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Inside AI's Influence on Consumer Choice and Brand Strategy

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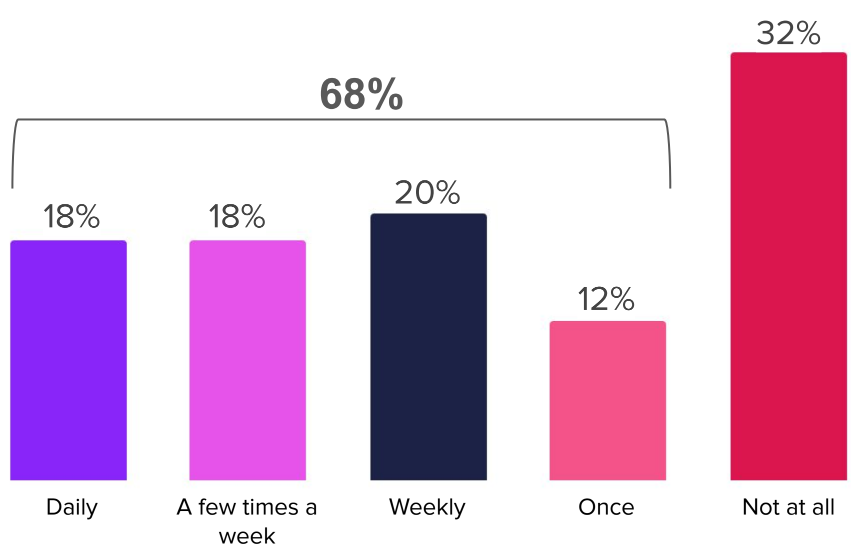
The Overall Shift

There is a fundamental "transformation gap" in the industry between consumer behavior and organizational adoption of AI. While 68% of consumers now use Generative AI tools at least monthly—an increase of 4% since late 2025—most organizations are using these same tools for internal, tactical tasks and remain largely localized in "content and creative" silos. CPG companies are primarily focused on efficiency (65%), aiming to reduce costs and automate manual tasks rather than driving new revenue streams.

More than two-thirds of consumers are using AI tools at least monthly

In the past month, how many times have you used Generative AI?



Individuals reporting monthly or more frequent usage increased 4.0% to 68% from November 2025 to February 2026

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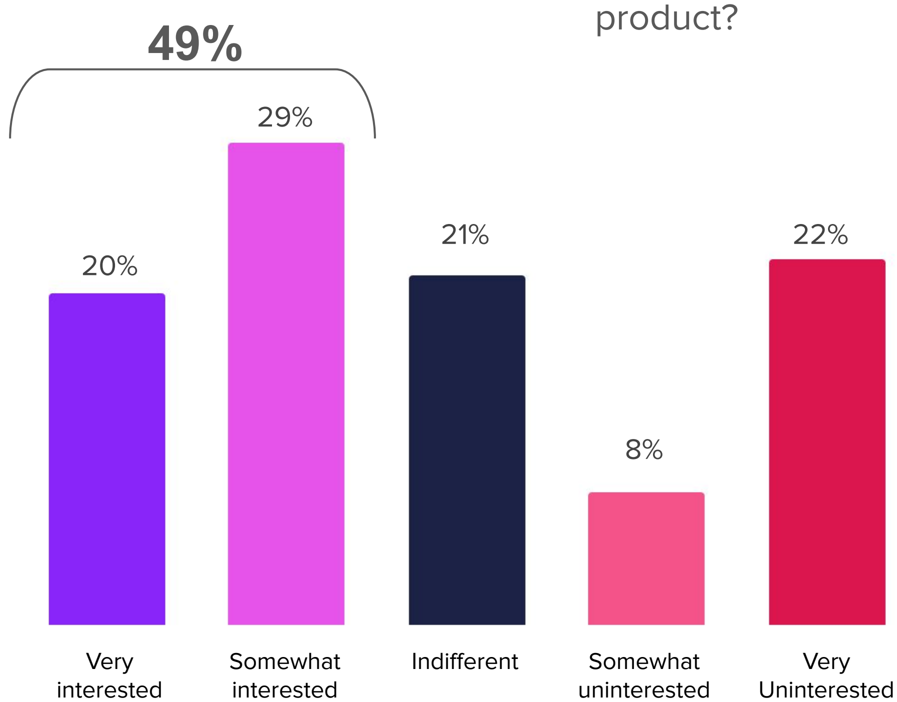
Shopper Behavior

Consumers are utilizing AI to streamline the "messy middle" of the shopping journey, though direct purchasing remains low. The Intent Gap: 34% of consumers use AI to research products and 23% use it to summarize reviews, yet only 8% have initiated a direct purchase. This indicates that while AI is influencing the consideration phase, consumers have not adopted autonomous shopping. Nearly half of consumers indicate there are interested in AI assistance with shopping. AI discovery helps consumers narrow down options and research products in a more streamlined way but there is a trust gap that is involved in moving to autonomous shopping.

Nearly half of consumers indicate they are interested in AI assistance with shopping

Rate your interest in having a Generative AI agent help you research and purchase a product?



Individuals reporting they were “Somewhat Uninterested” or “Very Uninterested” in using AI to help research and purchase products declined 2.7% from November 2025 to February 2026

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Adoption is not uniform. AI interest is heavily influenced by economic and generational factors. From a generational perspective, Millennials lead the charge with 62% combined interest, while Gen Z follows at 51%, highlighting a shift toward younger, digitally native cohorts who prioritize speed and convenience over traditional browsing. Furthermore, male consumers currently over-index in interest (55%), creating a specific demographic profile that brand manufacturers must target as they pilot their first consumer-facing AI agents.

BY GENERATION

Millennials are the most interested in AI-assisted shopping (62% combined interest), followed by Gen Z (51% combined interest).

BY INCOME

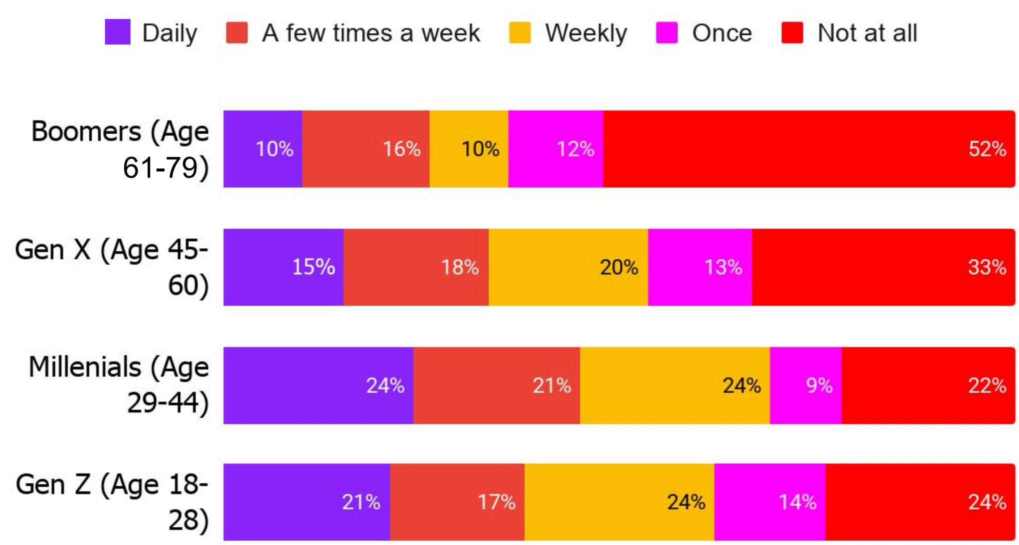
Higher-income households (>$100k) over-index on interest at 60%, compared to 39% for lower-income households (<$50k).

BY GENDER

Men currently over-index in interest, with 55% indicating they are "Very" or "Somewhat" interested in AI shopping agents.

Millennials are also generally using AI the most frequently

In the past month, how many times have you used Generative AI?



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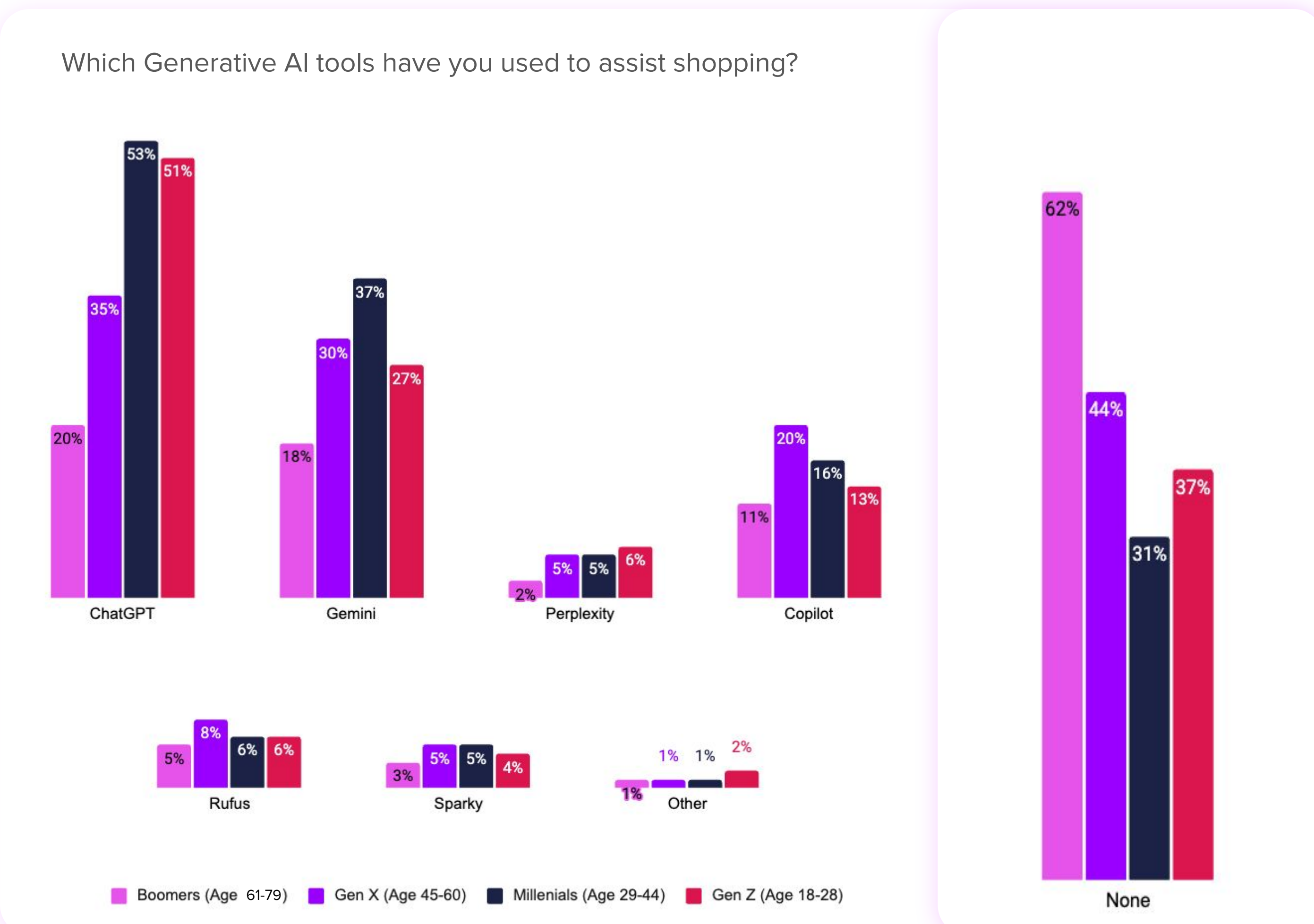
Even though LLM usage varies by generations, there is a clear winner in terms of which tool is being used. When evaluating the landscape of generative AI tools utilized for shopping assistance, standalone conversational models heavily dominate the market over native retail applications.

Generations mirror one another in terms of how they rank favorite AI tools for shopping



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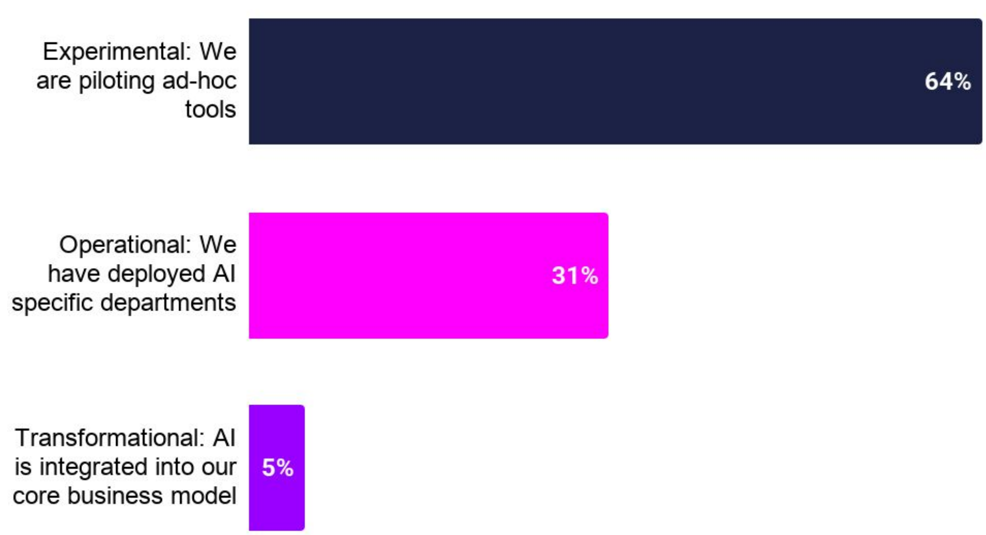
How Organizations are Using AI

While consumers are beginning to pick up adoption usage, most brands are struggling to move past the initial stages of adoption. The data shows that organizations believe AI will be significantly disruptive (49%) but are not making the internal changed necessary to match that change, 42% say their budget for AI will remain flat.

Most organizations are still in the experimental phases of AI

How would you describe your organization's current level of AI maturity?



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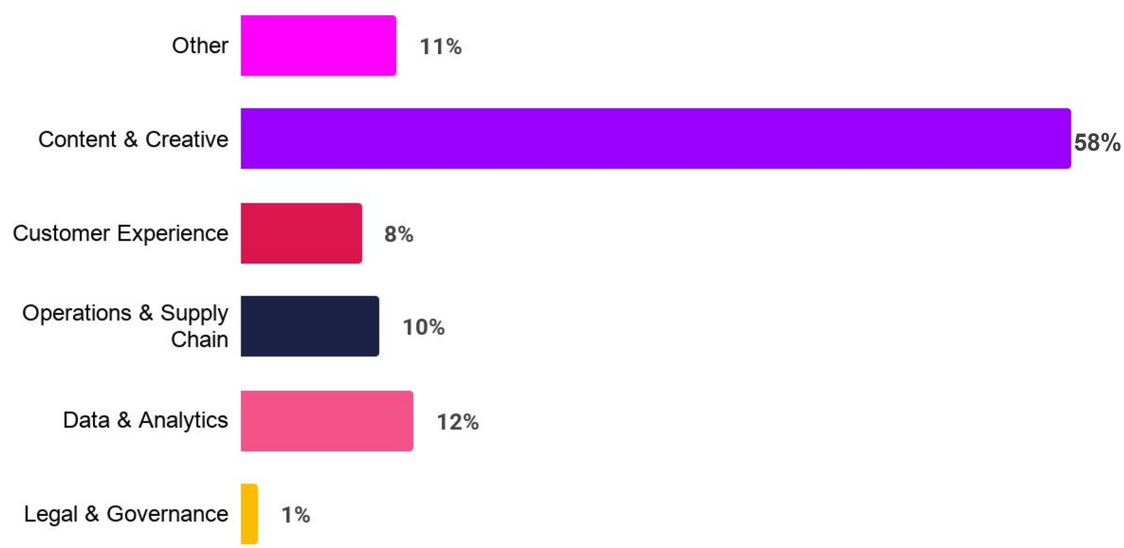
How Organizations are Using AI

The majority of organizations are using AI for content and creative (58%), which we see is the first place that brands experiment with AI because there is a clear use case, and it can increase efficiency.

Most organizations are focused on content and creative

Which specific area of your business is currently seeing the highest volume of AI application?



The Budget Impact & Strategic Objectives

Despite organizations believing that AI will significantly disrupt the industry and the overall ‘hype,’ financial commitments to not yet match the perceived importance of AI. AI will require investments from brands in the short term to see long term benefits.

42% Increase significantly

43% Increase moderately

13% Remain flat/ No dedicated budget

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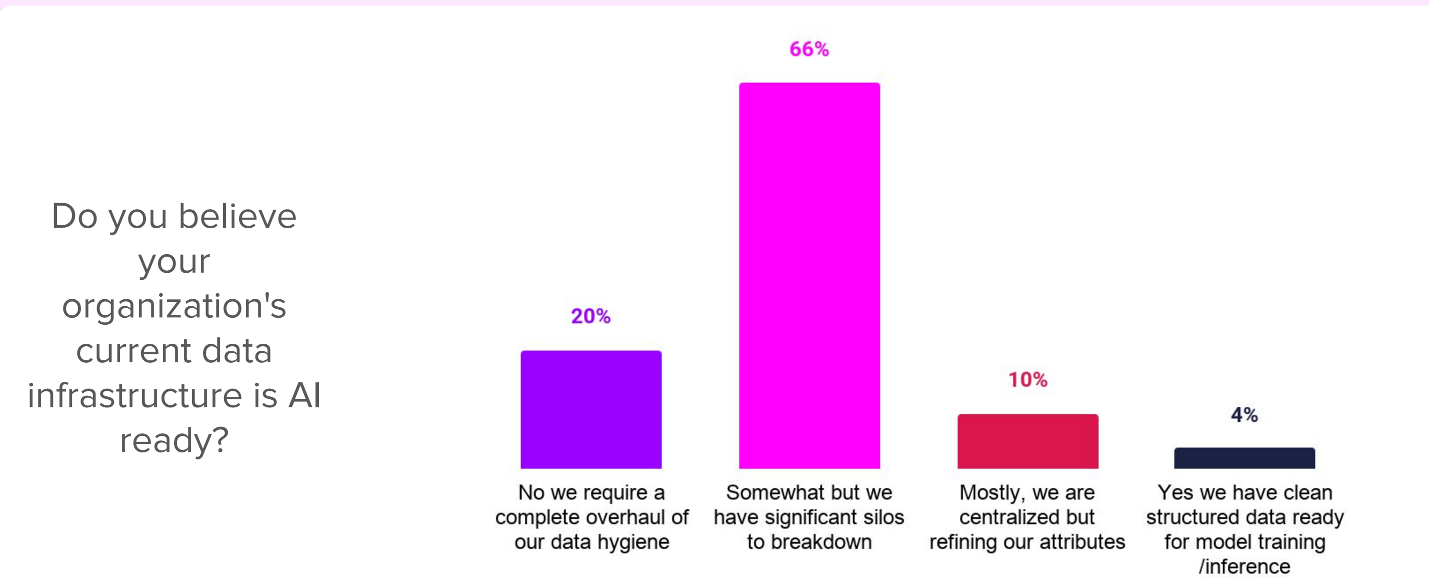
AI Organizational Readiness: Infrastructure & Education

When evaluating organizational readiness, brand manufacturers are facing a steep uphill battle across both infrastructure and internal talent, creating a severe bottleneck for true AI scaling. According to the data, a staggering 66% of organizations acknowledge that they are hindered by "significant silos" that prevent data integration across departments, while an additional 20% admit that their baseline data hygiene requires a complete, foundational overhaul. Only 4% of brand manufacturers possess a genuinely "AI-ready" infrastructure capable of supporting model training and inference. Compounding this data crisis is a profound education and talent gap. Nearly 29% of organizations cite a direct lack of internal skills and expertise as their primary barrier to entry: 55% of the broader workforce views AI strictly as a "utility" for minor tasks rather than a vehicle for empowerment, while 51% of leadership teams maintain a "low trust" posture that mandates manual human review of almost all automated outputs. This combination of fractured data systems, a missing specialized workforce, and culturally embedded skepticism deeply restricts an organization's ability to move beyond basic automation into advanced, autonomous capabilities.

Most organizations don't have data ready infrastructure to take advantage of AI



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Trust remains to be a common topic when talking about AI and adoption inside organizations. Our data indicates that 1% of leadership teams maintain "High Trust" to comfortably deploy fully automated workflows. In stark contrast, 51% operate in a "Low Trust" state requiring manual confirmation of almost all outputs, while a striking 25% maintain a "Zero Trust" policy where every single AI-generated asset or insight must be manually vetted by a human reviewer. This organizational friction is heavily fueled by the broader workforce's cultural stance, where a 55% majority views the integration of AI strictly as a basic utility for minor tasks, and nearly a third (23%) openly view the technology with skepticism, dismissing it as "hype" that adds little to no tangible value.

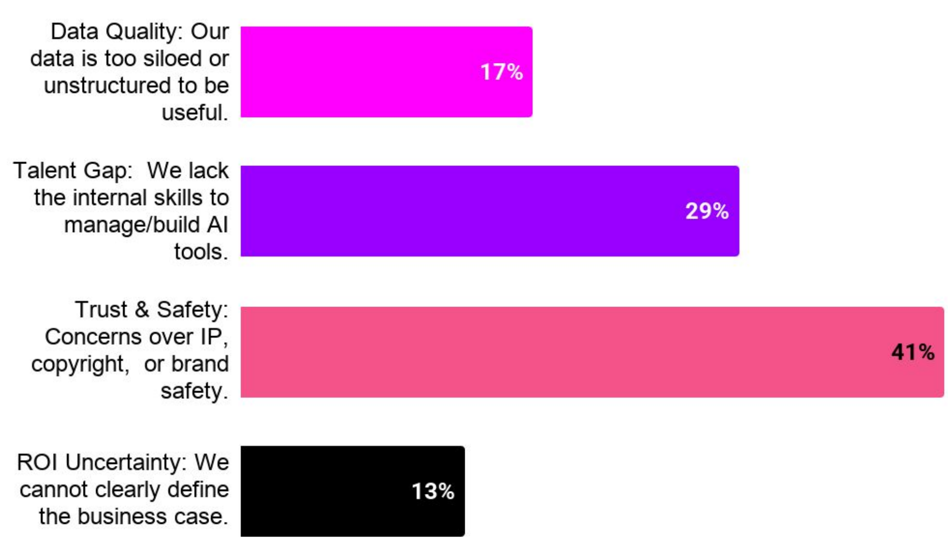
To what extent do you trust AI-generated outputs without human review?

51% — **Low Trust: We review everything**

25% — **Zero Trust: Every output must be reviewed**

Trust and safety remains a top concern for AI usage

Which "barrier to entry" is currently stalling your AI investment the most?



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What should brands focus on?

- **Know your consumer:** Understand your target audience and align your strategies with how your audience is engaging with LLMs.
- **Focus on data:** Clean data is the foundation to all things AI. If your data infrastructure and governance is not in place your AI efforts will not pay out.
- **Bridge the education gap:** Begin to educate your organization across all levels so they can adopt tools and make an impact.
- **Move beyond pilots:** Think about how AI can be further integrated into everything you do.

For organizations that fall into the somewhat ready or not ready phases of taking advantage of AI, the first things to focus on are: data centralization, forming cross-functional AI task forces, establishing data privacy guardrails.

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About The Digital Shelf Institute

The Digital Shelf Institute (DSI) is a community dedicated to developing and sharing the best actionable insights and strategies for brand manufacturers to win on the digital shelf

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About NIQ

NielsenIQ (NYSE: NIQ) is a leading consumer intelligence company, delivering the most complete and trusted understanding of consumer buying behavior and revealing new pathways to growth. By combining an unmatched global data footprint and granular consumer and retail measurement with decades of AI modeling expertise, NIQ builds decision systems that help companies turn complex data into confident action. With operations in more than 90 countries, NIQ covers approximately 82% of the world's population and more than $7.4 trillion in global consumer spend. Through cloud-based platforms, advanced analytics and AI-driven insights, NIQ delivers The Full View™—helping brands and retailers understand what consumers buy, why they buy it, and what to do next. For more information, please visit www.niq.com.

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