

# Consumer Behavior in Post-Pandemic Digital Marketplaces: A Review of Emerging Patterns and Drivers

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**Abstract**—The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an unprecedented accelerant for digital commerce, compressing years of anticipated e-commerce adoption into a matter of months and fundamentally reshaping how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products and services. This review paper examines the evolving landscape of consumer behavior in post-pandemic digital marketplaces, synthesizing literature on the structural shift from physical to omnichannel and digital-first shopping, changing consumer motivations around convenience, safety, and value, and the growing role of social commerce, live commerce, and mobile-first purchasing journeys. The paper reviews technology enablers including AI-driven personalization, conversational commerce, augmented reality try-on experiences, and recommendation systems that shape digital purchase decisions, alongside emerging concerns around data privacy, algorithmic trust, digital fatigue, and sustainability-conscious consumption. Comparative analysis of representative studies highlights generational and regional differences in digital adoption persistence, and identifies open challenges including the durability of pandemic-driven habits, the digital divide, and platform trust erosion. The review concludes with future research directions spanning privacy-preserving personalization, phygital (physical-plus-digital) retail experiences, and sustainable digital consumption behavior.

**Index Terms**—Consumer Behavior, Digital Marketplaces, E-Commerce, Post-Pandemic, Social Commerce, Personalization, Omnichannel Retail, Digital Trust, Sustainable Consumption.

## I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted established patterns of consumption almost overnight, forcing households and retailers alike to shift transactions from physical storefronts to digital channels under conditions of lockdown, social distancing, and heightened health anxiety. What began as a necessity-driven migration to online grocery, pharmacy, and essential-goods purchasing rapidly broadened into a durable restructuring of consumer expectations around convenience, contactless service, and digital-first discovery [1]. Retailers responded by accelerating investments in e-commerce infrastructure, curbside and last-mile delivery, and digital customer engagement, compressing digital transformation roadmaps that had previously been projected to unfold over several years [2].

As pandemic-era restrictions eased, a central question emerged for marketers and researchers: would consumers revert to pre-pandemic shopping habits, or would newly formed digital behaviors persist [1]? Emerging evidence suggests a hybrid outcome — a durable increase in baseline digital engagement combined with a renewed appreciation for experiential, in-person retail, giving rise to omnichannel consumption patterns that blend digital convenience with physical experience [3].

This review synthesizes literature on consumer behavior in post-pandemic digital marketplaces published primarily between 2020 and 2024. The primary contributions are: (1) a structured review of the key drivers reshaping digital consumer behavior; (2) an analysis of behavioral patterns specific to digital marketplaces, including social and mobile commerce; (3) a review of technology enablers shaping the

## B. The Pandemic Shock

Lockdowns and store closures forced a rapid, often involuntary shift to digital channels across nearly all demographic segments, including previously low-digital-adoption groups such as older consumers, who adopted online grocery and telehealth services out of necessity [4].

## III. Key Drivers of Changing Consumer Behavior

### A. Safety and Risk Avoidance

Perceived health risk associated with in-person shopping was a primary short-term driver of the shift to digital channels, prompting consumers to substitute physical store visits with online ordering, curbside pickup, and contactless delivery [4].

### B. Convenience and Time Value

Beyond safety, consumers increasingly valued the time savings and convenience of digital shopping, a preference that has persisted even as health risk concerns receded, suggesting a durable recalibration of the perceived value of convenience relative to in-store experience [3].

### C. Value-Consciousness and Price Sensitivity

Economic uncertainty during and after the pandemic heightened price sensitivity and deal-seeking behavior, accelerating adoption of price-comparison tools, cashback platforms, and value-oriented private-label products across digital marketplaces [5].

### D. Trust in Digital Platforms

Sustained engagement with digital marketplaces depends on consumer trust in platform reliability, delivery

digital purchase journey; (4) a comparative analysis of representative empirical studies; and (5) identification of open challenges and future research directions.

## II. Background

### A. Pre-Pandemic Digital Adoption

Prior to 2020, e-commerce adoption followed a relatively steady growth trajectory, concentrated among younger, urban, and higher-income demographics, with physical retail remaining the dominant channel for most product categories [2].

performance, and data handling practices; erosion of this trust, whether through delivery failures or privacy concerns, has been shown to reduce repeat digital purchase intention [6].

## IV. Comparison of Behavioral Drivers

Table I summarizes the relative influence, persistence, and demographic reach of the key drivers reshaping digital consumer behavior. Safety-driven adoption was strongest during acute pandemic phases but has since weakened, while convenience- and value-oriented drivers show greater persistence into the post-pandemic period and broader reach across demographic segments.

TABLE I — Comparison of Key Drivers Reshaping Digital Consumer Behavior

| Driver                     | Peak Influence   | Post-Pandemic Persistence | Demographic Reach       |
|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Safety/Risk Avoidance [4]  | High (2020-2021) | Low-Moderate              | Broad (temporary)       |
| Convenience/Time Value [3] | Moderate-High    | High                      | Broad                   |
| Value-Consciousness [5]    | Moderate         | High                      | Broad, income-sensitive |
| Platform Trust [6]         | Moderate         | Moderate-High             | Broad                   |
| Social Influence [7]       | Moderate         | High                      | Younger demographics    |

## V. Consumer Behavior Patterns in Digital Marketplaces

### A. Social Commerce

Purchase journeys increasingly originate on social media platforms, where influencer endorsements, user-generated content, and shoppable posts collapse the distance between product discovery and purchase, particularly among younger consumers [7].

### B. Live Commerce and Interactive Selling

Live-streamed shopping events, popularized initially in Asian markets, have expanded globally, combining real-time product demonstration with interactive Q&A and limited-time offers to create urgency-driven purchase behavior [7].

### C. Mobile-First Purchasing Journeys

Smartphone-based browsing and purchasing has become the dominant mode of digital shopping for most demographic groups, driving demand for streamlined mobile checkout, digital wallets, and app-based loyalty programs [8].

### D. Subscription and Replenishment Models

Subscription-based commerce for consumables and curated goods expanded significantly during the pandemic, reflecting consumer preference for automated replenishment and reduced decision friction for routine purchases [5].

## VI. Comparative Analysis

Table II compares representative studies examining post-pandemic consumer behavior across regions and demographic groups. Findings consistently indicate that while acute pandemic-driven behaviors such as panic buying and pure safety-motivated online substitution have declined, a substantial share of newly adopted digital habits — including online grocery shopping, digital payments, and

## VII. Technology Enablers of Digital Consumer Behavior

### A. AI-Driven Personalization

Recommendation engines and personalized marketing, powered by consumer browsing and purchase data, have become central to digital marketplace engagement, shaping product discovery and increasing conversion rates while raising corresponding data privacy concerns [6].

### B. Conversational Commerce

Chatbots and messaging-based customer service have expanded consumer touchpoints for pre-purchase queries, order tracking, and post-purchase support, reducing friction in the digital customer journey.

### C. Augmented Reality and Virtual Try-On

AR-based virtual try-on and product visualization tools address a traditional limitation of online shopping — the inability to physically evaluate products — and have shown particular traction in fashion, cosmetics, and home-furnishing categories.

### D. Algorithmic Trust and Transparency

As algorithmic curation increasingly mediates what consumers see and purchase, transparency around recommendation logic and data usage has emerged as a factor influencing consumer trust and platform loyalty [6].

## VIII. Empirical Studies on Post-Pandemic Behavior

Table III summarizes representative empirical and survey-based studies examining the scale and persistence of pandemic-driven shifts in digital consumer behavior across markets, providing the evidentiary basis for the comparative analysis in Section VI.

telehealth — has persisted at levels well above pre-pandemic baselines [1],[4].

**TABLE II — Comparative Analysis of Representative Studies**

| Author & Year                     | Region/Sample              | Focus                      | Method                       | Key Finding                                               |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Sheth [1] (2020)                  | Cross-national, conceptual | Habit persistence          | Conceptual analysis          | Distinguishes temporary vs. durable habit change          |
| Kim [4] (2020)                    | United States              | Digital sales preparedness | Commentary/analysis          | Rapid necessity-driven digital adoption across ages       |
| Pantano et al. [2] (2020)         | Europe                     | Retailer response          | Qualitative case analysis    | Retailers accelerated e-commerce investment               |
| Kirk & Rifkin [9] (2020)          | United States              | Coping behaviors           | Qualitative/consumer diaries | Identified reacting, coping, adapting behavior stages     |
| Roggeveen & Sethuraman [3] (2020) | United States              | Retail transformation      | Conceptual analysis          | Predicted lasting omnichannel restructuring               |
| Guthrie et al. [10] (2021)        | Australia                  | Online shopping behavior   | Survey                       | Increased online grocery adoption sustained post-lockdown |
| Hallikainen et al. [6] (2022)     | Multi-country              | Personalization & trust    | Survey                       | Personalization benefits offset by privacy concerns       |

**TABLE III — Representative Empirical Studies and Surveys on Post-Pandemic Consumer Behavior**

| Study/Source                    | Sample Scope                    | Category Focus                    | Key Metric Tracked                      |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Donthu & Gustafsson [11] (2020) | Cross-disciplinary bibliometric | Business/COVID-19 research trends | Research volume and thematic clustering |
| Verma & Gustafsson [12] (2020)  | Global literature review        | Business & management response    | Bibliometric trend analysis             |
| Grewal & Roggeveen [13] (2020)  | United States retail            | Customer journey management       | Retail experience design shifts         |
| Kirk & Rifkin [9] (2020)        | United States consumers         | Coping/adaptation behavior        | Behavioral stage progression            |
| Guthrie et al. [10] (2021)      | Australia consumers             | Online grocery adoption           | Adoption and retention rates            |
| Hallikainen et al. [6] (2022)   | Multi-country consumers         | Personalization and trust         | Trust and privacy-concern indices       |

## IX. Key Challenges

### A. Durability of Pandemic-Driven Habits

A central open question is the extent to which pandemic-driven digital habits will persist over the longer term versus partially reverting toward pre-pandemic in-person preferences as health concerns and economic conditions normalize [1],[3].

### B. Data Privacy and Consent

Increasing reliance on behavioral data for personalization raises consumer concerns about data collection scope, consent clarity, and cross-platform tracking, with regulatory frameworks such as GDPR shaping permissible practices in different markets [6].

### C. Digital Fatigue and Overload

The proliferation of digital touchpoints, notifications, and targeted advertising has contributed to consumer fatigue, potentially reducing engagement effectiveness and prompting some consumers to actively curtail digital

### B. Phygital Retail Experiences

Continued blending of physical and digital retail — including in-store digital kiosks, app-integrated in-store navigation, and hybrid fulfillment models — represents a promising area for understanding how consumers value integrated omnichannel experiences.

### C. Sustainable Digital Consumption

Research into consumer response to sustainability-oriented interventions in digital marketplaces, such as carbon-labeled shipping options and consolidated delivery incentives, remains comparatively limited and merits further study.

### D. Longitudinal Behavioral Persistence Studies

Long-term panel studies tracking individual consumers across pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods would strengthen causal understanding of which behavioral shifts represent durable change versus temporary adaptation.

marketplace interaction.

#### **D. The Digital Divide**

Disparities in internet access, digital literacy, and payment infrastructure mean that the benefits of digital marketplace expansion have not been evenly distributed, with rural and lower-income populations in many markets remaining underserved [4].

#### **E. Sustainability Concerns**

Growing consumer awareness of the environmental footprint of e-commerce — including packaging waste and last-mile delivery emissions — has begun to shape purchase decisions and generate demand for more sustainable digital retail practices.

### **X. Future Research Directions**

#### **A. Privacy-Preserving Personalization**

Future research is needed on personalization techniques that balance relevance and consumer trust, including on-device processing and privacy-preserving data aggregation methods that reduce reliance on centralized behavioral profiling.

### **XI. Conclusion**

This review has examined the reshaping of consumer behavior in post-pandemic digital marketplaces, synthesizing evidence on the drivers, patterns, and technology enablers underlying this shift. The evidence indicates that while acute, safety-driven pandemic behaviors have receded, a substantial and durable increase in digital engagement persists, reflected in sustained adoption of online grocery, social and live commerce, mobile-first purchasing, and subscription models. Technology enablers including AI personalization, conversational commerce, and augmented reality continue to shape the digital purchase journey, even as challenges around data privacy, digital fatigue, the digital divide, and sustainability remain unresolved. Future research on privacy-preserving personalization, phygital retail integration, and sustainable digital consumption will be important for understanding the next phase of consumer behavior in increasingly digital marketplaces.

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