



# The 2026 AI Consumer Insights Report

How consumers are redefining trust, control, and intelligence online

What's driving AI adoption and what's holding it back? We surveyed over 1,000 consumers to understand how AI is changing behavior, expectations, and digital life in 2026.

KEY INSIGHT

# Users want AI but with control

32%

Use AI daily

53%

Say AI improves their  
experience

44%

Concerned about  
unauthorized actions

## The Tension

AI adoption is accelerating. 31% of users actively engage with browser-based AI features, and more than half report improved digital experiences. But enthusiasm has its limits.

**Nearly half worry about AI taking action without approval. 26% struggle to disable unwanted features.** The message is clear: automation is compelling—autonomy loss is not.

KEY INSIGHT

# The next phase of AI adoption

Consumers are ready to embrace AI, but they expect greater control and intentional design.



## Strongest among professionals

Adoption is highest among working professionals and hybrid employees, signaling clear enterprise potential.



## Design-led future

The path forward requires design-led thinking, prioritizing intuitive control over feature overload.



## Comfort with agentic features

Nearly **half** are comfortable with AI acting autonomously, as long as they have oversight. Comfort rises significantly among working professionals and tech users.

KEY INSIGHT

# Regulation is mainstream

As AI becomes more embedded in daily life, demand for oversight is growing. Consumers want guardrails that protect safety and ethics without slowing innovation.

79%

Support government  
regulation

35%

Advocate for strong  
government regulation

12%

Believe no additional  
regulation is needed

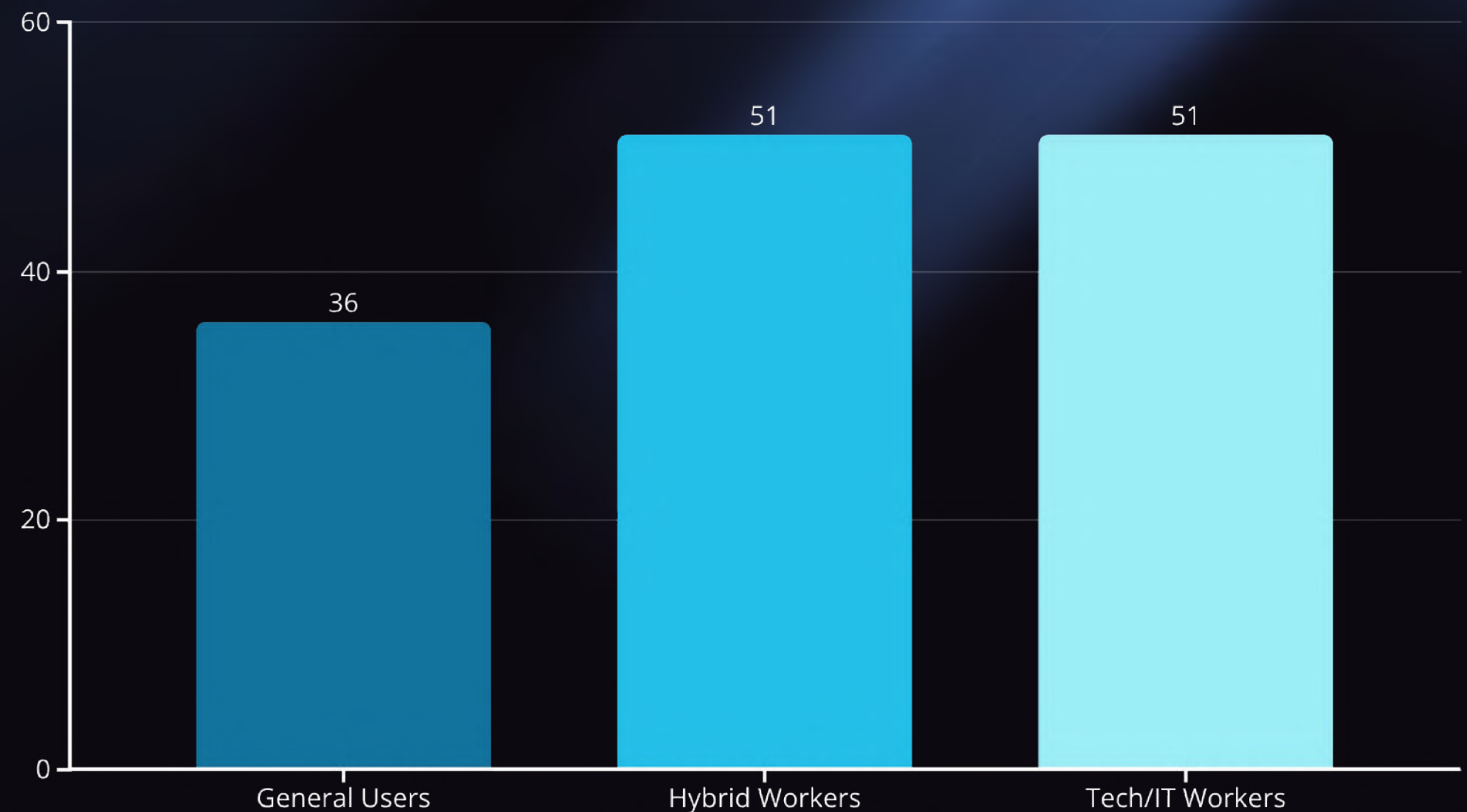
KEY INSIGHT

# Customization is the new trust signal

Users who want customization and control

## Control settings are key differentiators

Users expect adjustable AI features. Granular controls, visibility, and easy opt-outs are rapidly becoming baseline expectations. Demand is especially strong among **hybrid workers and tech/IT professionals. 51% want customization**, compared to **36% of the general population**.



EMERGING CHALLENGE

# Consumers rely on AI but expect clear insight into how answers are formed

A new layer of concern is emerging. One that goes beyond feature toggles and privacy settings.

Users want visibility into how AI shapes what they see, know, and believe. Control now means understanding how answers are generated, not just the ability to adjust settings.

# The trust-influence paradox

## Trust vs. influence

**60% trust AI engines** at least somewhat and **58% report feeling AI answers have shaped their opinions** at least occasionally.

Users rely on AI while remaining acutely aware of its persuasive power which heightens concerns around trust and safety.

### Privacy concerns

48% cite this as a top concern—the highest-ranked issue

### Accuracy worries

36% question whether AI information can be trusted

### Transparency gaps

32% struggle with lack of clarity about how AI works

**81% are concerned about AI using personal data**—survey results indicate privacy isn't negotiable

Source: Shift's 2026 AI Consumer Insights Survey

EMERGING CHALLENGE

# The environmental cost of AI

57% of users are concerned about the energy required to power AI systems. Sustainability is no longer a niche issue, it's in the mainstream.

Consumers increasingly expect AI providers to demonstrate environmental responsibility alongside performance.

KEY INSIGHT

# A generational divide is emerging

## 01

**20% of users never engage with AI.** This non-use is heavily concentrated among those 65+, retirees, and lower-income respondents, revealing a clear accessibility and adoption gap.

## 02

Younger users are significantly faster to adopt new AI technologies. But they are also more likely to say that AI feels **"too dominant"**, reflecting enthusiasm paired with a strong desire for control.

KEY INSIGHT

# AI adoption is growing but not universal

**32% daily engagement**

A core group actively integrates AI into their routines.

**20% never use AI**

A notable segment remains disengaged, pointing to adoption barriers.

Usage is concentrated among **tech workers and those aged 25–34**. Broad consumer adoption still has room to grow. For many users, AI improves the experience but it has yet to deliver truly transformational time savings.

KEY INSIGHT

# The future belongs to intentional AI

As consumers grow more discerning, systems that prioritize human values and control will win.

The path forward requires AI that is:



## Transparent

Users expect visibility into how AI works, its data sources, and how decisions are made.



## Adjustable

Granular controls and easy customization are essential so users can tailor AI to their preferences.



## Supportive

AI should augment human capability, offering support without overshadowing human judgement.



## Accountable

Providers must take responsibility for AI's impact, ensuring ethical outcomes and clear accountability.

# Survey methodology:

These insights are based on a survey of 1,448 adults that was conducted in February 2026. Data has been weighted to be nationally representative by annual income, ethnicity, age, gender, and region.