# Kate Hardcastle reveals why trust and emotion remain key amid AI’s retail takeover



In an era where technological advancements are rapidly reshaping consumer behaviour, Kate Hardcastle's new book, *The Science of Shopping*, arrives as a compelling resource for retailers aiming to navigate this complex landscape. Launching globally on 3rd June 2025, the book explores the intersection of emotion, strategy, and trust in the retail experience, echoing the trends observed in a global retail market now valued at an astonishing $29 trillion.

One of the core arguments presented is that up to 80% of shopping decisions are expected to be influenced by artificial intelligence (AI) in the near future. This projection dovetails with recent findings that demonstrate a significant increase in AI's role within the shopping experience. For instance, a report from Salesforce highlighted a nearly 4% year-over-year increase in U.S. online sales during the 2024 holiday season, showcasing how AI-powered chatbots have become an integral part of consumer transactions. Notably, nearly 42% of shoppers engaged with these AI services in a marked uptick from the previous year, suggesting consumers are more willing than ever to rely on technology for guidance in their purchasing decisions.

Yet, amid this digital transformation, Hardcastle argues that emotional connections remain paramount. According to her model, the Buyerarchy of Needs, which identifies fundamental motivations behind consumer purchases—including comfort, connection, and confidence—brands must cultivate trust and transparency to succeed. In fact, she emphasises that “Making a great product is only half the story. The rest is emotion, strategy, and trust.” This perspective resonates with a broader sentiment as 67% of consumers today express a lack of trust in advertising, seeking authentic connections instead.

Moreover, while the younger generation, particularly Gen Z, is pushing for a "real-life" retail experience over algorithm-driven commerce, they are also driving demand for hyper-personalised interactions with AI. A Capgemini report noted that 71% of consumers want generative AI integrated into their shopping experiences, reflecting a desire for seamless and personalised journeys that traditional retail fails to deliver.

However, the shift towards an AI-centric consumer culture is not without its challenges. Reports indicate that although AI-enhanced shopping experiences are increasingly adopted, concerns linger regarding product returns, with a return rate jumping to 28% during the recent holiday season. These returns may signal a gap between expectations set by AI recommendations and actual consumer satisfaction. Additionally, a separate study found that 88% of consumers in Southeast Asia reportedly use AI in their purchasing decisions, yet many rated these features as only moderately helpful, spotlighting the need for e-commerce platforms to refine their AI applications for greater consumer benefit.

Against this backdrop of rapid digital evolution and evolving consumer expectations, the upcoming RTIH AI in Retail Awards aims to celebrate innovation within the industry, recognising those companies effective at integrating AI into their operations. Scheduled for 3rd September 2025 at The Barbican in London, this event will gather thought leaders to discuss the critical role of AI in shaping retail's future.

Hardcastle’s *The Science of Shopping* thus not only offers practical insights for brands striving to meet these modern-day challenges but also serves as a clarion call for retailers to focus on the human elements of shopping. As we look toward a future where shopping is both digital and deeply human, the importance of fostering trust and emotional engagement will be pivotal in winning the loyalty of the next generation of consumers.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ai-influenced-shopping-boosts-online-holiday-sales-salesforce-data-shows-2025-01-06/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers), [[3]](https://www.capgemini.com/us-en/news/press-releases/71-of-consumers-want-generative-ai-integrated-into-their-shopping-experiences/), [[4]](https://www.time.com/2917391/social-media-doesnt-make-people-buy/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.axios.com/2018/10/18/digital-transition-ad-industry-trust-crisis-privacy-transparency), [[6]](https://technode.global/2024/10/31/lazada-whitepaper-reveals-88-percent-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai/), [[7]](https://futurecio.tech/88-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai-study-finds/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers), [[4]](https://www.time.com/2917391/social-media-doesnt-make-people-buy/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://retailtechinnovationhub.com/home/2025/6/3/the-customer-whisperer-kate-hardcastle-launches-new-book-the-science-of-shopping-and-lays-down-challenge-to-retailers> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ai-influenced-shopping-boosts-online-holiday-sales-salesforce-data-shows-2025-01-06/> - A report by Salesforce indicates that AI-powered chatbots contributed to a nearly 4% year-over-year increase in U.S. online sales during the 2024 holiday season, reaching $282 billion. Shoppers utilised AI-based chatbot services 42% more than the previous year. Globally, AI-influenced sales rose to $229 billion from $199 billion in 2023. However, a 28% product return rate, up from 20% in 2023, poses concerns for retailers' profit margins. Additionally, 79% of orders on Christmas Day were placed via mobile devices, and social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram drove 14% of e-commerce site traffic. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ai-influenced-shopping-boosts-online-holiday-sales-salesforce-data-shows-2025-01-06/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.capgemini.com/us-en/news/press-releases/71-of-consumers-want-generative-ai-integrated-into-their-shopping-experiences/> - Capgemini's 2025 report reveals that 71% of consumers desire generative AI integration in their shopping experiences, driven by Gen Z and Millennials seeking hyper-personalisation and seamless digital interactions. Nearly half (46%) of consumers are enthusiastic about AI's impact on online shopping, with 75% open to AI recommendations, up from 63% in 2023. Over half (58%) have replaced traditional search engines with AI tools for product/service recommendations. Additionally, 68% want AI to aggregate search results from various platforms to provide a comprehensive shopping experience. ([capgemini.com](https://www.capgemini.com/us-en/news/press-releases/71-of-consumers-want-generative-ai-integrated-into-their-shopping-experiences/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.time.com/2917391/social-media-doesnt-make-people-buy/> - A Gallup Organization report found that 62% of consumers reported that social media has 'no influence at all' on their purchasing decisions, and only 5% said it had 'a great deal of influence.' Despite companies spending over $5 billion on social media marketing in the U.S. last year, consumers primarily use social media to share personal content and connect with friends and family, not to learn about products. Gallup advises brands to focus on creating authentic, interactive, and compelling content to form emotional connections with consumers, which can drive purchasing decisions. ([time.com](https://time.com/2917391/social-media-doesnt-make-people-buy/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.axios.com/2018/10/18/digital-transition-ad-industry-trust-crisis-privacy-transparency> - The U.S. advertising industry, valued at $220 billion, is facing a trust crisis exacerbated by its digital transition, leading to increased fraud, dubious practices, discrimination, and national security concerns. Despite expectations of heightened transparency in the digital era, oversight remains lax, with the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission playing limited roles in governing digital ads. Companies often struggle to manage their own technology and demonstrate compliance, causing a widespread loss of trust among marketers and consumers. Approximately 25% of U.S. internet users employ ad blockers, while many view digital ads as intrusive. Marketers are now reducing spend on untrustworthy digital platforms. Industry consensus calls for greater accountability, yet concrete solutions remain elusive. ([axios.com](https://www.axios.com/2018/10/18/digital-transition-ad-industry-trust-crisis-privacy-transparency?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://technode.global/2024/10/31/lazada-whitepaper-reveals-88-percent-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai/> - Lazada's whitepaper reveals that 88% of consumers make purchasing decisions using artificial intelligence (AI), and 83% are willing to pay for AI-enhanced shopping experiences. The study found that nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) in Southeast Asia believe AI is widely adopted in online shopping, with over half of the respondents identifying AI chatbots (63%), translations (53%), and visual product searches (52%) as key recognised AI features in e-commerce. However, only one-third of the respondents rated these features as helpful in addressing their needs, highlighting an opportunity for the e-commerce industry to elevate shopping experiences through AI. ([technode.global](https://technode.global/2024/10/31/lazada-whitepaper-reveals-88-percent-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://futurecio.tech/88-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai-study-finds/> - E-commerce platform Lazada’s 'Artificial Intelligence Adoption in eCommerce in Southeast Asia' whitepaper shows that 88% of shoppers make purchasing decisions using AI-generated content and product recommendations. The survey of more than 6,000 shoppers across six Southeast Asian markets revealed that 63% of Southeast Asians believe AI is widely adopted in online shopping. Consumers recognise AI chatbots (63%), translations (53%), and visual product searches (52%) as key AI features in e-commerce. However, only one-third of the respondents rated these features as helpful in addressing their needs, highlighting an opportunity for the e-commerce industry to elevate shopping experiences through AI. ([futurecio.tech](https://futurecio.tech/88-of-consumers-make-purchasing-decisions-using-ai-study-finds/?utm_source=openai))