The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps:

What 56 Million Abandoned Carts Mean for U.S. Merchants and How Agentic AI is Changing What Comes Next



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The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps: What 56 Million Abandoned Carts Mean for U.S. Merchants and How Agentic AI is Changing What Comes Next was sponsored by and produced in collaboration with PayPal, and PYMNTS Intelligence is grateful for the company's support and insight. PYMNTS Intelligence retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

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Introduction

The sale was effectively made. Only at the final stage, it wasn't. The shopper had filled their cart and clicked "checkout," fully satisfied with their decision and ready to pay. But then they suddenly walked away, straight to a competitor to buy exactly the same item. Last month alone, around 56 million online purchases in the U.S. disappeared exactly this way, and all for a preventable reason—consumers couldn't use their desired payment method.[1]

Younger consumers are the most likely to walk away when they cannot pay the way they want, with Gen Z and millennials showing the highest rates of cart abandonment due to not having the option to use their preferred payment method. Digital wallets and buy now, pay later (BNPL) options account for most of the lost opportunity.

Nearly half of shoppers who abandoned a cart because their preferred method was unavailable wanted to use a digital wallet, while about one-third wanted to use BNPL. These two groups represent about 26.3 million and 19.2 million U.S. consumers, respectively.

Wallet acceptance also matters because it is becoming part of the infrastructure for what comes next. The equivalent of nearly 113 million U.S. consumers (43%) would likely link a digital wallet to an AI agent for purchases in the next two years. This makes digital wallets a central trust gateway for agentic commerce, giving consumers a familiar way to manage payment credentials while setting controls over how agents act on their behalf. Approval requirements, spending limits, purchase-scope restrictions and payment-source settings will help determine how quickly consumers move from AI-assisted shopping to AI-assisted purchasing.

These are just some of the findings in The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps: What 56 Million Abandoned Carts Mean for U.S. Merchants and How Agentic AI is Changing What Comes Next, a PYMNTS Intelligence report produced in collaboration with PayPal. The report is based on a survey of 2,179 U.S. adults conducted in June 2026 and examines how missing payment acceptance drives cart abandonment today, how digital wallets shape merchant competitiveness and how wallet-linked AI agents could change the next phase of online shopping.

1. This report is based on a survey of 2,179 U.S. consumers. Population-level figures are extrapolations from survey results applied to the U.S. adult population. Our sample was balanced to match the U.S. adult population by age, gender, education and income. See methodology section for further details.

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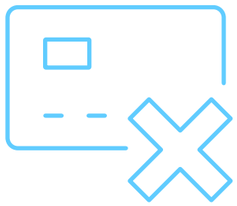
Key **Findings**

01

WHEN THE PREFERRED METHOD IS MISSING, THE SALE IS LOST.



56M

shoppers abandoned a cart in the last 30 days.

In the last 30 days, nearly 56 million U.S. consumers abandoned an online cart because their preferred payment method was unavailable. Around 19 million shoppers walked away over a missing BNPL option.

02

MISSING DIGITAL WALLETS DRIVE AWAY SHOPPERS.



36M

shoppers are at risk over digital wallet gaps.

About 36 million U.S. shoppers walked away from or would have abandoned a cart in the last 30 days because their preferred digital wallet was not accepted. This risk climbs sharply for younger consumers, doubling to 28% for Gen Z.

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03

DIGITAL WALLETS ARE THE TRUST GATEWAY TO AGENTIC SHOPPING.



43%

of U.S. consumers say they would link a digital wallet to an AI agent for purchases in the next two years.

Three controls unlock wallet linking for AI purchases: the power to approve agent transactions, cap spending and set the scope of what the agent can buy.



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01

Carts Abandoned, **Customers Lost**

In the last 30 days, 56 million U.S. consumers abandoned an online cart at least once because their preferred payment method was not available at checkout. That's more than one in five (21%) shoppers. Every unsupported payment method is a trigger for lost sales and customers. One in four digital wallet users will leave your store entirely if their preferred wallet isn't accepted.

36%

of Gen Z shoppers abandoned a cart in the last month. Younger consumers are especially likely to walk away if they can't pay the way they want.

Younger consumers are the most likely to walk away if they can't access their preferred payment methods. More than one-third (36%) of Gen Z shoppers abandoned a cart in the last 30 days because they couldn't pay the way they wanted, 1.7 times the overall average, followed by millennials at 31%. Together, that means 40 million Gen Z and millennial consumers gave up on intended purchases in a single month. For Gen X and baby boomers and seniors, these rates drop substantially, revealing a sharp generational divide.[2]

2. PYMNTS Intelligence uses the following birth dates and approximate age ranges in 2026 for generational cohorts: baby boomers: born in 1964 or earlier and now aged 62 or older; Generation X: born between 1965 and 1980 and now aged 46–61; millennials: born between 1981 and 1996 and now aged 30–45; bridge millennials: born between 1978 and 1988 and now aged 38–48; zillennials: born between 1991 and 1999 and now aged 26–35; Generation Z: born in 1997 or later and now aged 29 or younger; and Gen Alpha, born in 2010 or later.

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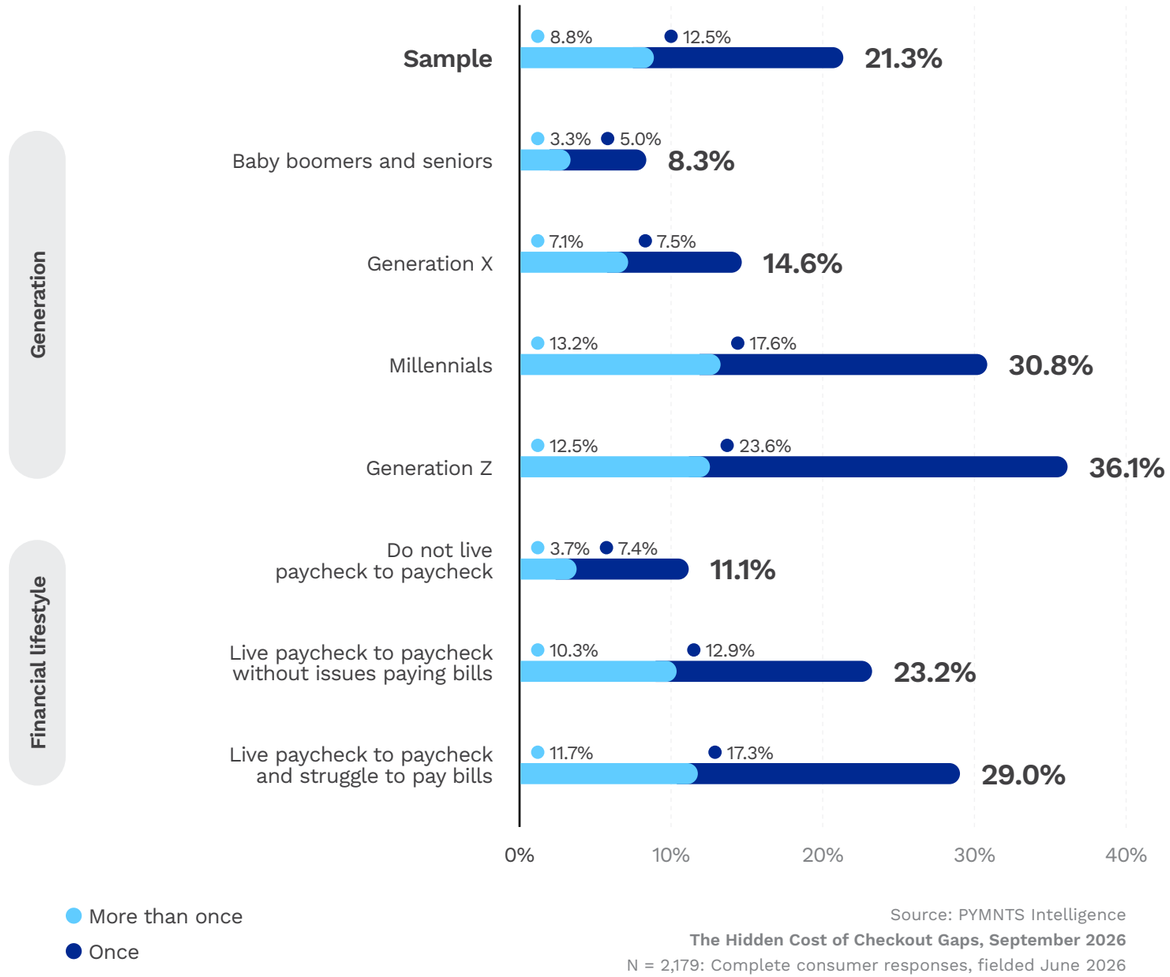
Financial pressure also plays a key role. Among shoppers living paycheck to paycheck who struggle to pay their bills, 29% gave up on purchases, nearly three times the rate of those not living paycheck to paycheck (11%).

Looking at specific payment methods reveals that the acceptance gap concentrates in two places: digital wallets and BNPL. Nearly half (47%) of shoppers who abandoned their carts in the last 30 days wanted to pay with a digital wallet. That translates to 26.3 million U.S. consumers. These shoppers most often wanted to use Apple Pay or Cash App, each named by 18%, followed by PayPal at 12%. (Respondents who abandoned multiple carts could select more than one payment method.)

FIGURE 1:

Those who walk away
Share of consumers who abandoned a cart in the last 30 days because their preferred payment method was unavailable



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 2,179: Complete consumer responses, fielded June 2026

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Why this matters

17.7 million consumers abandoned an online purchase in the past 30 days after having built the cart because PayPal was not available.

11.1M

abandoned because they couldn't use PayPal Pay Later.

6.6M

abandoned because they couldn't use PayPal as a digital wallet.

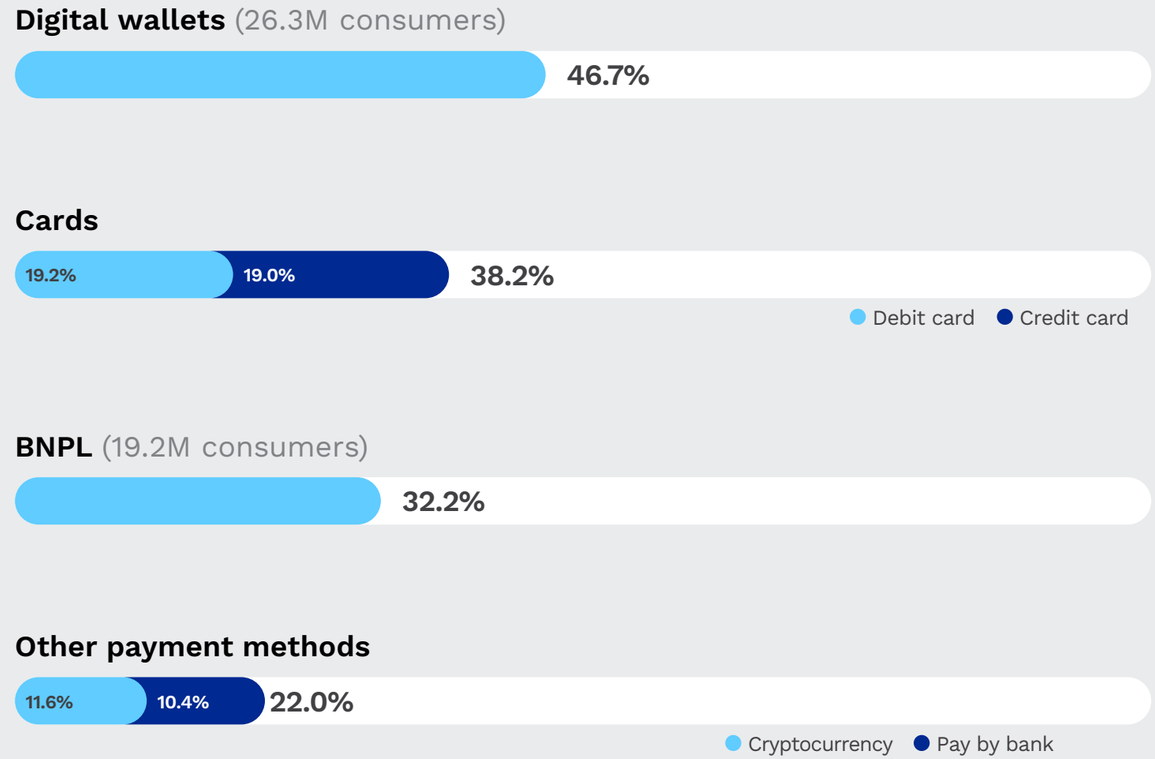
19.2

million U.S. shoppers **abandoned their purchases when BNPL was not an available payment method.**

FIGURE 2:

Cart abandonment peaks when digital wallets and BNPL are missing

The missing payment method that caused shoppers to abandon carts, in the last 30 days



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 458: Consumers who abandoned a cart because their preferred payment method was unavailable, fielded June 2026

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BNPL ranks as the second-most important missing payment method. Around one-third (32%) of cart abandoners—19 million U.S. shoppers—walked away when they could not use BNPL. PayPal Pay Later leads here at 20%, ahead of Klarna at 12.4%. Nearly half of Gen Z wallet users would switch merchants or abandon the purchase entirely if they could not use their preferred wallet.



What this means for merchants:

Every unsupported payment method is a potential lost sale, and the younger your customer base, the higher the risk.



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02

The Digital Wallet Gap and Who It's Costing You

47%

of Gen Z shoppers and
44% of millennial shoppers
used a digital wallet when completing an online purchase in the last month.

Merchants risk losing 36 million U.S. shoppers every month from digital wallet non-acceptance.

Lack of digital wallet acceptance puts three groups of shoppers at risk: those who abandoned a cart because a wallet was not offered (24.4 million), those who paid with a wallet and say they would have abandoned without it (9.7 million) and those who fall into both groups (1.9 million).

For merchants with younger customer bases, nearly one in three shoppers is at risk of wallet-driven abandonment.

Digital wallet adoption helps explain why the exposure is this large. Eighty-seven million consumers—one-third of U.S. shoppers—used at least one digital wallet online in the past 30 days, and nearly as many (77 million, or 29%) did so in-store. PayPal leads online digital wallet usage with 29 million consumers—the largest single brand in this dataset, and slightly ahead of Cash App (26 million) and Apple Pay (25 million). Apple Pay is the top choice for in-store purchases. Meanwhile, 22 million shoppers paid online with PayPal Pay Later, as did 19 million of those buying in-store.

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FIGURE 3:

One in three shoppers used a digital wallet online in the past 30 days
Payment methods that consumers used in the past 30 days

	Online	
Digital wallet	33.1%	**86.9M**
PayPal	18.1%	**47.6M**
PayPal using a debit or credit card	11.2%	**29.4M**
PayPal Pay Later	8.2%	**21.6M**
Apple Pay	9.4%	**24.7M**
Cash App	9.7%	**25.5M**
Google Pay	3.9%	**10.3M**
Venmo	3.9%	**10.2M**
Klarna	2.8%	**7.4M**
Affirm	2.7%	**7.2M**

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 2,179: Complete consumer responses, fielded June 2026

Digital wallet acceptance is not just a Gen Z issue—**1 in 3 Gen X shoppers and 1 in 6 baby boomers also paid with a wallet online,** making it a mainstream expectation across all age groups.



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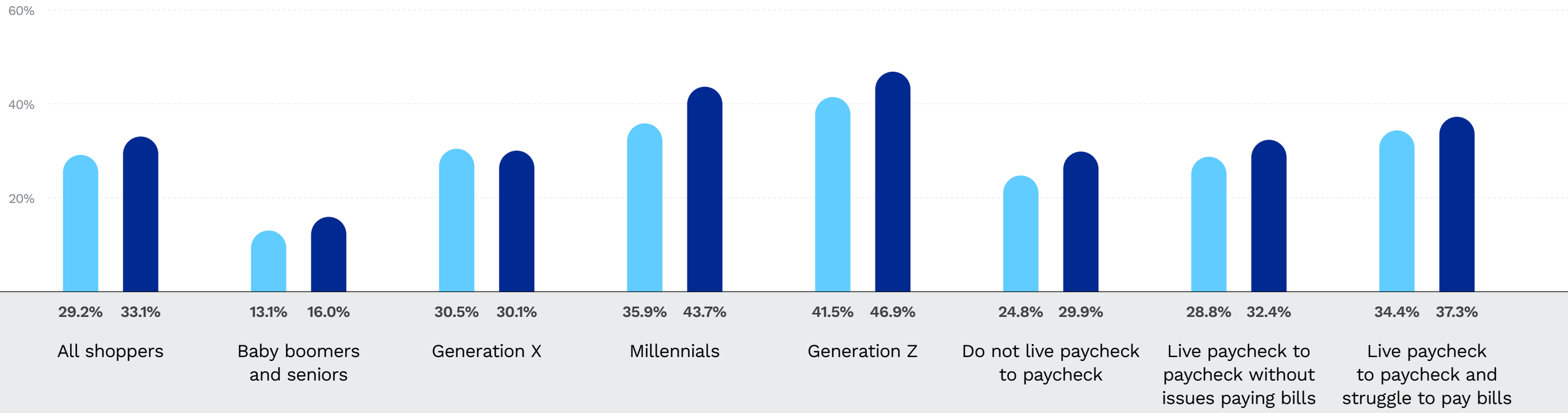
FIGURE 4:

Digital wallets across demographics
Share of consumers who paid with a digital wallet in the last 30 days



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 2,179: Complete consumer responses, fielded June 2026

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The youngest shoppers are the quickest to leave, making them exactly where the wallet gap costs merchants the most. More than one-quarter (28%) of Gen Z shoppers abandoned or would have abandoned a cart in the last month due to a lack of digital wallet acceptance. Eighteen percent of millennials, 10% of Gen X and just 3.9% of baby boomers and seniors said the same. These are also the consumers most likely to be the agentic commerce customers tomorrow, signaling that the stakes of wallet acceptance extend well beyond today's transactions.

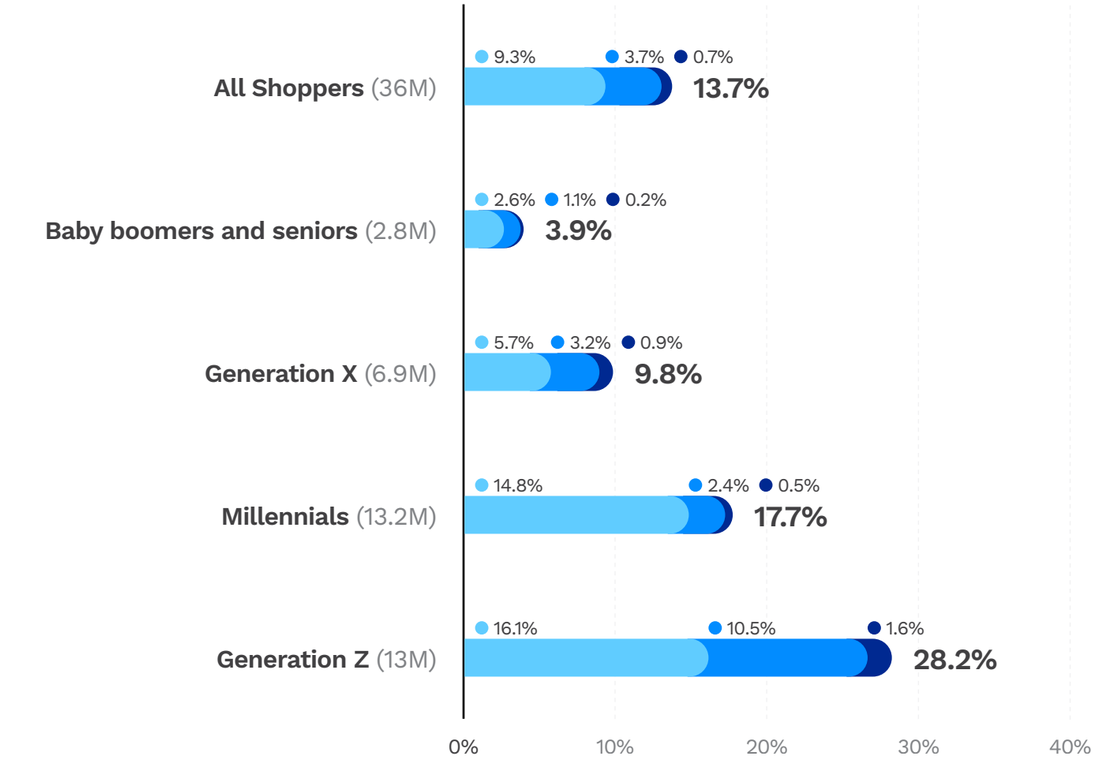
33%

of digital wallet users **would have delayed, switched merchants or not bought at all** if their method was unavailable.

FIGURE 5:

A missing digital wallet puts 36 million shoppers at risk

Consumers who abandoned or would have abandoned a cart due to digital wallet non-acceptance, by generation



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 458: Consumers who abandoned a cart because their preferred payment method was not accepted, fielded June 2026. N=458 is a subset of the full N=2,179 sample, representing respondents who abandoned a cart due to payment method unavailability.

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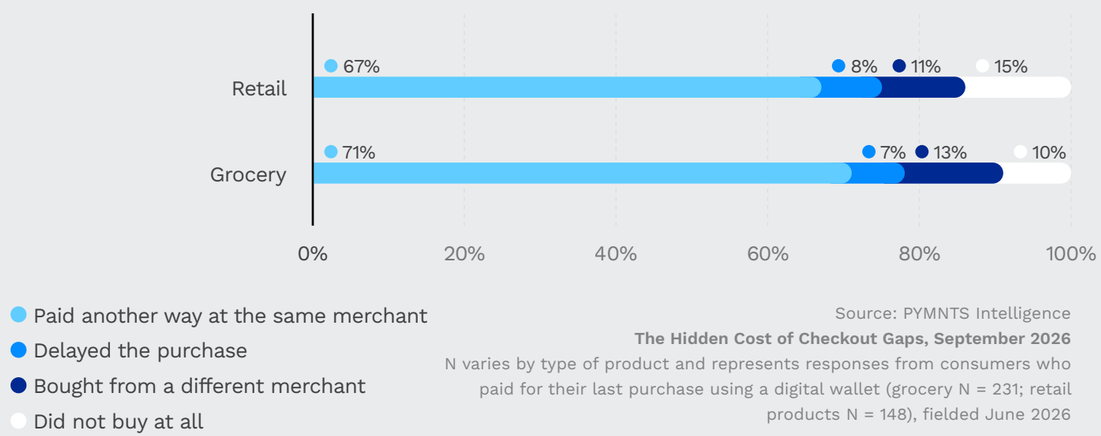
Nearly half of Gen Z retail shoppers who paid with a digital wallet would switch merchants or abandon the purchase entirely if that wallet was not available. Gen X wallet users are also at significant risk, with 25%–27% switching merchants or abandoning the purchase, a critical consideration for enterprise merchants whose customer base skews older.

FIGURE 6:

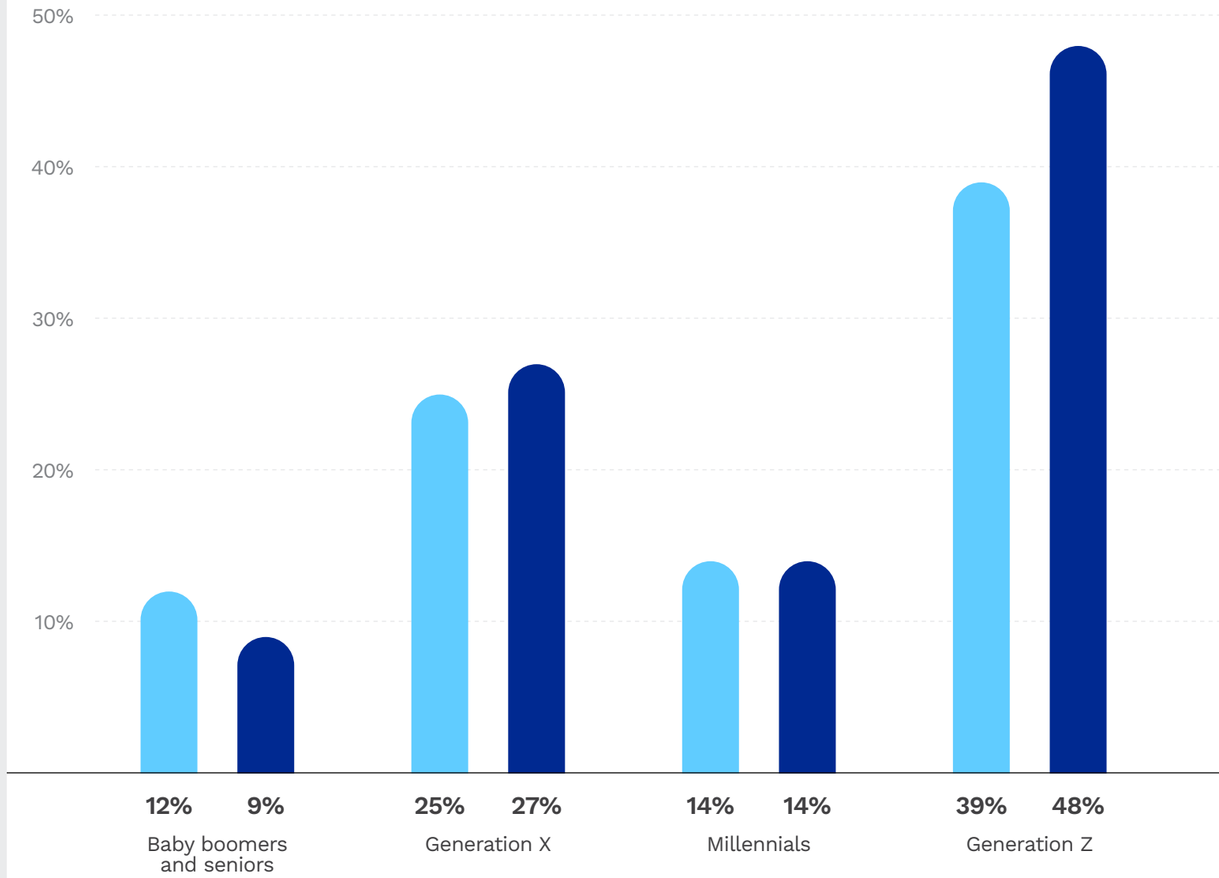
What digital wallet users did when their wallets weren't accepted



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N varies by type of product and represents responses from consumers who paid for their last purchase using a digital wallet (grocery N = 231; retail products N = 148), fielded June 2026

FIGURE 7:

Purchase share lost by a merchant, by shopper generation



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
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Once again, younger consumers prove much more sensitive to wallet acceptance. Nearly half (48%) of Gen Z shoppers who made their latest retail purchase with a digital wallet would have switched merchants or not purchased at all if they could not have paid this way—that's 2.3 million valuable young shoppers who will not convert to regular customers. For enterprise merchants processing millions of transactions, even a 1%–2% improvement in wallet acceptance could represent tens of millions in recovered annual revenue.



Nearly half (48%) of Gen Z consumers who made their last retail purchase through a digital wallet **would have changed merchants or abandoned the transaction if that payment method had not been accepted.**



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03

The Trust Gateway to Agentic Shopping

Agentic commerce is not a Gen Z-only opportunity. **Nearly half (46%) of Gen X consumers are ready to link a wallet to an AI agent,** signaling that the enterprise merchant opportunity is broad-based.

The shoppers ready to abandon a cart today over missing wallet acceptance are **the most likely to shop via AI agents tomorrow.**

Roughly 113 million U.S. consumers say they would likely link a digital wallet to an AI agent for purchases within the next two years. That number—equivalent to 43% of the U.S. adult population—means the agentic commerce opportunity is already here and digital wallet acceptance is the on-ramp.

Among shoppers who paid online with a digital wallet in the last 30 days, 52% say they would likely link their wallet to an AI agent in the next two years. That is nine percentage points higher than the 43% overall figure and 13 percentage points higher than the 39% of non-wallet users.

Millennials show the greatest readiness, with 55% likely to enable digital wallets for agentic shopping, followed by Gen Z at 49%. But large shares of consumers in their 50s and early 60s are open to the idea of agent-initiated purchases.

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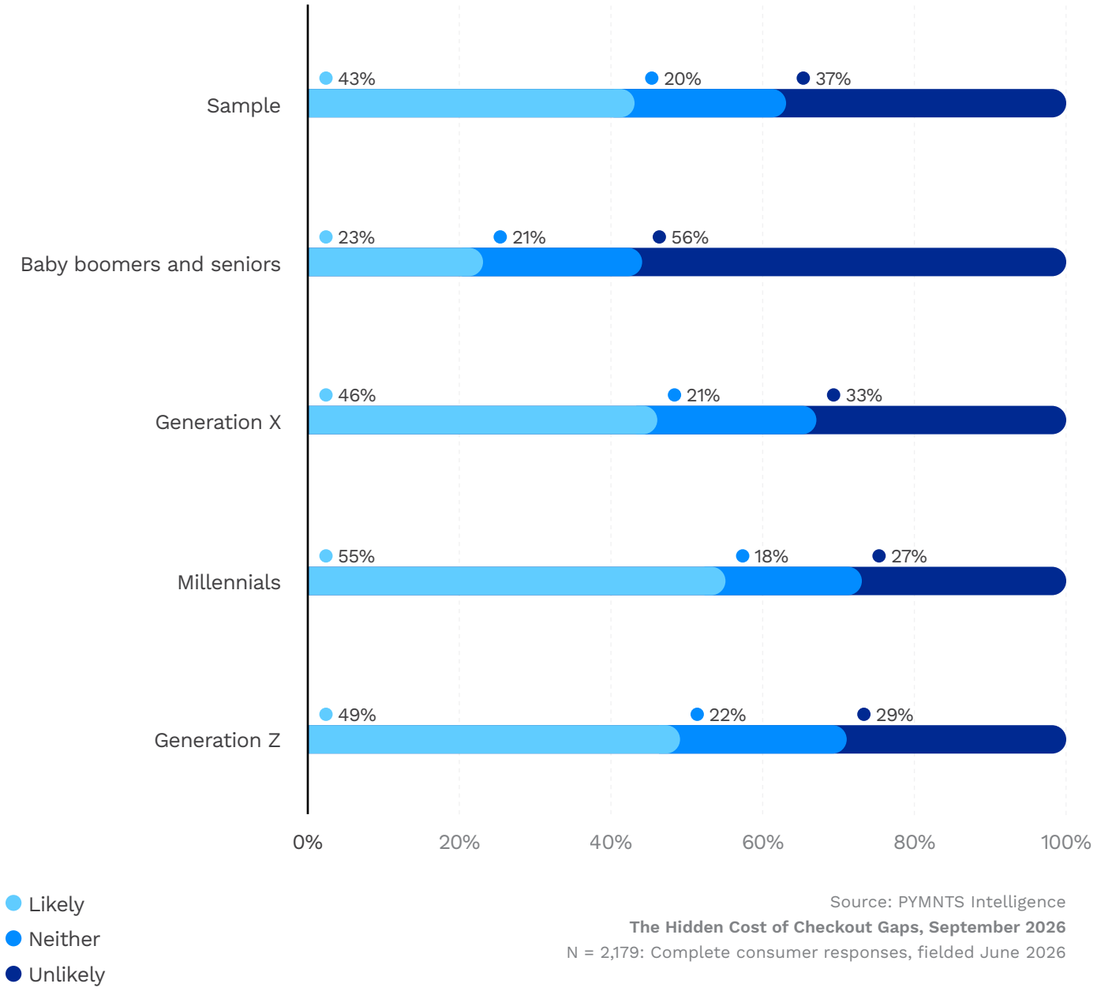
FIGURE 8:

Likelihood of a consumer linking a digital wallet to an AI agent in the next two years, by generation



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 2,179: Complete consumer responses, fielded June 2026

Merchants that integrate wallet solutions with built-in permissioning controls are better positioned to win agentic commerce spend.

52%

of digital wallet users **are ready to link to an AI agent—** 9 points higher than the overall average.

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> Merchants whose payment partners already offer these permissioning features—including approval, spending limits, and payment-source controls—**are better positioned to capture agentic commerce spend without additional infrastructure investment.**

113M

consumers would enable their digital wallets for agentic shopping, and having explicit purchase approval and visibility controls would further increase their willingness—that's more than double the rate seen among those unlikely to adopt.

The survey identifies four important levers for making shoppers more comfortable with linking their digital wallets to AI agents. Approval and visibility tops the list: More than four in 10 (41%) want either the ability to approve purchases before they happen or a notification after each one.

Across the board, the data shows wide gaps between shoppers already likely to link their wallets to agents and those who are less willing. For example, 41% say the availability of approval and visibility controls would make them likely to do so. Just over three in 10 want limits on the cost of a purchase.



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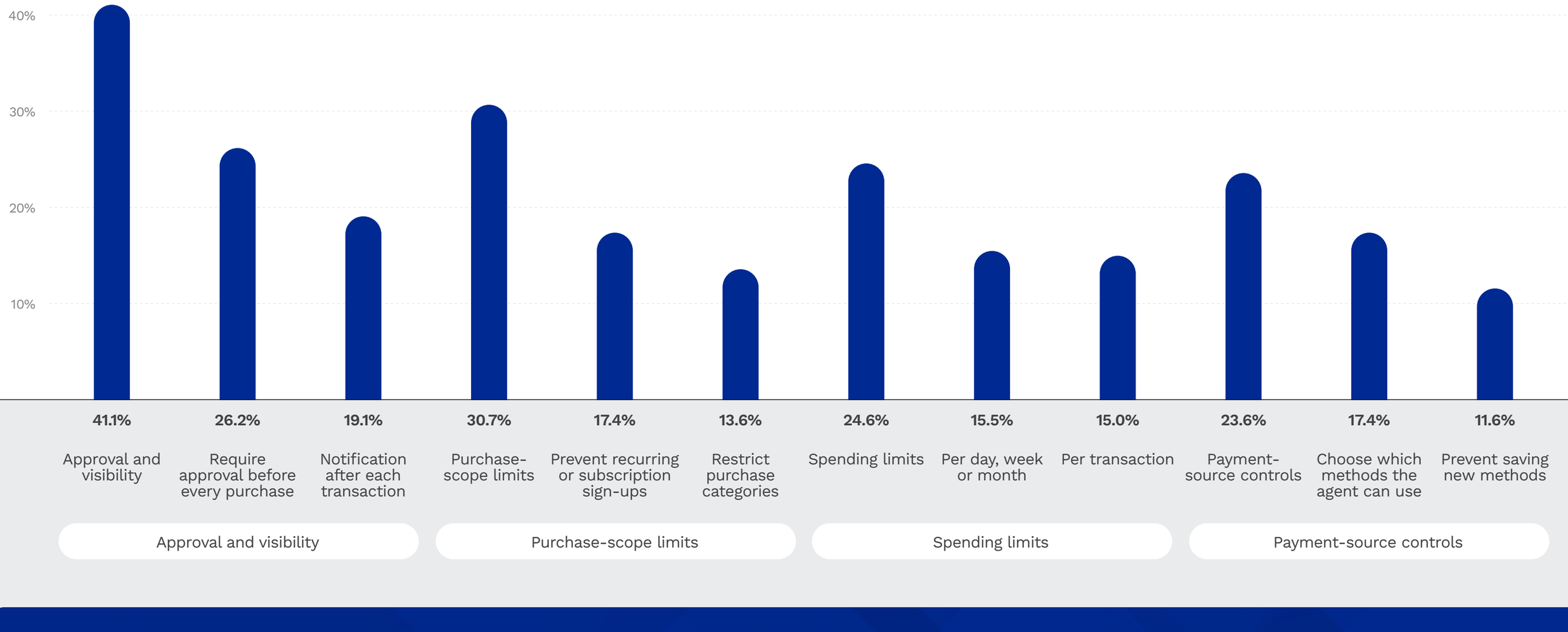
FIGURE 9:

What shoppers who adopt AI agents want

Settings that would make shoppers willing to link a digital wallet to an AI agent

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence
The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps, September 2026
N = 2,179: Complete consumer responses, fielded June 2026
Note: Because respondents could select multiple responses, category totals for Approval and visibility, Purchase-scope limits, Spending limits and Payment-source controls do not necessarily equal the sum of their component sub-categories.
Sample average = full survey population (N=2,179).



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An abandoned cart comes down to one thing. Did we speak to the consumer in a way that showed we understand who they are, what they need, and how to get the best value? People are busy, and even a small amount of friction is enough to lose them. Whether it's the product, the price, the ability to pay over time, or something simply got in the way of a purchase they were already prepared to make.

Most people are managing a budget. Payment flexibility can change what someone chooses to buy, but only if they know about it at the moment they're deciding, not after. Consumers make that decision on the product page, not at checkout, which means the full offer, the value, the price, and the payment terms, needs to be visible right where they're deciding what to buy.

I see the same thing happening as consumers start shopping with AI agents. Agent adoption is going to move fastest with repeat purchases, the everyday things people buy again and again, and PayPal wallets have a natural role there, since they've always been what builds trust between a consumer and a merchant. Most of the industry's attention right now is on the payment step itself, because matching the trust and reliability of today's checkout is a high bar to clear.



Mike Sutter
SVP, Head of Merchant, PayPal

The bigger opportunity is earlier, in discovery, making sure the right product information is visible to these tools, and that the handoff from an agent's research to a merchant's site feels like one continuous journey instead of two.

You win the sale by making sure the consumer has everything they need to purchase with confidence.

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Conclusion

Shoppers frequently reach checkout only to find that the payment methods they want to use—especially digital wallets and BNPL—are missing. That gap costs merchants the most among younger consumers and digital wallet users, both critical growth segments. Merchants that support the payment options these shoppers already prefer give themselves a second chance to convert sales headed out the door.

Agentic commerce makes the longer-term opportunity even more critical. Around 113 million U.S. consumers say they would likely link a digital wallet to an AI agent for purchases in the next two years . Adoption will depend on giving consumers approval and visibility, spending limits, purchase-scope restrictions and payment-source settings. Those features reflect a desire to keep agency, safety and visibility intact as more of the purchase process becomes automated. For merchants, wallet acceptance is a direct driver of sales and retention today and an infrastructure decision for what comes next.

Methodology

The Hidden Cost of Checkout Gaps: What 56 Million Abandoned Carts Mean for U.S. Merchants and How AI is Changing What Comes Next is a PYMNTS Intelligence report sponsored by and produced in collaboration with PayPal. It draws on a survey of 2,179 U.S. adults conducted in June 2026. PYMNTS Intelligence retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

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PayPal Open

PayPal has been revolutionizing commerce globally for more than 25 years. Creating innovative experiences that make moving money, selling and shopping simple, personalized and secure, PayPal empowers consumers and businesses in 200+ markets to join and thrive in the global economy.

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