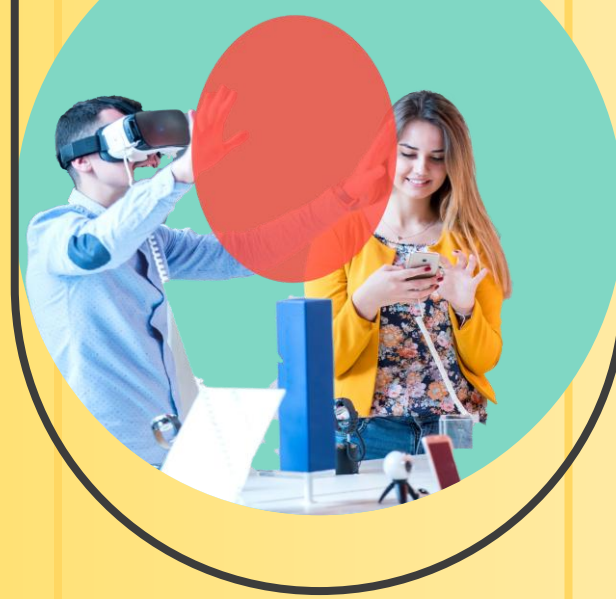100%

The global retail agency

Global Consumer Trends for 2026 and Beyond:

What They Mean for Brands & Retail.

Introduction.

Consumers are recalibrating how they live, who they trust and where technology fits in. In the next 12–24 months, the brands that thrive will be those that reduce friction without losing the human touch, design around increasingly fluid life stages, and rebuild everyday interactions across stores and online. This report captures the strongest consumer signals for 2026+ and translates them into retail-ready moves.

The consumer, redefined.

Three trends changing retail & what they mean for you.

Algorithmic Autonomy.

What's happening

People want the benefits of AI without being boxed in by opaque recommendations. Expect demand for transparency, opt-ins, and tools that let shoppers steer their own discovery.

Why it matters for retail

- Merchandising will shift from "Most Popular" to Explainable and Editable: show why a product is recommended and allow users to tune inputs (budget, style, sustainability, time).

- Expect growth in privacy-forward loyalty: zero-party data exchanges with clear value (exclusive experiences, faster services) and plain-English choices.

Stats that matter

63% **of UK adults** say AI makes them value things created by humans more. *(Mintel, 2025)*

37% **of customers** trust companies with their personal data.

48% would trade data for better experiences. *(Jack Morton, 2025)*

71% **of consumers** expect personalised interactions; **76%** get frustrated when they don't.
(McKinsey, 2025) (Credit: Mintel for the "Anti-Algorithm" framing.)

Retail Pioneer.

What they're doing: H&M is rolling out AI-driven store upgrades in key European flagships. According to reports, the brand is using AI for in-store merchandising, heat-maps, RFID tagged inventory and real-time product recommendations to bring the store experience closer to the precision of online.

Why it matters: This shows a major fast-fashion brand embedding algorithmic control in the physical space, not just online personalisation but store-floor discovery and choice.

What they're doing: The Ordinary's "Periodic Fable" campaign playfully exposes 49 empty beauty buzzwords from *"poreless"* to *"medical grade"* through film, interactive tools and outdoor ads. It continues the brand's long-running push for truth and transparency, helping shoppers cut through marketing jargon.

Why it matters: The campaign turns transparency into a form of shopper control. By revealing how beauty claims influence recommendations, The Ordinary gives customers the power to question and adjust what they believe echoing the principles of explainable, editable discovery that define this trend.
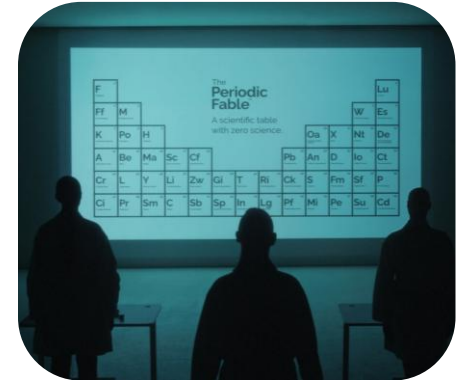
Store Image Source: https://wwd.com/

Heat map example source: retail store analytics

Image Source: The Ordinary

2026 Moves

Explain your algorithms. Add a short "Why you're seeing this" note beside product carousels and recommendations so shoppers understand how results are chosen.

Give shoppers control. Introduce *Discovery Modes* filters such as "Show me something different", "Only sustainable picks", or "Under 2-minute reads/videos". These build trust while keeping exploration fun.

Train teams to talk about AI simply. Equip store staff or chat agents to explain how recommendation tools work and what data is used.

2030 Trajectory

Personal shopping assistants become mainstream. By 2030, digital AI agents will create shortlists, compare prices and check delivery options. Retailers that share transparent data and permissions will appear in these agent searches.

Trust frameworks mature. "Guardian agents" will monitor for bias, fake reviews and unsafe suppliers, retailers will need to meet these standards to stay visible.

Human reassurance remains key. Even in an agent-led world, people will still want human advice for major or emotional purchases.

Questions for brands!

? Are our algorithms optimising for speed and conversion at the expense of surprise and delight?

? Do shoppers understand why they're seeing certain products and can they change those results in real time?

? Would we personally feel comfortable sharing data under our own privacy and value-exchange model?

? Beyond clicks, how are we measuring *confidence* and *trust* in our customer decisions?

The New Young

What's happening

Longer lifespans and blurred milestones are expanding the "middle" of life. Consumers invest in experiences, skills and health now, not only for a far-off retirement.

Why it matters for retail

- Shift from age buckets to *need states*: energy & recovery, skill-building, micro-adventures, multi-generational usage.
- Finance-meets-fun: subscriptions and bundles that mix protection (warranties, health checks) with experiences.

Stats that matter

Europe's 55+ consumers now account for **33%** of all discretionary retail spend, as longer lifespans and later retirements reshape consumption. *(BNP Paribas Exane, 2025)*

Generation X's global spending power sits at US $15.2 trillion in 2025, projected to reach US $23 trillion by 2035 the "middle-life" powerhouse of the decade. *(NielsenIQ / World Data Lab, 2025)*

Across Europe, **83%** of consumers still visit stores regularly, while 81% also shop online, signalling that multi-channel retail is now an all-ages expectation. *(RSM UK Retail Outlook, 2025)*

Holland&Barrett

Retail Pioneer.

ARKET

What they're doing: The UK health & wellness chain Holland & Barrett opened a new *Experience Store* in Cardiff focusing on health-services + retail. The site features diagnostic testing in partnership with Randox, a wellness-studio offering Pilates, yoga and meditation, along with their product range.

Why it matters: The store moves beyond selling vitamins by integrating diagnostics and wellness classes like yoga and meditation, supporting active living and wellbeing across life stages—reflecting consumers' shift toward lifestyle enrichment over pure transactions.
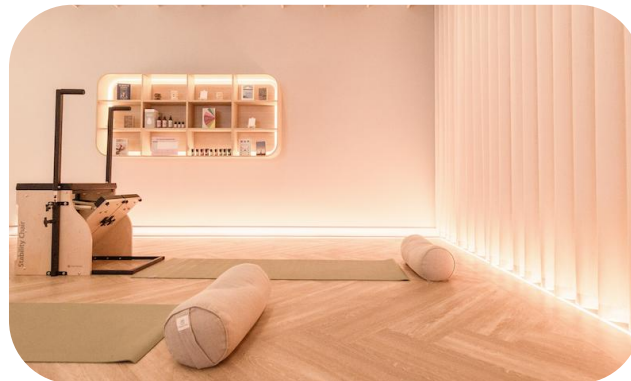
What they're doing: Scandinavian lifestyle brand Arket opened a new Dublin flagship (July 2025) in a ~810 m² two-floor space. It houses menswear, womenswear, childrenswear, body-care, home goods and a café led by a Scandinavian chef.

Why it matters: By combining fashion, homeware and a café, the store caters to families and multiple life stages, turning shopping into a shared experience and reflecting retail's shift toward longer lives, mixed ages and lifestyle-driven visits.

Image Source: hollandandbarrett.com

Image Source: MSN.com

2026 Moves

Design for life moments. Create bundles and experiences that support new hobbies, relocations or "second-act" careers.

Embrace multi-age usability. Prioritise readable typography, inclusive store layouts and flexible fulfilment.

Link health and lifestyle. Pair traditional categories with wellbeing or skill-building features (fitness, wellness tech, or local workshops).

2030 Trajectory

Everyday longevity retail. Products and services marketed for maintaining energy, mobility and wellbeing across decades.

Intergenerational retail. Shared experiences, travel, cooking, gaming designed for mixed ages.

Experience-led loyalty. Brands win repeat business through continuous learning, not just discounts.

Questions for brands!

? Are our algorithms optimising for speed and conversion at the expense of surprise and delight?

? Do shoppers understand why they're seeing certain products and can they change those results in real time?

? Would we personally feel comfortable sharing data under our own privacy and value-exchange model?

? Beyond clicks, how are we measuring *confidence* and *trust* in our customer decisions?

The Affection Reset

What's happening

Automation has made many interactions efficient but emotionally thinner. Consumers crave brands that lower the "cost of connection" and design for warmth, spontaneity and community.

Why it matters for retail

- Stores need micro-moments that encourage friendly human contact without adding friction, think concierge greeters, creator corners, local collaborations.
- Digital flows should leave room for serendipity and story, not just speed.

Stats that matter

76% of positive customer experiences in the UK were delivered *solely* by a human; only 4% were delivered purely by AI. *(Ventrica survey, UK, 2025)*

83% of UK consumers say they feel undervalued by the brands they remain loyal to ,showing a clear gap in emotional connection. *(SAP Emarsys study, 2025)*

71% of customers say they would recommend a brand if they felt an emotional connection; experiential retail is now a key driver of that. *(BearingPoint UK Retail Trends, 2025)*

Retail Pioneer.

What they're doing: The Paris-based fragrance and home-sense brand launched its London concept store *Maison Diptyque* with a fragrance library, gallery of brand heritage, workshop spaces open to the public and a Paris-style café.

Why it matters: The space is designed as more than a transaction zone, it fosters connection, culture, and community. By offering curated experiences (workshops, gallery, café) the brand lowers the "cost of connection" and builds deeper emotional ties.

What they're doing: Uniqlo opened a major Glasgow store in October 2025 featuring a **RE.UNIQLO Repair & Upcycling Studio**, in-store workshops, and collaborations with local creators. The space encourages customers to repair, customise and care for garments, blending service, craft and community.

Why it matters: This store brings people together through shared activities, repairing, learning, making, offering human interaction and local connection rather than a purely transactional shop. It's a strong example of how brands can build emotional loyalty through community-driven experiences.

Image Source: Wallpaper.com / Diptyque

Image Source: https://www.scotsman.com/

Image Source: heraldscotland.com/

2026 Moves

Create connection zones. Add small areas for community events, advice bars or workshops that encourage dwell time.

Blend digital + personal. Use digital tools for speed but keep human support for moments that matter—returns, styling, troubleshooting.

Measure emotion, not just efficiency. Track *Return on Affection* (community engagement, repeat visits, dwell with staff) alongside conversion.

2030 Trajectory

Emotional UX becomes a KPI. Journeys are scored on belonging, confidence and enjoyment.

Local networks strengthen. Stores double as social spaces or micro-hubs for neighbourhood connection.

Hybrid experiences scale. Seamless handoffs between human and digital touchpoints become standard.

Questions for brands!

? Where do we deliberately add a human touch, and where do we remove it?

? How are we empowering teams to create genuine, unscripted moments of care in-store?

? Which weekly rituals could we host around our category?

? What role can our spaces play in building local connection or shared belonging?

Key Takeaways

To-do List For Brands & Retailers

1   **Make algorithms explainable and editable.**
Clarify *why* shoppers are seeing certain products, and give them ways to steer results (budget, style, sustainability, pace).

2   **Design for longer lives and blended life stages.**
Create flexible, multi-age environments and product ecosystems that support wellness, skill-building and intergenerational experiences.

3   **Prioritise human warmth over frictionless automation.**
Introduce micro-moments of care, greeters, stylists, workshops, community corners. To counter emotional "thinning" in digital-first journeys.

4   **Build hybrid journeys that feel coherent and confidence-building.**
Shoppers want speed digitally and reassurance physically. Equip staff with data-driven tools while maintaining meaningful human interactions.

5   **Centre wellbeing, energy and lifestyle enrichment.**
Link traditional categories with wellness, local workshops, care services and learning opportunities to support everyday longevity.

6   **Measure emotion, not just efficiency.**
Track indicators like confidence, belonging, community engagement, dwell-time with staff and repeat visits, your "Return on Affection."

7   **Create community gravity.**
Stores should double as social spaces: places to return to, not rush through. Offer rituals, classes, meetups and local drop-ins that build connection.

Conclusion.

Consumers are entering an era defined by **agency, longevity and emotional clarity**. They want tools that help them navigate choice without losing control, spaces that support their evolving lifestyles, and brands that treat connection as a design principle - not an accident.

The next wave of retail leadership will come from brands that:

- let shoppers co-pilot their discovery
- honour multi-age and multi-life-stage needs
- design for genuine human warmth in an automated world.

The winners of 2026+ won't just optimise conversion,
they'll optimise confidence, connection and community.

Global Retail Solutions.

We partner with brands to grow sales and elevate the shopper experience.

Our award-winning retail display solutions are delivered globally, to drive efficiency, consistency and results in-store.

Can we deliver results in-store? **UNDOUBTEDLY!**

Will your next campaign benefit from our vast experience and expertise? **100%**

Produce · Install · Maintain · Remove

Plan · Deliver · Improve
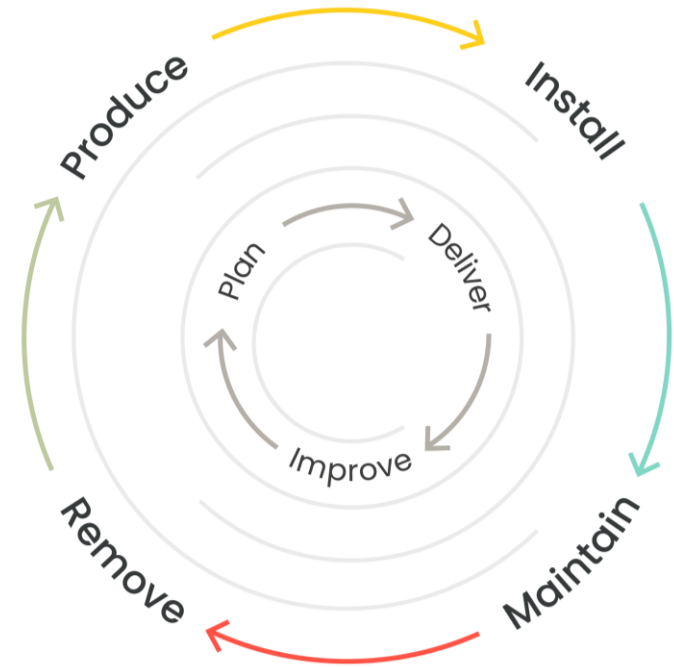
Get in touch to discuss your next project.

Dan Williams, Managing Director: dan.williams@100percentgroup.com

Visit our website to learn more: www.100percentgroup.com

100%

The global retail agency