

Customer Value Creation in A Phygital Retail Leveraging Immersive Technologies as Distribution Channels, and AI Agents' role in Optimizing Phygital Distribution



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Abstract

There is a powerful connection between customer value creation, the role of comprehensive consumer perspective, and the impact of disruptive technologies in phygital retail. Agentic AI is blurring the lines between marketing and service as the new marketing, the entire customer journey being impacted by the agentic CX stack. Customer journeys and decision flows' redesigning around agentic AI is depending on the right agents-human collaboration mode. Modern marketers must better understand how important is for brands' visibility and preference to be the top of the selection made by an AI agent, brands' perception being shaped by AI through interpretation based on technologies. And as you move forward on this path there is a real need for marketers to see the connection between customer insights' identification, impact of AI technology integration on CX and business operations, AI systems' context, customer interactions, and value creation surpassing what has been previously performed.

Keywords: Customer Value Creation; Phygital Retailer; Phygital Marketing; Phygital Distribution; Agentic AI;

AI Agents; Agentic CX Stack; Agents-Human Collaboration Mode; AI-Guided Purchases

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

Customer value creation in phygital retail, the role of comprehensive consumer perspective, and the impact of disruptive technologies

As to improve online shopping CX, the augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies are increasingly used, it is very important to better understand how customer value in online retailing is created under these both retailing conditions, being a fine link between customer journey outcomes and AR and VR attributes considering hedonic and utilitarian gratifications (Li et al., 2026), psychological and social traits (audience attributes being satisfied, for instance, by actively choosing media), as well as media/platform attributes (technologies'

embedded functionalities) being considered by researchers focused on attributes explained by gratifications. By investigating how relevant to prepurchase, purchase, and post-purchase outcomes are the immersion (that is powerfully associated with prepurchase outcomes), vividness (with post-purchase outcomes), presence and interactivity (both being associated with post-purchase outcomes) of AR and VR attributes, Li et al. formulating a model to a journey-based framework for AR and VR value creation, the customer-, product-, retailer-, interface-, and time- related conditions under which AR and VR value is created being identified further based on moderation analyses defining the context where the effect varies.

As shown by Quixy (2025), a more satisfying CX is ensured, for example, within their advance on the path to digital transformation (customers' satisfaction and loyalty being raised not only by personalized recommendations and seamless omnichannel experiences, but also by faster service and better customer support) by retailers' improved connection with customers (the baseline expectations being now instant gratification, mobile-first shopping, and omnichannel experiences are now), based on a digital business model incorporation into their systems [N.A., such as: POS; IMS; IT and data architecture; OMS; CDP/CRM; ERP middleware for optimizing logistics & inventory processes etc.], processes [N.A., such as: SCM; BOPIS; Curbside Pickup; BORIS; Merchandising; a specific mix to prevent retail shrinkage etc.], and operations [N.A., both workforce management and customer service]. And improving CX (considering the never-ending customer expectations) means including to ensure virtual try-ons within the rise of e-commerce and omnichannel, retailers' omnichannel strategies making possible to meet customers wherever they shop, across all touchpoints being delivered personalized service (virtual and augmented reality allowing customers to try before they buy). Consequently, customer confidence is increased and retailers obtain better online shopping conversions.

According to Kapoor, Kapoor and Sindwani (2026), there is an obvious consumer-brand interactions' transformation as a result of the immersive technologies' rapid progress, Metaverse, VR, and AR enabling interactive, multi-sensory, and personalized CX. Focused on AR as a phygital journey' part, Soon and Lim (2025) investigated AR as a supplementary service in phygital retail, turning the idea of how attitude should be theorized in AR-based service augmentation into a clear, manageable, and answerable question, specifying the motivational conversion step (based on extending self-regulation theory into phygital journeys), and showing that social cues work inconsistently (based on progressing understanding of social influence in technology-based services). New research by Romano, Luceri and Aiolfi (2026), who focused on VR solutions integration into e-commerce journeys, demonstrated the intention to use VR solutions when shopping online, based on a behavioral framework grounded in Task-Technology Fit (TTF) theory. Their research findings revealed a significant effect of interactivity and vividness as technological characteristics on TTF, alongside an unexpected negative moderation effect on usage intention of Personal Need for Structure (PNS).

Also, Alexander and Varley (2025) brought to our attention that customer-centric value should be created by retail stores beyond economic transactions (a comprehensive consumer

perspective standing at the base of individual and personalized phygital customer journeys' evaluation) and omnichannel retailing economic and functional boundaries (so as to ensure holistic integrated CX and value creation generation). It is a well-known fact (as has been underlined over time in our RDC Magazine and HMM Journal issues) that customer value creation in retail is stimulated by retailers' focus on real customer habits, seamless and streamlined moving between their phygital stores, apps, and social media, as well as by personalized offers with the help of disruptive technologies, all of these being enabled by the integration of the above-mentioned systems, optimization of processes, and the improvement of operations. While the success of AR (in-store and mobile) and VR (immersive commerce) initiatives depend on their alignment with retailers' IT and data architecture ensuring data consistency across omnichannel, reducing the gap between front-end CX with back-end operational systems so as to ensure omnichannel synchronization, real-time visibility and cost reduction. In case of phygital retail, for instance, there are significant operational benefits delivered by the aforementioned back-end operational systems, such as: data accuracy improvement; stockout prevention; friction reduction by mixing the physical stores' tactile experience with the digital velocity accelerated by the clear customer journey from first discovering the phygital store to finalized transaction and repurchase, instant digital data generated by AR interaction, virtual try-on, and VR eye-tracking movement, as well as by valorizing AR, VR, and instant experience deployment by means of cloud-based AR/VR software (cloud streaming, app clips and instant apps, webXR). According to EMARKETER principal analyst Sky Canaves (Wood, 2026), as consumers are actively researching and evaluating purchases in the middle of the marketing funnel (N.A., MoFu/Consideration) they must be reached by marketers here in MoFu, this being their quick wins [N.A., including AI-driven personalization]. Among other aspects, Canaves showed that in Gen AI usage and social buying the leader is Gen Z (that is gliding between social AI, retailer apps, and physical stores), and by 2030 this generation [N.A., for which AI is a collaborative partner] will represent the largest online buyers' cohort.

Agentic AI is blurring the lines between marketing and service as the new marketing, the entire customer journey being impacted by the agentic CX stack. Customer journeys and decision flows' redesigning around agentic AI is depending on the right agents-human collaboration mode

In our last RDC Magazine issue (Negricea & Purcarea a, 2026) we underlined phygital retailers' imperative 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, and technology as strategic capability stacks. More recently, the Research Director for CX and Commerce at 451 Research by S&P Global, Sheryl Kingstone highlighted that now agentic AI is at the top of the list in S&P Global's B2C data (what represents the fastest technology climb seen), the wall between marketing and service (service being the new marketing) being dissolved by AI into one

always-on agentic CX (Wallace a, 2026). Based on data from the 2025 Voice of the Enterprise survey, Kingstone grouped what is producing underneath the convergence of agents' use for automated customer support and marketing and sales optimization into a so-called agentic CX stack (unified intelligence, agentic orchestration, and autonomous engagement), consequently the customer journey stopping being a sequence of handoffs, organizations' departmental teams working together simultaneously throughout the entire customer journey with the help of AI agents.

According to Rodriguez et al. (2026), it is important to clarify how deliberately leaders are prepared to redesign around agentic AI (as “a structural shift in CX, from designing journeys to governing decisions in motion as a real-time system”), fundamentally changing how customers are served by companies with more coherent, responsive, personal, and trusted CX, AI agents making rapid choices as situations unfold. Agentic CX is adopted by companies across three horizons (workflow rewiring, domain orchestration, and ecosystem experience engine), the true partnership between business and technology to define agents-human collaboration being essential in redesigning together customer journeys and decision flows, as well as operating models and governance, while treating risk with the same rigor as value within companies' accelerated agentic CX journeys.

It is worth remembering that some month ago CB Insights (2026) identified “5 high-momentum markets that tell the story of where agents are going live, what's breaking in production, and where the dollars go next” (Multimodal AI agents – voice, text, image, video – win the customer service land grab; Voice AI deployments go high-touch as vendors embed engineers on-site; Continuous red teaming becomes standard for enterprise AI agent deployments; AI agent observability & evaluation tooling becomes an M&A battleground; World models power the next generation of physical AI agents). Within this context they underline significant aspects, such as the fact that the no. 1 area of AI agent adoption in their Q4'25 enterprise survey is customer service, and the future of enterprise support will be defined by AI agents that can “nail voice and seamlessly extend to text, images, and documents.” On the other hand, a clinical Professor of Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, Jim Lecinski (Escudero, 2026), highlighted that AI is altering how marketers apply marketing core principles (customers understanding, brands building, and value creation) changing the way companies deliver outcomes based on organizing people and technology (rethinking roles and reconfiguring workflows), going beyond buying technology and tools, and thinking about change management.

How important is for brands' visibility and preference to be the top of the selection made by an AI agent, brands' perception being shaped by AI through interpretation based on technologies

Coming back to our last RDC Magazine issue (Negricea & Purcarea b, 2026), allow us to remember the reference made to how thought-provoking will be in phygital marketing (within the evolving phygital consumer behavior) to ensure essential insights' detection. To see how

normal people use AI (Wallace b, 2026), the team of Kevin Indig, author of The Growth Memo [N.A., and a reputed organic growth advisor who led SEO and Growth at Shopify, G2, and Atlassian] conducted significant observational studies this year, their research findings revealing that once an AI agent has made a selection (handing someone a shortlist) there is almost no space left to compete (75% of people choosing the first item on the shortlist). Kevin categorized the moments where brands can still gain visibility and preference the comparison shopping is done by an AI agent (most AI-assisted shoppers read the shortlist and stop; a recognized brand is selected almost despite where it lands on an AI shortlist; winning takes place across the following reinforcing moments: the shortlist, the site visit, the unboxing, the post-purchase relationship, and brand recall all build on each other; one of the most powerful ways to win AI visibility is convincing people to search for a brand by name, the strongest signal being branded search; despite the fact that are just a small share of sends, behavior-based emails drive a disproportionate share of revenue), highlighting how important is for brands to be the top of the above-mentioned short list.

As shown by Qureshi (2026), customer trust and buying decisions can be directly shaped by the way AI agents perceive and present (as they learn it from multiple sources, including the context built by brand managers across digital touchpoints) a brand. Consequently, it is useful to consider some main points: brand perception is shaped by AI through interpretation based on technologies (such as knowledge graphs and sentiment analysis); how brands are discovered and understood by consumers is altered by the shift to AI-driven discovery (from traditional search engines); to build brand profiles there is an AI models' reliance on multiple factors (such as structured data, citations, consistency and so on); by continuously auditing how AI describes brands and refreshing key content, brands' AI representation can be influenced by brands; for maintaining brand equity in the AI era it is essential to take steps in both content creation, and visibility across various platforms.

Instead of conclusions: *Customer insights' identification, impact of AI technology integration on CX and business operations, AI systems' context, customer interactions, and value creation surpassing what has been previously performed*

As recently shown by the Content Marketing Strategist at Gladly AI (an AI-powered customer service platform combining AI and human support in one continuous conversation), as a result of improving retailers' anticipation with greater precision of customer needs (ensuring proactive solutions provisions accordingly), more refined personalization and predictive capabilities will be enabled by AI (Malpani, 2026). Within this framework, it was underlined how not only new immersive CX will be created in the phygital space as VR and AR will become mainstream, but also new opportunities for smooth context-sensitive shopping will be created by voice commerce, smart device integration, and 5G connectivity. Also, some relevant

examples were given, such as: Sephora (their app for online use; their Color IQ system, in-store); Nike (their Nike Fit technology); IKEA (their Place app), and so on.

With regard to AR, for instance, a Sr. Content Marketing Manager at Amazon (Toogood, 2025) highlighted the impact of AR technology integration on retail dramatic transformation (both CX and business operations: enhanced customer engagement, reduced returns, and competitive advantage), digital information being projected by AR (through smartphones, tablets, or smart glasses) onto the real world (while an entirely digital environment is created by VR), customers benefitting from a more immersive and informative shopping experience.

According to Bharadwaj et al. (2026), new patterns of demand across product categories are created within the context of the current structural shifts (recognized by the fastest growing companies which are acting accordingly), what constitutes value being rethought by consumers increasingly relying on AI. In the current retail landscape consumer insights' identification is the key challenge, and companies need to translate insights that matter into action based not only on strategic foresight and continuous market intelligence, but also on rapid testing to work together. Consequently, companies' commercial capabilities must evolve as quickly as consumers do, the consistent delivery of the brand promise being ensured by a marketing valorizing value propositions' adaptation by companies, consumers' trust gaining, and improved AI-guided purchases. Companies' growth is now depending on understanding the faster changing consumer demand, and faster adapting their growth strategies.

And allow us to end by quoting three thought-provoking sources:

- **Don Peppers** (https://www.azquotes.com/author/36865-Don_Peppers): ***“Customer will create most value for you at the point where he thinks you’re creating most value for him.”***
- The Head of AI and ML at MetaRouter (known as the Customer Context Infrastructure that captures, connects, and acts on every customer signal in real time – inside your own cloud), **Patrick Harrington** (Brinker and Riemersma, 2025): ***“The capabilities of these large language models and generative AI systems [N.A., like OpenAI and Anthropic] are really transforming how we think about customer interactions... The key is that first-party data. For marketers, the richness of their behavioral data — what customers are clicking on, what they’re purchasing, how they’re navigating — becomes the training ground and the context for these AI systems... We can instrument these new AI interactions to capture not just what happened, but the quality and context of what happened... I think it’s really about pivoting from a risk and status-quo point of view to a growth mindset with these new AI capabilities... For retailers and the marketers supporting them, behavioral data, purchase data, and customer interactions are valuable first-party assets that can create value above and beyond what has been done in the past...”***
- **Steve Jobs** (<https://rowansimpson.com/quotes/start-with-the-customer/>): ***“You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work back the technology, not the other way round.”***

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