

Phygital Marketing and Agentic AI Shopping: Detecting Essential Insights (Part II)



Costel NEGRICEA and Ioan Matei PURCĂREA

Abstract

Organizations are challenged to move up their analytics maturity curve, and ensure a right value proposition to their customers by leveraging data connectivity so as to transform fragmented data into actionable insights, as well as making sure data in motion protection between brands and AI endpoints. Digital marketers' holistic data analytics approach is a must to obtain actionable insights into customers' behavior as actions and decision-making processes' mix in response to precisely targeted marketing campaigns, within the context of consumers' purchase journeys increasingly impacted by the rising consumers' turning to conversational AI. Phygital retailers are under pressure to better understand how to approach AI agents' governance within agentic AI shopping journeys gaining traction, customer value propositions' redesigning, as well as the increasing importance of merchandising, customer growth and digital activation (which refers to loyalty and personalization, digital channels and CX, and retail media), and technology as strategic capability stacks. Also, there is an obvious organizations' need to make certain AI risk management both actively, and continuously, being ready for execution tasks for each identified risk. Without a doubt, as agentic shopping is being seen as something good for customers, it will be thought-provoking to detect essential insights within the context of the evolving phygital consumer behavior in the era of hyper-digitalization, so as to overcome continuous challenges in phygital marketing. And as it's time to advance, let's move forward within phygital contexts, and user's control over the phygital experience, better understanding how growth is acquired and retain through trust, starting from valorizing trust-based teams. And as AI governance maturity is essential including from the point of view of earning trust, it is necessary to pay attention to how trust can be eroded if brands pursue short-term performance gains created by AI, while unaware of the circumstances promoting long-term inability of a brand system difficult to correct. Organizations are challenged to agilely adapt to the operating environment that demands constant realignment, operational success needing to be driven based on continuously learning while facing the rapid technological shifts, and innovating while integrating the new technology.

Keywords: Data Connectivity Enhancement; Phygital Marketing; AI Agents' Governance; Phygital Retailers; AI risk management; Phygital Consumer Behavior; Agentic AI Shopping; Trust

JEL Classification: D12; D83; L21; L81; M21; M31; M37; O31; O33

Building the necessary conditions for trust, phygital well-being, responsibility within phygital contexts, user's control over the phygital experience, and the emerging agentic trust infrastructure spanning the broader AI agent workflow

In our last RDC Magazine issue (Negricea and Purcarea, 2026) we made reference to how critical is for innovative phygital marketers to focus on doing the right thing for achieving seamless omnichannel journey, data synchronization across touchpoints, real-time personalization, and AI-assisted phygital retail interactions. According to Cachinho (2026), retail ecosystems' phygitalization impacts on proximity reinvention, including by valorizing emotional loyalty (known as functioning on feelings) and cognitive loyalty (known as being based on logic and convenience). Raza, Niu and Umair (2026), who focused on Gen Z consumers' purchase behavior impacted by metaverse, demonstrated how cognitive and affective trust is markedly influenced by both telepresence and interactivity, and psychological stimuli, a key mediating mechanism in bridging the intention–action gap being trust.

The renowned Professor of Marketing and Business Management Wided Batat (2026), well-known for advancing study linking fundamental and phygital paradigms, launched the so-called Human First Phygital Value (HFPV) framework revealing the heart of the conceptual design, clearly outlining the integrated physical-digital ecosystems' foundational components converting resources into results based on analyzing the development of human capacities, strengths, and virtues, as well as the institutional trust, resilience, and equity at scale. Expressing a human-first direction for phygital market design and governance, Batat established the foundational preparation for novel avenues for investigation in relation with phygital well-being (taking into account the importance not only of ethical AI and organizational redesign, but also of sustainability and cross-cultural variation).

Other authors (Gombar, Boban and Pejić Bach, 2026), who focused on digital trust and phygital responsibility within phygital contexts revealing user behavior transformation, have built a model that: reconceptualized users (as both cognitively, and emotionally engaged agents)' involved in algorithmic interaction; eliminated the conceptual distance between personalization ethics, user's control over the experience, and emotional dynamics in the above-mentioned interaction. They took into consideration that there is an obvious expanding role – in user choices' shaping, fairness perceptions' shaping (as a fundamental driver of human behavior), as well as in shaping sustainability-related behavior – played by algorithmic systems within the dynamic synergy characterizing these systems' relationship with digital architecture. While Lecointre-Erickson et al. (2026), who revealed a comparative sentiment-based perspective on CX (based on consumer perceptions' decoding through Google Reviews) in phygital and traditional retail environments (transforming into actionable insights unstructured qualitative data within this analytical framework), highlighted that a basic connector in a phygital environment is the interaction between the shopper and frontline sales employees.

The author of “Transforming Customer-Brand Relationships” (Kogan Page, September 30, 2025), the well-known Fractional Chief Customer Officer (CCO) and the creator of

Customer Trust Infrastructure (CTI), Christina Garnett (2026), brought recently to our attention that to ensure trust gap closing organizations need to treat trust as the output of the infrastructure beneath it (not the output of good experience), measuring the existent conditions for trust, then build the necessary conditions. The diagnostic framework (worth considering to bridge the gap between the scores of momentary satisfaction and the structural trust keeping customers when something better can supersede) developed by Garnett explains including her so-called Customer Trust Equation ($\text{Trust} = \text{Consistency} + \text{Response} + \text{Connection} + \text{Value} - \text{Friction}$).

According to the Director of CX Solutions Gamma Communications, Richard Hall (2026), only a future ready network can deliver a future-optimized CX based on fast, consistent and trustworthy interactions ensured by an entire system availability (connectivity, security, application performance, service), this network supporting every data flow and every conversation with confidence (not only every interaction). Recent research findings by CB Insights (2026), that brought to light and charted the most promising companies building both the technology, and tools behind AI-powered fraud prevention, revealed including the emerging agentic trust infrastructure as a distinct category spanning the broader AI agent workflow.

The role of trust in relation to the organizational growth, trust not being easy to copy like products' specific characteristics, capabilities, and attributes, while AI is transforming proprietary products into offerings easy to be found or reached, and product needing to be the story told by marketing. Better understanding how growth is acquired and retain through trust, starting from valorizing trust-based teams

It is well-known that to deliver maximum value an organization's operating model must be engineered to provide on the promise, articulating a strong employee value proposition, emphasizing a key differentiator of its value proposition, solving pressing problems of its target audience, and advancing on the path to agilely adapting its growth model. What is the role of trust in relation to the organizational growth that needs judicious balance of organization's resources, strategy, and culture, ensuring key elements' alignment (people, processes, technology, and risk minimization by prioritizing initiatives using analytical and strategic framing)?

According to recent approaches (Verna a, 2026), trust is not easy to copy like products' specific characteristics, capabilities, and attributes. She underlined how a lot of channels (such as: employee-led social, influencer and creator partnerships, community-driven growth, and product-led brand) insert into building word of mouth as the ultimate trust signal, being known the difficulty of making these channels really working harmoniously together (people needing to be highly impressed). And within the context in which AI is more efficient than organization's workflow tool, users moving forward with the products they trust, trustworthiness (building it by ensuring: transparent roadmap sharing, responsive iteration based on feedback, word of mouth moments, thoughtful lifecycle communications mapping out the customer journey, and

monetization aligned with outcomes) must be demonstrated by product itself (which is solving the problems marketing promotes) that has to be the story told by marketing (based on product marketing alignment around organization's unified value proposition).

Of course, the aforementioned ideas are becoming an increasing challenge for a performance marketing under pressure to blend various brand strategies (an immersive brand stage being, for instance, including POS) and human-led creative (human-crafted ideas being blended with data-driven convenience by phygital strategies) leveraging new technology. On the other hand, taking into account the above-mentioned approach, it is necessary to understand the role of trust-based teams as starting point in trust-based growth (Verna b, 2026), all the more so even in case of an external trust-building (outside of an organization) the techniques start with trusting organization's employees.

As CX in B2B is trust-based, the moment of escalation is critical for trust-first AI in CX, and to ensure trust preservation it is necessary to design AI-driven experiences when customers are in critical need, AI governance maturity being essential including in earning trust. Paying attention to how trust can be eroded if brands pursue short-term performance gains created by AI, while unaware of the circumstances promoting long-term inability of a brand system difficult to remedy

A recognized global B2B strategist, Founder of Eglobalis and the European Customer Experience Organization (ECXO), Ricardo Saltz Gulko (a, 2026), brought to our attention significant aspects, such as: customer experience (CX) in B2B is trust-based, as well as relational and cumulative, when the issues customers face become complex or urgent their confidence being built not only through mechanisms such as predictable escalation (the real trust determinant in AI-led CX has become escalation design; B2B relationships being hurt by escalation failures more than in case of B2C ones) and visible accountability (confidence collapsing when AI replaces accountability), but also through another one like fast human intervention when issues become complex or urgent; trust is rapidly deteriorating when AI is interfering with the above-mentioned three mechanisms; organizations need to pay attention when reducing costs rather than improving outcomes by deploying mainly AI self-service tools, this way risking to erode customer trust. In support of his approach Saltz Gulko made reference to both a Gartner survey which revealed customers concern about AI use within the customer service function, and industry analysts warning about the aforementioned risk (making reference to customers' escalations and dissatisfaction, as well as early churn signals).

The global B2B strategist highlighted that AI is treated not as a barrier, but as a triage (O/N as systematic process of tasks' assessment and prioritization and the likelihood of a successful outcome) by organizations rebuilding trust, and trust (in AI-driven CX) restoring is possible through better decisions (prioritizing: escalation designed as a core feature; visible human ownership; success measured by resolution and confidence). Also, he (Saltz Gulko b,

2026) underlined that trust can be earned (together with faster scaling and innovation sustaining) by organizations engineering governance (governance maturity differentiating leaders, not AI adoption) into their operating models.

The co-founder of Code and Theory, Dan Gardner, draw attention in an interview to the fact that marketers should treat AI as infrastructure shaping how an organization operates and represent, ensuring organization's values definition and their reinforcement by AI as meaning's force multiplier at the confluence of the technological power and human imagination (Bradbury, E., 2026). He highlighted that trust can be eroded if brands (AI being brand risks if misused) pursue short-term performance gains created by AI, while unaware of the circumstances (determining brands' overreaching, misrepresenting information, mishandling data, or automating carelessly) promoting long-term fragility difficult to correct or remedy.

Instead of conclusions

In our last RDC Magazine issue we highlighted significant aspects within the context of the rising agentic commerce, such as: the imperative of AI's alignment with human priorities; retailers' challenge to valorize CX E2E; the pressure of rethinking shopping in relation with including highly personalized consumer journeys dealing with choosing experiences worth remembering. And within our focus on proactively directing team behavior, ensuring voluntary collaborative teams' inspiration and motivation in developing a small retail business integrating phygital experiences, considering including Agentic AI shopping journeys and human-centered AI design, as well as loyalty-driven growth strategy (to ensure personalized experiences' leveraging and so on), we thought it was time to move forward in clarifying new aspects, such as: trust and responsibility within phygital contexts, and user's control over the phygital experience, better understanding how growth is acquired and retain through trust, starting from valorizing trust-based teams. And as AI governance maturity is essential including from the point of view of earning trust, it is necessary to pay attention to how trust can be eroded if brands pursue short-term performance gains created by AI, while unaware of the circumstances promoting long-term inability of a brand system difficult to correct.

It is noteworthy to mention, for instance, that Meta's new shopping experience (built within its new AI model Muse Spark, and found next to the "Search with Meta AI" tab/Instagram) is for retailers another discovery channel (powered by AI and conversational commerce), a dynamic evolving recommendation engine, Meta's own ecosystem allowing product discovery to be combined not only with creator content and targeting, but also with direct purchase intent signals (Choudhary, 2026). A new form of AI chat shopping systems was introduced by Shopify's Agentic Storefronts, consumers being enabled to discover and purchase products directly within platforms (like ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot), and Google's AI experiences, this system allowing the shopping journey's embedment into conversational

interfaces, making possible this way not only product discovery and comparison, but also checkout without interruptions (Rahman, 2026). By moving shopping from dedicated sites to integrated AI dialogues takes place an online merchandising redefinition (conversion funnels and channel economics being changed in retail e-commerce), and for both discoverability, and competitive differentiation not only product metadata, but also presentation become primary levers within the context in which product visibility shifts to algorithmic and conversational contexts.

The CEO and founder of a well-known London-based eCommerce platform (working with significant retailers across the UK, EU, and MENA), Native Commerce (Bolotov, 2026), highlighted that a holistic approach is required by AI integration, turning experimentation today into sustainable growth involving ensuring scalable automation enablement and personalized experiences, as well as strategic insights, all of these based on reliable backend and frontend systems (as a balanced combination of: proven structures designed to solve specific repeatable problems; ensuring failures' aggressively interception, managing, and penalizing; robust infrastructure). Without doubt, retail and CPG operations have been transformed by AI, and the 2026 NVIDIA State of AI in Retail and CPG (Countouris, 2026) revealed AI budgets' increase in 2026, including the focus on both agentic (operations' speed and efficiency being increased by AI agents orchestrated by agentic AI) and physical AI (warehouse and supply chain operations' streamlining and automation being helped by physical AI systems).

According to Donnelly (2026), as CX in real time can be autonomously managed by agentic AI (relevance being delivered at scale), there is a rising confidence that agentic AI will help when needed regarding cross-channel e-commerce personalization (offering relevant and contextual experiences based on using real-time, first-party data allowing customers' better understanding), seeing significant conversion lift from AI-powered personalization. There were identified proven personalization strategies used by top e-commerce brands to increase sales (dynamic product recommendations, behavioral email marketing triggers, intelligent search personalization, location-based content personalization, browse abandonment recovery campaigns, customer lifecycle messaging, and real-time content optimization), as well as advanced personalization tactics (semantic understanding for search, advanced segmentation and targeting, and 1:1 personalization at scale).

Recent research by Boston Consulting Group (BCG), that focused on the so-called crown jewels of personalization strategy, showed how to ensure both rapidly increasing campaign volumes' management, and tangible value creation demonstration, agentic capabilities' development will be critical for the next-best action (NBA) programs designed as compounding systems, the next decision improvement being helped by data generated from every customer interaction (Palumbo et al., 2026). And as every opportunity for growth needs to be reduced to its constituent parts in order to interpret it, BCG's research revealed that NBA enablement to the next level presupposes to simultaneously close four structural gaps (architecture, science,

operating model, and measurement) causing most NBA programs to underdeliver (confirming that the evolution of the operating environment is faster than the systems built to manage it).

Organizations are challenged to agilely adapt to the operating environment that demands constant realignment, operational success needing to be driven based on continuously learning while facing the rapid technological shifts, and innovating while integrating the new technology. As Shep Hyken once said, “AI can make us faster, smarter and more informed, but it can’t make us more caring, empathetic or trustworthy. That’s still our job.” And as Stephen R. Covey underlined, “Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.”

And allow us to end by quoting a thought-provoking source that examined “... the dynamic nature of attitudes towards AI, the significant role of trust in (AI) adoption, and the context-dependent factors that influence both attitudes and trust. Future research could focus on understanding the mechanisms of shifting attitudes towards AI and specific contexts of developing trust in AI, including in high-risk environments” (Daly, Wiewiora and Hearn, 2025).

References

- Batat, W., 2026. Phygital Science and the Future of Macromarketing: The Human First Phygital Value (HFPV) Framework for Integrated Physical-Digital Ecosystems, *Journal of Macromarketing*, First published online May 14, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02761467261450501>.
- Bolatov, M., 2026. AI in ECommerce: Recognising Real Value Beyond the Vibe-coding Hype, *European Business Review*, March 29. Available at: <<https://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/ai-in-ecommerce-recognising-real-value-beyond-the-vibe-coding-hype/>> [Accessed 1 April 2026].
- Bradbury, E., 2026. All things AI with Dan Gardner, *Marketing Brew*, February 23. Available at: <<https://www.marketingbrew.com/stories/2026/02/23/all-things-ai-with-dan-gardner?>> [Accessed 25 February 2026].
- Cachinho, H., 2026. Phygitalization: The New Frontier of Neighborhood Retail in the Omnichannel Era, Chapter 25 in “The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the City, Retail, and Consumption” (Editors: Daniel Paiva, Pedro Guimarães, First published:30 January 2026). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394278657.ch25>.
- CB Insights, 2026. The fraud prevention market map: 200+ companies building fraud & trust infrastructure for the AI era, *Research library*, Report, June 2. Available at: <<https://www.cbinsights.com/research/report/the-fraud-prevention-market-map-for-the-ai-era/?>> [Accessed 5 June 2026].
- Choudhary, V., 2026. Meta introduces new shopping upgrades under AI model Muse Spark, *RetailBrew*, E-Commerce, April 16. Available at: <<https://www.retailbrew.com/stories/2026/04/16/meta-introduces-new-shopping-upgrades-under-ai-model-muse-spark?>> [Accessed 16 April 2026].
- Countouris, C., 2026. From Warehouse to Wallet: New State of AI in Retail and CPG Survey Uncovers How AI Is Rewiring Supply Chains and Customer Experiences, *NVIDIA*, January 7. Available at: <<https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/ai-in-retail-cpg-survey-2026/>> [Accessed 3 April 2026].
- Daly, S.J., Wiewiora, A., Hearn, G., 2025. Shifting attitudes and trust in AI: Influences on organizational AI adoption, *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 215 (2025), pp. 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2025.124108>.
- Donnelly, I., 2026. 7 Ecommerce Personalization Strategies to Boost Sales in 2026, *Bloomreach*, May 14. Available at: <<https://www.bloomreach.com/en/blog/ecommerce-personalization>> [Accessed 22 May 2026].
- Garnett, C., 2026. How the Customer Trust Equation Reveals What NPS Can’t About Friction, Response, and Connection, *CustomerThink*, May 29. Available at: <<https://customerthink.com/how-the-customer-trust-equation-reveals-what-nps-cant-about-friction-response-and-connection/>> [Accessed 1 June 2026].
- Gombar, M., Boban, M. and Pejić Bach, M., 2026. Digital Trust and Phygital Responsibility: A User-Centered Model for Sustainable Consumer Behavior in Algorithmic Environments, *World* 2026, 7, 86, pp. 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world7050086>.

Hall, R., 2026. CX is an outcome of the network beneath it, TelcoNews UK, 7th May. Available at: <<https://telconews.co.uk/story/cx-is-an-outcome-of-the-network-beneath-it>> [Accessed 4 June 2026].

Lecointre-Erickson, D., Adil, S., Khan, L., Agbokanzo, K.S., Bassily, M., Meatchi, S., 2026. Human-centric experience in phygital retail: a sentiment-based comparison of hybrid and traditional touchpoints, *Journal of Services Marketing*, Année: 2026. Available at: <<https://univ-angers.hal.science/hal-05591572/>> [Accessed 19 April 2026].

Negricea, C. and Purcarea, I.M., 2026. Phygital Marketing and Agentic AI Shopping: Detecting Essential Insights (Part I)," *Romanian Distribution Committee Magazine*, vol. 17(1), pp. 40-53, February.

Palumbo, S., Abraham, M., Johnson, K. and Lim, Y., 2026. The Four Gaps in Next-Best Action Programs, BCG, May 29. Available at: <<https://www.bcg.com/publications/2026/the-four-gaps-in-next-best-action-programs?>> [Accessed 5 June 2026].

Rahman, M., 2026. AI Chat Shopping Systems, TrendHunter, March 30. Available at: <<https://www.trendhunter.com/trends/ai-chat-shopping-systems>> [Accessed 7 April 2026].

Raza, M.A., Niu, B., Umair, T., 2026. From screen to shopping bags: Decoding Gen Z's path through metaverse experience toward actual phygital fashion products in Retail Fashion, *Technology in Society*, 27 March 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2026>.

Saltz Gulko, R., 2026. AI in CX Is Not the Problem — Escalation Failures Are the Real Trust Gap, CustomerThink, February 17. Available at: <<https://customerthink.com/ai-in-cx-is-not-the-problem-escalation-failures-are-the-real-trust-gap/?>> [Accessed 23 February 2026].

Saltz Gulko, R., 2026. Agentic AI and Customer Innovation: Why Governance Is Now the Key Differentiator, CustomerThink, March 3. Available at: <<https://customerthink.com/agentic-ai-and-customer-innovation-why-governance-is-now-the-key-differentiator/?>> [Accessed 11 March 2026].

Verna, E., 2026. Growth Is Now a Trust Problem, Jan 13. Available at: <<https://www.elenaverna.com/p/growth-is-now-a-trust-problem>> [Accessed 6 June 2026].

Verna, E., 2026. Your AI strategy has a trust problem, not a tooling problem, June 05. Available at: <<https://www.elenaverna.com/p/your-ai-strategy-has-a-trust-problem?>> [Accessed 6 June 2026].

