

# THE CHANGING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR BETWEEN REAL LIFE AND DIGITAL WORLD

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As technology continues to permeate our daily lives, consumer behavior has shifted notably between the physical and digital realms. The convergence of these domains, largely due to the rise of social media, e-commerce, and virtual reality, has transformed how individuals make purchasing decisions, interact with brands, and communicate socially.

Consumer behavior has long been influenced by evolving social and economic factors. With digitalization, the line between real-world interactions and digital experiences has blurred, impacting consumers' perceptions and their engagement with products and services. Recent studies (Keikhosrokiani, 2022); Rangaswamy *et al.*, 2022) have outlined the fundamental shifts in consumer behavior due to digital integration. These shifts have altered traditional shopping patterns and redefined the social interactions surrounding consumption.

*The Virtualization of Consumer Behavior.* Digital identity has been identified as a significant driver of consumer behavior (Wittich *et al.*, 2024). Individuals increasingly cultivate their online personas, which often differ from their real-world identities. As digital identities gain importance, consumers make purchases that align with their desired virtual image. This shift underscores the role of social media platforms as central hubs for consumer engagement, where individuals project idealized versions of themselves (Hadi *et al.*, 2024).

The convenience offered by digital shopping channels has been a major catalyst in the shift toward online purchasing. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of e-commerce, and this trend has become more permanent, as consumers now value the seamlessness of digital transactions, further encouraged by innovations like one-click purchasing and subscription models. Such digital-native conveniences have raised consumer expectations for real-life shopping experiences, driving the need for retailers to blend online and offline channels (Fortuna *et al.*, 2021).

Virtual and augmented reality technologies have introduced a new dimension to consumer experiences, allowing individuals to interact with products digitally before purchasing them. Celestin *et al.*, (2024) emphasize that VR/AR technologies enable immersive experiences, which can enhance brand loyalty and product satisfaction by providing a “try-before-you-buy” experience. This phenomenon not only influences consumer choices but also expands the potential for personalization, as companies tailor virtual experiences to align with consumer preferences.

*Social and Economic Implications.* While digital platforms facilitate consumer engagement and brand interaction, they also create challenges related to digital disconnection and authenticity. Prolonged digital engagement can lead to reduced social interaction in real life. Additionally, consumers face the paradox of presenting an idealized self-image while grappling with real-world insecurities. The emphasis on "likability" and social validation online influences consumer choices, particularly in fashion and lifestyle products, often promoting aspirational rather than practical consumption.

By an economic point of view, with the rise of digital assets, such as NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) and digital collectibles, consumers now spend significant amounts on virtual goods (Tan, 2024). This economic shift has encouraged brands to diversify into digital offerings, creating new revenue streams and stimulating innovation in marketing strategies. However, the long-term sustainability of these virtual assets remains uncertain, also considering their environmental impact and the digital rights issues.

Social media platforms are critical in shaping consumer behavior, with influencers playing a central role in guiding purchasing decisions. Consumers are increasingly influenced by the recommendations of online personalities, as they view influencers as more trustworthy than traditional advertisements. This shift towards influencer-based marketing has altered advertising landscapes and given rise to micro-influencers, who target niche markets and foster deeper engagement. Companies must navigate this new terrain carefully, as reliance on influencers can lead to ethical concerns, particularly around transparency and authenticity (Steils *et al.*, 2022).

*Adapting to Hybrid Consumption: The Future of Consumer Behavior.* As digital and real-world consumer experiences become increasingly intertwined, businesses must adapt to a hybrid model of consumption that combines digital innovation with tangible experiences. The consumer demand for seamless transitions between digital and physical experiences is growing, whether in the form of personalized online recommendations that lead to in-store purchases or digital platforms that facilitate real-world gatherings. This hybrid approach is essential for brands aiming to sustain consumer interest and build loyalty in an evolving marketplace.

Moreover, advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning are expected to further refine consumer targeting, offering hyper-personalized experiences across platforms. By embracing these changes, businesses can stay competitive while addressing the unique demands of the modern consumer, who seeks convenience, personalization, and authenticity in both virtual and physical environments.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the shifting consumer behavior between the real and digital worlds reflects broader social and economic changes, driven by digitalization and the virtualization of lifestyle. Consumers increasingly prioritize online identities, convenience, and virtual assets, transforming traditional consumption patterns and redefining brand interactions. As we move towards a more interconnected marketplace, companies must adopt hybrid strategies that cater to consumers' needs across both domains. Future research should focus on the ethical implications of digital influence and explore sustainable models for virtual economies. Ultimately, understanding these shifts is essential for brands and policymakers aiming to navigate the complexities of modern consumer behavior.

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