

Agile E-Commerce Relevance Within the Expansion of the Digital Economy and the Phyigital Business Models Challenged to Ensure Continuously Improved CX



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Abstract

Marketing leaders are under constant pressure to come up with fresh ideas, embracing relevance, reducing the experience gap, increasing employees' contribution to a better CX, paying more attention to today's youth signal. They are facing continuous challenges within the context of consumers' new normal and the new age of commerce, the expansion of the digital economy, the shift to more personalized CX being obvious. E-commerce contribution to sustainability in retail and agile e-commerce and the dynamic of m-commerce's share of ecommerce are also other current preoccupations.

Keywords: E-Commerce Relevance; M-Commerce; Digital Economy; Disruptive Technologies; Phyigital Business Models; CX

JEL Classification: D83; L21; M21; M31; M37; O31; O33

Embracing relevance, reducing the experience gap, increasing employees' contribution to a better CX, paying more attention to today's youth signal

It is encouraging to see many companies speaking out about issues of their business relevance. There was a lot of debate gradually during a long period about this fundamental

concept (not only for documentation and information science, but also for information retrieval) of relevance, and an intense debate is still going on, this concept being deeply analyzed more recently in the Journal of the American Society for Information Science (Mizzaro, 1997).

Ten years later (Saracevic, 2007), as all is flux according to Plato, the same Journal continued and updated a similar review to what appeared priorly (in 1975, as Part I), adding two new rigorous parts in analyzing this key notion of relevance.

In 2013, Inc. Magazine (James, 2013), starting from the definition given by The Oxford English Dictionary (“the state of being closely connected or appropriate to the matter in hand”), underlined various characteristics of being relevant in the business world (such as: leadership, expertise, acumen, or emotional support).

Eight years ago, the well-known leading business media brand Fast Company (2014) highlighted how business relevance changes both behavior (while sustaining change), and minds by causing a better business understanding by all those experiencing it fully (product, brand, or cause).

Two years later, Branding Strategy Insider (Colon, 2016), let us know that brands compete against irrelevance in the attention economy (where everyone is your competitor), hence a better predictive key performance indicator (KPI) may be relevance needing to be measured (by social listening, making shorter feedback loops for digital products, and using Net Promoter Score). This opinion determined another one pledging for using a more suitable marketing metric taking into account the irrelevance of the brand relevance as a metric.

In January 2021, the world’s leading cloud-based relevance platform, Coveo (2021), issued its first “Relevance Report 2021. Ecommerce” (commissioned by Coveo, Researchscape International conducted an online survey, December 26, 2020 - January 6, 2021), the respondents saying as follows: *“While 9 out of 10 said they expect online shopping to be equal to or better than in-store, half of them are experiencing crushing disappointment. If retailers don’t address this experience gap, more bad news awaits. Almost three quarters of customers say they will abandon a brand after a short series of negative experiences, according to the results. And up-and-coming digital natives — loyal customers of the future — show even less tolerance.”*

This year, Coveo (2022) – recognized for its Coveo Relevance Cloud™ ensuring delivering of relevant experiences in digital interactions based on applied AI – issued its second Relevance Report (entitled “Relevance Report 2022: Ecommerce Shoppers Reveal the ‘Brand Experience’ Gaps”), which did not reveal a significant CX improvement of the online shopping (that remained the main mode of consumption), respondents surveyed (working people, using a computer in companies with more than 250 employees) reproaching different aspects (such as: customer service shortfalls, 48%; website navigation, 32%; search deficiencies, 29%; post-transaction problems, 27%). According to this second Coveo’s report (signaling a very low level of ‘always’ relevant online shopping experiences to customers’ buying habits and preferences,

only 6% of customers), retailers need to consider personalization and consumers' journeys' start, as well as reducing the experience gap and become friendly with the preferences of our younger demographics, as shown in figure below. And while pledging for the need of embracing relevance, this second Coveo's report also underlined the significance of the brand trust, as well of the so-called (by Coveo) "Cold-Start Shopper Dilemma". It is also worth remembering within this framework that as 70% of the site traffic is made up by cold-start shoppers it is important to know what is to be done so as to improve ROI on personalization for these shoppers (Polonioli, 2021).



Figure no. 1: Today's Youth Signal, What Tomorrow Has in Store

Source: Coveo, 2022. *Relevance Report 2022: Ecommerce Shoppers Reveal the 'Brand Experience' Gaps.* [pdf] January 2022, p. 7 (work cited)

With regard to the brand experience' gap it is also worth remembering that in the RDC Magazine issues it was underlined that CX with a brand is defined by the interactions with touchpoints (including the role of micro moments), hence the imperative of reducing the difference between customers' expectations and brands' beliefs (as behaviors' code established in employees' mind). Very recently, McKinsey's representatives (Miller et al., 2022) highlighted the need to increase employees' contribution to a better CX by empowering them in agilely acting while avoiding common pitfalls in this transformation, as shown in figure below.

To upgrade CX, plan and prioritize to avoid six common pitfalls.

1. Failure to link CX to value Needed capabilities: • Clarify how CX improvements will boost business performance and drive value • Gain the organization's support and momentum for a CX transformation	2. Fragmented priorities Needed capabilities: • Prioritize journeys, pain points, and ideas • Sequence tasks thoughtfully • Test hypotheses	3. A narrow view Needed capabilities: • Map customer journeys • Create personas • Conduct ethnographic research • Identify and size pain points using customer and operational data
4. Limited creativity Needed capabilities: • Run ideation sessions and surface solutions using design thinking • Create a future-state vision and journey • Challenge long-held organizational orthodoxies	5. Sideline customers Needed capabilities: • Prioritize solutions and test hypotheses through immersive prototypes and MVPs • Design effective pilots, success metrics, test and control groups • Gather quantitative and qualitative customer feedback • Foster a culture of rapid test-and-learn and experimentation	6. CX on its own island Needed capabilities: • Understand customer impact of day-to-day decisions • Use data-driven customer feedback to inform decisions • Form cross-functional journey teams • Set up and use CX measurement systems

Figure no. 2: To upgrade CX, plan and prioritize to avoid six common pitfalls

Source: Miller, I., Neher, K., van den Broek, R. and Wintering, T., 2022. [pdf] McKinsey & Company, Marketing & Sales Practice, March 2022, p. 2 (work cited)

As shown by Shaw (2022), it is important to identify when customers decide or doesn't decide (crossing the metaphorical Rubicon in that brand experience) to buy from a brand, so as to design, if that is the case, the suitable environment to encourage them to make the decision wanted by the brand, considering the importance of various aspects (such as: the cognitive process of choosing between two or more alternatives; where customers are in their decision-making journey; the difference between managing the process before and after the decision, adapting also to customers' needs after decision-making).

On the other hand, as shown by eMarketer (Fisher, 2022), digitally savvy Gen Z consumers have high digital expectations from brands regarding online shopping, what presupposes to be engaged and met where they are, and taking into account their susceptibility to both brand switching (if their demands are not met), and discovering and adopting new online behaviors.

Consumers' new normal and the new age of commerce. The expansion of the digital economy, the shift to more personalized CX being obvious

Significant research by Accenture (2018) revealed how customer relevance is driving companies' growth outcomes (Accenture developing a model linking vitality with firm

performance, to each company being assigned a so-called “Vitality Score”), the impact of companies’ capabilities (targeting new opportunities, designing for customers, building engagement, scaling with partners, rewiring culture) with regard to become and stay hyper-relevant to their customers, and how consumers’ perception (within Accenture’s annual Global Consumer Pulse Survey) of a brand’s relevance drives their purchasing behaviors. This was seen as a period that is just beginning, as shown in figure below. Which of course raises the question to what extent (while acting on the path to obtain companies’ growth outcomes) an effective e-commerce strategy can contribute to driving growth based on valorizing the growth opportunities provided by each selling channel, improving CX.

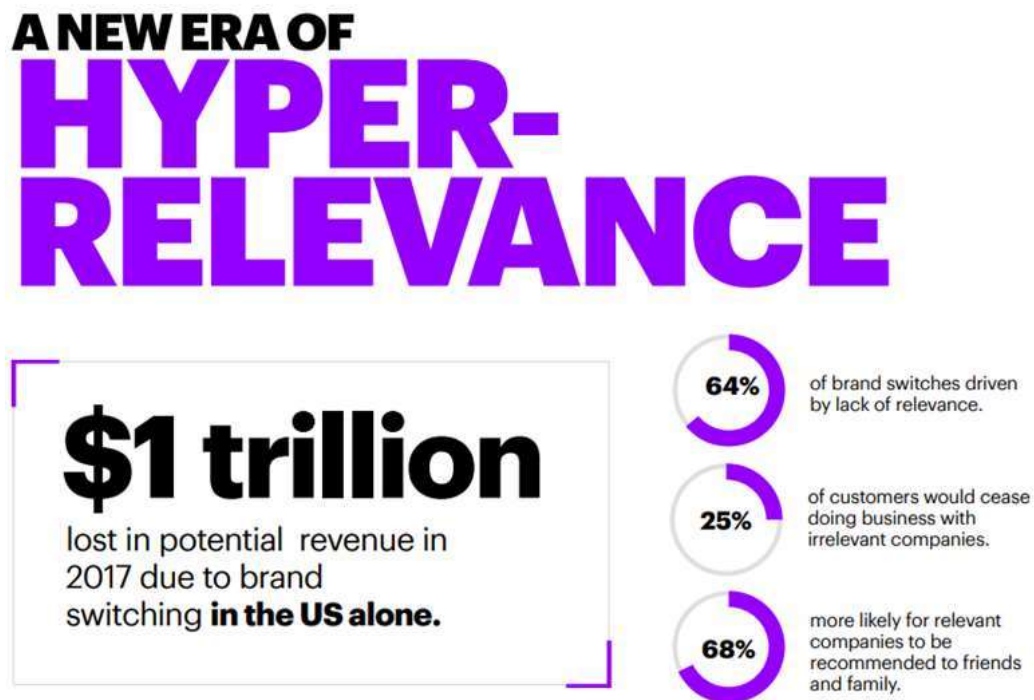


Figure no. 3: A New Era of Hyper-Relevance

Source: Accenture, 2018. *Relevance: The beating heart of a living business achieving sustainable growth through Hyper-Relevance.* [pdf] Accenture Research, p. 2 (work cited)

Consumers’ new normal is having with minimal effort a very nearly instantaneous access to products, says the reputed eCommerce platform Linnworks (2021) that is known as helping online retailers (including based on its Total Commerce platform) automate key processes, reduce costs and grow their business. According to Linnworks (n.d.), for online merchants Total Commerce is that type of commerce able to “ensure a seamless customer journey, regardless of when, where, and how the shopper interacts with your business”, consumers’ insights being essential to maximize their engagement, and consumers’ purchase fulfilling process needing to

be E2E frictionless (finalized by orders' fulfillment until placement into consumers' hands), once engagement is achieved. The Linnworks report entitled "The great ecommerce acceleration. How retailers need to adapt to the effortless economy" showed, among other aspects, that: in order to achieve Total Commerce (selling wherever consumers want to shop, consumers being the drivers of it) retailers need to adapt better understand the challenges (omnichannel and convenience) and prioritize business strategies (by rethinking their selling strategy and logistics, considering new platforms like marketplaces and social channels, one hand, as well as proper supply chain diversification and fulfillment strategies), delivering that by consumers demanded CX; a key part in building a competitive CX is played by automation. The key processes targeted by retailers' prioritized investment in technology (within the context in which a major priority for 2022 being investment in omnichannel capabilities), and why retailers invest in automation are shown in the below figure. Other significant aspects revealed by this study were regarding what respondents' opinions about supply chain disruptions' impact and identified key reasons (as shown in the next figure below), as well the necessary key mitigation strategies to build the capacity for resistance and recovery.

Furthermore, retailers were prioritizing their 2022 investment in technology across the following key processes.



While those retailers investing in automation indicated that.

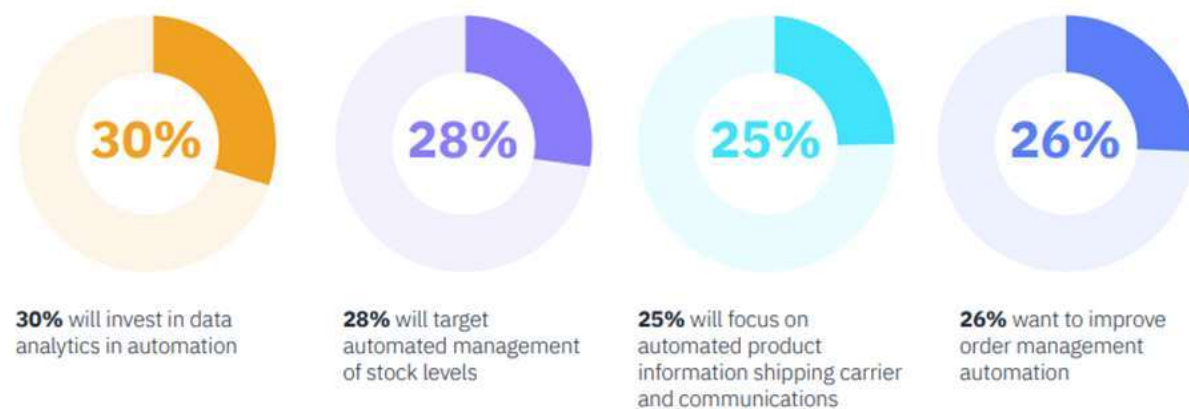


Figure no. 4: The key processes targeted by retailers' prioritized investment in technology and why retailers invest in automation

Source: Linnworks, 2021. The great ecommerce acceleration. How retailers need to adapt to the effortless economy. [pdf]. December 2021, p. 13 (work cited)

The impact has been felt right across retail operations, with businesses identifying a range of consequences.



71% of respondents said that supply chain disruptions over the past 12 months have still not been resolved, indicating ongoing disruptions. The key reasons identified were:



Figure no. 5: Respondents' opinions about supply chain disruptions' impact and identified key reasons

Source: Linnworks, 2021. The great ecommerce acceleration. How retailers need to adapt to the effortless economy. [pdf]. December 2021, p. 16 (work cited)

It is also well-known that the most comprehensive set of insights within the limitations of its class is offered by the Adobe Digital Economy Index (Adobe, 2022) covering significant visits to U.S. retail sites (over 1 trillion) and Stock Keeping Units (over 100 million SKUs, in 18 product categories). New U.S. e-commerce data (U.S. consumers spent online, from March 2020 through February 2022, \$1.7 trillion) published recently on the occasion of Adobe Summit revealed the expansion of the digital economy after two years of COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to more personalized CX being obvious. Trends and new consumer shopping behaviors were identified by Adobe as follows: inflation contributes without doubt to e-commerce growth (see the first figure below); e-commerce is being reshaped by grocery shopping, groceries becoming a major e-commerce category; the largest e-commerce category is remaining electronics (see next figure below/); apparel demand fallen heavily within the context in which consumers spent more time at home; within supply chain disruptions have been seen by consumers many out-of-stock messages (60 billion OOS between March 2020 - February 2022); Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) orders increased considerably (growth slowing only in recent months, but demand remaining

strong), consumers both spending more online, and looking for new ways to manage their money; the fulfillment method known as Curbside Pickup (placing order online and collecting it from convenient location; already a major fulfilment method for retailers using it) saw rise (accounting for 20% of all online orders this year until now) as many consumers are now accustomed to value both speed, and convenience.

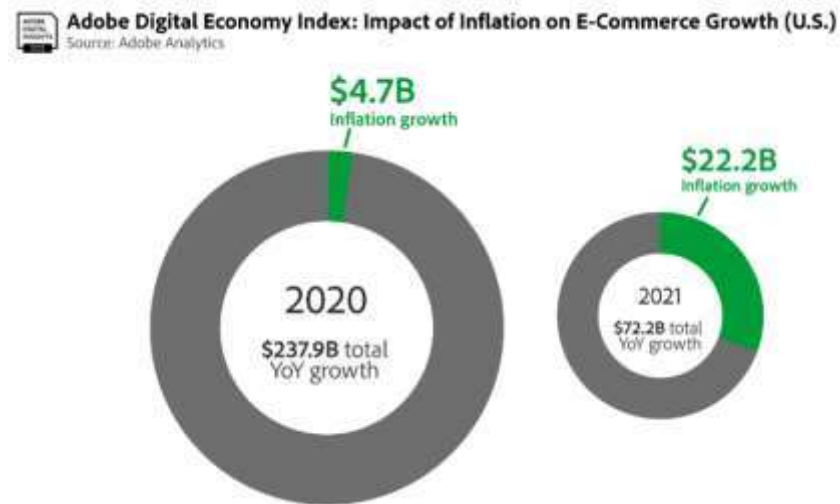


Figure no. 6: Adobe Digital Economy Index: Impact of Inflation on E-Commerce Growth (U.S.)

Source: Adobe, 2022. Adobe: U.S. Consumers Spent \$1.7 Trillion Online During the Pandemic, Rapidly Expanding the Digital Economy, Press Release, Tuesday, March 15, 2022 (work cited)

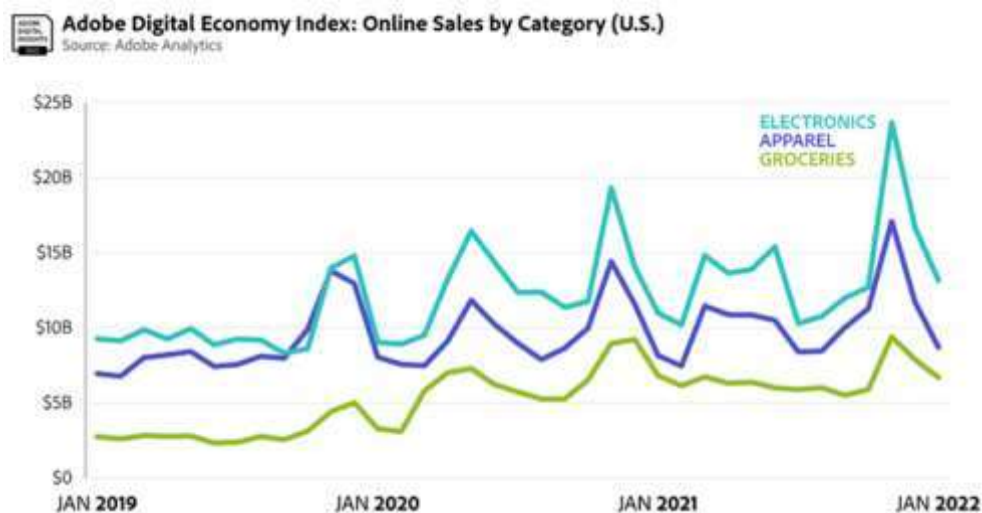


Figure no. 7: Adobe Digital Economy Index: Online Sales by Category (U.S.)

Source: Adobe, 2022. Adobe: U.S. Consumers Spent \$1.7 Trillion Online During the Pandemic, Rapidly Expanding the Digital Economy, Press Release, Tuesday, March 15, 2022 (work cited)

E-commerce contribution to sustainability in retail

Purcarea et al. (2022) highlighted the relationship between the concepts of circular economy, sustainability, and sustainable development, one hand and the relationship between retailers' sustainability journeys and consumers' perspective towards sustainable consumption, the other hand. Within this framework, it was underlined, among other aspects, the need of more comprehensive studies concerning retailers' digital transformation to enable both consumers' adoption of more sustainable lifestyles, and consumers' making of informed choices in the omnichannel world.

More recently, a report by Coresight Research (Weinswig, 2022) published within their Innovator Profile series made reference to a sustainability-focused e-commerce enablement innovator founded in 2019, EcoCart (according to Coresight Research categorization it falls under "reducing waste and increasing sustainability"), known as providing retailers both an e-commerce plugin in order to offer customers at checkout a carbon-neutral order option (by deploying algorithms based on product type, package weight, shipping distance etc.), and with the opportunity to understand (thanks to EcoCart's analytics dashboard) the environmental impacts of their product lifecycles' specific parts. From the point of view of consumers, they have such an option to make their order carbon neutral (by paying an extra cost) when shopping at over 10,000 stores, which is possible on the basis of EcoCart's Google Chrome extension that calculates the orders' carbon footprint. EcoCart's customers (92%) expressed their desire to support brands investing in nature- for ecosystem resilience and regeneration, which is not surprising, as long as EcoCart is struggling to reduce the detrimental impacts of e-commerce by making online shopping a climate-friendly and ecologically sustainable experience.

It is also worth mentioning that also according to Coresight Research supply chains' optimization (E2E, being known, for instance the role of fast delivery in improving CX) is a constant preoccupation of retailers considering more and more the emerging technologies as key growth drivers in harmony with sustainability initiatives.

Agile e-commerce and the dynamic of m-commerce's share of ecommerce

The well-known comprehensive source of information on how to operate in a digital world, eMarketer, provided recently a global outlook for retail sales and retail ecommerce sales in this year and beyond, showing, among other aspects, that the worldwide ecommerce sales will exceed, in 2022, \$5 trillion for the first time (more than 1/5 of overall retail sales), and total spending (in spite of slowing growth) will to rise and fall actively \$7 trillion by 2025 (eMarketer, 2022), as shown in figure below. This valuable research was commissioned by ChannelAdvisor in 2021.

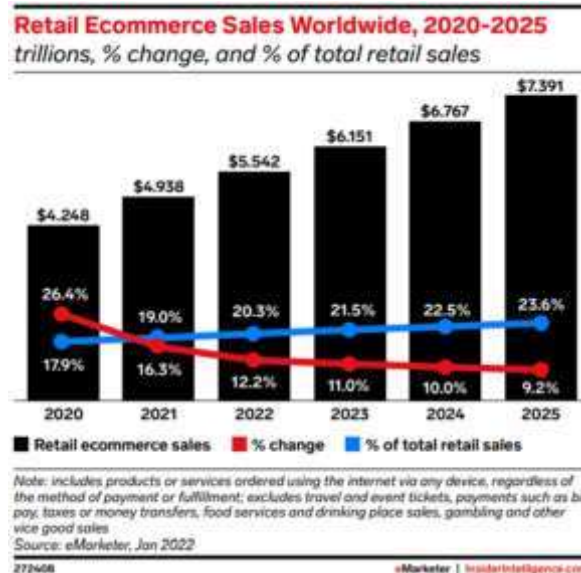


Figure no. 8: Retail Ecommerce Sales Worldwide, 2020-2025

Source: eMarketer, 2022. eMarketer Global Ecommerce Forecast Report. [pdf] Insider Intelligence Inc., Report presented by ChannelAdvisor, p. 3 (work cited)

According to this eMarketer Global Ecommerce Forecast Report digital buyers' spending on ecommerce around the world is expected to be with \$603.68 billion more in 2022 than last year, by 2025 being expected that digital shoppers will spend online \$7.391 trillion. A top 12 countries, ranked as % of total worldwide ecommerce, 2022 is presented below.



Figure no. 9: Top 12 Countries, Ranked as % of Total Worldwide Ecommerce, 2022

Source: eMarketer, 2022. eMarketer Global Ecommerce Forecast Report. [pdf] Insider Intelligence Inc., Report presented by ChannelAdvisor, p. 6 (work cited)

The above-mentioned valuable report also revealed significant aspects regarding m-commerce (see the figure below), within the context in which its share of ecommerce is still growing, even if very slowly now because of both the comfort level (with shopping and buying via mobile) reached by the digital users in North America and Europe (despite their still existent

preference for larger-screen computers in order to finalize their transactions). This dynamic is still evolving, but slower than before), and the fewer new users starting an e-commerce journey via mobile every year (taking into account what is happening in emerging markets where smartphones have already become common, while internet access is rapidly close to become very common).

Retail Mcommerce Sales Worldwide, 2020-2025 <i>trillions, % change, % of total ecommerce sales, % of total retail sales</i>						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Retail mcommerce sales	\$2.721	\$3.203	\$3.643	\$4.089	\$4.541	\$4.999
% change	29.2%	17.7%	13.7%	12.3%	11.1%	10.1%
% of total ecommerce sales	64.1%	64.9%	65.7%	66.5%	67.1%	67.6%
% of total retail sales	11.5%	12.3%	13.3%	14.3%	15.1%	16.0%
Note: includes products or services ordered using the internet via any device, regardless of the method of payment or fulfillment; excludes travel and event tickets, payments such as bill pay, taxes or money transfers, food services and drinking place sales, gambling and other vice good sales						
Source: eMarketer, Jan 2022						
272444 eMarketer InsiderIntelligence.com						

Figure no. 10: Retail Mcommerce Sales Worldwide, 2020-2025 (trillions, % change, % of total ecommerce sales, % of total retail sales)

Source: eMarketer, 2022. eMarketer Global Ecommerce Forecast Report. [pdf] Insider Intelligence Inc., Report presented by ChannelAdvisor, p. 8 (work cited)

The today's diversity of stimulus brands can take on are affecting consumers' choice, consumers being determined to buy by their motivations (utilitarian or hedonic) associated to purchases, and mainly in digital environment consumers are most valuing their CX (Pinto de Lima and Almeida Monteiro, 2022), their trust in brands depending on CX improvement. Recently published research findings by Çakıcı (2022) brought to our attention the role of digital agility (defined by IGI Global dictionary as company's ability to enable, update, change or adapt rapidly its business processes) in the context of digital transformation impact (which is long-term) on the process of by both companies and consumers joint value creation. Within this framework Çakıcı made reference to digital transformation as digital technologies' use to enhance CX by transforming business practices and operations extending throughout a company (Vial, 2019). On the other hand, as shown by Kumar (2022), in a VUCA environment companies need to match digital transformation with improved CX, constantly reinventing themselves. And as demonstrated by Purcarea et al. (2021), there is a real need today for companies to take the test of VUCA time for Retail 4.0 impacted by the Industry 4.0 technologies, becoming real innovators, integrating digital into all aspects of the retail business and creating customers' real-time digital experience (seamless and immersive Omni channel experiences) with reduced friction.

Of course, while analyzing how agile it is e-commerce, we need to recall some aspects already discussed by us, such as those highlighted by BCG's representatives (Baxter et al., 2021):

- The importance of agility as of one of the most common challenges to e-commerce success (see figure below).

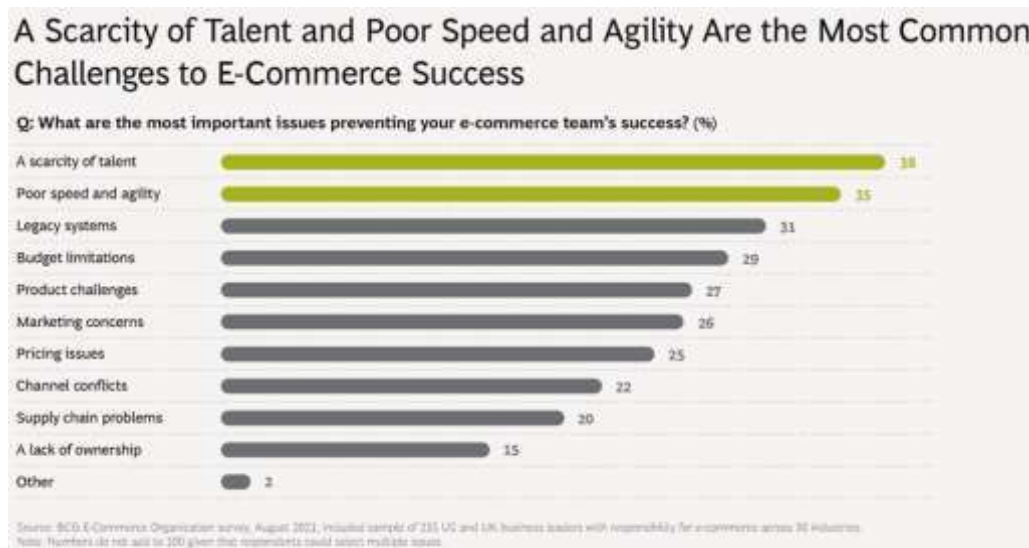


Figure no. 11: A Scarcity of Talent and Poor Speed and Agility Are the most common challenges to E-Commerce Success

Source: Baxter, A., Paizanis, G., Robnett, S. and Yang, H., 2021. Building a World-Class E-Commerce Organization, BCG, December 13, 2021 (work cited)

- Both the organizational structure, and the routes to market specific to an e-commerce organization, recalling BCG's archetypes shown in the below picture.

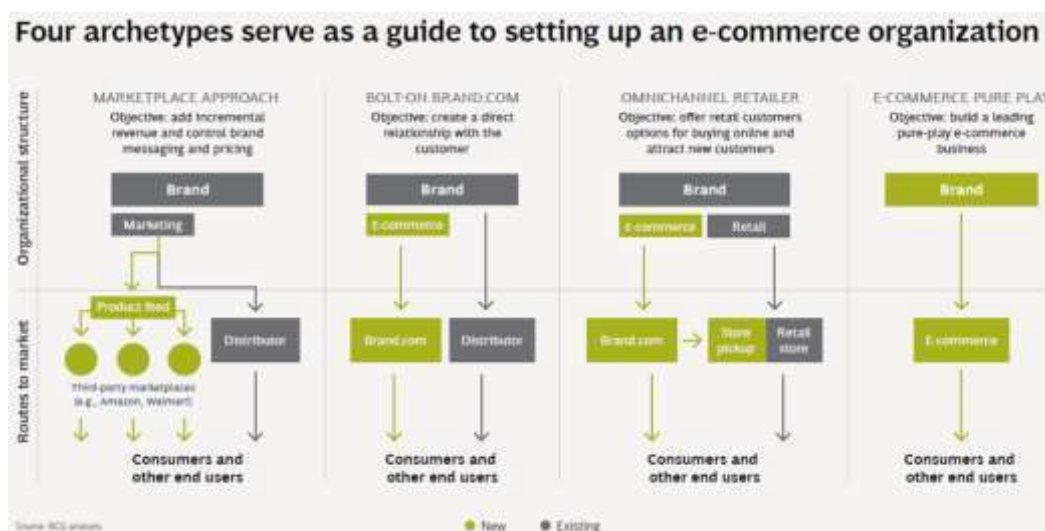


Figure no. 12: Four archetypes serve as a guide to setting up an e-commerce organization

Source: BCG, Leading in the New Reality. Digital Transformation [pdf], <four-e-commerce-archetypes-pdf>, cited by Baxter, A., Paizanis, G., Robnett, S. and Yang, H., 2021. Building a World-Class E-Commerce Organization, BCG, December 13, 2021 (work cited)

Conclusions: *The relevance of e-commerce within the phygital business models challenged to ensure continuously improved CX*

As shown by the founder of the experiential marketing mix (7Es: Experience, Exchange, Extension, Emphasis, Empathy, Emotional touchpoints, Emic/Etic process), Wided Batat (2019), the proper mix of 7Es allowing companies to design a proper CX maximizing lived experience (the purpose of the consumption being evaluated based on symbolic and aesthetic criteria) within the phygital context integrating new technologies, hence experiential marketers' challenge to better understand the emerging both experiences, and behaviors. In our opinion, if we are to gain further conclusions regarding the relevance of e-commerce within the phygital business models challenged to ensure continuously improved CX it is important that the analysis must be deeper, considering the following aspects:

- Raj De Datta (2021), CEO and Co-Founder at Bloomreach, underlined the difference between a customer (who desires to make a purchase) and a seeker (who desires to fulfill an intention), and showed that as more first-time seekers (demanding improved experience) have entered the e-commerce space mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic it is important to create digital experiences with the seeker in mind so as to better understand their motivations, achieving customers' understanding on a deeper level.
- According to Gartner's Digital Commerce Survey published on 29 October 2021, there is a particular focus of marketing leaders on digital-first value creation and CX from the point of view of their investments, as they are recognizing the need to evolve companies' digital commerce capabilities.
- The schematically up-to-date marketing management model recommended by Kovshova (2022) within the digital transformation of business and society, as shown in figure below.

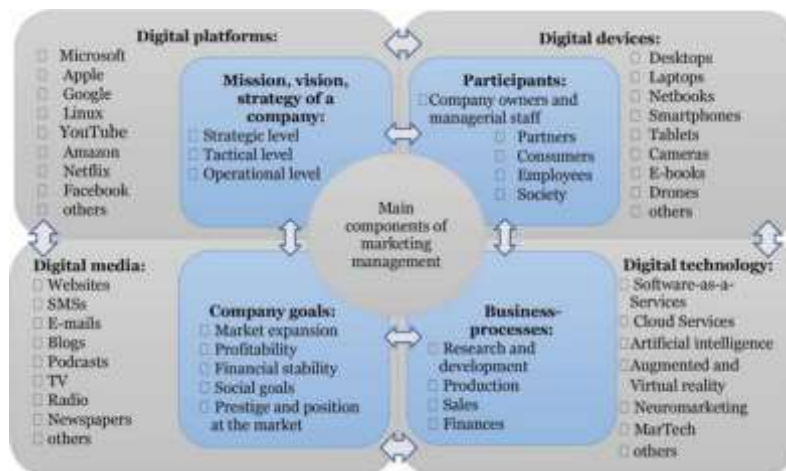


Figure no. 13: The up-to-date marketing management model in digital transformation of business and society

Source: Kovshova, I., 2022. Digital Transformation: The Age of Innovations in Business and Society, Open access peer-reviewed chapter, From the edited volume "Digital Transformation", Edited by Petrillo, A., De Felice, F., Achim, M. V. and Mirza, N., 2022 (work cited)

- The fact that the so-called Mobile App Experience (MAX), as shown by Airship (2022), is already transforming how businesses manage relationships with consumers, a new digital center of CX is emerging, namely mobile apps, and the new normal is represented by app-enabled experiences.
- There is a significant impact of social apps on livestream shoppers (Lebow, 2022), taking into account the rise of purchased products during a livestreaming event by Internet users worldwide (see the bellowed figure).

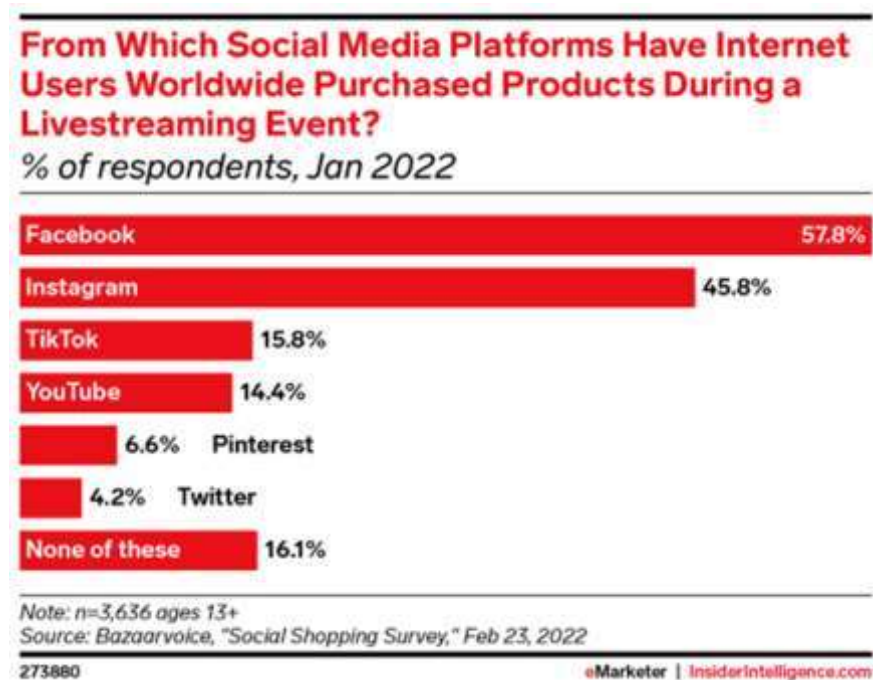


Figure no. 14: From which social media platforms have Internet users worldwide purchased products during a livestreaming event

Source: Lebow, S., 2022. Which social apps get livestream shoppers to open their wallets? eMarketer, Mar 31, 2022 (work cited)

- The fact that a panel discussion (entitled “Designing Tomorrow’s Retail Experiences: From Experimentation to Mass Adoption: Trending Technologies and Their Potential to Transform Retail”) on the occasion of day four, March 30, 2022, of the Shoptalk 2022 (which confirmed that livestreaming and the metaverse are top of mind) in Las Vegas, US, concluded that top retail-tech trends are visual search and personalization (Coresight Research, 2022).
- According to Gartner (2022), in order to differentiate CX and deliver long-term results, Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) should explore digital-first value creation (see figure below).



Figure no. 15: Long-term planning: CMOs should explore digital-first value creation to differentiate customer experience and deliver long-term results

Source: Gartner, 2022. Digital Commerce Strategic Priorities by Industry, Infographic (work cited)

As we showed in the last RDC Magazine issue (Purcarea, 2021), there is an obvious marketers' need to reach the best return on CX by adapting accordingly the e-commerce strategies based on strong built data organization, valorizing digital technologies within integrated supply chain. Hence the pressure of working developing new operating models, evolving companies' digital commerce capabilities, ensuring better customers' understanding, considering the app-enabled experiences and the impact of social apps on livestream shoppers etc., exploring digital-first value creation and so on.

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