SmartPulse

AI Is Rewriting the Grocery Journey

How shoppers are using AI to plan meals, discover products, and make purchase decisions – and what it means for CPG brands.

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AI Has Moved from Experiment to Everyday

AI is now a practical shopping tool, not an emerging behavior.

68% of shoppers already use AI to guide grocery purchases. They're turning to tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity for meal planning, recipe discovery, and product research.

Adoption is accelerating across every generation, income level, and household type. This isn't speculative – it's happening now.

AI influences consideration before shoppers ever reach a retailer. Discovery is faster, consideration is more fluid, and the path from inspiration to cart is collapsing. Brands that don't show up in AI-driven recommendations risk losing shoppers early in the journey.

AI Goes Mainstream for Grocery Shopping

9 in 10 shoppers use AI tools regularly – and 68% have already turned to AI for grocery help.

AI tool usage in the past 3 months:

87%
Used ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, or similar AI search tools

68%
Have used AI for grocery help

42%
Used AI-generated shopping lists

28%
Used AI recipe generators

22%
Used AI meal-planning tools

Life stage, not age, is what drives AI adoption for grocery shopping.

Even among Baby Boomers, more than one-third are using AI for grocery decisions — a sign of how quickly adoption is spreading beyond early users.

Parents are the true power users. Among households with children under 18, **82% have used AI for grocery decisions**, compared to **56% of households without children**. Convenience needs, not novelty, are driving usage.
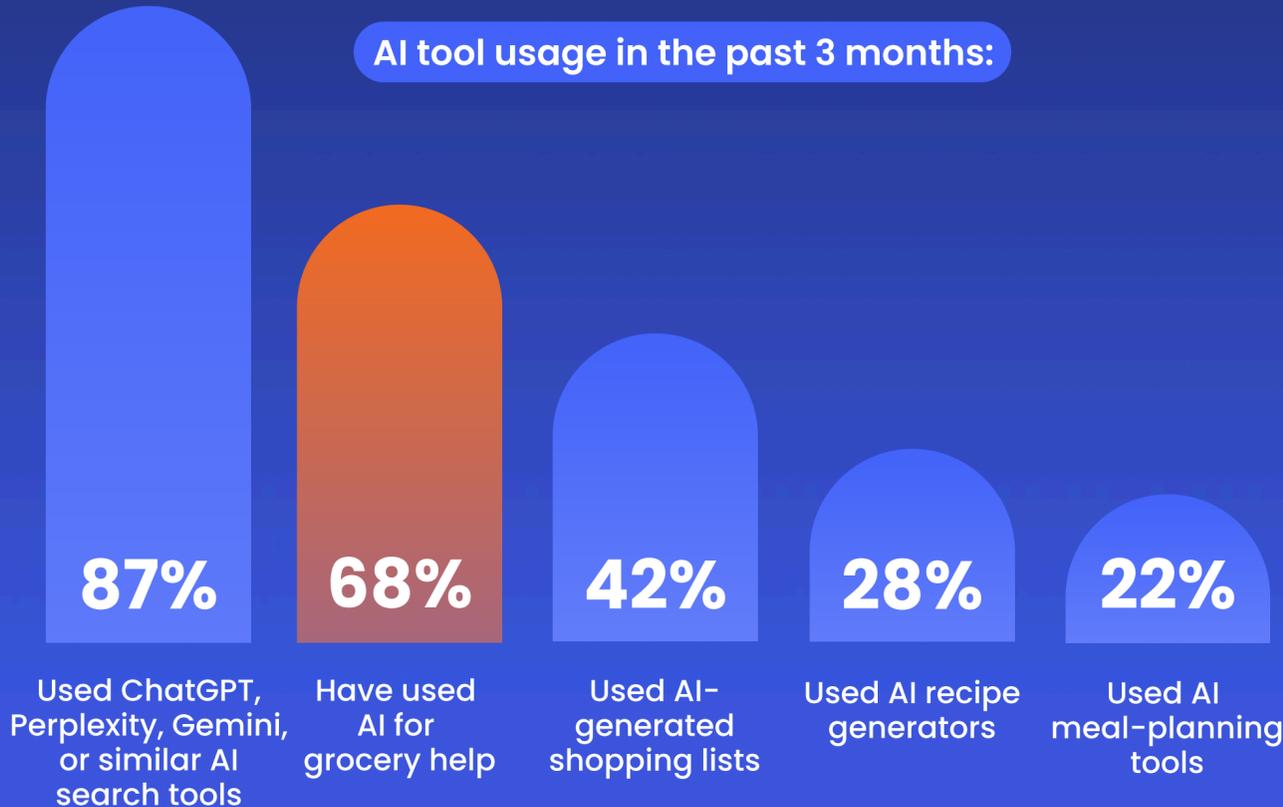
Recipes Are the Entry Point to AI Grocery Shopping

Finding recipes is the #1 desire, closely followed by price comparison and automated meal planning.

Recipe discovery is the entry point. Low-commitment, high-value, immediately useful. Once shoppers see AI deliver a great recipe, they ask for more: build a list, compare prices, automate meal plans.

Baby Boomers lean hardest into recipes and price. Among 61–79 year olds, 56% want recipe help and 54% want price help – utility over experimentation.

Millennials want both inspiration and optimization. Among 29–44 year olds, recipes (41%) and best prices (41%) tie as top priorities.

When asked what they want AI to help with most:

42%
Finding recipes

40%
Finding the best prices

35%
Meal planning

26%
Creating a shopping list

What this means:
Recipe discovery isn't content marketing – it's the front door to AI shopping behavior.
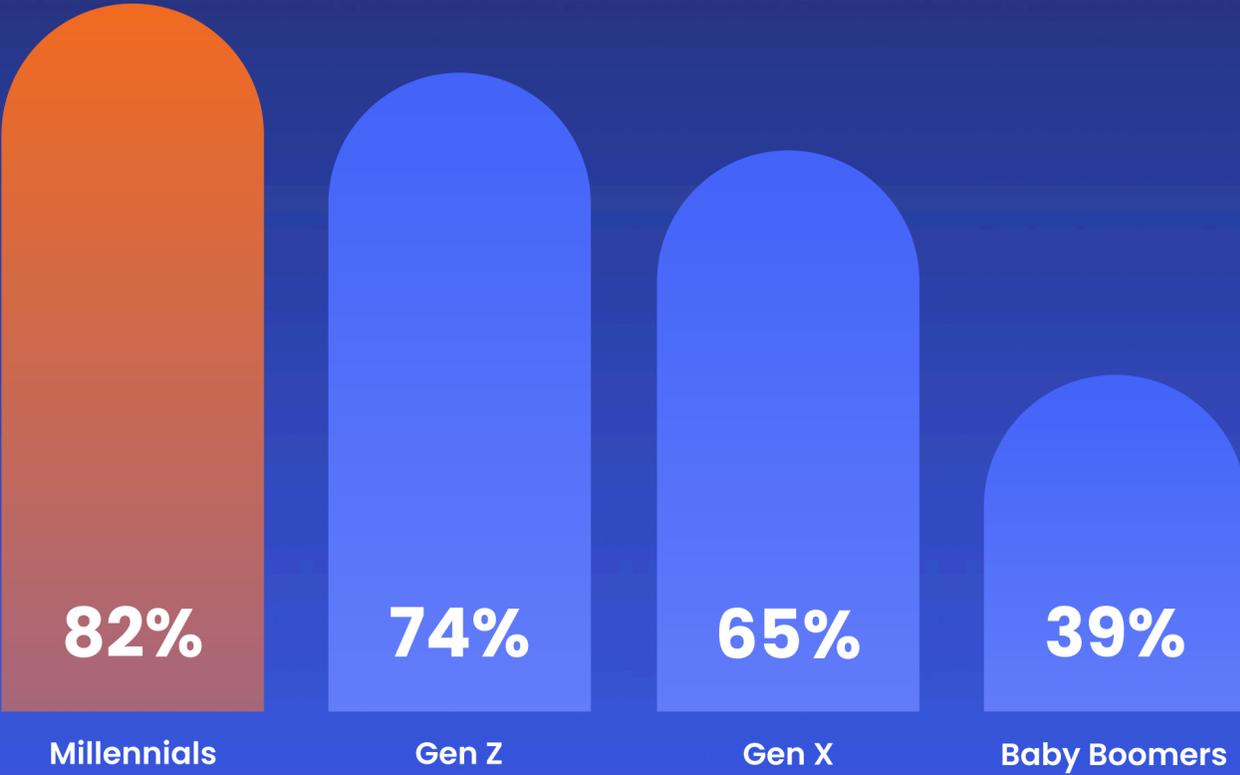
The New Expectation: Full Automation

Shoppers expect ideas to convert directly into carts. When asked if they'd use AI to instantly convert a recipe or meal plan into a ready-to-buy shopping cart at their preferred retailer:

60%
Yes, definitely

32%
Maybe

AI-generated shopping lists are in demand. When asked how appealing AI-generated shopping lists built from their habits, previous orders, dietary needs, or budget would be:
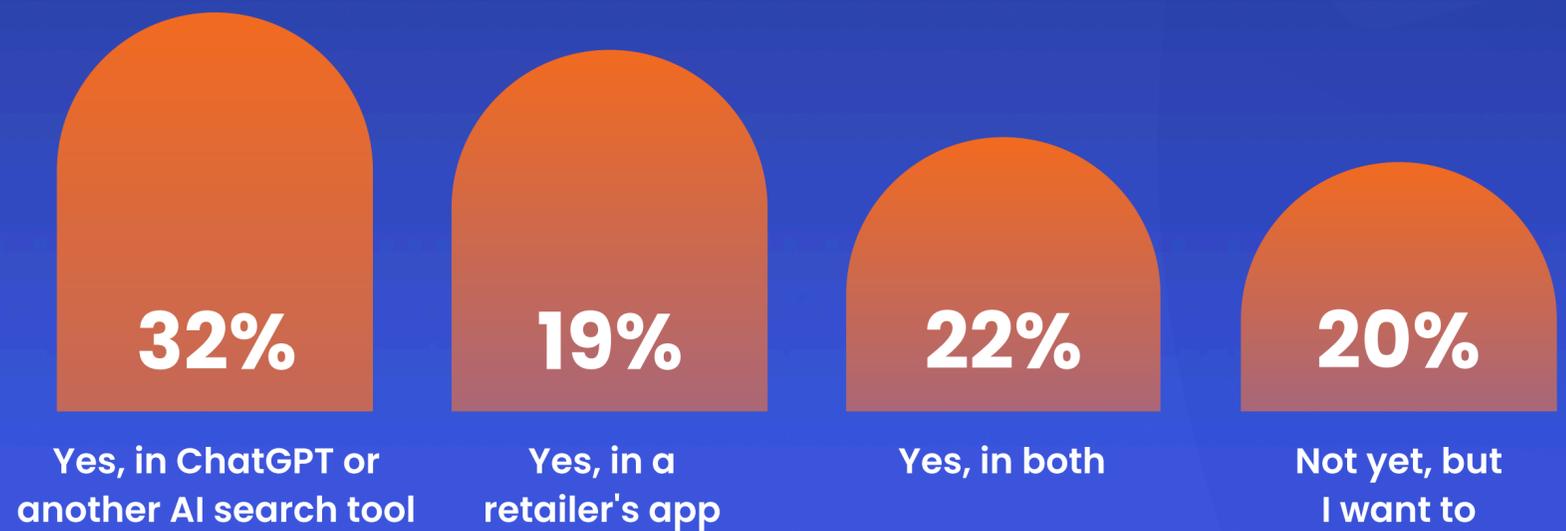
60%
Very appealing

36%
Somewhat appealing

Retailer AI Is Live — And 86% Are Ready to Buy From It

Retailer AI is becoming a new decision surface for brands. 93% have used or want to use these tools, and purchase intent is exceptionally high.

When asked if they're already engaging with it:

32%
Yes, in ChatGPT or another AI search tool

19%
Yes, in a retailer's app

22%
Yes, in both

20%
Not yet, but I want to

And they're ready to convert. When asked how likely they'd be to purchase if they could use Walmart, Target, or Amazon's AI inside ChatGPT to build their cart:

7%
I would only use it for planning, not buying

8%
Not likely

48%
Very likely

38%
Somewhat likely

That's 86% likely to buy directly from an AI-built cart.

Price comparison is the top value driver. When asked which feature would be most valuable:

32%
Finding the lowest price across sizes/flavors

29%
Turning a recipe or meal plan into a cart

23%
Automatically building my weekly shopping cart

The Future Is Autonomous — And More Than Half Are Ready

Many shoppers are open to AI handling parts of their shopping – and brands will increasingly be evaluated by systems, not just people.

That comfort level varies by generation:

72% Millennials

63% Gen Z

50% Gen X

27% Baby Boomers

59% are comfortable letting AI choose, order, and deliver products autonomously.

AI shopping is already frequent. When asked how often they currently use AI to shop for groceries or household items:

74% are using AI to shop frequently or occasionally.

What Shoppers Are Saying

Beyond the numbers, survey participants expressed a range of perspectives — from enthusiastic early adopters to opinionated skeptics:

Time-saving:

"I feel like AI helping me with my grocery/daily shopping needs would take a massive load off of me."

Approval:

"It would be very helpful to automatically make carts and find the best prices, but I wouldn't want it to make the purchase without my approval."

Concerns:

"I don't mind it as of right now, but as AI starts to get more powerful, it will ruin the world."

What Marketers Should Do Now

Be discoverable in AI-assisted search

68% of shoppers already use AI tools for grocery decisions. Brands that don't appear in AI-generated recommendations lose consideration before shoppers even reach a retailer.

Treat recipes as a conversion layer

60% want instant conversion from meal inspiration to shoppable cart. The gap between inspiration and cart needs to be zero.

Design for both humans and AI systems

59% are comfortable letting AI shop for them autonomously. Optimize for AI agents, not just human shoppers.

Make pricing legible and comparable

40% want AI to find the best prices, and 32% say price comparison is the most valuable retailer AI feature. Competitive pricing visibility matters at the moment of decision.

Test and learn with retailer-led AI experiences

86% are likely to purchase when they can build a cart inside ChatGPT, Amazon, or Walmart AI. Visibility in these environments is no longer optional.

Respond to AI or Lose Visibility

- **Make every digital touchpoint shoppable now.** Turn brand recipes and content into instant action. The gap between inspiration and cart must be zero.

- **Use AI/ML to surface the right products at the right time.** Personalize journeys to move shoppers from discovery to cart seamlessly.

- **Get ready for AI-driven discovery on brand-owned channels in 2026.** Optimize for both human shoppers and AI agents evaluating your products.

Brands that act today shape consumer decisions tomorrow.

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