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Review Article
Agentic Distance and Delegated Consumer Sovereignty in Emerging Asian Markets

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Abstract

Background and Objective: The movement of generative artificial intelligence from advisory tools toward autonomous, goal-directed agents that discover, negotiate and complete purchases on a consumer's behalf marks a structural shift in market exchange. Existing scholarship mainly treats artificial intelligence as a recommender, conversational assistant, or delegate for a bounded task and focuses on developed markets. This study conceptualises agentic commerce, theorises how consumer sovereignty changes when purchase agency is delegated to an autonomous proxy and examines these dynamics in emerging Asian markets. **Materials and Methods:** The paper is a conceptual review article based on an integrative review of peer-reviewed literature published mainly between 2023 and 2026. Relevant studies were identified through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and leading marketing journals, then synthesised with principal-agent theory and the consumer sovereignty tradition. **Results:** The paper defines agentic commerce and a continuum of agentic autonomy. It introduces Delegated Consumer Sovereignty, in which the consumer becomes a principal, the agent a boundedly loyal buyer and the firm must satisfy the agent to reach the consumer. It also introduces agentic distance, capturing the functional, psychological, informational and relational separation created between consumer and market. The marketing mix is reframed as agent-oriented marketing, with contingencies specific to mobile-first, super-application and low-institutional-trust Asian economies. **Conclusion:** Agentic commerce shifts persuasion from the human to the machine buyer, with consequences for brand equity, loyalty, impulse and consumer welfare and requires research attentive to emerging-market conditions.

Key words: Agentic commerce, agentic distance, consumer sovereignty, artificial intelligence delegation, emerging Asian markets

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INTRODUCTION

For most of the digital era the consumer has remained the decisive actor in market exchange. Search engines, recommender systems and conversational assistants widened the choices available and shaped preferences, yet the moment of purchase stayed with the human being who clicked, paid and took delivery. That settlement is now under pressure. Generative artificial intelligence has moved quickly from producing text and images toward planning and acting and a new class of systems, commonly described as agentic, can pursue goals across multiple steps, use external tools, transact with merchants and adapt to feedback with limited human oversight[1,2]. When such a system is asked not merely to recommend a product but to find, compare, negotiate and buy it, the human consumer ceases to be the operative decision maker at the point of exchange and becomes instead the principal who sets objectives for an artificial buyer. This paper argues that this shift is not an incremental extension of digital marketing but a structural reconfiguration of consumer behaviour and of the marketing exchange itself.

Interest in this transition has grown sharply. Studies now examine consumer acceptance of high-autonomy assistants[3], the acceptance of deeply personalised super-assistants[1], the adoption of autonomous agents among younger cohorts and the way an autonomous agent reshapes the classic decision process[4]. Practitioners increasingly speak of agentic commerce as the next platform for retail[2]. Yet the scholarly conversation remains fragmented. Research on decision support and task delegation treats artificial intelligence as an aid to choice or as a delegate for a discrete task, such as choosing among options or executing a single purchase[5-7]. Research on conversational and voice commerce treats the exchange as an interface question, asking how consumers respond to spoken recommendations or to a chatbot's persona. Research rooted in the psychology of automation investigates when consumers embrace or resist algorithmic advice[8,9]. These literatures are valuable, but each captures only a facet of a phenomenon whose defining feature is the transfer of continuous, goal-directed purchasing agency to a persistent artificial actor. No integrative account yet explains what happens to consumer sovereignty, to brand relationships and to the marketing mix when the buyer is a machine that optimises on the consumer's behalf.

Three gaps motivate this study. The conceptual gap is that the field lacks a definition that distinguishes agentic commerce from adjacent phenomena and that locates it on a continuum of autonomy, from advisory support through to anticipatory action. Without such clarity, empirical findings about a chatbot and findings about an autonomous purchasing agent are treated as though they concern the same thing, when they concern very different distributions of agency. The theoretical gap is that the field lacks an account of how the interposition of an autonomous agent alters the consumer's relationship to the market. When an agent stands between the person and the transaction, the felt ownership of the decision, the exposure to brand cues, the experience of choosing and the locus of trust are all displaced, yet no construct captures this displacement or its consequences. The contextual gap is that the evidence base is overwhelmingly drawn from developed economies, even though the conditions that shape agentic commerce, including mobile-first access, super-application ecosystems, uneven digital literacy and thin institutional trust, are most consequential in the large emerging markets of Asia[10,11].

This paper addresses these gaps through a conceptual and integrative synthesis. It makes four contributions. It offers a definition and typology of agentic commerce, organised as a continuum of agentic autonomy. It develops the Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework, which uses principal-agent theory to reconceive the marketing exchange as a triangular relationship among consumer, agent and firm. It introduces agentic distance as a novel construct, specifies its dimensions and derives its behavioural consequences. It reframes the marketing mix as agent-oriented marketing and grounds the whole framework in the conditions of emerging Asian markets, developing propositions that are sensitive to those conditions. The paper proceeds by defining agentic commerce, establishing its theoretical foundations, presenting the framework and the construct, reconsidering marketing practice, examining emerging-market contingencies and closing with contributions, implications and a research agenda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is a conceptual review article and does not report primary empirical data. It builds theory through an integrative review; an approach suited to an emerging phenomenon whose evidence base is still forming and which calls for a new organising framework rather than a statistical summary of a settled literature. Relevant scholarship was identified through the major academic databases, principally Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar, supplemented by hand-searching of leading marketing, retailing and information-systems journals. The search combined terms covering agentic and generative artificial intelligence, autonomous agents, decision and purchase delegation,

algorithm aversion and appreciation, consumer autonomy and sovereignty and digital commerce in emerging markets. Priority was given to peer-reviewed work published between 2023 and 2026 to capture the rapid development of agentic systems, while a smaller number of foundational sources were retained for theoretical grounding.

Studies were selected for their direct bearing on the delegation of purchasing agency to an autonomous agent and for methodological quality, retaining conceptual and empirical contributions in peer-reviewed outlets and setting aside material that did not speak to the research questions. The retained evidence was then read against principal-agent theory and the consumer sovereignty tradition to construct the Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework, to specify the construct of agentic distance and to derive the propositions that follow. Because the field is young and moving quickly, the review is interpretive and integrative rather than exhaustive and the framework is offered as a foundation for the empirical work set out in the closing section.

EMERGENCE OF AGENTIC COMMERCE

From recommendation to autonomous action: The digital consumer journey has long been mediated by systems that inform choice without displacing the chooser. Recommender systems narrow the field of alternatives and shape consideration sets[12], voice assistants translate spoken requests into search and reordering and generative assistants now synthesise information that once required a person to compile[13,14]. These systems altered how consumers decided, but the decision remained a human act. Agentic commerce differs in kind rather than degree. An agentic system is a goal-directed artificial actor that can plan a sequence of actions, invoke external tools and services, transact and revise its behaviour in light of outcomes, all with limited step-by-step human direction[1,2]. Where a recommender proposes and a person disposes, an agent is delegated the disposition itself.

The distinction matters because it changes the unit of analysis in consumer research. When artificial intelligence recommends, the object of study is the human response to a suggestion and the relevant questions concern trust, persuasion and acceptance[3,15]. When artificial intelligence acts, the object of study expands to include the delegation relationship, the agent's decision rule and the firm's attempt to influence an artificial buyer. Recent work has begun to register this shift. Scholars describe the arrival of the agent as a new participant in the decision process[4], examine how consumers weigh efficiency against the loss of control when an assistant shops for them[16] and document that autonomous voice agents can serve as genuine shopping surrogates rather than mere interfaces[17]. The transition from recommendation to action is therefore not only technological but conceptual and it requires a vocabulary that existing frameworks do not supply.

Defining agentic commerce: This paper defines agentic commerce as the conduct of market exchange in which an autonomous, goal-directed artificial agent, acting on delegated authority from a consumer, performs one or more of the core functions of purchasing, including need identification, search, evaluation, negotiation, transaction and post-purchase management, with limited real-time human oversight. Three properties are constitutive. Delegated authority means that the agent acts on behalf of a human principal who has transferred some portion of purchasing agency to it, which distinguishes agentic commerce from purely autonomous machine-to-machine procurement. Goal-directed autonomy means that the agent pursues objectives across multiple steps and adapts its actions rather than executing a single fixed instruction, which distinguishes agentic commerce from one-shot task delegation[6,18]. Transactional capability means that the agent can complete an exchange, which distinguishes it from advisory systems that stop at recommendation[12]. Agentic commerce is thus not a synonym for generative artificial intelligence, for conversational commerce or for recommendation, although it draws on all three. The definition also clarifies the relationship between agentic commerce and the broader notion of machine customers, non-human economic actors that request and purchase goods. Agentic commerce is a subset of that notion, distinguished by the delegation relationship at its core, since the agent's authority is derived from and accountable to a human principal rather than self-originating[2]. This distinction matters for marketing, because it means that the human principal's preferences and welfare remain the ultimate criterion of success even as the agent becomes the proximate buyer and it preserves a role for the brand relationship and for human-directed communication that a purely machine-to-machine account would discard.

A continuum of agentic autonomy: Agentic commerce is best understood not as a binary state but as a continuum along which purchasing agency is progressively transferred from consumer to agent. This study proposes five levels. At the advisory level, the agent provides information and options while the consumer decides and acts, as with generative search and product question answering[13,14]. At the assisted

Table 1: A continuum of agentic autonomy in consumer purchasing

Level of autonomy	Agent's role	Consumer's role	Illustrative form
Advisory	Provides information and options	Decides and executes	Generative search, product Q&A
Assisted	Prepares and stages the transaction	Confirms and executes	Basket assembly, saved carts
Supervised	Executes routine purchases within rules	Sets rules, retains veto, reviews	Automatic replenishment
Autonomous	Completes discretionary purchases within a mandate	Sets mandate, notified after action	Delegated category buying
Anticipatory	Identifies latent needs and acts pre-emptively	Sets broad goals and constraints	Predictive, need-sensing purchase

level, the agent prepares and stages a transaction, such as assembling a basket, but the consumer confirms and executes. At the supervised level, the agent executes routine purchases within consumer-set rules and reports back and the consumer retains veto power. At the autonomous level, the agent completes discretionary purchases within a mandate without prior approval, notifying the consumer after the fact. At the anticipatory level, the agent identifies latent needs and acts before the consumer has articulated a want, drawing on predictive models of consumption. Table 1 summarises the continuum and its behavioural implications. The value of the continuum is that it disciplines both theory and measurement. Findings about acceptance of an advisory assistant cannot be assumed to hold at the autonomous level, where the consumer surrenders the act of choosing itself and the psychological stakes, particularly the sense of control and ownership, rise sharply as agency is transferred[19,20].

Restructured decision journey: The transfer of agency also restructures the consumer decision journey that has organised much marketing thought. In the conventional journey, the consumer moves through need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase assessment and marketing intervenes at each stage to inform and persuade. When an agent assumes the middle stages, search and evaluation collapse into a single machine process that the consumer neither performs nor observes and the journey contracts from a sequence of human touchpoints into a mandate at the front and an outcome at the end[4,14]. The generative systems that already convert search rankings into synthesised answers foreshadow this contraction, since they replace a list of options the consumer scans with a single recommendation the consumer is invited to accept[13,14]. For agentic commerce, the contraction is more complete, because the agent does not merely answer but acts, so that the touchpoints at which brands once competed for attention are removed from the consumer's view and relocated inside the agent's evaluation. This relocation is the mechanism behind several of the propositions developed later and it explains why the phenomenon cannot be understood as a faster version of the existing journey but must be treated as a different structure.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Consumer sovereignty under delegation: The idea that the consumer is sovereign, that production ultimately answers to consumer preference expressed through choice, has anchored marketing thought for a century. Agentic commerce complicates this idea without abolishing it. When a consumer delegates purchasing to an agent, sovereignty is not surrendered but exercised at one remove. The consumer still holds ultimate authority, in that the agent's mandate derives from and can be revoked by the principal, yet the expression of preference now passes through an artificial intermediary that interprets goals, weighs alternatives and acts[20,21]. This creates what the present paper calls delegated sovereignty, a condition in which the consumer governs outcomes by setting objectives and constraints rather than by making each choice. The distinction is consequential. Preferences that are never enacted directly are harder for firms to observe and preferences filtered through an agent's decision rule may diverge from what the consumer would have chosen unaided, a possibility already visible in evidence that recommendation systems can amplify cognitive biases and reshape the very preferences they claim to serve.

Principal-agent theory as an organising lens: Because agentic commerce establishes a relationship in which one party acts on another's behalf, principal-agent theory offers a natural organising lens. The framework directs attention to the alignment of interests between principal and agent, to the information asymmetries between them and to the mechanisms of monitoring and control that keep the agent faithful. Recent studies of human-artificial intelligence delegation have begun, often implicitly, to work in this register, examining how perceived choice and decision autonomy shape willingness to delegate purchasing[6], how the allocation of control between user and system affects responses[18] and how the balance of augmentation and automation depends on the agent's human likeness[22]. Freisinger and Schneider[23] show that the decision to delegate to artificial intelligence is contingent and task-specific rather than uniform and Song and Lin[7] demonstrate that perceived artificial intelligence intellect, trust and task objectivity jointly

govern delegation. Read through a principal-agent lens, these findings describe the conditions under which a consumer will appoint an artificial buyer and how much authority the appointment will carry. Crucially, the theory also anticipates a problem that the marketing literature has not fully confronted, namely that the agent may be subject to influence by third parties, including the platforms that build it and the merchants that transact with it, creating the possibility of divided loyalty.

Algorithm aversion, appreciation and trust: Whether consumers will delegate at all depends on their disposition toward algorithmic actors, a question studied under the headings of algorithm aversion and algorithm appreciation. The evidence is nuanced. Consumers sometimes discount algorithmic advice, particularly for subjective or identity-relevant decisions, yet they appreciate it for objective tasks and can be moved by contextual cues[8]. Trust is central and multidimensional. Chang *et al.*[24] distinguish dual dimensions of trust in artificial intelligence financial advice, Lu and Zhang[25] show that trust in artificial-intelligence-enhanced chatbots depends on product context and identity fit and Pathak and Bansal[5] find that the trust dimensions relevant to accepting a delegated agent differ from those relevant to accepting a mere aid. Anthropomorphic design can raise trust but also provoke discomfort when personalisation feels intrusive[26] and perceived corruption or bias in the surrounding environment can paradoxically reduce aversion by making the algorithm seem comparatively impartial[9]. These findings establish the psychological preconditions for delegation, but they largely concern the consumer's evaluation of a system that advises. The present framework extends them to a setting in which the consumer must trust a system that acts, where the stakes of misplaced trust are materially higher.

Generative capability as the enabling substrate: The enabling foundation is technological. Agentic commerce is made possible by the generative turn in artificial intelligence, which endows systems with the linguistic competence to interpret loosely specified goals, the reasoning capacity to plan and the flexibility to operate across heterogeneous merchant environments[15]. Generative systems already reshape information search[13], restructure the path from query to synthesised answer[14], reconfigure the consideration set relative to conventional recommenders[12] and influence motivation and behaviour when embedded as shopping assistants. They are entering service delivery, advertising, luxury creation and even the conduct of consumer research itself. This generative substrate is what allows delegation to move beyond the narrow, rule-bound tasks of earlier automation toward the open-ended, goal-directed purchasing that defines agentic commerce.

Relational and moral status of the agent: A further foundation concerns what the agent is to the consumer, since the transfer of purchasing agency raises questions that are relational and moral as well as functional. As agents assume more of the buying role, consumers form relationships with them and the character of those relationships shapes delegation. Anthropomorphic cues can make an agent feel like a companion rather than a tool, yet the same cues can misfire, as when a system that treats each consumer identically produces a sense of uniqueness neglect that undermines the felt personalisation of the interaction. This tension is central to agentic commerce, because an agent that is trusted enough to buy on a consumer's behalf must be experienced as attentive to that consumer's particular preferences, not as a generic optimiser. A parallel and deeper question concerns the moral standing of an actor that makes consequential choices. Scholarship on machine ethics asks whether an artificial system can possess anything resembling moral autonomy and concludes that current systems fall well short of genuine moral agency even as they take on morally consequential tasks[27]. For marketing, the practical implication is that responsibility for an agent's purchases cannot be assigned to the agent itself and must instead rest with the consumer who mandates it and the platform that builds it. This allocation of responsibility becomes a defining feature of the delegation relationship and of the governance questions the framework raises.

DELEGATED CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Triangular exchange: Drawing these foundations together, this paper proposes the Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework, presented in Fig. 1. The framework reconceives the marketing exchange, conventionally a dyad between firm and consumer, as a triangle among three parties. The consumer becomes a principal who defines goals, constraints and mandates and who retains ultimate authority. The agent becomes a boundedly loyal buyer that interprets the mandate, searches and evaluates the market and transacts. The firm becomes a supplier that must now satisfy two audiences at once, the human principal whose preferences and welfare are the ultimate arbiter and the artificial agent that is the

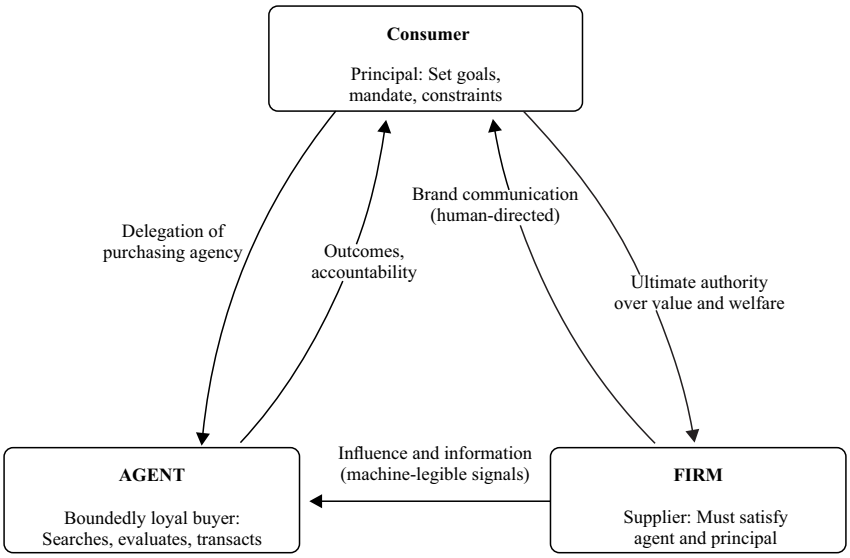

Fig. 1: Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework, showing the triangular relationship among the consumer as principal, the autonomous agent as buyer and the firm as supplier

proximate decision maker at the point of exchange. The relationships among the three are governed by delegation from consumer to agent, by influence and information flowing from firm to agent and from firm to consumer and by outcomes and accountability flowing back from agent to consumer. This triangular structure is the framework's central claim and it reorganises the questions that marketing must ask.

Antecedents of delegation: The framework specifies three classes of antecedents that govern whether and how much a consumer delegates. Task-related antecedents matter because consumers delegate more readily for routine, objective and low-identity purchases and retain control over subjective, symbolic and high-involvement ones, consistent with evidence that delegation is task contingent[7,23]. Agent-related antecedents encompass perceived competence, transparency, anthropomorphism and the trust the consumer places in the agent and its platform[5,24,28]. Consumer-related antecedents encompass digital literacy, need for control, privacy concern and prior experience with automation[29]. From these, the paper derives the propositions that follow.

Proposition 1 holds that the extent of delegated purchasing authority increases with the perceived objectivity and routineness of the task and decreases with its symbolic and identity relevance. Proposition 2 holds that delegation increases with the consumer's trust in both the agent and the platform that operates it and that platform trust becomes more important as the level of agentic autonomy rises, because higher autonomy reduces the consumer's ability to monitor each action. Proposition 3 holds that the relationship between agent competence and delegation is moderated by transparency, such that competent agents that cannot explain their actions secure less delegated authority than equally competent agents that can[28,30].

Agency problem in agentic commerce: The triangular structure introduces an agency problem that the dyadic model did not contain. Because the firm can attempt to influence the agent directly, through the data, interfaces and incentives it exposes to the agent, the agent's recommendations and purchases may serve interests other than the principal's[31]. The consumer, standing behind the agent, may be unable to observe this influence, a classic condition of information asymmetry. Digital nudging by an agentic system can steer outcomes in ways the consumer neither sees nor sanctions[31] and autonomous systems can undermine the consumer's sense of ownership over outcomes they did not directly choose[19]. Proposition 4 therefore holds that as agentic autonomy increases, the consumer's ability to detect misalignment between the agent's actions and the consumer's interests decreases, raising the salience of platform governance and regulatory oversight as substitutes for direct monitoring[32]. This proposition reframes consumer protection in agentic commerce as a problem of agent governance rather than of consumer information alone. Principal-agent theory further suggests that the parties will invest in monitoring and bonding to contain misalignment and agentic commerce gives these classic mechanisms new forms. Monitoring by the consumer takes the form of audit

Table 2: Dimensions of agentic distance

Dimension	Definition	Representative indicators
Functional	Breadth of purchasing tasks the agent performs	Share of decision steps delegated; frequency of intervention
Psychological	Felt involvement in and ownership of the decision	Perceived ownership; decision involvement; sense of control
Informational	Transparency of the agent's reasoning to the consumer	Perceived understanding; explainability; predictability
Relational	Displacement of direct consumer-brand contact	Exposure to brand cues; felt closeness to chosen brands

trails, spending limits and periodic review of the agent's actions, yet each of these is costly in attention and expertise and the value of delegation lies precisely in economising on that attention, so consumers face a tension between the control that protects them and the convenience that motivated delegation in the first place[16]. Bonding by the agent and its platform takes the form of transparency features, explanations and guarantees that signal fidelity to the principal's interest[28,30]. The equilibrium level of delegation therefore reflects a negotiated balance between the residual loss the consumer will tolerate and the monitoring and bonding costs both parties will bear and this balance shifts with the level of agentic autonomy and with the consumer's capacity to supervise.

AGENTIC DISTANCE

Conceptualising the construct: Alongside the triangular exchange, the framework contributes a construct that captures what the interposition of an agent does to the consumer's relationship with the market. This paper defines agentic distance as the perceived and functional separation between the consumer and the point of market transaction created by the delegation of purchasing to an autonomous agent. As agency is transferred along the continuum described earlier, the consumer moves further from the act of exchange and this distance has measurable consequences. Agentic distance is conceived as a multidimensional construct with four dimensions. The functional dimension concerns the breadth of purchasing tasks the agent performs, from a single step to the whole journey. The psychological dimension concerns the consumer's felt involvement in and ownership of the decision, which weakens as the agent assumes more of the work[19]. The informational dimension concerns the transparency of the agent's reasoning to the consumer, with opacity widening the distance[30]. The relational dimension concerns the displacement of direct contact between the consumer and the brand, as the agent rather than the person now encounters marketing communications. Table 2 sets out the dimensions and their indicators. Distinguishing agentic distance from adjacent constructs clarifies its contribution. It is not the same as psychological ownership, which it influences but does not reduce to, nor as trust, which is one of its antecedents and consequences rather than its substance, nor as perceived autonomy, which captures the consumer's sense of self-direction but not the structural separation from the point of exchange that agentic distance names[19,21]. The construct is closest in spirit to the idea of psychological distance, but it is specific to the delegation of market action and is grounded in an observable structural fact, namely how much of the purchasing process an agent performs. This grounding makes agentic distance measurable through a combination of behavioural indicators, such as the share of purchasing steps delegated and the frequency of consumer intervention and perceptual indicators, such as felt involvement, understanding of the agent's reasoning and sense of contact with chosen brands. A validated measure spanning the four dimensions would allow the propositions developed here to be tested and would give the construct empirical as well as conceptual support.

Behavioural consequences: Agentic distance is proposed to reshape several established regularities of consumer behaviour. Consider impulse purchasing, long understood as a response to in-the-moment stimuli at the point of sale. When an agent mediates exchange, the consumer is no longer present at that point and the stimuli that trigger impulse, promotional cues, scarcity signals and atmospheric design, are received by the agent rather than the person. Proposition 5 holds that increasing agentic distance reduces consumer impulse purchasing, because the agent filters the stimuli that provoke it, while shifting the locus of impulse management from the consumer to the agent's decision rule. This has a corollary that firms may attempt to trigger impulse in the agent through machine-directed cues, a possibility examined in the next section.

Brand loyalty and equity are likewise implicated. If an agent selects goods against a specification and if it substitutes freely among suppliers that meet the specification, the emotional and habitual bonds that sustain loyalty may weaken and brands risk being reduced to interchangeable bundles of attributes[4]. Proposition 6 holds that increasing agentic distance weakens the effect of brand affect on purchase outcomes and strengthens the effect of machine-legible attributes such as price, specification and verifiable quality signals. Trust, too, is transformed. Under high agentic

distance the consumer's trust must be placed in the agent rather than in each brand, so that trust is transferred from a portfolio of brand relationships to a single agentic relationship[24,25]. Proposition 7 holds that as agentic distance increases, consumer trust in the agent becomes a stronger predictor of category and brand outcomes than consumer trust in individual brands, concentrating relational equity in the agent and its platform.

Consequences for autonomy and well-being: A final set of consequences concerns the consumer's autonomy and welfare. Delegation can relieve the burden of choice, reducing decision fatigue and the postponement it produces and it can improve outcomes for consumers who lack the time or expertise to choose well. Yet the same delegation can threaten the consumer's sense of autonomy and self-determination, a threat documented in responses to artificial-intelligence-based promotion and recommendation[20,21] and it can generate anxiety about ceding control[33]. Proposition 8 holds that the relationship between agentic distance and consumer well-being is curvilinear, such that moderate distance improves welfare by reducing effort and error while high distance diminishes welfare by eroding perceived autonomy and ownership[19,33]. This curvilinear claim distinguishes the present framework from accounts that treat delegation as uniformly beneficial or uniformly threatening and it identifies the calibration of autonomy as a central design and policy question.

AGENT-ORIENTED MARKETING

Marketing to a machine buyer: If the proximate decision maker at the point of exchange is increasingly an artificial agent, then marketing practice must address that agent as well as the human behind it. This paper terms the resulting reorientation agent-oriented marketing and it argues that each element of the marketing mix is reconfigured when the buyer is a machine that optimises against a mandate. The reconfiguration is not the replacement of human-directed marketing but its augmentation with an additional layer aimed at the agent and the two layers can pull in different directions, since what persuades a person may not move an optimiser and vice versa[34].

Consider product and value proposition. A human buyer responds to holistic impressions, brand meaning and emotional resonance, whereas an agent evaluates against machine-legible criteria. Value propositions must therefore be rendered in structured, verifiable and comparable form so that an agent can parse and weigh them, a requirement that privileges specification, certified quality and transparent provenance over ambient brand imagery[4,28]. Consider promotion. Persuasion aimed at the agent is less a matter of narrative and affect than of supplying the credible, structured signals an agent uses to satisfy its mandate, which shifts promotional investment toward verifiable claims and machine-readable trust markers[29]. The persuasive modality itself matters, since evidence shows that the way an agent presents options, by voice or by text and in a given order, changes outcomes[34]. Consider place. Discoverability now depends on being legible and accessible to agents, giving rise to a discipline analogous to search optimisation but directed at agentic intermediaries, in which suppliers structure data and interfaces so that agents can find, assess and transact with them. Consider price. Agents can compare prices continuously and without loyalty, intensifying price competition and compressing the margins that brand attachment once protected, unless suppliers can establish non-price criteria that the agent is mandated to weigh[4].

Personalisation, service and the post-purchase relationship: Agent-oriented marketing extends beyond acquisition to the whole relationship and two features deserve emphasis: Personalisation and service recovery. Personalisation matters because an agent that holds a rich model of its principal can tailor purchases with a precision that individual firms cannot match and evidence indicates that artificial-intelligence-driven personalisation can move purchase decisions materially when it is perceived as relevant rather than intrusive[29]. In agentic commerce this personalising capability sits with the agent rather than the firm, which means that firms increasingly compete to supply the agent with the structured information it needs to match their offerings to a principal's model, rather than personalising the offering directly. Service recovery deserves equal emphasis. When something goes wrong with a delegated purchase, the consumer's experience of redress is mediated by the agent and the quality of automated service recovery shapes continued willingness to delegate. A poorly handled failure at high agentic distance is doubly damaging, because it both harms the immediate outcome and reminds the consumer of their reduced control, whereas smooth recovery reinforces trust in the agent and deepens delegation. Firms and platforms that treat post-purchase service as integral to the agentic relationship, rather than as a separate function, will therefore hold an advantage and the design of agent-mediated recovery becomes a marketing question rather than a purely operational one.

Contest for the agent: Because the agent stands between firm and consumer, a contest arises over whose interests the agent serves and this contest is the strategic heart of agent-oriented marketing. Platforms that operate agents occupy a powerful position, since they shape the data and options the agent sees and can nudge outcomes through the agent's design[31]. Firms that do not own the agent must compete for its attention on the criteria the agent uses, while also lobbying, through governance and standards, for agents that are transparent and fair[32]. Proposition 9 holds that in agentic commerce, marketing effectiveness depends increasingly on the machine legibility of a firm's value proposition and decreasingly on the affective strength of its brand communications, with the shift growing more pronounced at higher levels of agentic autonomy. Proposition 10 holds that the entity controlling the agent captures a disproportionate share of category influence and, consequently, of value, because it governs the choice architecture within which all suppliers compete[2,31]. Together these propositions imply a redistribution of marketing power toward agent platforms and away from individual brands, with significant implications for competition and for the strategies open to challenger firms.

AGENTIC COMMERCE IN EMERGING ASIAN MARKETS

Why context changes the phenomenon: The dynamics described so far are general, but their expression depends on context and the emerging markets of Asia present conditions that differ markedly from the developed economies in which most evidence has been gathered. These differences are not peripheral. They shape which consumers delegate, which agents they trust and how the contest for the agent unfolds and they therefore warrant explicit theorising rather than treatment as boundary noise[10,11].

Mobile-first leapfrogging and super-application ecosystems: Many Asian markets skipped the desktop era and became mobile-first and in several the digital economy is organised around super-applications that integrate messaging, payment, commerce and services within a single platform. This architecture is unusually hospitable to agentic commerce, because a super-application already holds the payment credentials, transaction history and service breadth an agent needs to act across a consumer's life and because consumers are accustomed to conducting many activities within one trusted environment. Proposition 11 holds that agentic commerce will diffuse faster in mobile-first super-application ecosystems than in fragmented multi-platform ones, because the super-application lowers the integration cost of delegation and concentrates the data an agent requires. This concentration also sharpens the redistribution of power identified in Proposition 10, since the super-application operator is positioned to control the dominant agent. Evidence on the rapid uptake of mobile payment and embedded finance in the region, including in moments of disruption and on the swift adoption of buy-now-pay-later and cross-border platforms, is consistent with a consumer base primed for delegated, platform-mediated transaction[35].

Trust, institutions and digital literacy: Emerging Asian markets are also marked by thinner formal institutional trust and by wide variation in digital literacy and both conditions bear on agentic commerce in ways that cut against a simple diffusion story. Where formal institutions of consumer protection are weak, trust often rests on platforms and interpersonal networks rather than on regulation, which can accelerate delegation to a trusted platform agent while heightening the risk that consumers cannot detect or contest agent misalignment[26,29]. At the same time, uneven digital literacy means that the consumers who could benefit most from delegation, those least equipped to navigate complex digital markets, may be least able to configure and supervise an agent and most exposed to manipulation through it. Proposition 12 holds that in low-institutional-trust settings the consumer's trust in the agent platform substitutes for trust in brands and in regulation, strengthening the platform's role as guarantor, while the welfare consequences of delegation become more polarised across the digital-literacy distribution. The hyper-personalisation that emerging-market consumers increasingly encounter[10] can thus be experienced as empowering by some and as opaque and intrusive by others[26] and the balance between these experiences is a central question for research and policy in the region.

Cultural orientation and the reception of autonomy: Cultural orientation conditions how the transfer of agency is received. In contexts where collective and relational norms are strong, the delegation of routine consumption to a trusted agent may fit existing practices of relying on intermediaries and social networks, whereas the delegation of identity-relevant or gift purchases may meet greater resistance because such acts carry relational meaning that consumers are reluctant to automate. Language and localisation matter as well, since agents that do not accommodate local languages and idioms raise the informational dimension of agentic distance and depress adoption. Delegation in these settings also intersects

Table 3: Summary of propositions

Proposition	Statement
P1	Delegated authority rises with task objectivity and routineness and falls with symbolic and identity relevance
P2	Delegation rises with trust in the agent and its platform; platform trust matters more as autonomy rises
P3	Transparency moderates the competence-delegation link; opaque agents secure less authority
P4	Higher autonomy lowers the consumer's ability to detect agent misalignment, raising the salience of governance
P5	Higher agentic distance reduces consumer impulse purchasing by filtering point-of-sale stimuli
P6	Higher agentic distance weakens brand affect and strengthens machine-legible attributes on outcomes
P7	Higher agentic distance makes trust in the agent a stronger outcome predictor than trust in brands
P8	Agentic distance and consumer well-being have a curvilinear (inverted-U) relationship
P9	Marketing effectiveness depends more on machine legibility and less on brand affect as autonomy rises
P10	The entity controlling the agent captures a disproportionate share of category influence and value
P11	Agentic commerce diffuses faster in mobile-first super-application ecosystems
P12	In low-institutional-trust settings, platform trust substitutes for brand and regulatory trust; welfare effects polarise by digital literacy

with the rapid, sometimes cautious, adoption of autonomous technologies more broadly, where perceived benefit and social influence weigh heavily. These observations suggest that the reception of agentic commerce in Asia will be neither uniform nor a simple lag behind developed markets, but a distinct trajectory shaped by ecosystem architecture, institutional trust, literacy and culture. These cultural and institutional particularities also interact with the informal and cash-based commerce that remains significant across much of the region, where the movement of consumers into platform-mediated and increasingly agent-mediated exchange represents not a marginal efficiency gain but a substantial change in how trust is established and how consumption is organised[35]. As agents take on purchasing for consumers who are newly formalised into digital markets, the platform that operates the agent inherits a quasi-institutional role, setting the norms of fair dealing that weak formal institutions do not supply and this inheritance concentrates both power and responsibility in ways that merit close attention from scholars and regulators alike[31,32].

DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions: This paper makes several contributions to marketing theory. The contribution to conceptual clarity comes from defining agentic commerce and locating it on a continuum of agentic autonomy, which supplies precision to a literature that has conflated advice, conversation and action and clarifies why findings at one level of autonomy cannot be assumed to transfer to another[3,4]. The contribution to exchange theory comes from reconceiving the marketing exchange as a triangle among consumer, agent and firm, since the Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework reorients the discipline's central questions from persuading a human chooser to governing a delegation relationship and satisfying a machine buyer[6,18]. This reorientation connects marketing to principal-agent theory in a way that has not been fully developed and that opens a rich agenda concerning alignment, monitoring and divided loyalty in consumer markets. The contribution to construct development is the concept of agentic distance, which offers a parsimonious way to theorise and eventually measure the displacement that delegation produces and which yields non-obvious predictions, including the weakening of brand affect, the transfer of trust to the agent and the curvilinear relationship between distance and well-being[19,33]. The contribution to contextual theorising comes from embedding the framework in the conditions of emerging Asian markets, where the paper resists the tendency to universalise developed-market evidence and specifies how ecosystem architecture, institutional trust, literacy and culture shape the phenomenon[10,35].

The framework's novelty lies in shifting the locus of analysis from the human response to artificial intelligence toward the structural reconfiguration of exchange that autonomous agency produces. Much recent work, valuable as it is, asks how consumers feel about delegating, adopting or trusting artificial intelligence[5,8]. The present paper asks a prior and more encompassing question, namely what the marketing exchange becomes when the buyer is a machine and it answers with a framework, a construct and a set of testable propositions that together constitute an agenda rather than a single hypothesis. Table 3 consolidates the twelve propositions for empirical examination.

Managerial implications: For managers, the framework implies a dual marketing capability. Firms must continue to build brands that resonate with human principals, since the mandate and the ultimate authority remain human, while simultaneously rendering their value propositions legible and persuasive to agents, since the agent is the proximate buyer[28,34]. This requires investment in structured, verifiable and machine-readable representations of product attributes, quality and provenance and in the trust markers that agents

will weigh[29]. It also requires a strategic view of the agent platform as both channel and gatekeeper and a recognition that firms which do not control agents will compete on the criteria those agents apply and should engage in the governance debates that will shape agent transparency and fairness[31,32]. The same logic applies to the many service settings, from retail to hospitality and finance, where autonomous and generative systems are already changing how value is created and delivered. In emerging Asian markets specifically, managers should attend to super-application ecosystems as the likely locus of agentic commerce, to platform trust as the currency of delegation and to the wide variation in digital literacy that will shape both opportunity and risk[11,35]. For public policy, the framework relocates consumer protection from the provision of information to the governance of agents, since a consumer who cannot observe an agent's actions cannot be protected by disclosure alone[31,32].

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conceptual and its propositions await empirical test. The framework should be examined across the levels of the agentic-autonomy continuum, since its claims are explicitly conditioned on the degree of delegated agency and the construct of agentic distance requires operationalisation and validation, including the development of a measurement instrument spanning its four dimensions. The curvilinear well-being proposition invites experimental and longitudinal designs that vary the degree of delegation and track autonomy, ownership and satisfaction over time[19,33]. The reconfiguration of the marketing mix implied by agent-oriented marketing can be tested through studies that compare the effectiveness of human-directed and agent-directed value propositions and that examine how agents respond to different trust signals and presentation modalities[34]. A closely related agenda concerns the inputs that agents themselves consume, since an agent evaluates alternatives using structured signals, machine-generated reviews and synthesised advice and research should ask how the design of these inputs steers agent behaviour and, through it, consumer outcomes, extending existing work on recommender design and on machine-generated content. Studies might also examine whether generative and agentic tools that reshape information discovery alter which products enter consideration in the first place and how consumers react to advice they know to be machine generated. Resistance to agentic systems, whether rooted in privacy concern, loss of control, distrust of automation or the ethical unease that automation can provoke, also merits study, since the dark side of adoption can be as consequential as adoption itself. The emerging-market propositions call for comparative research across Asian ecosystems and for attention to the distributional consequences of delegation across the digital-literacy spectrum[10,26]. Because the technology is evolving rapidly, the framework should be treated as a living structure to be revised as agentic systems and consumers' relationships with them, mature. Research should also examine the boundary conditions set by product category, cultural orientation and regulatory regime and it should investigate the emerging contest among firms, platforms and regulators for control of the agent, which this paper identifies as the strategic centre of gravity in agentic commerce[2,32].

CONCLUSION

Agentic commerce marks a point at which the consumer, long the decisive actor in market exchange, begins to govern consumption at one remove, setting objectives for autonomous agents that discover, evaluate and buy. This paper has argued that the shift is structural rather than incremental and it has offered a framework, Delegated Consumer Sovereignty, that recasts the marketing exchange as a triangle among consumer, agent and firm. It has introduced agentic distance to capture the displacement that delegation produces and to derive its consequences for impulse, loyalty, trust, autonomy and welfare and it has reframed the marketing mix as agent-oriented marketing for a world in which the proximate buyer is a machine. By grounding these ideas in the conditions of emerging Asian markets, the paper has shown that agentic commerce will follow a distinct trajectory shaped by mobile-first super-application ecosystems, institutional trust, digital literacy and culture. The locus of persuasion is moving from the human to the machine and marketing scholarship and practice must move with it. The framework and propositions advanced here are intended as a foundation for the empirical work that this transition now urgently requires.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

This study introduces the concept of agentic commerce, the Delegated Consumer Sovereignty framework and the construct of agentic distance to explain what happens to market exchange when consumers delegate purchasing to autonomous artificial intelligence agents. This study will help researchers to uncover the critical areas of brand equity, consumer autonomy and marketing strategy that autonomous agents reconfigure, which many researchers

were not able to explore because existing frameworks treat artificial intelligence only as an advisor. A new theory of agent-oriented marketing, attentive to the conditions of emerging Asian markets, may thus be arrived at.

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