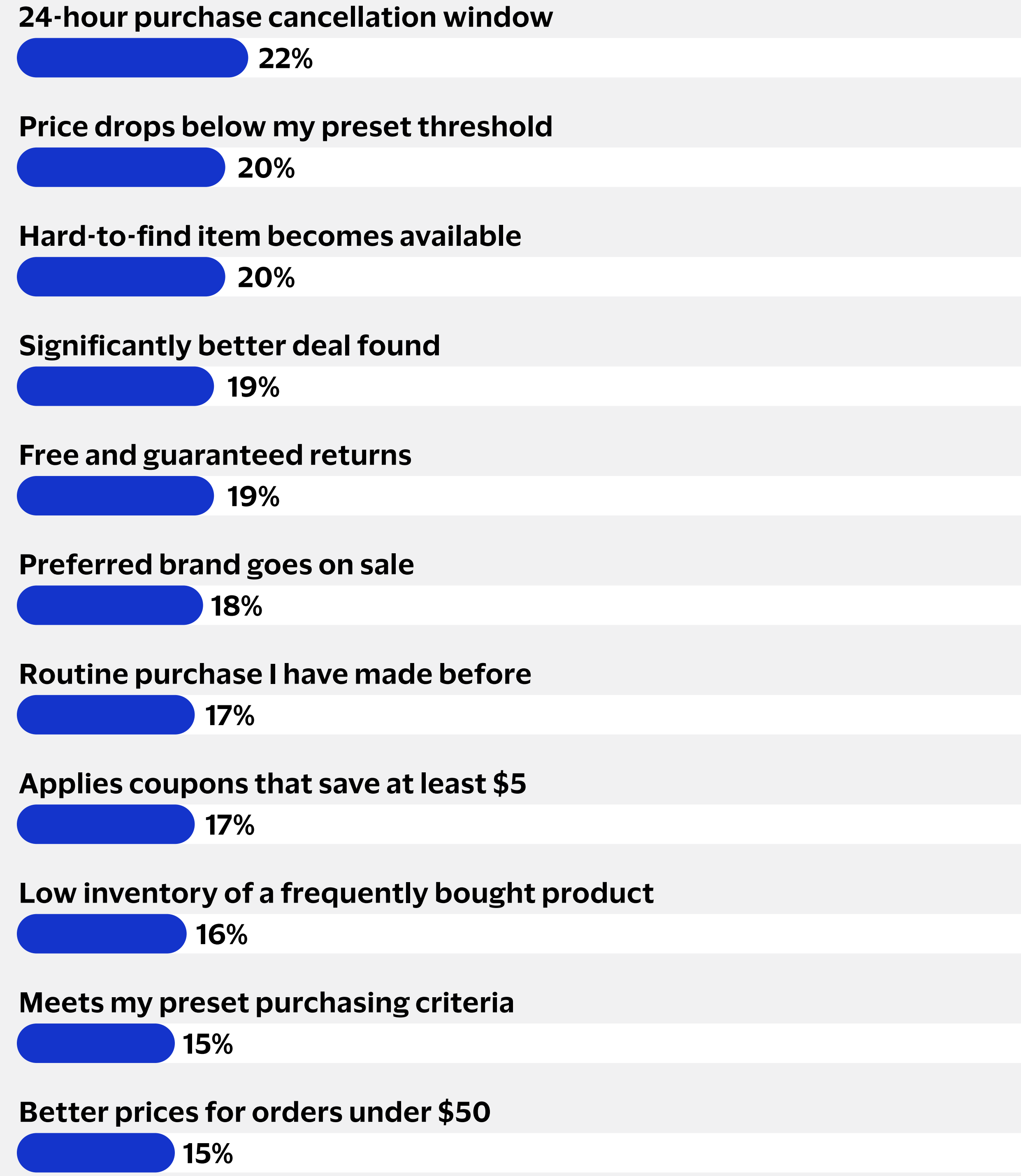
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

More specifically, 61% of consumers are ready to let agents make purchases today—if they see the right safeguards and benefits in place. The most-cited feature is a 24-hour cancellation window (22%), followed closely by price dropping below a preset threshold (20%) and a hard-to-find item becoming available (20%). The UAE is the most amenable market: Only 9% of consumers there say they'd never allow autonomous ordering, compared to 12% in Brazil and 31% in the U.S. These wide differences across countries reflect where each market sits in their broader adoption of digital shopping. For years, our data has shown the UAE to be a digital shopping leader, while the U.S. lags in many categories.

Figure 7:

Consumers are ready to let agents do their ordering

Consumers who would let an agent auto-order under selected conditions



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

At the payment layer, the picture is even starker. For a $300 purchase, 52% of consumers overall say they want to choose the payment method themselves, with no AI involvement. Another 25% would accept an AI recommendation they can approve before the transaction finalizes. Just 6% would give an agent full discretion.

The "recommend and approve" model appears to be the bridge to broader adoption. The UAE again stands out: Sixty-seven percent of consumers there are open to some level of AI involvement in payment selection versus 45% in the U.S., making the UAE the most viable early market for the full agentic payment journey.

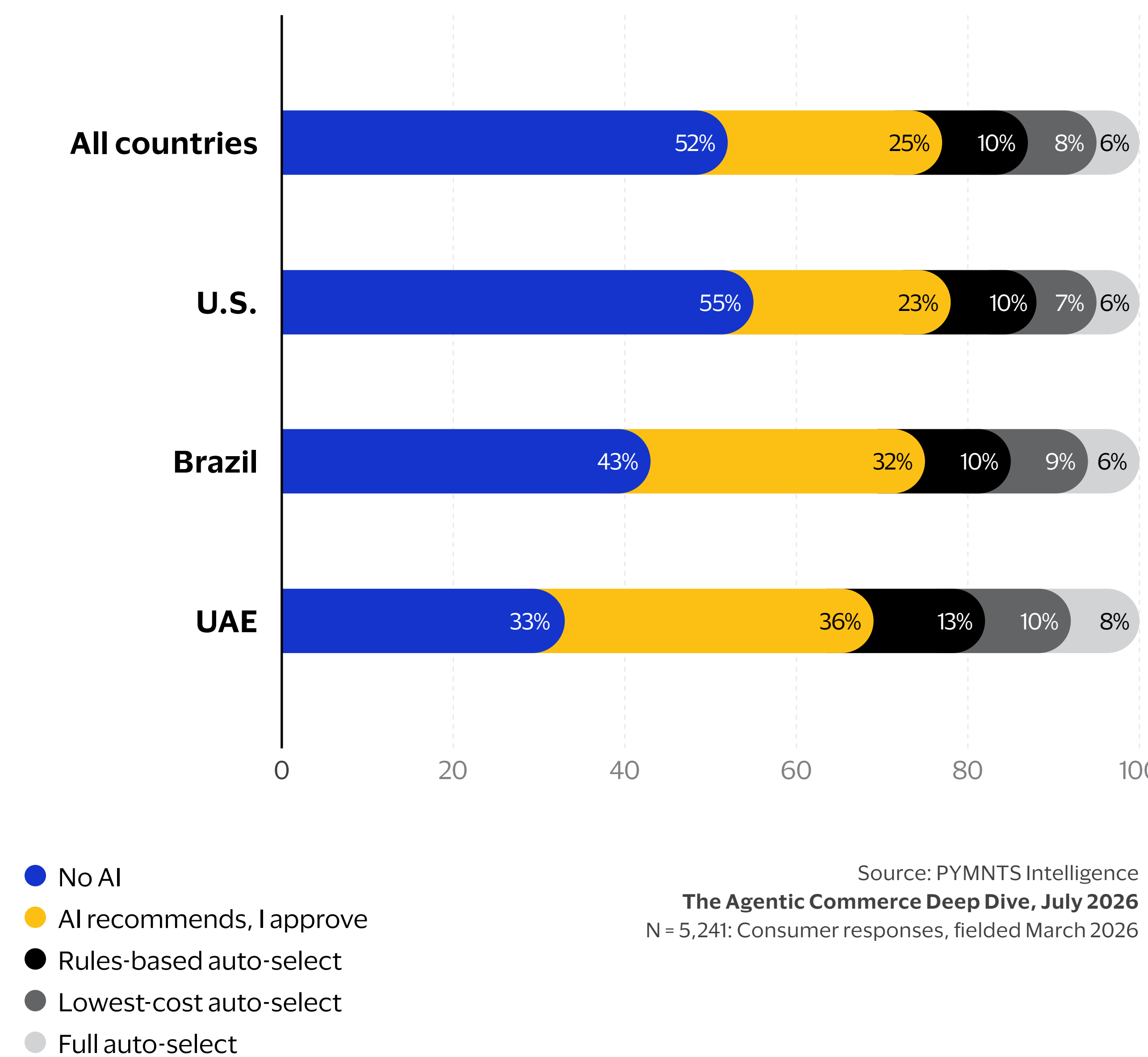
55%

of U.S. consumers **don't want any AI involved in determining their payment method** for a $300 purchase.

Figure 8:

Most consumers want to choose the payment method themselves

Preferred level of AI involvement in payment method selection for a $300 purchase



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

03

Merchants see opportunities but set limits

Merchants recognize the huge potential introduced by agentic commerce. Across 11 agentic capabilities, many more merchants see opportunities than threats. Three benefits stand out most here: Fifty-seven percent of merchants in all three countries see opportunities from personalizing loyalty offers, 57% from placing orders from rules that customers set, and 55% from optimizing orders by personal preferences. In each case, only 14%–15% of merchants identify threats. Other key areas of opportunity for using AI include to search and compare across merchants, manage reorders and subscriptions, and handle returns, refunds, and exchanges.

57%

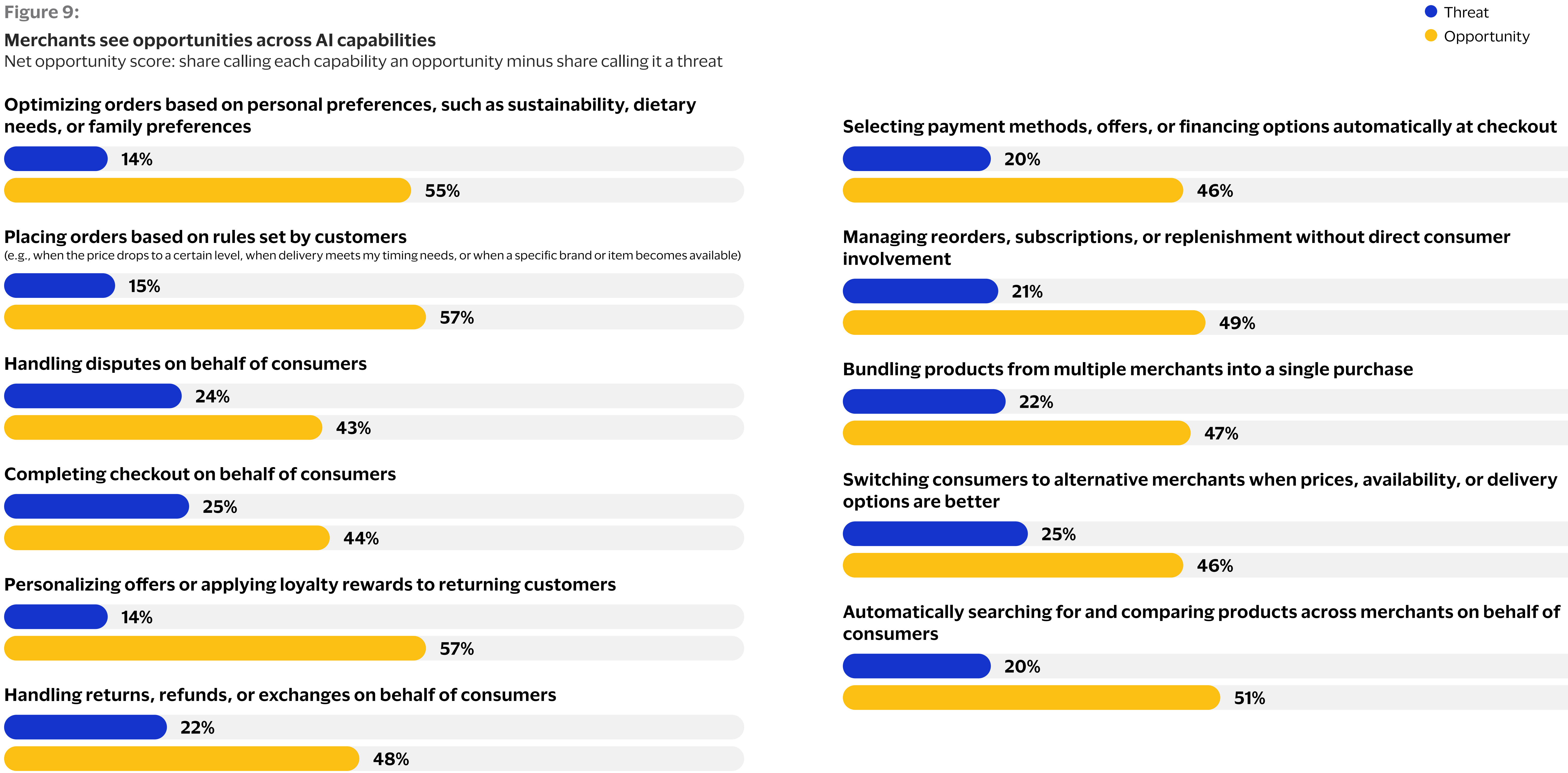
of merchants in the U.S., Brazil, and UAE **see opportunities from allowing AI agents to personalize customer loyalty offers.**

How merchants say they will evaluate agentic commerce reveals the outcomes they prioritize. Customer satisfaction leads at 54%, followed by purchase frequency and repeat purchases at 50%. Fraud and payment loss reduction comes third at 41%, with average order value (38%), conversion rate (35%), checkout abandonment reduction (30%), and cost-to-serve reduction (30%) trailing. Notably, the data indicates that **merchants are primarily framing agentic commerce as a customer relationship play**—something they expect to pay off in loyalty and customer lifetime value over time—rather than as an immediate way to boost revenues or trim losses.

Figure 9:

Merchants see opportunities across AI capabilities

Net opportunity score: share calling each capability an opportunity minus share calling it a threat



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

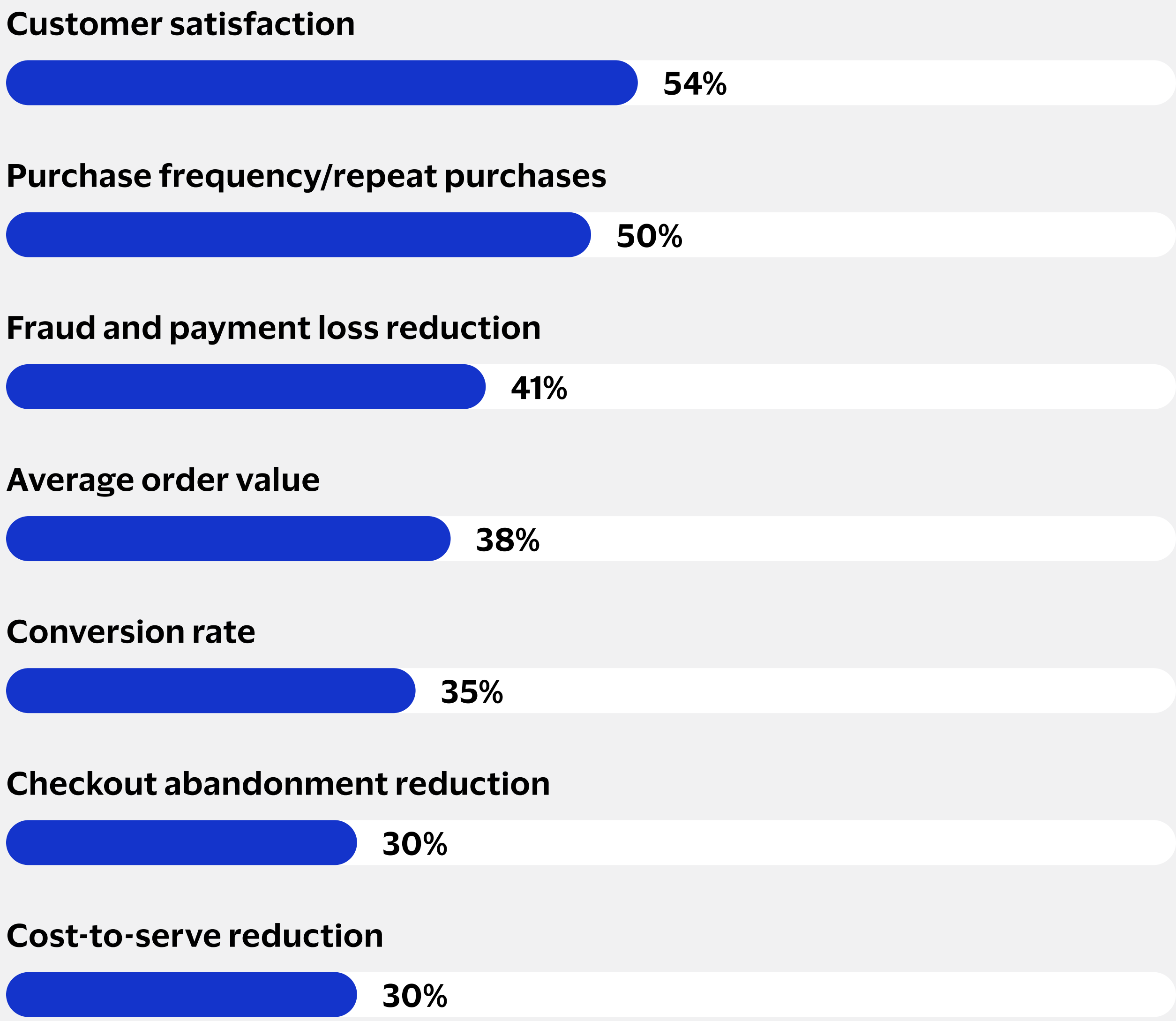
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026

N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

Figure 10:

Merchants prioritize AI's ability to drive customer satisfaction and repeat purchases

Metrics merchants would use to evaluate the return on investment of agentic commerce



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

Fraud protection and unauthorized-transaction safeguards are the top condition for merchant participation in agentic AI, at 44% globally. This rises to 50% in the UAE and 49% in Brazil, while the U.S. is lower at 40%. Other top considerations include the ability to set rules for agents (37%), low cost and minimal complexity (37%), and data-privacy compliance (36%). Merchants share the same top priority in fraud protection regardless of size but diverge meaningfully below it.

Larger enterprises weigh transparency in agent ranking (41%) and data privacy (42%) more heavily, while SMBs prioritize cost and simplicity (39%) and are more likely to view agentic commerce as a threat overall (56% vs. 45% for large merchants). This suggests that **SMBs see the competitive risk of AI agents steering consumers toward larger, better-optimized competitors more acutely than enterprises do.**

Figure 11:

Fraud protection is non-negotiable for merchant participation in agentic commerce

Conditions for participating in agentic commerce

	All countries	U.S.	Brazil	UAE	Large merchants	SMBs
Transparency in agent ranking	38%	33%	45%	32%	41%	35%
Ability to set rules for agents	37%	38%	37%	35%	40%	35%
Data ownership and access	32%	32%	33%	30%	33%	32%
Fraud and unauthorized protections	44%	40%	49%	50%	45%	44%
Low cost and minimal complexity	37%	35%	40%	34%	35%	39%
Compliance with data-privacy, security, and regulatory requirements	36%	37%	36%	33%	42%	31%
Defined liability and dispute resolution	33%	35%	32%	28%	37%	29%
Seamless integration	35%	36%	33%	43%	37%	34%
Confidence in incremental sales	31%	29%	34%	30%	32%	31%
Ability to opt in or out of specific agent-driven use cases	27%	30%	21%	32%	31%	22%
Trusted agent certification	30%	29%	30%	40%	36%	25%
Protections against margin erosion from automated coupon stacking or rewards optimization by agents	27%	26%	28%	23%	31%	23%
We would not want to participate in an agentic commerce ecosystem under any conditions	10%	14%	6%	5%	6%	14%

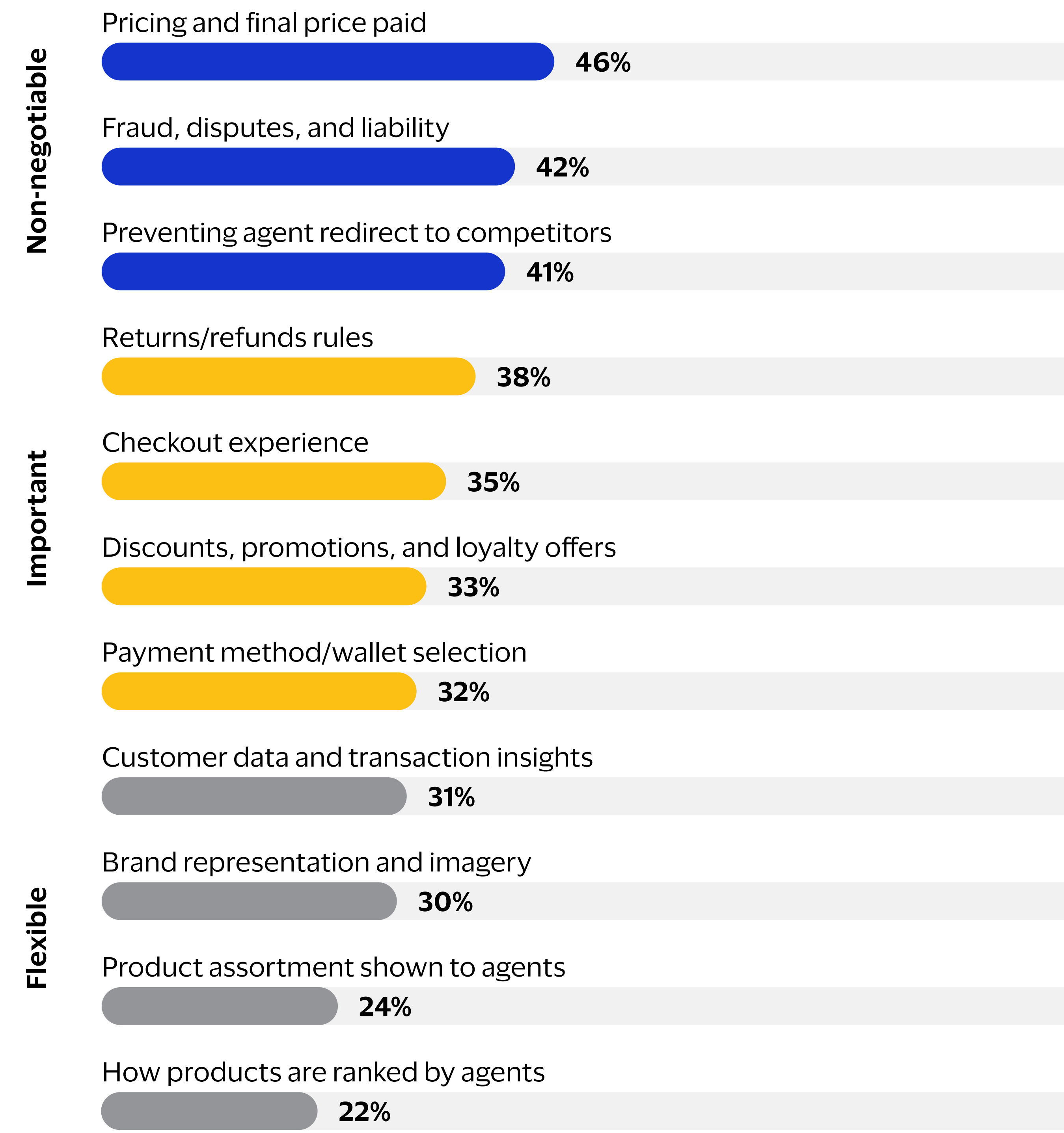
Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

Merchants have clear lines about what they will and won't give agents control over. Pricing is the most sensitive area, cited by 46% as one where they need to retain control. Fraud, disputes, and liability comes second at 42%, followed by preventing agent-driven redirection to competitors at 41%. At least one-third of merchants also named return and refund rules (38%), the checkout experience (35%), and discounts, promotions, and loyalty offers (33%) as non-negotiable areas.

The data here emphasizes that most merchants are ready to start leveraging agentic capabilities but will draw hard lines around anything that directly affects their revenues or competitive positioning. Merchants also want to preserve direct ownership of the customer relationship in a world where agents act as demand aggregators. These constraints define the central merchant-facing design problem in agentic commerce—how to give agents enough autonomy to create value while letting merchants protect the parts of their business they can't afford to weaken.

Figure 12:

Merchant willingness to give agents control



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

04

The liability question

Every agentic commerce system will eventually make a mistake. An agent will buy the wrong item, fail to apply loyalty points, select a payment method the consumer didn't want, or execute a transaction the consumer later disputes. **The question of what happens next is largely unanswered. How is liability distributed, who bears the cost, and who initiates resolution?** The data shows wide gaps between how consumers, merchants, and acquirers look at these evolving dynamics.

Consumers are most likely to point to the AI agent itself. When asked who should be primarily liable for resolving a fraudulent or incorrect AI-initiated transaction, 37% overall say the agent, rising to 38% in the U.S. In Brazil and the UAE, the answer is more distributed. Brazilian consumers are more likely to look to their bank (24%), reflecting stronger institutional trust in that market, while UAE consumers spread liability across the AI agent, the retailer, and the issuer more evenly.

More revealing than these country-level differences, however, is that consumers don't share a clear consensus about where liability rests when something goes wrong. As a result, some consumers will blame each key party involved in a transaction and the related payment. **This underscores the importance of building agentic trust standards that give consumers confidence to transact via agents.**

Figure 13:

Consumers point to the AI agent as primarily liable when things go wrong
Who should be primarily liable for resolving a fraudulent AI-initiated transaction

	All countries	U.S.	Brazil	UAE
AI agent	37%	38%	31%	30%
Retailer	25%	25%	23%	21%
Bank/card issuer	20%	18%	24%	23%
Payment network	10%	9%	13%	14%
Digital wallet	8%	10%	9%	12%

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 5,241: Consumer responses, fielded March 2026

Merchants have a clear sense of boundaries. They're most likely to accept liability for what they directly own, such as inventory exposure (45%) and subscription management (31%). For functions that sit further from their direct control, they push liability onto other participants, especially AI providers.

Notably, 34% of merchants say AI providers should own the explainability of agent decisions. In the other four areas surveyed—inventory exposure, subscription management, cross-business checkout coordination, and consent and data governance—merchants believe AI providers are the second-most liable party after the merchants themselves.

Figure 14:

Merchants believe liability is shared
Primary liability for transaction functions

	Merchant	AI/agent	Processor	Issuer	Network
Inventory exposure to agents	45%	23%	11%	11%	10%
Subscription management	31%	30%	14%	14%	12%
Cross-business checkout	30%	24%	17%	13%	16%
Explainability of decisions	29%	34%	14%	11%	11%
Consent and data governance	30%	23%	15%	16%	17%

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

Acquirers also see liability as highly fragmented. They are most likely to rank themselves as the primary owners of fraud prevention (40%) and cross-business checkout (37%). **Meanwhile, payment networks are seen as the primary custodian of credential security and tokenization (44%).** AI providers bear the most liability for explainability (52%) and for errors and misuse (36%). Merchants own inventory exposure (72%) and refunds and chargebacks (60%). Identity verification is the most contested function: Acquirers, AI providers, and issuers each claim around 28%, with no dominant owner.

All of this adds up to a complex web of perceived liability across consumers, merchants, and acquirers. There will be strong demand for a unified ecosystem for agentic commerce that makes liability clear and transparent.

Figure 15:

Acquirers see a fragmented liability ecosystem

Primary liability for transaction functions

	Transaction functions	Enablement functions	
Merchants	Refunds and chargebacks 60%	Inventory exposure 72%	Subscription management 32%
Issuers	Payment authorization 51%	–	
Payment networks	Credential security 44%	Consent and data governance 25%	
Acquirers	Fraud prevention 40%	Cross-business checkout 37%	
AI/agent providers	Liability for errors/misuse 36%	Explainability of decisions 52%	
Acquirers/AI/issuers	Identity verification 28%	–	

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 150: Acquirer responses, fielded January 2026

05

The path to merchant readiness

With opportunities mapped and the red lines drawn, **the practical question centers on where merchants plan to prioritize investment and which partners they want to support them.**

Merchants identify personalized offers and loyalty programs as their highest priority for AI capability, with 31% planning investment in the next 12 months and 31% in 24 months. Nearly as many merchants will invest in automatic search-and-compare functions, automatic ordering based on rules set by customers, and order optimization based on consumer preferences. Over half of merchants also expect to invest in several other key features in the 24-month timeframe, most notably in the ability for agents to select payment methods or financing options automatically at checkout.

62%

of merchants in the U.S., Brazil, and UAE **plan investment in personalized offers and loyalty programs fueled by AI over the next 24 months**.

These findings make clear that merchants know which way the market is headed. Over the next 24 months, **more than six in 10 (62%) plan to invest in personalizing offers or applying loyalty rewards to returning customers.** But acting now and acting later are not the same thing. Early movers will gain a critical advantage in the emerging agent-driven retail landscape.

Figure 16:

The path to agentic readiness: what merchants invest in first

Timing of merchants' planned investment in selected AI capabilities

	Within 12 months	Within 24 months	Later or never
Automatically searching for and comparing products across merchants on behalf of consumers	31%	29%	41%
Personalizing offers or applying loyalty rewards to returning customers	31%	31%	38%
Placing orders based on rules set by customers	30%	29%	40%
Optimizing orders based on personal consumption preferences, such as sustainability, dietary needs, or family preferences	30%	30%	40%
Managing reorders, subscriptions, or replenishment without direct consumer involvement	28%	29%	43%
Selecting payment methods or financing options automatically at checkout	28%	27%	44%
Switching consumers to alternative merchants when prices, availability, or delivery options are better	27%	29%	44%
Handling returns, refunds, or exchanges on behalf of consumers	27%	29%	44%
Bundling products from multiple merchants into a single purchase	26%	26%	48%
Completing checkout on behalf of consumers	26%	28%	45%
Handling disputes on behalf of consumers	26%	29%	45%

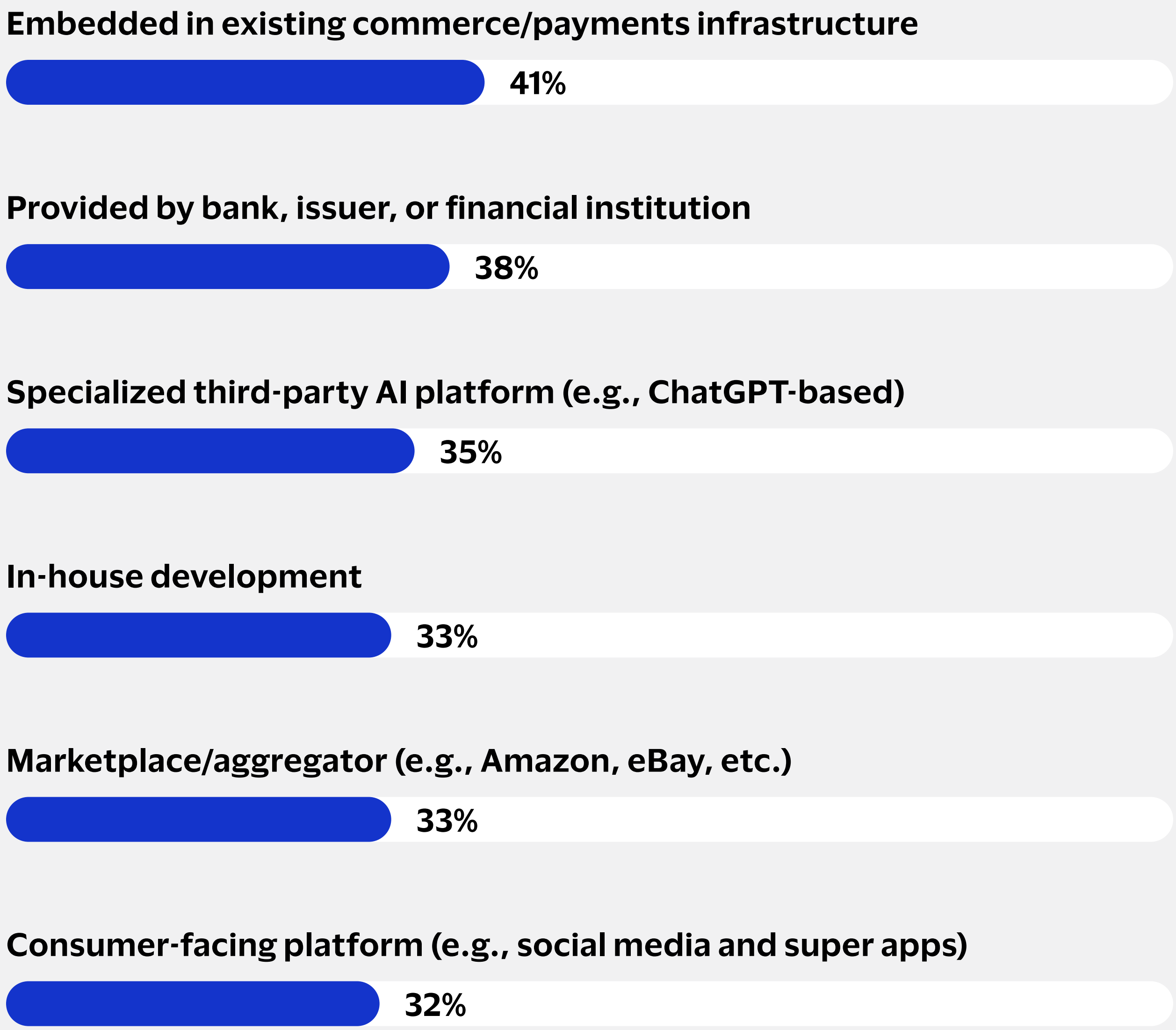
Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

Merchants' preferred adoption models point to a practical reality: They want agentic commerce capabilities without adding entirely new systems.

Embedded capabilities within existing commerce or payments infrastructure lead at 41%, ahead of every standalone or third-party option. Banks, issuers, and financial institutions rank second at 38%, followed by specialized third-party AI platforms at 35%. This suggests that merchants are most comfortable adopting agentic capabilities through systems they already use to run checkout, payments, and customer engagement.

The relatively even spread across adoption channels also shows that no single model has yet become dominant. In-house development, marketplaces or aggregators, and consumer-facing platforms each attract about one-third of merchants. That fragmentation reflects the early stage of agentic commerce, in which merchants are open to multiple paths, but **their strongest preference is for capabilities that integrate into existing infrastructure rather than force them to rebuild workflows around a new agent platform.** This situation favors providers that can make agentic capabilities feel like an extension of current commerce and payments operations, not a separate technology stack.

Figure 17:
Merchant preferences for agentic AI capability adoption



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 1,185: Merchant responses, fielded March 2026

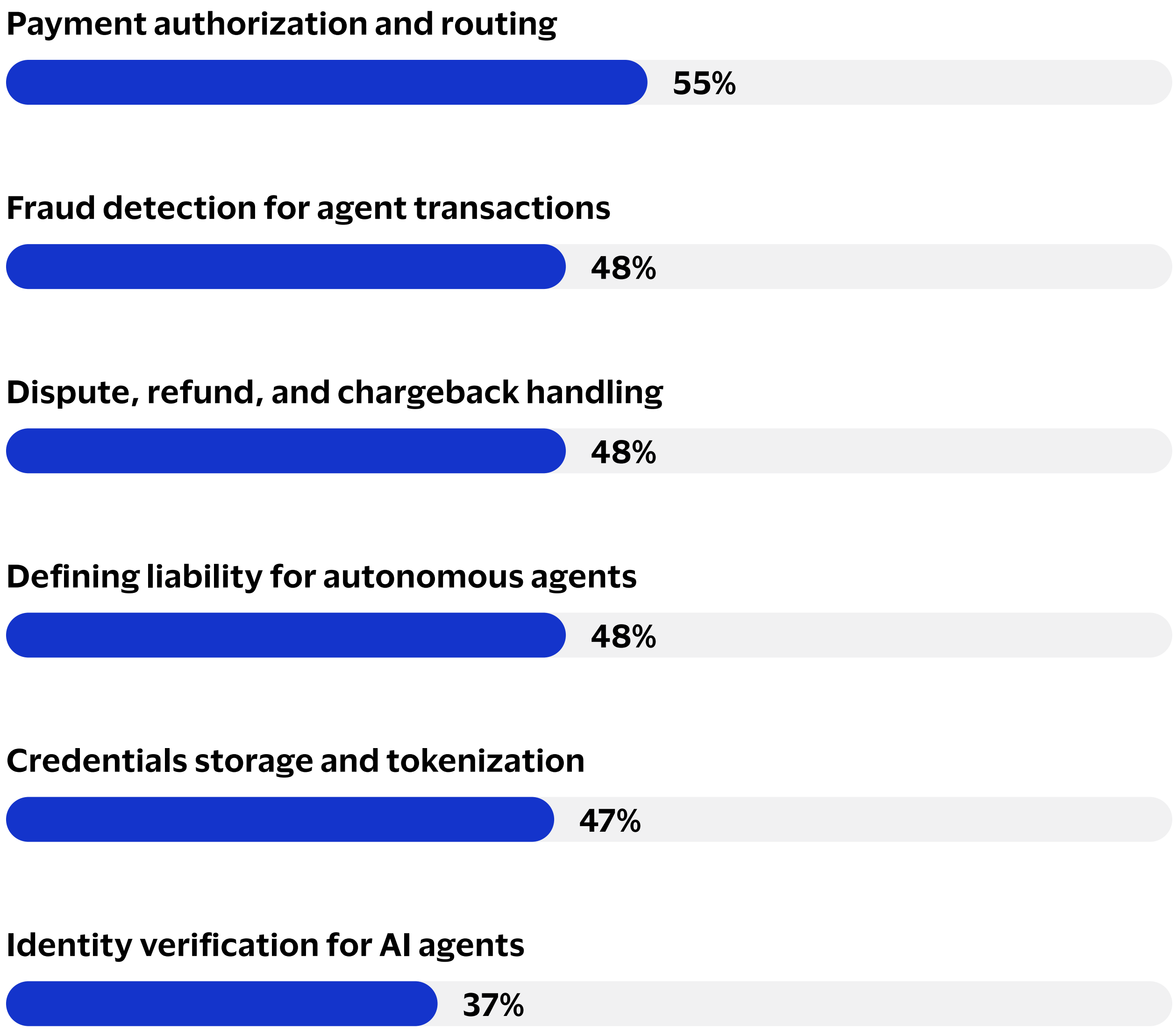
The support picture reinforces the same point. **Merchants are most likely to look to payment networks and banks, payment processors, or acquirers for help, with each cited by 26%.** AI platforms follow closely at 24%, while digital wallet providers trail at 14%. These results show that merchants do not view agentic commerce as only an AI problem. They also see it as an infrastructure challenge foundational to safe payments and consumer trust.

That distinction is relevant because merchants will need support on more than front-end automation. **They will need partners that can help identify agent-initiated activity, manage authorization and fraud risk, structure consent, and resolve disputes when automated transactions go wrong.**

AI platforms will shape the consumer-facing experience, but merchants expect payment networks and payment-services partners to provide much of the infrastructure that makes agentic commerce safe and scalable. That infrastructure should also enable interoperability, adhering to emerging agentic standards that position merchants for maximum agility as the market evolves.

Figure 18:

Acquirer confidence in adapting existing infrastructure for agentic commerce



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 150: Acquirer responses, fielded January 2026

Turning to acquirers, the picture is one of high technical confidence combined with structural uncertainty. Nearly half expect to need entirely new capabilities as agents begin acting on behalf of consumers. Payment authorization and routing tops the list at 55%, followed by fraud detection for agent transactions, dispute handling, and defining liability for autonomous agents, each cited by about half of all acquirers. These are extensions to the transaction stack that will scale more quickly as liability frameworks and technical standards mature.

Infrastructure confidence across the acquirer base is high: Nine in 10 express confidence in their ability to adapt their existing systems to an agentic commerce ecosystem. Acquirers rate consent and data-governance frameworks (93% important) and agent-governance and permissions (96% important) at the top of their priority lists. But confidence thins where systems integration goes deepest. Only about one in four acquirers are very confident in their ability to support agent-initiated fulfillment orchestration, and about one in eight say they are not at all confident. The bottleneck centers not on capability but on the absence of agreed rules that would let that capability be deployed safely.

About two-thirds of acquirers cite regulatory uncertainty as the dominant barrier to enabling agentic commerce. The gap between that figure and the 92% infrastructure confidence number tells the story: The pipes exist, and emerging standards are beginning to define how agent-led transactions flow through them. The remaining opportunity is to make liability, certification, and monitoring rules consistent across the ecosystem. The partner that helps secure this—by defining agent certification standards, setting transaction monitoring protocols, and providing an identity verification framework—will set the terms on which agentic commerce scales.

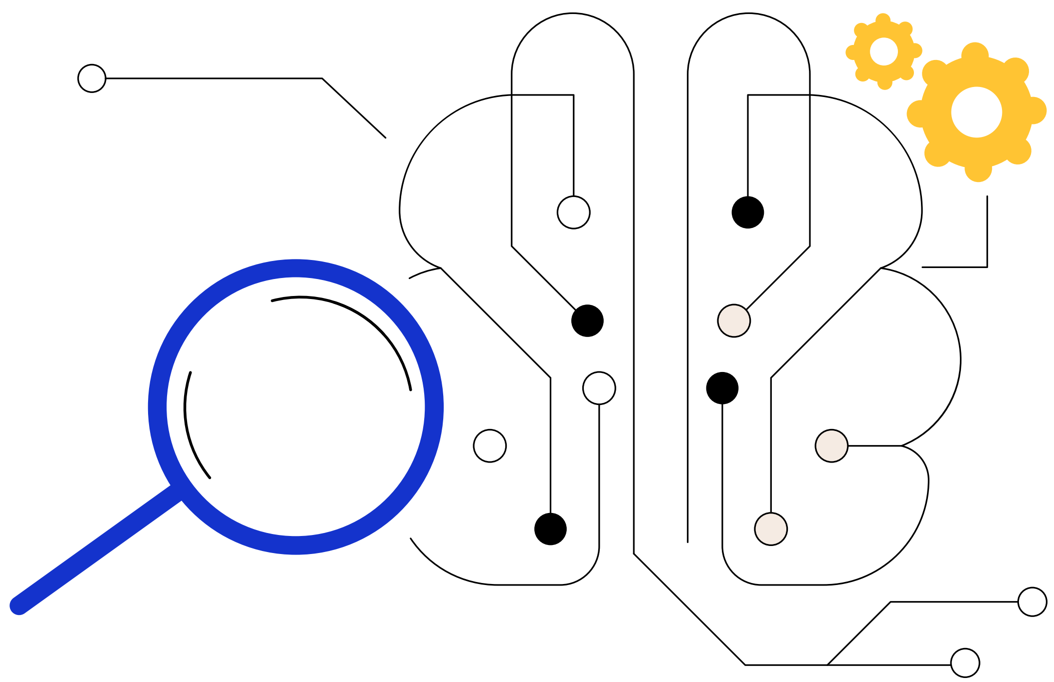
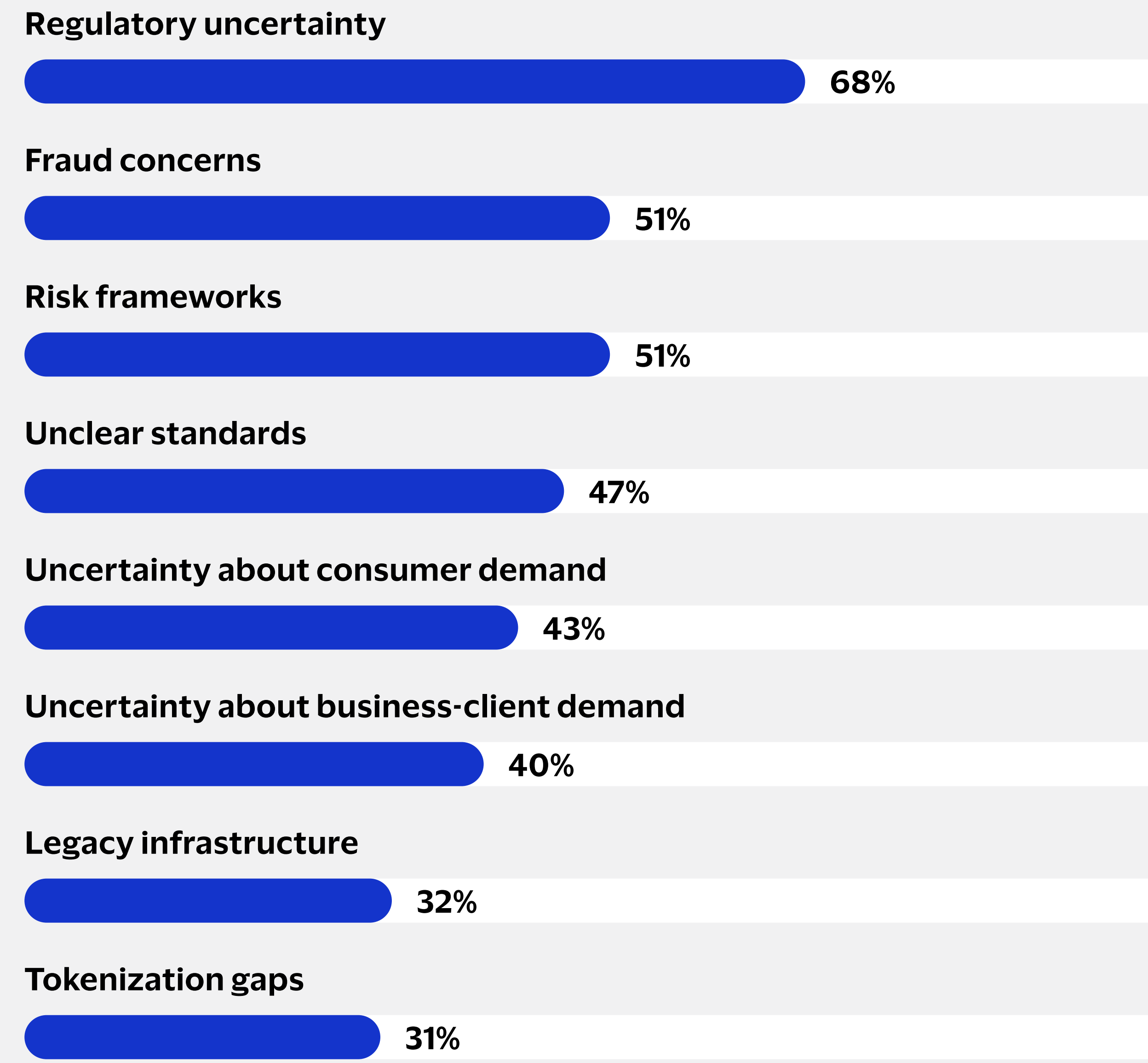


Figure 19:

Primary barriers to enabling agentic commerce for business clients that sell directly to consumers



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, July 2026
N = 150: Acquirer responses, fielded January 2026

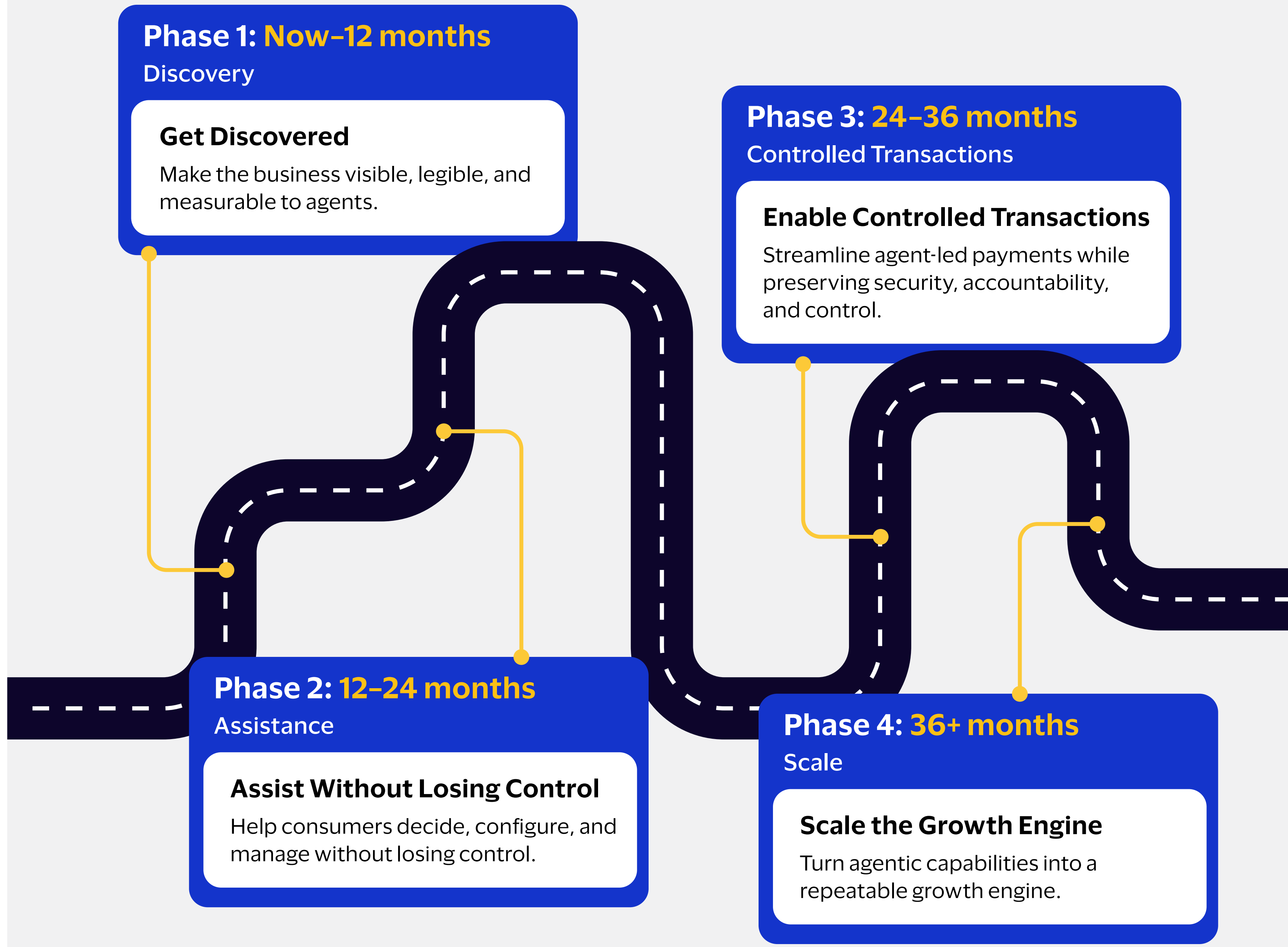
Actionable insights

Merchant Roadmap to Agentic Commerce

A phased framework for how merchants can prepare for and capture value from agent-initiated commerce, derived from a survey of 1,185 merchants across the U.S., Brazil, and UAE.

Agentic readiness is built in sequence, not all at once.

Merchants that chase autonomous checkout before they are discoverable, helpful and firmly in control will stall on the same trust and liability barriers slowing adoption today. Each pillar unlocks the next.



The core insight: Merchants are convinced but not yet ready. Up to 65% of large merchants and 58% of SMBs agree AI will fundamentally reshape how they operate, yet only 15% have structured data ready for agents and 23% can identify agent-driven traffic. This roadmap sequences the build so that each capability compounds into the next.

Phase 1

Phase 1:

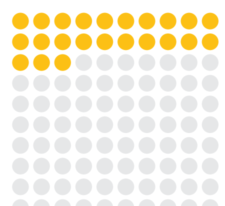
Now–12 months

Discovery:
Get Discovered

Make the business visible, legible and measurable to agents.

Identify agent activity across channels.

Establish a shared definition of agent-initiated transactions covering agent identity, delegation scope, consent object, and audit trail. Without a common standard, every downstream decision—liability, fraud scoring, dispute resolution—is built on sand.

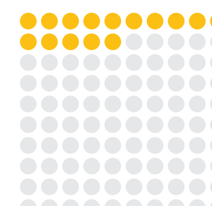


23%

of merchants can clearly identify AI-driven traffic and purchases today.

Make core information agent-readable.

Structure product data, pricing, promotions, delivery options, return policies, and loyalty benefits into consistent schemas, feeds, and APIs so that agents can retrieve and compare them accurately.

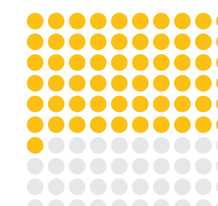


15%

of merchants have structured data ready for AI agents.

Own brand representation and attribution.

Define which data agents may access and how the brand is represented, then measure how agent discovery influences research, comparison, conversion, and repeat purchasing beyond the last click.

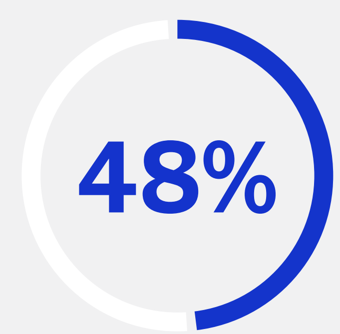


61%

of merchants say AI results (ChatGPT, Gemini) will influence purchases more than traditional search.

Why start here?

Agents cannot drive demand toward merchants they cannot find, read, or evaluate. Consumer demand is already here, yet merchant foundations lag. Nothing downstream scales until the business is legible to agents.



of online shoppers already used AI to research their most recent purchase, roughly double the mid-2024 level.

Phase 2

Phase 2:

12–24 months

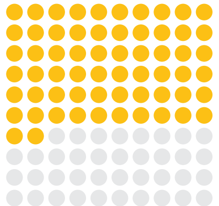
Assistance:

Assist Without Losing Control

Help consumers decide, configure and manage without taking away control.

Design guided decision journeys.

Give agents accurate inputs for comparing products, checking fit, evaluating availability, and explaining trade-offs, reflecting consumer preferences and merchant rules rather than opaque rankings.

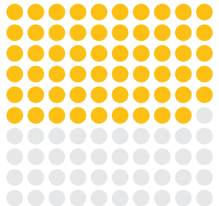


62%

of high-income shoppers are willing to let agents search and compare products across merchants.

Connect loyalty, promotions and service.

Let agents identify applicable rewards, benefits, subscriptions, and support options without creating inconsistent offers or exposing merchants to uncontrolled discounting.

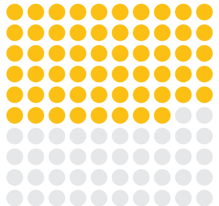


59%

of merchants expect agents to manage loyalty programs across multiple merchants.

Keep a human in the loop, extend beyond checkout.

Provide clear approval points before consequential actions and use agents for delivery updates, returns, exchanges, and issue resolution to build trust before higher-risk delegation.

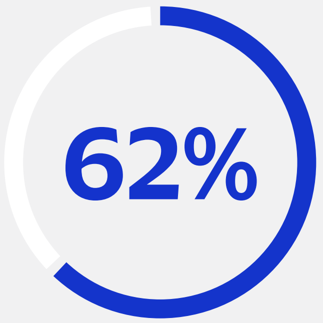


58%

of merchants expect agents to automate returns, refunds, and issue resolution.

Why this comes next?

Once discoverable, a merchant must be useful. Assistance is the bridge between being found and being authorized to transact. It is exactly where merchants are investing first and where consumers are most willing to delegate.



of merchants plan to invest in personalized offers and loyalty programs fueled by AI over the next 24 months, their single highest AI priority.

Phase 3

Phase 3:

24–36 months

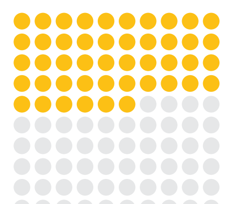
Controlled transactions:

Enable Controlled Transactions

Streamline agent-led payments while preserving security, accountability and merchant control.

Verify the agent and its authority, then apply granular controls.

Capture agent identity, consumer delegation, and consent, then enforce spending limits, product and merchant restrictions, time-bound permissions, and thresholds that trigger consumer confirmation.

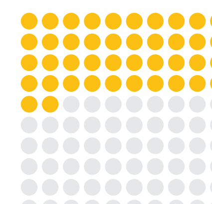


46%

of merchants name pricing and the final price paid as a non-negotiable control.

Extend fraud tools with agent-specific signals.

Adapt fraud models to recognize non-human behavior, delegated credentials, and deviations from the consumer's stated rules, treating agent signals as an added layer within established risk systems.

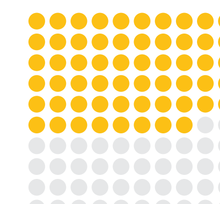


42%

of merchants keep fraud, disputes, and liability as an area they will not hand over.

Make every transaction explainable and reversible.

Maintain audit trails for intent, consent, credentials, and approvals, and standardize the evidence needed to cancel, refund, or unwind transactions consistently across every channel.

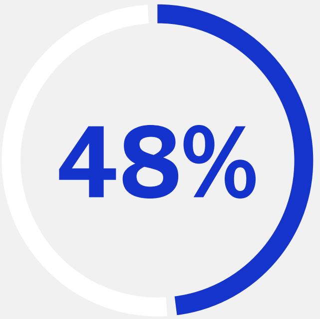


58%

of merchants expect agents to choose payment methods based on rewards, fees, and costs.

Why this comes next?

Every agentic system will eventually make a mistake. Agent-led payments should feel like an extension of existing commerce, not a riskier environment. Merchants draw hard lines around revenue-critical functions, and this phase lets agents act inside them.



of high-income shoppers are willing to let an agent start and complete a purchase—the delegation controlled transactions must earn.

Phase 4

Phase 4:

36+ months

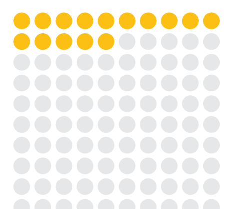
Scale:

Scale the Growth Engine

Turn agentic capabilities into a repeatable growth engine.

Prioritize use cases by commercial value and repeatability.

Rank opportunities by incremental sales, conversion lift, average order value, margin, abandonment reduction, and cost to serve, avoiding pilots that show novelty without a credible path to scale.

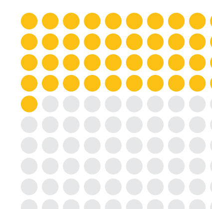


15%

of merchants expect agents to generate more than 30% of their sales within two years.

Use embedded capabilities where they reduce complexity.

Build on commerce platforms, payment providers, and networks that can add agent identity, tokenization, fraud controls, consent, and reporting to systems merchants already run.

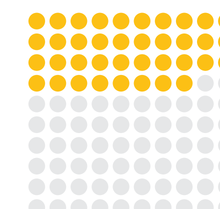


41%

of merchants prefer to adopt agentic capabilities embedded in existing commerce and payments infrastructure, the top choice.

Connect agent activity to the operating core.

Integrate agent signals with CRM, loyalty, merchandising, inventory, and service systems, and track agent-attributed sales in a merchant-wide performance framework.

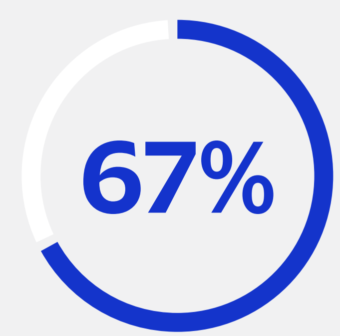


38%

of merchants look to their bank, issuer, or financial institution to provide agentic capabilities.

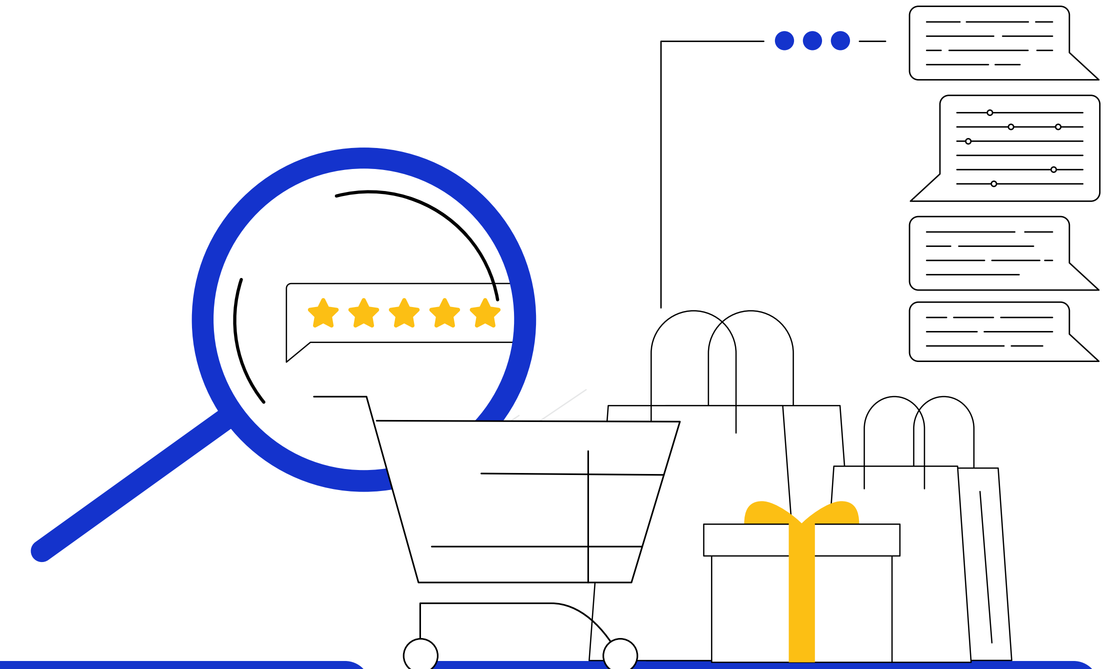
Why is this the last stage?

The commercial payoff comes from making agentic commerce a core operating capability rather than an isolated pilot. Scaling depends on connecting agents to the operating core and leaning on embedded partners, and becomes viable once the first three phases are in place.



of merchants expect at least 5% of their digital sales to come through AI agents within two years.

How leading merchants stay ahead of agentic commerce



Fix the data foundation first.

Leaders make products, pricing, and policies agent-readable before competitors do. With only 15% of merchants ready today, early movers own visibility.

Lead with assistance, not autonomy.

Leaders build trust through guided help and loyalty, where 62% are investing, before asking consumers to hand over the checkout.

Draw hard lines, then automate inside them.

Leaders protect pricing (46%) and liability (42%) up front, which lets them safely widen what agents are allowed to do.

Build on what you already run.

Leaders adopt agentic capabilities embedded in existing commerce and payments infrastructure (41%) rather than bolt on a new stack.

Conclusion

The payments industry has navigated structural transitions before, from paper to cards, from magnetic stripe to chip, from physical to virtual. Each of those transitions required a standards body, liability framework, and trust anchor that consumers and merchants could rely on. Agentic commerce needs the same things. **AI changes the interface, but it does not change the expectation that payments should be secure, reversible, and accountable.**

Every party in the data is moving AI closer to the center of the shopping experience. Consumers are already using AI for discovery and expect to use it for purchasing. Merchants are investing in the use cases where they have the most control and the least liability exposure. Acquirers are technically ready and actively adapting existing systems as governance frameworks and common industry standards mature.

Decisions being made now about standards, liability, certification, and infrastructure investment will determine who is well-positioned as the agentic commerce shift accelerates in the next few years. **The parties that move early to define agent identity, establish certification standards, and build interoperable trust frameworks will be setting the terms on which everyone else participates.**

Methodology

The Agentic Commerce Deep Dive, a PYMNTS Intelligence and Visa Acceptance Solutions collaboration, examines how AI agents are poised to reshape payments, trust, and the transaction layer across consumers, merchants, and acquirers. It draws on three surveys fielded in early 2026 across the U.S., Brazil, and the UAE.

- Consumers: 5,241 respondents surveyed in March 2026. Country samples are weighted to reflect the national adult population.
- Merchants: 1,185 respondents surveyed in March 2026. Sample includes both SMBs and large merchants across the three countries.
- Acquirers: 150 respondents surveyed in January 2026. All countries combined.

Key segmentations include country (U.S., Brazil, and UAE), generation (Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers and seniors), and merchant size (SMB and large). PYMNTS Intelligence retains full editorial control over all content, findings, methodology, and data analysis.

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