

2024

THE FUTURE SHOPPER



8TH EDITION

31,500 consumers /// **20** countries



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 8th edition of The Future Shopper – this huge, global survey is an unparalleled look into the habits and online shopping trends of 31,500 consumers across the regions of the world.

What's interesting is that over the course of the eight editions, online shopping – very much its own channel at the outset – has now morphed simply into shopping, with omni-channel shopping experiences being expected and demanded by global consumers. This means that The Future Shopper and its findings go way beyond just shopping online – albeit online, rather than physical, remains its focus.

With a vast amount of data underpinning these trends, we aim to deliver businesses a robust, reliable and empirical guide to the developments that we believe they need to be aware of and be planning for.

And this year we see some interesting trends taking shape – be that evolving consumers who think and act in a different way, or the shift towards re-normalization, with consumers being more open to physical shopping experiences again. We note marketplaces retaining their dominant position in the customer journey, but their grip weakening, and we look into the impact of new technologies like AI and how they could change what we sell, how we sell it, and who we sell it to. And of course, we focus on our old-favorites such as service – including price, delivery and content.

All of this means that there has never been a more inspiring or exciting time for brands to design the ideal shopping experience across the myriad of channels at their disposal. And this is an opportunity for brands to innovate across all these channels, including marketplaces, D2C, social, gaming, chat and personalized content.

What's clear is that consumers expect and demand a lot from retailers and brands. They want it all, and will search to find it, across a multitude of channels. This poses a challenge, albeit an exciting one, to see which brands and retailers can give consumers what they want.

Methodology

31,500 shoppers across 20 countries were surveyed. In order to qualify they had to have shopped at least once online in the preceding month. The surveys took place in: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, UAE, UK, and US, between the 05.22.2024 – 06.05.2024. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.



Hugh Fletcher

Global Demand Content and
Thought Leadership Director



Beth Ann Kaminkow

Global Chief Commerce Officer
and Co-CEO, VML NY



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THE FUTURE SHOPPER REPORT 2024:

The headlines you need to know

THE HEADLINES YOU NEED TO KNOW

1

Whilst still a preferred experience for many, online shopping growth has slowed, signaling a shift towards a more balanced retail channel landscape.



2

Physical retail undergoes a resurgence but must embrace innovation and immersive experiences to compete in an omni-channel world, with a need to address areas where it underperforms online.



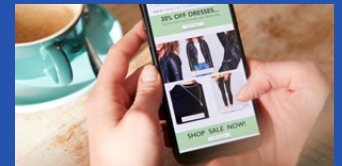
3

The post-COVID consumer is a different consumer based on experiences and circumstances, both personal and professional, and prioritizes health, wellness, and bucket-list experiences, demanding brands cater to their evolving values.



4

Mobile shopping dominates, but brands and retailers have been slow to adapt (despite what they say), leading to frustrating user experiences. A "mobile-first" mindset is crucial for brands to prioritize seamless and intuitive mobile shopping.



5

Consumers crave speed and convenience in their shopping journeys, driving the rise of "compressed commerce" and highlighting the need for streamlined yet connected omni-channel journeys.



THE HEADLINES YOU NEED TO KNOW

6

Price sensitivity remains a dominant factor in purchasing decisions, with consumers ready to shop around more to actively seek out the best deals – bringing into question brand and channel loyalty of the past.



7

Marketplaces maintain dominance in product discovery but face increasing competition as consumers explore alternative channels for purchasing. The COVID years of simply defaulting to marketplaces appear over.



8

Delivery speed expectations reach new heights, with consumers demanding near-instant gratification and service-led brands capable of meeting these demands setting the pace.



9

Sustainability and purpose resonate with consumers, but brands must take concrete action and be seen to be “doing their bit” whilst balancing environmental concerns with convenience and price.



10

The very definition of “consumer” is evolving, as digital avatars gain importance, while technology and new channels allow for interactions beyond the physical realm. The new era of consumers is upon us.



THE FUTURE SHOPPER CONDENSED

Online shopping is a channel reaching maturity – but it's still positively viewed and showing potential for growth.

53% of spending is online – down from 58% in 2023. But it is set to grow to 60% in 5 years' time.

47% of global consumers believe online provides a better experience than offline retailing.

Physical retailing is making a comeback in an omni-channel world, but experiences must be engaging and innovative.

64% of global consumers say that they would prefer to shop from a retailer or brand that has both a physical and online store (vs 60% in 2023).

61% of global shoppers want seamless communication across sales channels, with their journey and data following them (vs 56% in 2023).

60% of global shoppers say they want their physical shopping experiences to be immersive, futuristic and creative.

The world is changing and so are shoppers: the new-normal consumers are different.

66% of global consumers are now increasingly focused on their health, and this impacts what they buy and who they buy from.

65% of global consumers say they are more focused on wellness, and this influences what they purchase.

57% of global consumers admit that because of the upheaval of the last few years (COVID, wars, inflation, and so on) they are more likely to spend money on bucket list experiences, as "life is too short".

Brands and retailers must work on their consumers' shopping experiences, with particular focus on mobile:

36% of online spending is done on mobile.

64% of global consumers told us that they wished that brands and retailers would make the online shopping experience more entertaining.

40% of global consumers claim they find shopping on mobile phones "difficult".

Despite the desire for omni-channel, consumers are also driven by speed across the journey (AKA "Compressed Commerce"), and a focus on completing the purchase through just one channel or device:

63% of consumers want to get from inspiration to purchase as quickly as possible.

71% of consumers said that when they purchase a product online, they tend to use only one device.



Consumers are still price-sensitive – if not even more so:

56% of global consumers say that a "better price" would encourage them to buy directly from brands (that's up from 53% in 2023).

50% of consumers say that they would choose another retailer over a marketplace if there was "cheaper pricing".

68% of global shoppers believe that retailers and brands are using inflationary crises to artificially inflate prices.

Marketplaces remain dominant but face competition, with a weakening grip on purchase:

35% of global consumers go to the leading marketplace in their region for inspiration.

32% of global consumers go to the leading marketplace in their region to search products.

29% of global consumers shop through marketplaces, down from 35% last year.

THE FUTURE SHOPPER CONDENSED

Brands selling via D2C struggle to convert in the inspiration and search phases:

9% of purchasing goes through direct-to-consumer platforms, despite 21% of consumers going to them for inspiration and 20% for search.

Becoming “service-led” is essential as delivery speed expectations soar:

31% of global consumers expect the products that they have ordered online to arrive in less than 2 hours.

Peer-to-peer becomes more important when making online purchase decisions:

19% of global shoppers say the biggest influence when they shop is friends (making it the number one biggest influence).

37% of global shoppers say ratings and reviews are the most important piece of content when shopping online.

Sustainability & purpose – resonating, pressing, but a conflicting consumer issue:

56% of global consumers say that due to concerns about global warming and the environment they have changed their shopping habits.

49% of global consumers have used sustainable delivery options when ordering online (up by 3% from last year).

63% of global consumers say they like to shop with retailers and brands that have a purpose beyond just selling their products or services.



Social commerce gains traction but is yet to explode:

73% of global shoppers claim to have bought something through a social media platform.

62% of global shoppers say that they intend to shop more through social media in the future.

New innovative commerce channels develop but still await their full commercial maturity:

59% of global consumers said that if a brand is digitally innovative, they are more likely to purchase from them.

49% of global consumers own a smart assistant.

49% of global consumers do not believe that VR headsets will take off because they don't like the idea of wearing a computer on their face.

53% of global shoppers said they had purchased via an online live shopping event.

Consumers and their experiences are being redefined as physical and digital lines blur:

47% of global consumers said that they would be interested in buying from beyond the grave (AKA “post-death consumerism”).

46% of consumers say they would like to be able to talk to those that have died using AI to bring them “back to life”.

30% of consumers claim to be buying or have bought via the metaverse (up from 23% last year).

With a captive audience, gaming commerce presents new opportunities for brands and retailers – if they are brave enough:

89% of global consumers are “gamers” (that's anyone who plays a game on their electronic devices), while 60% of these spend money in-game.

55% of gamers tell us that looking good in-game is just as important as looking good in real life.

52% of gamers said they would be just as excited to go to a virtual concert as they would to an event in real life.



AI sparks both excitement and concern:

55% of global consumers say that they have used AI (like ChatGPT).

41% of global consumers said that they would let an AI organize their lives.

68% of global consumers say that they are fed up with not being able to speak to a real person when they call a company.

A woman with dark hair in a braid, wearing a light-colored blazer over a patterned top, is holding a black smartphone in her right hand and a small pink container in her left hand. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting. A large blue diagonal overlay covers the left side of the image, containing the text.

SECTION 1

Changing consumers, changing behaviors

CHAPTER 1:

Online spending shrinks

We always start Future Shopper by looking at one key metric: the percentage of spending online versus offline. And straight away we see a change since last year – namely a 5% drop in online spending.

53% OF SPENDING IS ONLINE

In 2023, the figure for online spending was 58%, and the year before it was 57%. But, in 2024, we see a decline to 53%.

What can we read into this? Is this evidence of the post-COVID normalization of shopping that has been talked about? Is it the physical stores fighting back? Could it be due to inflation and that fact that a larger part of income is absorbed by primary shopping needs that are more often satisfied in-store? Or is it a migration away from the more functional, quicker and easier experience of online shopping to the real-world advantage of being able to directly interact with products?

We'll come back to this throughout the report.

And is this shift driven by any age group in particular? No. In fact, all age groups post between a 4.56% to 6.17% drop in online spending. The group with the largest drop? The 16-24-year-olds – moving from 62% to 56%. This would appear to support our assertion that digitally native does not always mean digitally exclusive.

And where in the world is online spending percentage the highest? In first place comes India (62%), almost matched by China, while the lowest percentage is Italy with 44%.

62% INDIA IS THE COUNTRY WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF ONLINE SHOPPING



Percentage of online spending across countries now and in five years:

	% spend currently online	% spend online last year	Estimated online spend in 5 years' time	% change from in 5 years' time
1. India	62%	64%	61%	-1%
2. China	62%	64%	61%	-1%
3. Thailand	61%	59%	63%	+2%
4. Saudi Arabia	57%	N/A	70%	+13%
5. Brazil	56%	60%	67%	+11%
6. South Africa	55%	58%	64%	+9%
7. UK	54%	57%	57%	+3%
8. UAE	54%	58%	69%	+15%
9. Colombia	54%	66%	65%	+11%
10. Indonesia	53%	N/A	57%	+4%
11. Netherlands	52%	56%	62%	+10%
12. Mexico	51%	69%	60%	+9%
13. USA	51%	54%	55%	+4%
14. Peru	50%	N/A	61%	+11%
15. Argentina	50%	62%	62%	+12%
16. New Zealand	49%	N/A	57%	+8%
17. Australia	48%	53%	54%	+6%
18. Germany	48%	55%	57%	+9%
19. France	47%	48%	56%	+9%
20. Italy	44%	N/A	51%	+7%

Percentages have been rounded, so countries displaying the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.

CHAPTER 2:

Online spending is predicted to grow again

This means that we've seen a shrinking of online spending since last year. Perhaps not what we were expecting. But what about in the future? Is online spending set to follow this trend or will it grow? The answer seems to be that online spending will increase – rising from an average of 53% to 60%.

ONLINE SPENDING IS SET TO INCREASE TO 60% (FROM 53%)
IN FIVE YEARS' TIME

But that's not the case in all countries. In fact, in two countries – India and China – consumers estimated that they would be spending less online in 5 years' time, while in the Middle East – in the UAE and Saudi Arabia – the most growth is expected (+15% and +13% respectively).

And when we look at which age groups will be driving this change, it is older consumers where the change will be the greatest. The 45-54-year-olds are set to increase their online spending by 10% in the next 5 years, while the 55+s are not far behind with a 9.51% increase.



What will be the percentage of online spending across age groups in five years' time?

Age	Now (online)		Five years (online)		Change
16-24	56%		62%		+6%
25-34	56%		62%		+6.%
35-44	54%		61%		+7%
45-54	48%		58%		+10%
55+	42%		52%		+10%

Percentages have been rounded, so age groups displaying the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.



EXPERT OPINION:

Why is online spending growth so high in the Middle East?

The Middle East boasts a young, tech-savvy population eager to embrace new technologies. This demographic, combined with rising disposable incomes, creates a vast and diverse consumer base primed for eCommerce. Governments have recognized this potential, investing heavily in digital infrastructure and implementing favorable regulations and initiatives to promote digital literacy. Dedicated eCommerce zones offer businesses incentives to innovate and thrive.

In a region where smartphone penetration is exceptionally high, consumers enjoy the convenience of shopping anytime, anywhere, reinforcing its status as a mobile-first market. This underscores the importance of seamless integration between online and offline experiences. Additionally, enhanced logistics and secure payment solutions have bolstered consumer confidence, making online shopping more reliable and trustworthy.

The Middle East's online spending growth is driven by a mix of technological, demographic, and cultural factors. For brands, this represents a golden opportunity. By adapting to the rapidly evolving landscape, products and categories traditionally reliant on offline sales can uncover new touchpoints and audiences unlike anywhere else in the world.

This growth invites brands to explore new channels, audiences, and innovations, engaging with a market that is not only ready but eager for the digital shopping revolution. However, this evolving context also presents a challenge: brands will need to work harder to stand out.



Mona Hassanie

Head of Strategy UAE

E: mona.hassanie@vml.com

CHAPTER 3:

Mobile phones rise in importance for online sales










Our data was clear last year – we are living in a mobile-first world, and this trend has gathered pace in 2024. While mobile spending accounted for 32% of online spending in 2023, this has risen to 36% this year. And if we include tablets, it's an even more resounding 44%.

36% OF ALL ONLINE SPENDING IS DONE VIA
MOBILE PHONES

And just to be clear, this is not an age thing. Mobile spending increased across all groups – with the exception of the over 65s – with increases ranging between 34.77% (for the 16-24-year-olds) and 39.27% (for the 45-54-year-olds).



Which devices do consumers use, and prefer to use when purchasing online

		% of shopping through this device	% of consumers who prefer to use this device to shop
	Mobile phone	36%	53%
	Laptop	16%	16%
	Desktop	13%	12%
	TV	8%	2%
	Tablet	8%	5%
	Games console	6%	2%
	Smartwatch	5%	2%
	Smart assistant	4%	2%
	Virtual Reality Headsets	4%	1%

And where in the world is mobile purchasing highest? Thailand. In fact, it's the one country where mobile spending accounts for over 50% of spending.

One of the big losers though has been the desktop computer, dropping from 16% last year to 13% this year. Laptops too have fallen from 17% to 16%.

We not only wanted to gauge what devices were being used, but which devices were preferred. And once again, it is mobile devices that come top, with 53% of consumers saying they preferred to shop through mobile.

What's clear for businesses is that they must view their online sales offerings through a mobile lens. Whilst this seems like an obvious statement, many companies are still focused on a desktop / laptop first strategy... perhaps because this is what the majority of the workforce uses on a day-to-day basis.

Percentage of online spend via mobile devices by country

Thailand	51%
New Zealand	43%
Indonesia	42%
Argentina	42%
Mexico	41%
Australia	40%
Netherlands	40%
Colombia	38%
Italy	37%
UK	36%
Peru	35%
USA	34%
China	34%
South Africa	34%
Brazil	34%
UAE	33%
France	32%
Saudi Arabia	32%
India	28%
Germany	27%

CHAPTER 4:

But the mobile experience needs to improve!

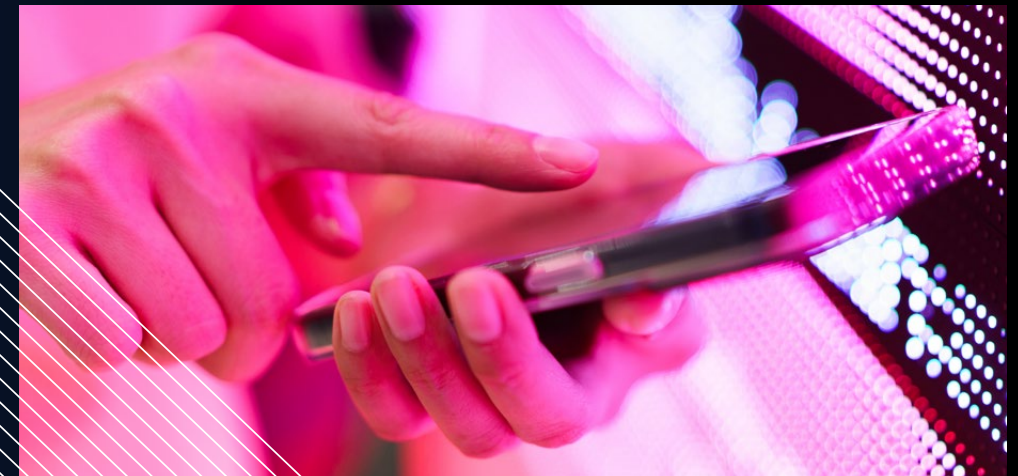
Despite the preference for mobile, there is still work to be done on the shopping experience. Almost half of global respondents (49%) said that they felt that mobile purchasing still lags behind desktop and laptop, with 40% claiming that they find shopping on mobile difficult. When it comes to checkout, consumers are split in their view – with 42% agreeing that the checkout and payment process on mobile is frustrating, compared to 31% who disagree.

66%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS CLAIM THAT RETAILERS AND BRANDS SHOULD WORK HARDER AT MAKING THEIR MOBILE EXPERIENCES BETTER

There is also a belief amongst consumers that mobile phones are right for some types of shopping and not others. In fact, 44% told us that they don't think their phone is for making serious, expensive, or critical purchases.

Who's to blame for this experience? Consumers lay the blame firmly on retailers and brands, with two-thirds (66%) believing that retailers and brands should work harder at making their mobile experiences better.





EXPERT OPINION:

How can businesses shift their mindset to ensure they're mobile-first and meeting customer expectation

Being mobile-first requires a shift in how we view the role of a business' digital experience. Mobile enables shopping anytime, anywhere, resulting in fast, micro on-demand shopping for fast comparison or impulse buying or continuous shopping, not stretched through one long experience, but done over many small shopping "episodes". The result requires experiences built around the customer, erring on simplicity, and focused on facilitating quick, meaningful engagements.

To enable this shift, businesses should reinvestigate where, how and when their customers are shopping. They should:

- Understand the customers' jobs to be done (functional, social, and emotional) and the situational moments they are shopping, helping architect experiences that can facilitate inspiration vs. accelerating the path to purchase.
- Embrace design constraints of a mobile-first experience, tuning the design (both UX and UI) to be optimized to the situational moments.
- Ensure content structure and creation is pulled forward in the design process and matches the expectations in those moments in the form factor of a mobile device.
- Ensure the technology and design prioritizes simplicity, enables fast load times and powers a persistent experience.

Today, retailers and brands aspire for the best, most exhaustive version of their brand, but all too often consumers expect a mobile experience that is simple, fast, and relevant to their situation. Winning requires businesses to accept and embrace the constraints of a mobile-first experience, designing around the customer and their moments rather than a brand's aspirations.



Ben Geheb

Global Chief Experience Strategy Officer

E: ben.geheb@vml.com



CHAPTER 5:

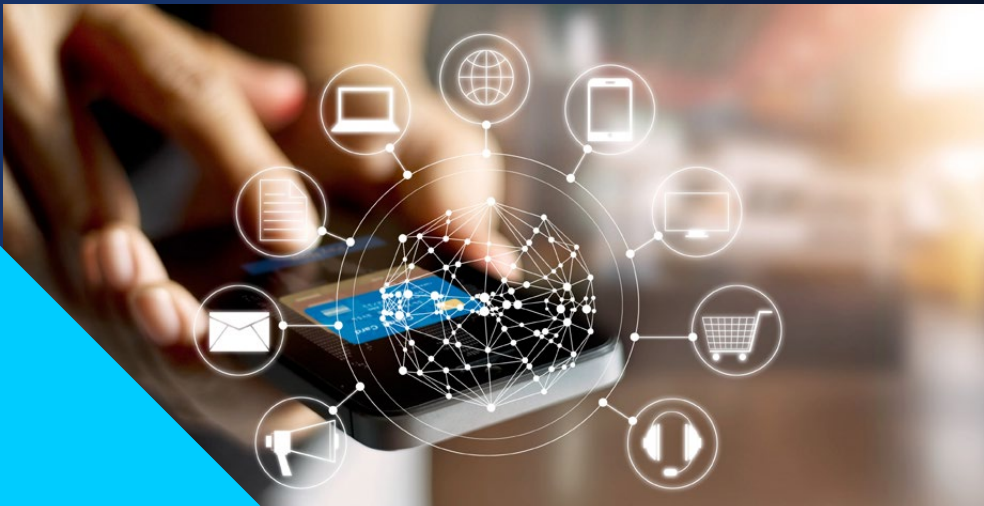
Omni-channel

The number of channels that businesses need to sell through is growing. Later in this report, we'll investigate some of the newer channels.

What's very clear is that consumers want omni-channel spanning both physical and digital. For the last 2 years, 60% of consumers told us that they would prefer to shop with a retailer or brand that has both a physical and online store. This year, the percentage has risen to 64% – more proof that physical retail is alive and kicking, and that omni-channel is the way forward.

To further prove this point, a huge 72% of consumers said that they research their products online before they buy them in-store, demonstrating the use of both physical and digital channels for a single purchase.

64% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THAT THEY WOULD PREFER TO SHOP FROM A RETAILER OR BRAND THAT HAS BOTH A PHYSICAL AND ONLINE STORE



Of course, the challenge with omni-channel is ensuring that all channels are connected, with consumers able to seamlessly move from one to another. And this is becoming more important, because while 56% of consumers said this was important in 2023, this figure is now 61%.

61% OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS WANT SEAMLESS COMMUNICATION ACROSS SALES CHANNELS, WITH THEIR JOURNEY AND DATA FOLLOWING THEM

Although, in an interesting twist, it does appear that consumers – despite demanding omni-channel experiences across devices and across digital and physical – can be surprisingly “uni-channel” when it comes to purchasing too. 71% of consumers said that when they purchase a product online, they tend to use only one device. We'll talk a little later about “compressed commerce”, but getting from inspiration to purchase as quickly as possible might be driving this.

CHAPTER 6:

The post-COVID consumer

While COVID-19 thankfully seems like a distant memory to most of us, its impacts are still being felt, and certainly businesses would do well to be aware of some of these.

Take for instance health and wellness. Our data tells us that two-thirds (66%) of global consumers are now increasingly focused on their health, and told us that this directly impacts what they buy, but also who they buy it from.

But while it's true that COVID may have spurred many consumers into thinking more about their health and wellbeing, it's also true that this is a much wider trend, with consumers becoming more aware of their health in general, and being more aware of how their consumption decisions and behaviors affect how they feel.

While you might at first glance presume this was driven by younger consumers, our data tells us that across all age groups, a focus on health and its impact on purchasing is becoming more important.

66%

**OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS ARE NOW
INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON THEIR HEALTH,
AND THIS IMPACTS WHAT THEY BUY AND WHO
THEY BUY FROM**

And from a country perspective, it is Thai and Indonesian consumers for whom this is most important (82% and 81% respectively), while Dutch consumers are at the bottom of this list, albeit still with 46% saying they are increasingly focused on their health.

Wellness – and not just health – is important too, with 65% of global consumers confirming they are more focused on wellness and that this influences what they purchase.

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EXPERT OPINION:

Brands must reconsider who their consumers are, and what they want, in order to boost their brand equity

People are demanding more meaningful value from brands and are using their spending power to determine how brands show up. Economic, societal, technological, cultural and environmental factors, mean multiple micro trends are playing out against a backdrop of macro trends – continuously shaping consumer behavior in real-time. It's crucial to understand what triggers and inspires your consumers today and in the future.

We know that 63% of how a person feels about a brand is how they experience it, so brands need to reassess how and where their equity is now being built – and that means across all channels. Digital commerce experiences were designed to only serve the needs of cost comparison and convenience, but with eCommerce touchpoints now often being the first port of call for shoppers, we need to focus on how we're building brand love and commerce experiences in those moments.

Welcome to a new era of brand building.



Naomi Troni

Global Chief Marketing Officer

E: naomi.troni@vml.com

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The percentage of consumers who are increasingly focused on their health, with this impacting what they buy and who they buy from



In our Tomorrow's Commerce report from a few years ago, we also identified a trend around the "post-COVID gratification wave" of purchasing. Or to put it another way, consumers changing what they spent their money on as a direct consequence of the issues they had endured. But do the stats prove this? They sure do, with 57% of global consumers saying that, as a result of the significant turbulence of the last few years, they are more likely to spend money on bucket-list experiences as "life is too short". Retailers and brands should think about how they tap into these carpe diem moments via their communications, products and experiences.

And despite living in a very digital world, it would seem that sometimes being "always on" is just too much – 58% of consumers told us that sometimes they feel overwhelmed by technology and like the idea of being liberated from it by doing digital detoxes and "no internet" breaks.

58%

OF CONSUMERS TOLD US THAT SOMETIMES THEY FEEL OVERWHELMED BY TECHNOLOGY AND LIKE THE IDEA OF BEING LIBERATED FROM IT

“

EXPERT OPINION:

How a more health-conscious consumer must be considered and how VML can help

Given this increased focus on global wellness, with 65% of global consumers saying that they are more focused on wellness and that this influences what they purchase, retailers and brands would be remiss not to focus on how to address this consumer directly.

VML can help by deep-diving into manufacturers' current audiences of focus, with human-centered insights and data-driven rigor. Leveraging our proprietary data sources like Choreograph via Audience Origen, secondary sources like shopper behavior data (Circana Panel, 84.51, Luminate), social data via Infegy and industry trend sources like Mintel, Y-Pulse and Kantar IQ, we can build and size targetable sub-audiences, knowing that health-conscious and wellness-driven mean different things to different people. We then enrich these audiences in WPP Open, building synthetic audiences and querying to understand their preferences, barriers, triggers and opportunities to convert. We test creative and messaging against these audiences to ensure that we are bringing the best personalized experience to every consumer.



Michelle Baumann

Chief Strategy Officer, Commerce

E: michelle.baumann@vml.com

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Key takeaways

1

Online spending shows signs of maturation: While online spending has slightly decreased since last year, it is projected to grow in the next five years, particularly among older demographics. This suggests a more balanced approach to online and offline shopping moving forward.

2

Mobile-first should be non-negotiable: Mobile devices are now the dominant force in online shopping, surpassing desktops and laptops. Businesses must prioritize mobile optimization to meet consumer preferences and ensure a seamless shopping experience.

3

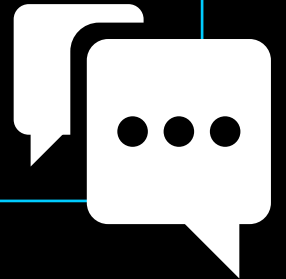
Omni-channel strategies are essential: Consumers increasingly demand a seamless experience across both physical and digital channels. Brands and retailers must connect their online and offline presence to cater to this desire for integrated shopping journeys.

4

The post-COVID consumer is evolving: Consumers are increasingly focused on health, wellness, and seeking out meaningful experiences. Brands need to adapt their offerings and messaging to align with these shifting priorities and values.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- **Growth mining** (focused on where to play, how to win, how to grow)
- **Omni-channel growth opportunity mapping**
- **Mobile strategy, build and operation; Native apps**
- **Data orchestration**
- **Journey mapping**
- **Channel audits**
- **Traffic acquisition**
- **Strategic media planning**
- **Digital Shelf experience**





SECTION 2

Working from home

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, while COVID lockdowns are thankfully a distant memory for most, their effect lives on, and one of the areas it has impacted is the acceptance of working from home (WFH).

There are ongoing debates about the pros and cons of WFH, but we're less interested in those, and more focused on what it means for consumers and their shopping habits.

CHAPTER 1:

WFH and online shopping

It would certainly appear that working from home is driving consumers to buy more online. Three in five (59%) global consumers told us that they have shopped more online due to working from home.

59% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS ARE SHOPPING MORE ONLINE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME

However, last year's figure was 65%. Could this fall be a consequence of a re-alignment of online and physical shopping as we saw in the previous section? Fueled perhaps by more people operating hybrid working lives?

We need to factor in that consumers are now researching online more. At their fingertips is access to an endless aisle where, with a little effort, they can find the best product, at the best price. And our data backs this up. One of the effects of WFH is that 61% of consumers say that they now spend more time researching their purchases online.

In addition, 58% of consumers say that they are also spending more time on social media due to working from home. Don't tell their managers, but this increased usage of social media during the workday should be factored into advertising and acquisition.



CHAPTER 2:

WFH, brands and loyalty

With less exposure to physical stores because of working from home, it stands to reason that loyalty and love for brands and retailers has changed. Over half (53%) of global consumers admit that their favorite retailers have changed since working more from home, while 52% say that they feel less loyal to the physical stores that they used to frequent.

53% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS ADMIT THAT THEIR FAVORITE RETAILERS HAVE CHANGED SINCE WORKING FROM HOME

The flipside of this is that with more research, and with a changing set of requirements, 60% of consumers say that they have discovered new brands and retailers due to working from home. This is important for brands. Could historic brand equity be under threat from newer brands who have better grasped the changing face of consumers?

And in addition, consumers are demanding more from brands. Later in this report, we'll talk about "service-led brands" and the importance of delivery. And it would appear that WFH has had an effect on this too, as 63% of consumers say that due to working from home more, delivery has become more important to them.

CHAPTER 3:

WFH and service-led brands

The shift towards remote work has undeniably impacted consumer expectations, particularly when it comes to the convenience and reliability of delivery services. As more individuals embrace the work-from-home lifestyle, the reliance on seamless delivery experiences has grown significantly. A staggering 63% of consumers now consider delivery to be a more crucial aspect of their purchasing decisions, highlighting the need for businesses to prioritize and optimize their delivery operations.

This evolving landscape necessitates a closer examination of “service-led brands” – companies that prioritize exceptional customer service and delivery as key differentiators. In the following sections, we will delve deeper into the characteristics and strategies employed by these brands, exploring how they leverage efficient and customer-centric delivery experiences to foster loyalty and drive growth in this new era of consumer behavior.



Key takeaways

1

WFH fuels online shopping and research is king: Working from home continues to boost online shopping, but the real emphasis is now on thorough online research before purchase.

2

Brand loyalty loosens as new favorites emerge: The shift to WFH has disrupted traditional brand loyalty, opening doors for new brands to capture consumer attention and preference.

3

Delivery reigns supreme in a WFH world: Seamless and reliable delivery has become paramount for consumers, positioning service-led brands with strong delivery offerings for success.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- Data & CRM strategy and execution
- Last mile delivery strategy and execution
- Journey mapping
- Traffic acquisition
- Retail media strategy and execution
- Pop-up retail activations
- Sampling & trial campaigns
- AI-powered Product Content Generator
- AI route optimization





SECTION 3

The customer journey

As is the case each year, we like to look at a simplified customer journey across three stages: Inspiration, Search and Purchase, to identify trends when it comes to online shopping.

CHAPTER 1:

Compressed commerce

Before we look at each of these stages, let's talk about "compressed commerce" – a concept which we've covered for a number of years. This is the notion of getting from inspiration to purchase as quickly as possible, i.e. compressing the customer journey.

Last year, 61% of consumers told us this was important. This year that figure has risen to 63%, although it's still some way off the COVID-driven 80% of 2022. What's clear though is that, for a majority of global consumers, getting from inspiration to purchase as quickly as possible is vital – and a good reason why getting consumers to your site at the early stages of their journey (inspiration and search) is so crucial.

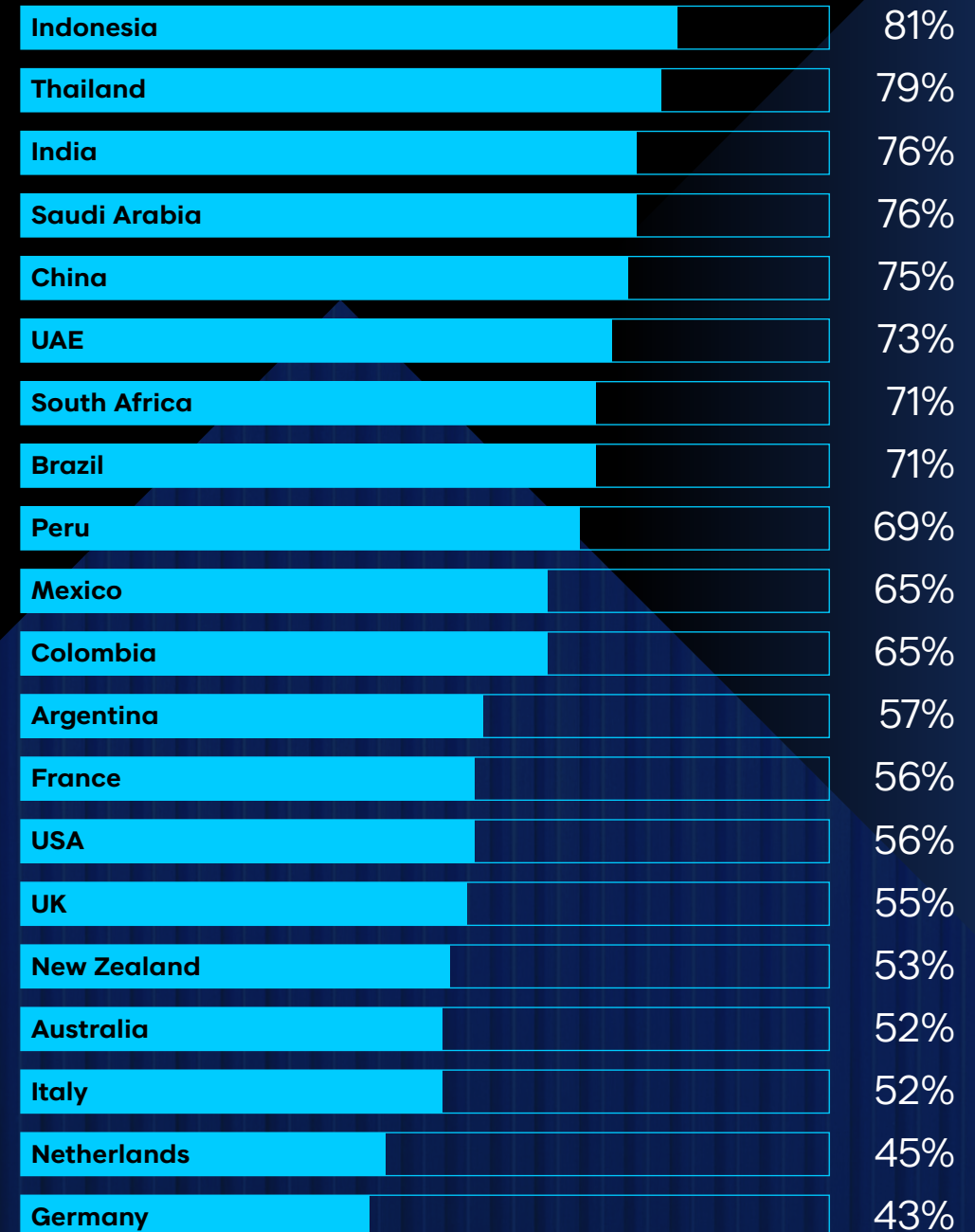


63%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS WANT TO GET FROM INSPIRATION TO PURCHASE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, WHILE 64% LIKE THE IDEA OF BUYING EVERYTHING FROM JUST ONE RETAILER

This is even more important as consumers, while signaling their desire to operate across channels, can also be heavily uni-channel at times. As we mentioned, 64% of global consumers told us that they liked the idea of buying everything from just one retailer!

The percentage of consumers across countries who want to get from inspiration to purchase as quickly as possible



CHAPTER 2:

Inspiration

As was the case last year, when it comes to inspiration, the leading marketplaces in each region (Amazon, Mercado Libre, Alibaba, etc.) remain on top. However, as a whole, they show no growth versus last year, and the percentage of consumers who get their inspiration there remains at 35%.

35%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS GO TO THE
LEADING MARKETPLACE IN THEIR REGION
FOR INSPIRATION

While the percentage remains constant, and we may agree that the years of massive audience and customer growth for marketplaces may be over, we should still take a moment to consider that over a third of consumers are going to marketplaces for their inspiration. Just a few years ago this idea would have been staggering, but today we accept it as the norm.



The top six channels for inspiration

		2024	2023
01	The leading marketplace in the region	35%	35%
02	I browse in-store	31%	24%
03	Branded websites	21%	15%
04	Retailer sites	18%	13%
05	Other marketplaces	13%	13%
06	Search engines	12%	15%

So, where do we see the changes?

Last year we saw the re-emergence of browsing in physical stores for inspiration when the percentage of consumers getting their inspiration in-store increased by 9%. Once again, physical stores see an increase, this time of 7% to 31%. Much of this can be attributed certainly to a post-COVID normalization, but it is also further proof that humans crave physical shopping experiences.

It's good news for brands considering going direct-to-consumer (D2C) too, as this channel shows an increase of 6% for inspiration, rising to 21%.

And when it comes to the losers this year, the usage of search engines for inspiration continues to decline, falling 3%.

Due to the concept of "compressed commerce" the fight for consumer attention at inspiration stage is vital. What we see are numerous channels vying for consumer attention at this stage. Retailers and brands must work hard to ensure that they are seen as the right place for consumers to get their inspiration.

CHAPTER 3:

Search

In terms of search, once again, leading the pack is the main marketplace in each region – up 1% from last year, but again showing the slow growth we discussed around inspiration.

32%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS GO TO THE LEADING MARKETPLACE IN THEIR REGION TO SEARCH FOR PRODUCTS

We again see the continued trend of the comeback of physical retailing, with 28% of consumers “searching” in-store, versus just 18% last year. This is a major shift, and, given the challenges of the physical versus the endless digital aisle, could show that consumers are prepared to forego so much choice in favor of a physical and more visceral experience.

Brand websites also see a large uplift in search too, rising from 14% to 20%, and retailer sites rise to 17% from 12%. The move away from search engines continues with a 2% drop down to 12%.

Retailers and brands need to remain abreast of these constantly fluctuating search habits and must consider how this impacts their acquisition strategy.

The top five search channels

	2024	2023
01 The leading marketplace in the region	32%	31%
02 I browse in-store	28%	18%
03 I browse brand websites	20%	14%
04 Retailer sites	17%	12%
05 Search engines	12%	14%



CHAPTER 4:

Purchase

In terms of purchase, the big news this year is the drop in marketplace spending – from 35% to 29%. As we saw in the previous sections, marketplace’s hold on inspiration and search has remained consistent, and whilst it once again tops the charts as the number one channel to purchase through, it has lost ground.

29% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SHOP THROUGH MARKETPLACES, DOWN FROM 35% LAST YEAR



Elsewhere, despite strong rises in inspiration and search, branded websites have seen their percentage fall when it comes to purchase – are we once again seeing the issues of attrition that looked to have been addressed last year?

Across a number of different physical channels, percentages are also on the rise, with a higher proportion of spend going through physical stores, including supermarkets, grocers and convenience stores.

Where do global consumers spend their money?

	2024	2023	Difference
Leading marketplace	29%	35%	-7%
Physical stores (including grocery and convenience)	28%	20%	8%
Retailer sites	10%	13%	-3%
Branded websites	9%	14%	-6%
Via an aggregator / delivery app (e.g. Uber Eats, Deliveroo)	8%	5%	3%
Social media	7%	5%	2%
Gaming	5%	3%	3%
Other	4%	3%	0%

“““

EXPERT OPINION:**The rise of marketplaces may be plateauing but they should still form a central plank in a brand's strategy**

As this survey confirms, more than a third of consumers are going to marketplaces for inspiration. Therefore, marketplaces remain an important part for brand owners in the sales and marketing mix. And with the rise of AI technology, brand owners are finally able to go one step further at reasonable cost and adapt their content specifically to each marketplace with the associated adapted tone of voice, to target each specific audience.

Multiple AI-driven, bespoke content creation, storage and dynamic syndication to the different marketplaces represents a big challenge for brand owners today, and will be a major success factor. That's why VML parent WPP has launched WPP Open in order to make AI-driven content generation and adaption available to all its clients. More specifically, the marketplace tools sit in WPP Open's Commerce Studio and are fully integrated in the existing workflow processes of our clients.

**Helmut Rieder**

CEO VML Luxembourg and
Head of VML Center of Excellence for Amazon

E: helmut.rieder@vml.com

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Key takeaways

1

Compressed Commerce drives urgency: Consumers increasingly prioritize speed and efficiency in their shopping journey, emphasizing the need for brands to streamline the path from inspiration to purchase.

2

Physical retail undergoes a resurgence: Despite the dominance of online marketplaces, physical stores are experiencing a comeback highlighting the enduring value of in-person shopping.

3

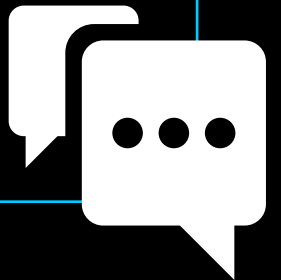
Marketplaces show signs of weakness: Whilst still retaining their first position in inspiration, search and purchase, their conversion rates are declining, indicating potential difficulties in translating browsing into buying.

4

Brand sites face conversion challenges: Despite attracting consumer interest in the early stages, brands struggle to convert this interest into sales, suggesting a need to optimize their online presence and checkout processes.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- **Journey mapping**
- **Promotion & Experience design**
- **Creative Commerce** (engaging and captivating the consumer to conversion)
- **Growth mining** (and building behavior-based growth audiences)
- **Marketplace audits, growth strategies and AI-powered Product Content Generator**
- **Retail & Performance Media** (incl. Stream self-service retail media platform)
- **D2C strategy, execution and management**
- **WPP Open Creative Studio**



An aerial photograph of a busy pedestrian street, likely in a European city, showing a diverse group of people walking in various directions. The street is paved with dark cobblestones. A large, semi-transparent blue diagonal overlay covers the left side of the image, serving as a background for the text.

SECTION 4

The customer journey by industry

A DEEPER DIVE INTO 9 KEY SECTORS

Presenting a journey across all sectors is of course a challenge; how one product is bought differs from another. In order to understand these nuances a little more, we delved into a number of different industries to see where inspiration, search and purchase takes place.



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for alcohol online

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Browsing in-store	33%	Browsing in-store	30%	Physical stores total	34%
02	I don't get these online	19%	Leading marketplace	19%	I don't get these online	17%
03	Leading marketplace	19%	I don't get these online	18%	Leading marketplace	11%
04	Retailer sites	15%	Branded websites	15%	Retailer sites	8%
05	Branded websites	13%	Convenience stores	14%	Via an aggregator / delivery app (e.g. Uber Eats, Deliveroo)	6%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for **automotive and accessories** online

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	36%	Leading marketplace	37%	Leading marketplace	30%
02	Browsing in-store	21%	Browsing in-store	20%	I don't get these online	12%
03	Branded websites	20%	Branded websites	19%	Other marketplaces	11%
04	Search engines	16%	Search engines	14%	Retailer sites	11%
05	Other marketplaces	15%	Other marketplaces	13%	Branded websites	9%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for **beauty products** online (e.g. haircare, skincare, makeup)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	39%	Leading marketplace	35%	Leading marketplace	25%
02	Browsing in-store	29%	Browsing in-store	27%	Physical stores total	16%
03	Branded websites	23%	Branded websites	23%	Retailer sites	16%
04	Retailer sites	18%	Retailer sites	17%	Branded websites	11%
05	Social media	15%	Other marketplaces	12%	Other marketplaces	9%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for clothing and fashion online (e.g. high-street clothing, footwear)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	42%	Leading marketplace	37%	Leading marketplace	24%
02	Branded websites	32%	Branded websites	28%	Retailer sites	22%
03	Browsing in-store	31%	Browsing in-store	27%	Branded websites	18%
04	Retailer sites	23%	Retailer sites	22%	Other marketplaces	10%
05	Other marketplaces	16%	Other marketplaces	14%	Physical stores total	7%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for grocery products online (e.g. food and drink)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Browsing in-store	42%	Browsing in-store	38%	Physical stores total	45%
02	Leading marketplace	25%	Leading marketplace	23%	Leading marketplace	12%
03	Retailer sites	22%	Retailer sites	21%	Retailer sites	9%
04	Branded websites	15%	Branded websites	15%	Via an aggregator / delivery app (e.g. Uber Eats, Deliveroo)	8%
05	From TV, emails, adverts	11%	Retailers' mobile apps	9%	I don't get these online	8%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for health and pharmaceutical products online

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Browsing in-store	37%	Browsing in-store	35%	Physical stores total	22%
02	Leading marketplace	28%	Leading marketplace	25%	Leading marketplace	16%
03	Retailer sites	17%	Retailer sites	16%	I don't get these online	14%
04	Branded websites	15%	Branded websites	15%	Retailer sites	12%
05	Search engines	15%	Search engines	13%	Branded websites	7%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for household products online (e.g. cleaning products, toilet roll, etc.)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	40%	Leading marketplace	35%	Physical stores total	33%
02	Browsing in-store	36%	Browsing in-store	33%	Leading marketplace	23%
03	Retailer sites	20%	Retailer sites	18%	Retailer sites	11%
04	Branded websites	14%	Branded websites	14%	I don't get these online	8%
05	From TV, emails, adverts	12%	Other marketplaces	11%	Other marketplaces	7%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for luxury products online (e.g. high-end clothing, watches, jewelry, bags, art)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	34%	Leading marketplace	30%	Branded websites	23%
02	Branded websites	28%	Branded websites	27%	Leading marketplace	18%
03	Browsing in-store	23%	Browsing in-store	22%	Retailer sites	14%
04	Retailer sites	16%	Retailer sites	15%	I don't get these online	11%
05	Other marketplaces	15%	I don't get these online	14%	Other marketplaces	9%



The top five sources for inspiration, search and purchase for technology products online (e.g. smartphones, tablets, computers, headphones)

Inspiration			Search		Purchase	
01	Leading marketplace	50%	Leading marketplace	44%	Leading marketplace	33%
02	Branded websites	29%	Branded websites	27%	Branded websites	16%
03	Browsing in-store	24%	Browsing in-store	23%	Retailer sites	15%
04	Retailer sites	16%	Retailer sites	16%	Other marketplaces	12%
05	Search engines	16%	Other marketplaces	15%	I don't get these online	5%



SECTION 5

Online purchasing in more detail

We've just looked at the customer journey. Now let's delve a little deeper into purchasing.

As is always the case, what we find, quite clearly, is that consumers are driven by price. But this year, there is evidence that consumers are indexing this more strongly, as inflationary and economic pressure impact countries across the globe. A significant proportion of consumers sense that retailers and brands are taking advantage of this – with 68% saying that they are using inflationary crises to artificially inflate prices. This may or not be true in practice – particularly in view of the increased cost of raw materials as well as challenging supply chain issues, but the perception alone should cause concern.

CHAPTER 1:

What's most important to consumers when they shop online?

There's not a lot of change versus last year when it comes to what's important to consumers when they shop online. As with last year, at the top of the pile sits price, followed by accurate product descriptions.

The matter of price or pricing policy needs little introduction. The importance of accurate, detailed product descriptions cannot be overstated too. For instance, if you sell on Amazon, you'll most likely know that Amazon's algorithm will reward you with higher search rankings. With most shoppers never looking beyond the first page of Amazon's search results this makes product descriptions doubly critical.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR INFLUENCING PURCHASE
DECISION-MAKING ONLINE IS PRICE

Of course, other factors play an important role too – including the ability to find the right product, availability, delivery and returns. Once again, “brand” doesn't make the top ten, being ranked by our consumer audience in sixteenth position.

What can we take from this? Online shoppers are demanding, and they want not only the best price, but the best service too. As we've said for many years, service-led brands (those that focus on key elements of the customer experience like delivery and returns) stand out to consumers more in the online world.

The top ten factors that influence purchase decisions when buying a product online

- 01 Price of the item
- 02 Accurate product descriptions
- 03 Easy to find the product I'm looking for
- 04 Convenient delivery
- 05 The item I want is in stock
- 06 Strong customer service
- 07 Speed of delivery
- 08 Easy returns process
- 09 Product reviews
- 10 Free delivery

CHAPTER 2:

What would encourage consumers to buy directly from brands?

One of the key areas we like to keep our eye on in our Future Shopper survey is the role of direct-to-consumer (D2C). In 2022, we noticed that the percentages for consumers getting inspiration and searching on D2C platforms was higher than the percentage that was purchasing on them. Or to put it another way, brands selling via D2C were losing consumers who had come to them for inspiration and search by the time it came to making their final purchase decisions. In 2023, it appeared that this trend had been truncated, but as you will have seen from the section on the customer journey, while D2C sites have experienced a growth in the percentage of consumers coming for inspiration and search, once again they are losing consumers when it comes to the payment stage.

Do consumers care? By and large, not at all! In most cases, they are typically buying 'enterprise brands' which are available through multiple channels. If the D2C experience falls short, there are other channels that can readily meet their needs.

So, what can businesses selling through D2C do? How can they encourage more consumers to buy from them? The answer is simple; differentiate powerfully (e.g. via exclusivity) or just give consumers the products they want, at the price they want, backed up with fantastic delivery, free returns, exclusive offers and content that makes their purchase decision easier. Sounds easy right?!

And herein lies the D2C challenge: the benchmark for what 'good' looks like has been set so high, that reaching it requires a huge amount of effort, investment and planning – which is often out of reach for many enterprises selling D2C. To this point, there's a strong argument to think (and plan) in terms of "optichannel" – optimizing around the channels that make the most sense, because few businesses have the resources to succeed powerfully through omni-channel, in its literal sense: through every channel. And this comes back to our long-held recommendation to brands and retailers of seeking to build a balanced channel strategy.

56%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THAT A
"BETTER PRICE" WOULD ENCOURAGE THEM
TO BUY DIRECTLY FROM BRANDS
(UP FROM 53% IN 2023)

The top ten factors that would encourage consumers to buy directly from brands

		2024	2023	2022
01	Better price	56%	53%	49%
02	Free delivery	49%	49%	47%
03	Fast and convenient delivery	40%	36%	34%
04	Free returns	37%	36%	35%
05	Loyalty program	27%	27%	25%
06	Exclusive products	26%	22%	23%
07	Better information about products	25%	21%	22%
08	Access to full product range	24%	21%	22%
09	Bundled product deals	22%	21%	17%
10	Personalized products	18%	16%	17%

““

EXPERT OPINION:**How brands wanting to sell D2C must address their checkout and payment process to deliver ‘compressed commerce’**

Our research shows that a seamless checkout experience is crucial for eCommerce success. While competitive pricing remains important, a cumbersome checkout process directly impacts conversions and brand loyalty.

Brands selling D2C must prioritize a streamlined checkout flow that meets evolving consumer expectations. This includes offering diverse payment options, transparent pricing, clear communication on delivery costs and timelines, and a mobile-first design.

It's surprising how many brands still don't optimize their checkout for mobile or offer Google or Apple Pay in their checkout, given that all the hard work of acquiring the customer and getting them through the journey to the basket has already been done.

By investing in a frictionless and customer-centric checkout experience, businesses can unlock significant value, driving revenue growth and building lasting customer relationships.

**Shalina Ganatra**

Head of eCommerce Consultancy

E: shalina.ganatra@vml.com

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CHAPTER 3:

Loyalty programs

Another driver for loyalty, is of course loyalty programs themselves. We wanted to understand what percentage of consumers belonged to which schemes.

Once again, top of the pile sits supermarket loyalty programs at 43% – although this is down from 47% last year. They are closely followed by programs offered by marketplaces (like Prime) at 37% – the same as last year.

Two areas with a marked increase are aggregator sites, up from 9% last year to 14% this year, and travel programs (from 16% to 21%) perhaps fueled by the evolving consumer and their desire for experiences.



The percentage of global consumers who belong to loyalty schemes

	All
Supermarket (e.g. Nectar, Tesco Clubcard, myWaitrose card)	43%
Leading marketplace (e.g. Amazon etc.)	37%
Health and beauty (e.g. Boots Advantage Card, Superdrug Health & Beauty Card)	28%
Department stores (e.g. My John Lewis)	23%
Travel (e.g. Avios)	21%
Fashion (e.g. ASOS Premier, H&M Club)	20%
Wholesale (e.g. Costco, Makro)	19%
Consumer electronics (e.g. Curry's PC World, ao.com)	19%
I'm not a member of any of these	14%
Aggregator sites	14%
Multi-brands coupons programs (e.g. Coupons Network, Ma Vie en Couleurs, Croquons la Vie)	14%
Mercado Libre	12%
JD Status	1%

CHAPTER 4:

The impact of advertising on online purchasing

There can be a tendency for us to sneer at the efficiency of online advertising. Consumers frequently roll their eyes at being followed around the internet by adverts pushing the last product that they viewed.

We wanted to find out whether this rhetoric was representative, or whether consumers were actually engaging with online advertising. The results paint a picture of the efficiency of online advertising – with 61% of global consumers saying that they find adverts promoting relevant or related items useful. While the same percentage say that they have made a purchase based on an advert that they have seen or clicked on online.

This data seems to provide clear proof that brands and retailers looking to drive sales should consider online adverts. One growth area is “Retail Media”. See our break-out box for more details.



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EXPERT OPINION:

With brands seeking to maximize ROI often from shrinking budgets, retail media cannot be ignored

Three key reasons stand out as to why it may cost brands to overlook retail media...

Firstly, retail data is at the heart of retail media. With challenges related to privacy, retailers hold the promise of providing privacy-compliant, scaled, deep 1st party data to help brands better understand shopper behaviors and preferences – as well as having a clear view of a brand's performance vs. the rest of the category. This data is key to inform planning, targeting, measurement and budget allocations.

The second factor is omni-channel activation. Brands can reach shoppers throughout their journey by leveraging full-funnel omni-channel opportunities across on-site, off-site, and in- and out-of-store; enabling them to show up consistently across touchpoints that are becoming less siloed.

And thirdly is the matter of closed-loop measurement. With closed-loop measurement brands can understand the link between ad exposure and sales, and fine-tune future campaigns.



Kiessé Lamour

Global Head of Media, Commerce

E: kiesse.lamour@vml.com

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CHAPTER 5:

Who, or what, influences consumers?

As in previous years, we wanted to get a view on who or what influences purchasing. The big fallers this year are family members, dropping two positions from top spot to third. The role of friends has become more important, placing them in first place with 19%, while social media influencers has risen by 1% and maintains second place.

19% THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON GLOBAL CONSUMERS WHEN THEY SHOP IS FRIENDS



Who influences you most about what you'd like to buy?

	2024	2023	2023-24 change	2022
Friends	19%	17%	+2%	17%
Social media influencers / bloggers (e.g. Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat)	17%	16%	+1%	15%
Family members	16%	20%	-4%	20%
Celebrities	6%	5%	+1%	5%
In-store sales assistants	6%	6%	0%	6%
Streamers	5%	4%	+1%	5%
Colleagues	3%	3%	0%	3%
Sport stars and athletes	3%	3%	0%	3%
Business people	3%	3%	0%	3%
Journalists	1%	1%	0%	2%
Politicians	1%	1%	0%	1%

Who influences you most about what you'd like to buy?

	Age 16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Social media influencers / bloggers on	24%	23%	16%	9%	6%	2%
Friends	22%	20%	19%	18%	16%	12%
Family members	11%	14%	17%	21%	22%	25%
Celebrities	8%	7%	6%	4%	1%	0%
Nothing/no one	7%	10%	16%	27%	38%	50%
In-store sales assistants	5%	5%	6%	6%	7%	6%
Streamers	5%	6%	6%	4%	1%	0%
Sport stars and athletes	4%	4%	3%	2%	1%	0%
Colleagues	4%	4%	4%	3%	2%	0%
Business people	4%	3%	4%	2%	1%	1%
Journalists	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Politicians	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	3%

CHAPTER 6:

Buy now, pay later?

The emergence of “buy now, pay later” schemes has been a highly visible development as part of the shopper journey in the last few years. But what do global consumers think of these? Our survey indicates that sentiment is very positive, with 58% saying that they find “buy now, pay later” loans really useful in helping them to buy the products they want. Clearly this capability plays an instrumental role for many consumers in the shopper journey, and retailers and brands would be wise to integrate the option into their checkouts.

The highest percentage of users are in Saudi Arabia (76%), India (73%) and the UAE 73%, with France showing the lowest at 41%.

Whilst when it comes to age, it is the 25-34-year-olds who have the highest percentage (66%) followed by the 35-44-year-olds. So while you might presume that as this capability is relatively new, and that youngest consumers would be the biggest users, the data doesn't prove this.



Key takeaways

1

Price sensitivity reigns supreme: Consumers are increasingly price-conscious due to economic pressures and perceive brands as exploiting the situation. This highlights the need for transparent pricing and strong value propositions.

2

Brands selling D2C face an uphill battle: While attracting interest in the early stages, many struggle to convert, losing customers to competitors offering better prices, delivery, and returns. They need to meet high consumer expectations and/or differentiate powerfully in order to compete effectively.

3

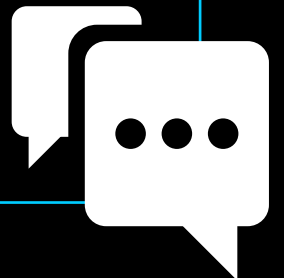
Online advertising proves its worth: Despite skepticism, online advertising effectively drives purchases, with consumers finding relevant ads useful and making purchases based on them. This underscores the importance of targeted online campaigns.

4

Friends take center stage in influencing purchases: While family influence declines, friends emerge as the most significant influencers on purchasing decisions, highlighting the power of word-of-mouth marketing and social proof.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- **Growth mining** (and building behavior-based growth audiences)
- **Creative Commerce**
- **Digital Shelf Experience** (including ShelfMaster PXM)
- **Category & Aisle Assortment audit**
- **Streaem** (VML's self-service retail media platform)
- **Retail & Performance Media strategy and execution**
- **Channel orchestration**
- **Merchandising & Site trading**
- **D2C strategy, CX, build and measurement**
- **AI-powered Product Content Generator**



SECTION 6

Getting the experience right

We're all wired for connection, and customer experience offers brands and retailers a crucial lifeline to connect with, service and satisfy, consumers. When done right, the benefits are invaluable, including reinforced loyalty, maximized conversion, improved differentiation and growth. But how right are businesses getting it for today's consumers? Let's take a closer look...

CHAPTER 1:

Consumers are dissatisfied with the online shopping experience

In this section, we'll investigate the experience that online consumers expect, and more importantly, what drives their buying behavior.

But one thing's clear – online shopping, despite the high percentage of sales which it accounts for – still has some way to go to create the experiences that consumers want. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents told us that they wished that brands and retailers would make the online shopping experience more entertaining, while 59% told us that they wished that the online experience could be multisensory – with sight, sound, touch, smell and even taste. It's worth keeping that in mind when you read through the section on new channels and technologies.

64%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS TOLD US THEY
WISHED THAT BRANDS AND RETAILERS WOULD
MAKE THE ONLINE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE
MORE ENTERTAINING



CHAPTER 2:

Understanding the customer experience

There also seems to be the sense that online brands and retailers do not truly understand what consumers want online.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of global consumers told us that retailers need to get better at giving them the products, services and experiences they want in online shopping (up from last year's 61%). One of the key elements of this is understanding the consumer and their journey. Once again, consumers believe that brands and retailers are falling short, with just over half (51%) claiming they don't think that brands and retailers understand all the steps they take to purchase a product – again, up on last year (49%).

And this dissatisfaction will result in lost sales, as 56% of global consumers say that, in future, they will not shop with retailers, brands or marketplaces that do not match their expectations of online shopping.

So, what can retailers and brands do?

Understand the customer journey across channels for one, and what drives purchasing (in this section we'll take a closer look). Or take a leaf out of the book of a brand like Supreme – who typically combine hype, branding (often via collaborations) and exclusivity – in view of the fact that 59% of shoppers said they like online experiences where exciting online moments are created around the launch or sale of new products.



““

EXPERT OPINION:**Why product drops and the likes of Supreme are injecting excitement into the online shopping experience**

Consumers crave excitement – a connection to the heart of the brand – so brands and retailers cannot afford to present online shopping experiences that are simply transactional and forgettable. This is particularly true in Latin America, where passion runs deep and experiences are meant to be felt. Product drops and collaborations, like those pioneered by Supreme, tap into this desire. They transform a simple purchase into an event, a chance to be part of something exclusive, engaging and special.

This energy and excitement however needs to extend beyond the drop itself. Brands need to weave creativity and a cohesive brand story across the entire buyer journey. Whether navigating online marketplaces, engaging on social media, browsing an e-retailer, or stepping into a physical store, the experience must resonate with that same energy, reinforcing the brand's unique identity.

**Glenda Kok**

Chief of Technology & Commerce LATAM

E: glenda.kok@vml.com

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CHAPTER 3:

Online vs offline – which channel is better at what?

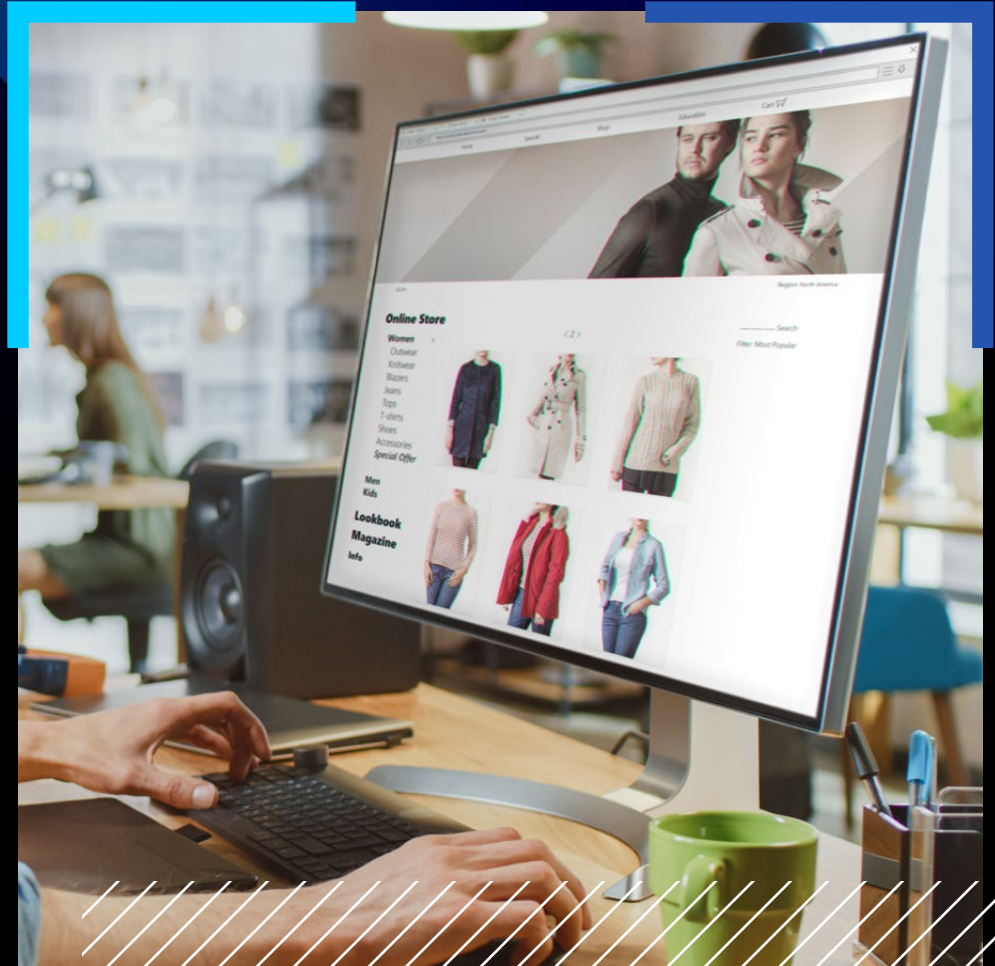
In addition to looking each year at the percentage of spending through online and offline, we also put a number of different elements of the shopping experience under a lens, and ask “What’s best – online or offline?” Whilst it may sound a flippant question, the results are compelling.

Across most, online wins hands down, just beaten by offline in two areas. What’s particularly notable are the overwhelming differences in the percentages – offline is not even close in most of the shopping criteria. Overall, 47% of consumers believe online offers the best experience, with 22% pointing to offline, and 30% claiming both are the same.

47% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS BELIEVE ONLINE PROVIDES A BETTER EXPERIENCE THAN OFFLINE RETAILING

Where does offline triumph? The first area is in the ability to try the right product or to get the right fit, although it’s telling that the difference is small (37% vs 40%) which may well point to the maturity and adoption of AR visualization tools that do a good job of recreating the in-store experience. The second area is in the freshness of the products (35% vs 38%).

So, while physical shopping might be showing signs of a resurgence, it’s clear that there are a number of areas where it still struggles to compete.



How do you compare online shopping with offline shopping?

	"Online is better"	"Offline is better"	Difference	2023 "online is better" score	2022 "online is better" score
Wide variety of products / items	62%	11%	51%	61%	61%
Review / evaluation of products	60%	12%	48%	57%	60%
Accessibility for those with disabilities (if applicable)	59%	13%	46%	57%	57%
Low price / cost of purchase (including shipping cost)	57%	16%	41%	56%	56%
Comparison of brands / products	56%	14%	42%	55%	55%
Better value overall	51%	13%	38%	N/A	N/A
Better comprehension about brands / products	49%	18%	31%	45%	48%
Fun of shopping	46%	23%	23%	42%	44%
Return process	45%	25%	20%	42%	42%
Speed of delivery	44%	31%	13%	43%	44%
Sense of loyalty to a retailer or brand	42%	18%	24%	39%	41%
Groceries are better value overall	41%	27%	14%	N/A	N/A
Credibility of products / retailers	40%	22%	18%	36%	39%
Getting consultation with / advice from store or website staff	38%	36%	1%	34%	35%
Ability to try the right product or get the right fit	37%	40%	-4%	34%	36%
Freshness of products	35%	38%	-3%	35%	35%

CHAPTER 4:

Improving the delivery experience

With delivery being so important when it comes to online buying, we wanted to know what consumers would change about it – if anything. As has been the case for the last few years, “faster delivery” is the number one thing on their list.

However, if we look at the table, what we see is a more exacting consumer versus last year – with a higher percentage wanting not only better price, but more clarity on timing, a more tailored approach to delivering to where the consumer is, with better packaging. Interestingly, there is a slightly lower percentage than last year wanting cheaper delivery. But overall, as we have always said, speed, ease and convenience are what consumers want when it comes to delivery.



What would consumers change about the delivery experience?

		2024	2023	2022
01	Faster delivery	51%	48%	48%
02	More clarity on exact times for delivery	42%	39%	39%
03	It would be cheaper	41%	43%	41%
04	Able to deliver to me wherever I am	32%	27%	26%
05	Better packaging	30%	26%	27%
06	More options for pick up	26%	23%	22%
07	It would consider the environment more (e.g. reduced carbon footprint options, eco-delivery vehicles)	23%	23%	24%
08	Roadside / curbside item collection option (no need to step in-store)	15%	15%	15%
09	No contact delivery	13%	13%	20%
10	Nothing	5%	6%	5%

CHAPTER 5:

Speed of delivery

Consumer craving for speedy delivery shows no sign of abating. In 2022, consumers expected their orders to arrive in 2.36 days. In 2023, this dropped to 2.16 days. In 2024, this has fallen further to 1.85 days.

And the demand for super-fast delivery – less than 2 hours – has risen too. In 2022, just 4% of consumers expected delivery in less than 2 hours. That spiked in 2023 to 24% and has jumped even further in 2024 to 31%.

Consumers are saying quite clearly what they want – and what they want is super-fast delivery!

31%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS EXPECT THE PRODUCTS THEY HAVE ORDERED ONLINE TO ARRIVE IN LESS THAN 2 HOURS!

And who's the best at super-fast delivery? By a long shot, it's the lead marketplace in each region (Amazon, Mercado Libre, Alibaba etc.) with 44%. And just to reinforce the point, in second place with 12% are other marketplaces (like eBay for instance). Clearly marketplaces are still the benchmark when it comes to speedy delivery.

It's not just fast delivery they're getting right, 44% also identify the lead marketplaces as being the best at convenient delivery, and 43% say they are best at free delivery too! Marketplaces clearly represent the gold standard on delivery for other channels to aspire to.



How quickly do consumers expect the delivery of their online orders to take?

	Days	Less than 2hrs	Less than 24 hrs
All	1.85	31%	50%
Grocery (e.g. food and drink)	0.92	49%	72%
Health and pharmaceutical	1.25	43%	62%
Alcohol	1.31	40%	57%
Financial products (e.g. Insurance)	1.38	40%	61%
Elderly care products	1.55	34%	54%
Household products	1.75	31%	52%
Beauty (e.g. haircare, skincare, makeup)	1.94	27%	46%
Technology (e.g. smart phones, tablets, computers, headphones)	2.21	22%	42%
Second-hand products	2.26	24%	42%
Toys (e.g. board games, soft toys)	2.28	23%	40%
Clothing and fashion (e.g. high-street clothing, footwear)	2.34	22%	39%
Luxury (e.g. high-end clothing, watches, jewelry, bags, art)	2.38	22%	39%
Automotive and accessories (e.g. seat covers, hubcaps, satnav)	2.43	22%	38%

CHAPTER 6:

Returns

As we all know, but sometimes forget, the experience of online shopping does not stop once the product has been bought. Nor for that matter does it stop when the product has been delivered. As we’ve seen in this report, and in previous years, the returns process is a key consideration for consumers.

First, let’s start by looking at the percentage of items that are returned. Last year, this figure was 19%, and this year, we see a slight fall to 17%. This is an interesting trend, as back in 2022, the figure was 23%. Could this be evidence that online businesses are addressing issues around sizing, fit, and appropriateness using visualization tools and more detailed content? Or is this counter-balanced by more businesses introducing additional costs or penalties based on the number of returns by customer? We see it as a mixture of both.



This downward trend is an interesting one given that this year 38% of consumers admitted to over-ordering with the intent of returning unwanted items. This is up from last year’s 35%.

And what are the reasons for these returns? The table presents the main reasons, with the first two centering around issues with the products ordered working properly. This suggests there is still room for improvement on product quality, and potentially issues around the delivery process too.

And who is best at easy returns? It won’t surprise you to know, that like with delivery, the leading marketplace in the region is in number one spot (42%) followed by other marketplaces (12%). As with delivery, marketplaces are setting the benchmark and customer expectations.

Top ten reasons for returning online orders

01	Defective or does not work	31%
02	Item received is damaged or defective	28%
03	Wrong item was sent	27%
04	Item doesn’t fit properly	27%
05	Item received doesn’t meet expectations	22%
06	Missing parts or accessories	21%
07	Item received is of lower quality than expected	21%
08	Product and delivery box both damaged	18%
09	Performance or quality not adequate	17%
10	Description on website not accurate	15%

Percentages have been rounded, so reasons with the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.

CHAPTER 7:

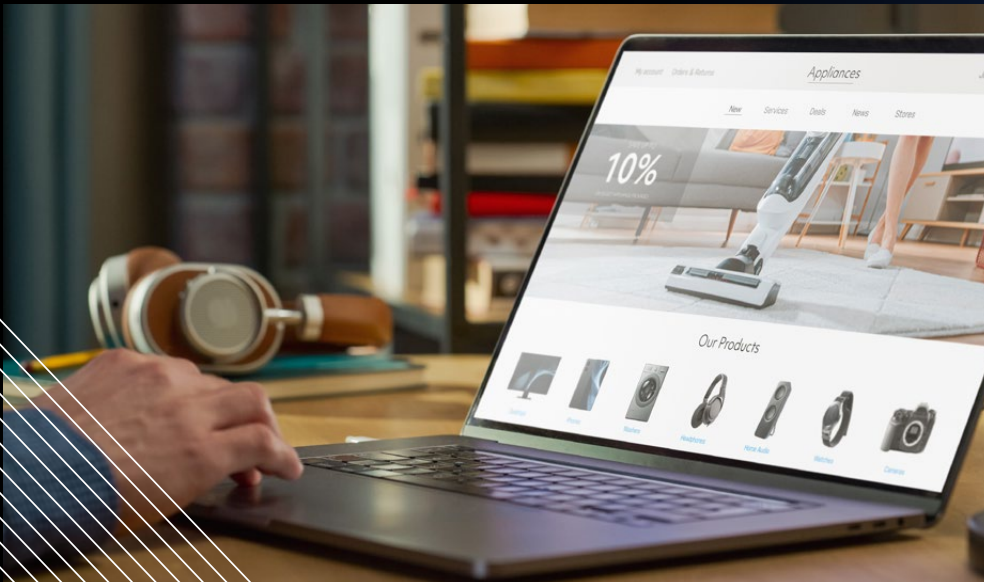
Content

We also wanted to investigate what content influenced consumers most when it came to online purchasing. Top of the list sits “ratings and review” (37%) closely followed by accurate product descriptions (35%).

37%

OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS SAY RATINGS AND
REVIEWS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE
OF CONTENT WHEN SHOPPING ONLINE

But, of course, the content that the consumer sees is just the tip of the iceberg. Getting content strategy, systems, technology, syndication, processes and people right all contribute to consumers receiving the right content, at the right time, to encourage conversion.



Which content influences consumers the most?

01	Ratings and reviews	37%
02	Accurate product descriptions	35%
03	The brand	28%
04	High quality images	24%
05	Video content	18%
06	Easy to read content	16%
07	User-generated content (e.g. imagery and video from other buyers)	15%
08	Good looking site	14%
09	Speed of checkout	14%
10	Influencers and influencer content	11%
11	Augmented reality (e.g. seeing the product in my own home on my phone or tablet)	8%
12	Blog posts and news on the site	7%
13	No content influences me the most when buying a product online	6%

Percentages have been rounded, so content with the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.

““

EXPERT OPINION:

Why getting content right is more than just what the customer sees – the whole content value chain must be right!

To ensure meaningful, appropriate and timely content is available to the customer, organizations must ensure that they are producing, developing and distributing the right content. As customer engagement channels and modes continue to proliferate, it is more fundamental than ever to have a mature approach to aligning the production of content with its management, and in particular, ensuring alignment with the underlying product catalog and/or product propositions.

In delivering an effective content value chain, there are three critical considerations: 1) Ensure the entire content ecosystem of often disparate producers is united through good governance and operations. 2) There should be an underlying taxonomy and metadata model capable of reflecting the relationships between various types of content. 3) The “core trio” of technology functions – digital asset management, product information management and syndication – must work together to effectively deliver content into the hands of customers wherever they are.



Mark Deal

Technology Strategy Director

E: mark.deal@vml.com

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Key takeaways

1

Online shopping falls short of expectations: Consumers desire more engaging and multisensory online shopping experiences, with many expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of online retail. This highlights a need for brands to prioritize entertainment and create more immersive digital environments.

2

Understanding the customer journey is paramount: Consumers feel misunderstood by brands and retailers, leading to frustration and lost sales. Brands must invest in understanding customer needs, preferences, and pain points throughout the entire shopping journey.

3

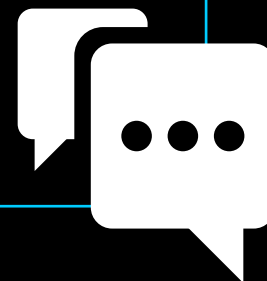
Delivery and returns remain critical battlegrounds: Fast, convenient, and transparent delivery and returns processes are non-negotiable for online shoppers. Marketplaces currently set the bar high in these areas, challenging other retailers to elevate their logistics and customer service.

4

Content is king, but authenticity matters: Ratings, reviews, and accurate product descriptions are crucial for online shoppers, but consumers are wary of fake content and seek authentic experiences. Brands need to prioritize genuine customer feedback and transparent communication to build trust.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- **Creative Commerce**
- **Journey mapping**
- **S.C.O.R.E.** (VML's powerful partnership methodology)
- **Foresight** (VML's partnership matching tool)
- **Promotion & Experience design**
- **Content Management** (Digital Shelf, PIM/PXM, DAM, Syndication)
- **Category & Aisle Assortment audit**
- **Product content generator**
- **Brand Guardian** (VML's AI-driven, content management and compliance platform)





SECTION 7

Marketplaces

What we've seen so far paints an interesting picture when it comes to marketplaces.

On one side, they are the dominant force when it comes to inspiration, search and purchase, as well as being "best-in-class" across most key consumer metrics, including delivery and returns.

On the other side, their commanding position – notably in purchasing – appears to be weakening slightly, with consumers prepared to research more, and to use alternative channels to purchase.

CHAPTER 1:

Balanced channel strategy

The key to commerce success is the ability to operate efficiently across multiple channels. So, given what we've seen, operating on marketplaces is a vital part of online success.

But what about other channels like D2C? What would encourage consumers not to default to marketplaces and what would make them choose another retailer?

As we often see, the key driver is price, with 50% of global consumers saying that they would choose another retailer over a marketplace based on cheaper pricing. And if we look at the trends over the years from our survey data, it would appear that cheaper pricing is becoming even more important.

Next on the list comes more convenient delivery options (29%). Once again, this is up on last year's figure (21%).

And backing up the trend that we've seen throughout this report, the existence of physical stores comes in third position (24%), up on last year's figure of 20%.



66% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAID THAT THEY LIKED BUYING FROM BRANDED MARKETPLACES

But what about the phenomenon of branded marketplaces, where brands and retailers are choosing to promote and sell multiple brands through their own sites? Are consumers happy with this relatively new breed of marketplaces?

The answer is a resounding yes, and each year the percentage grows. In 2022, 54% of global shoppers told us that they liked buying from branded marketplaces, and in 2023, this figure had risen to 58%. This year, the figure has jumped to 66%. So, if you haven't already, perhaps it's time to start considering the creation of your own marketplace.

50% OF CONSUMERS SAY THAT THEY WOULD CHOOSE ANOTHER RETAILER OVER A MARKETPLACE IF THEY HAD "CHEAPER PRICING"

The reasons that consumers would choose another retailer over a marketplace

	2024	2023	2022	2021
01 Cheaper pricing	50%	46%	42%	46%
02 More convenient delivery options	29%	21%	20%	20%
03 Existence of physical stores	24%	20%	18%	16%
04 More attractive loyalty program	21%	18%	15%	19%
05 Better / more specialized product range	19%	17%	17%	19%
06 Better-looking website	16%	10%	11%	12%
07 Better environmental practices (e.g. less packaging, reduced carbon footprint, eco-delivery vehicles)	14%	13%	14%	14%
08 Better ethics	14%	12%	12%	13%
09 Better personalization so they know and treat me better as an individual	13%	12%	14%	12%
10 I prefer to support other independent retailers	13%	11%	13%	13%
11 I don't wish to support the increasing growth of the leading marketplace	8%	7%	8%	8%

NB. Consumers were able to choose multiple options, so the totals do not add up to 100%. Also percentages have been rounded, so reasons with the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.

EXPERT OPINION:

What does it take to create your own marketplace?

Creating a marketplace is an exciting, yet daunting venture for any business and requires a well-rounded approach. First and foremost, understanding your target audience is crucial, and creating distinction in the market is critical. There is no point creating the same value as another competitor – the unit economics will not end favorably. It is essential to identify customer segments and analyze their purchasing trends, ensuring you cater to their needs effectively to drive interest and long-term stickiness. Making your marketplace digitally accessible and easy to navigate is essential. This can be achieved with a user-friendly website and mobile app, employing strategies to boost your search engine ranking, and leveraging social media to extend your reach. Offering unique features, such as advanced search options, AI-based services, and more personalized omni-channel experiences will differentiate and significantly enhance the user experience.

Utilizing AI-driven approaches across the full value chain is critical, whether this is around recommendation engines and chatbots for customer support, or supply chain and distribution.

Differentiating your marketplace involves offering competitive pricing, attractive and sustainable packaging, reliable delivery options, and a seamless shopping journey from start to finish. The unboxing experience alone can create a highly tailored shopping experience. High-quality content and branding help establish your marketplace's distinctiveness and will drive mental, physical into digital availability to stand out from all aisle and shelves. Additionally, strategic marketing campaigns across various channels, along with robust analytics tools to monitor performance, are essential for driving traffic and conversions.



Gemma Spence

Chief Digital Commerce Officer EMEA

E: gemma.spence@vml.com

CHAPTER 2:

Suggested, sponsored and fake products

In the previous chapter, we talked briefly about the content that helps consumers to convert online. In top spot was ratings and reviews. But we wanted to get a little more information about ratings and reviews, particularly within the context of marketplaces.

And while 70% of consumers say they trust reviews, 60% say that they have encountered a review that they suspect to be fake. Clearly one of the important strategic jobs not just for marketplaces, but for anyone wanting to sell online, is to minimize the lack of belief that consumers might have in ratings and reviews.

70% OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS TRUST REVIEWS THEY SEE ON MARKETPLACES. THAT MEANS ALMOST A THIRD DON'T!



And what about recommended products that we often see when purchasing via marketplaces?

These clearly have an effect on purchasing, with 59% of global consumers saying that marketplace-recommended products influence their purchasing, and 58% admitting they often buy additional products to those they were intending to buy based on these personalized suggestions.

What can we take from this? The right product, served to the right consumer at the right time via a recommendation is highly likely to end in an additional sale.

But what about “sponsored” items? When it comes to this, the feedback is less positive, with 58% of shoppers questioning the credibility of sponsored items, and 57% finding that they get in the way of what they’re looking for. The learning? Clearly look at how effective these sponsored items are, as the data may tell a different story, but from a user perspective the feedback is not encouraging and may undermine credibility.

Finally, let’s talk about fake and counterfeit products.

Sometimes buying from a marketplace can leave consumers open to unscrupulous third-party sellers and their products. Again, the picture here is mixed – with 69% of global consumers saying that they trust products to be what they say they are, but a significant 55% claiming that they have encountered a product that they suspect may be fake.

55% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THEY HAVE ENCOUNTERED A PRODUCT THEY SUSPECT MAY BE FAKE

CHAPTER 3:

Marketplaces – sky's the limit?

With marketplaces playing such a key role in our lives – shopping, voice assistants, content, and much more – we like to investigate what else marketplaces might offer in the future, and what the consumer appetite may be.

One area that we've tracked for several years is the idea of financial services. Last year, 48% of consumers globally told us that they would be open to banking and purchasing other financial products sold through marketplaces such as loans, mortgages, pensions and insurance. This year the figure rose to 53%.

And what about utilities? Once again, this year we see a slight increase, with 53% saying that they would be open to buying their energy and water (utilities) from a marketplace. Last year this figure was 51%.

Finally, like last year, we wanted to test our theory that consumers trust marketplaces so much (and have so much of our data), that they would be happy to use a dating app from them. Once again, this year the figure grew from last year – rising from 42% to 48%.

48%

OF CONSUMERS GLOBALLY SAID THEY WOULD
BE HAPPY TO USE A DATING APP PROVIDED
THROUGH A MARKETPLACE

While this section may seem initially trite, it makes a clear point. Marketplaces are so ubiquitous in our lives, and our trust of them so great, that we would happily engage with them across numerous touchpoints and ventures. This opens up a world of possibilities for marketplaces in the future.



Key takeaways

1

Marketplaces face growing competition: While still dominant in online shopping, marketplaces face increasing pressure from price-sensitive consumers and the resurgence of alternative channels, particularly brand websites and physical stores.

2

Consumers respond to value and convenience: Cheaper pricing, convenient delivery options, and the existence of physical stores are key drivers for consumers choosing retailers over marketplaces, highlighting the need for a balanced and competitive offering.

3

Branded marketplaces gain traction: Consumers are increasingly receptive to branded marketplaces, appreciating the curated selection and brand-backed experience they offer. This presents a significant opportunity for brands looking to expand their reach and control their brand narrative.

4

Trust and transparency are crucial: While consumers generally trust marketplaces, concerns remain around fake reviews, counterfeit products, and intrusive sponsored content. Marketplaces must prioritize transparency and authenticity to maintain consumer trust and long-term success.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- Marketplace management
- Owned marketplace strategy, creation and operating
- Marketplace strategy across Amazon, Mercado Libre, Alibaba, etc.
- In-channel planning
- Content asset optimization
- Creation of personalized product recommendations
- Ratings & Reviews strategy and execution
- WPP Open Creative Studio



The background features a dark blue gradient with a large, glowing 'AI' logo in the center. The logo is composed of a large 'A' and a smaller 'I', both in a light blue color. Surrounding the logo are several translucent, glowing cubes that appear to be floating or stacked. These cubes have a grid-like pattern on their faces, suggesting a digital or data structure. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and high-tech.

SECTION 8

Artificial Intelligence

CHAPTER 1:

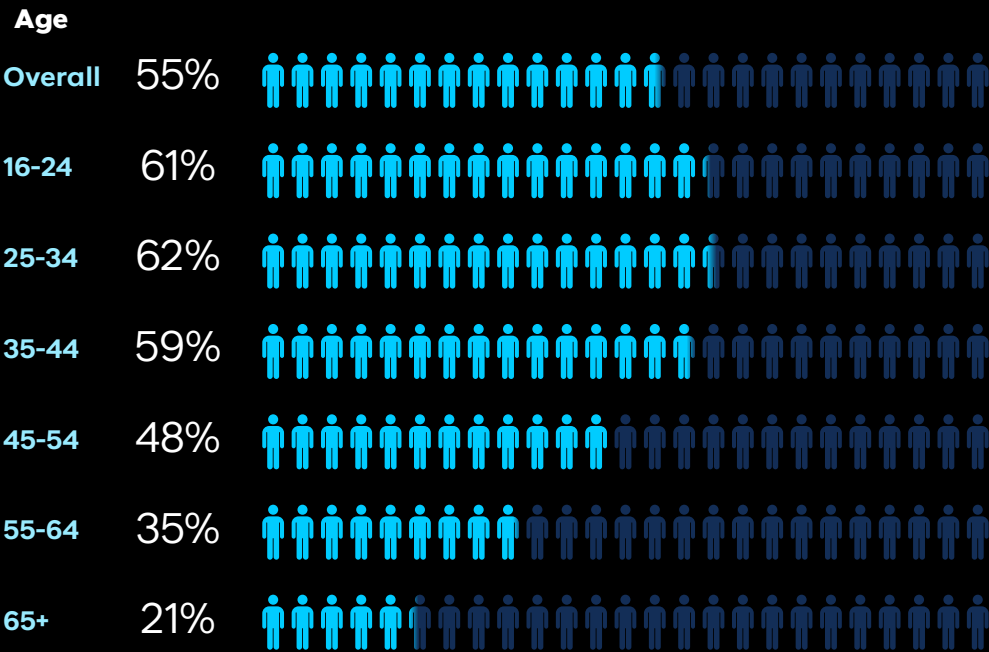
AI adoption and usage

It seems like you can't converse about commercial, societal or cultural trends without someone referencing AI. But what's the consumer perspective on AI?

We started by asking how many consumers had (knowingly) used artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT. The answer was surprisingly high at over half (55%).



The percentage of consumers who have used AI



Now, when it comes to its impact, the sentiment is mixed. On a positive front, 53% see AI as a great opportunity to free them up from mundane tasks, and 50% of consumers believe that the positives of AI outweigh the negatives.

More negatively, 58% of global consumers said that they were worried about AI and its effect on the world, while 48% said that they were fearful about their job security due to the advances of AI.

This all paints a picture that underlines consumer uncertainty on how AI will affect them. This is probably a pretty fair view. Despite all the noise, it's hard to truly grasp how palpably and deeply AI will be integrated into our lives, and how it will affect businesses.

There has also been a lot of discussion about generative AI. How do consumers feel about consuming AI generated content? Are they concerned? The overall sense is that they're not, with 48% of consumers saying that it does not currently bother them that content could be AI generated. Meanwhile, 24% admit they are concerned.

And it would appear that the majority of consumers are open to AI helping them and shopping for them, with 41% saying they would let an AI organize their life, including what things to buy and even what to do at the weekend (36% were against this, though).

Taking it one step further, 40% of global consumers said that they would let an AI take full control of their food shopping including sorting out delivery and payment!

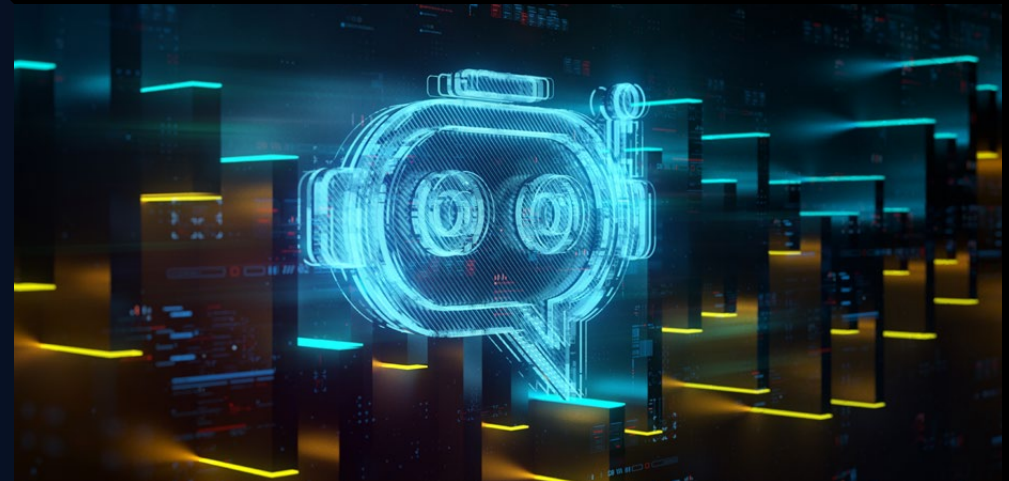


CHAPTER 2:

Programmatic Commerce™ (automated ordering)

The concept of machines ordering on our behalf (AKA Programmatic Commerce™) is not new. In fact, we've been talking about it for quite some time, even coining the trademarked phenomenon. But sometimes the technology is ahead of the consumer. We found that this year, 15% of consumers say they use machines to automatically order products on their behalf. This is 1% up on last year, but not what you might call an accelerated adoption curve. On the flipside, 27% of consumers are clear that they do not and will not use this in the future. Incidentally, this is down from 31% last year.

What does this tell us? It tells us that consumers are still to be convinced about programmatic commerce, but in the right scenarios, they might be persuaded.



CHAPTER 3:

Chatbots

Often linked to AI are chatbots. Yet consumer sentiment is not great when it comes to our automated friends.

A huge percentage (68%) say they get fed up with not being able to speak to a real person when they call a company, and worryingly, 57% say that they are less likely to buy from a business that they know uses chatbots instead of real people to resolve customer service issues.

57%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THEY ARE LESS
LIKELY TO BUY FROM A BUSINESS THEY KNOW
USES CHATBOTS INSTEAD OF PEOPLE TO
RESOLVE CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES

Once again, we need to delve a little deeper to understand what businesses should do, because consumers are driven by immediacy, and despite the concerns about chatbots, 41% of global consumers would rather use a chatbot than wait for a real person.

Key takeaways

1

Consumers express mixed feelings towards AI: While many consumers have used AI tools like ChatGPT, there's uncertainty and concern about their impact on jobs and society. However, there's also optimism about AI's potential to improve efficiency and free up time.

2

AI-driven commerce faces adoption challenges: Concepts like Programmatic Commerce™ and AI-powered shopping assistants show promise but haven't gained widespread adoption. Consumers remain hesitant to relinquish control over their purchases, indicating a need for greater transparency and demonstrable benefits.

3

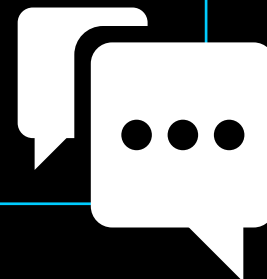
Human interaction still holds value: Despite the convenience of AI-powered chatbots, consumers express frustration with the lack of human interaction in customer service. Brands need to strike a balance between automation and human touchpoints to ensure customer satisfaction.

4

Transparency and control are key for AI acceptance: Consumers are more likely to embrace AI when they understand its benefits and have control over its use. Brands need to prioritize transparency, explain AI's role clearly, and offer consumers choices in how they interact with AI-powered systems.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- AI strategy and consulting
- AI inspiration, education and key note speaking
- Discovery workshops
- Explore integration of AI into existing service offerings and processes (including chatbots)
- AI governance, tools and ethics
- Cloud & Data engineering, Native apps, MACH architectures
- WPP Open (WPP's AI-powered intelligent marketing operating system)



A modern building with a glass facade reflecting green trees. The image is overlaid with diagonal blue and teal geometric shapes. The text 'SECTION 9' is in light blue and 'Sustainability' is in white.

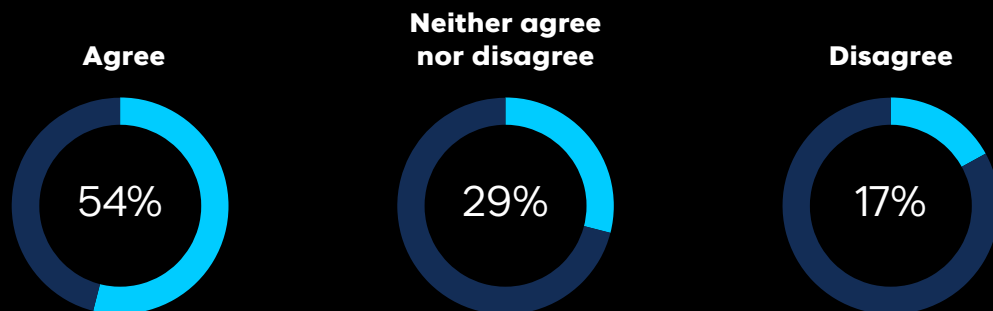
SECTION 9

Sustainability



Each year, the matter of our climate and environment becomes ever-more critical and political, regularly monopolizing the news as the impact of extreme temperatures, flooding and wildfires are felt near and far. Naturally, it makes sense to gauge the extent to which sustainability is influencing consumer behavior and our relationship with brands and retailers.

Products labeled “Climate Friendly” influence my purchase decision:



CHAPTER 1:

The demand for sustainability

Ask consumers if sustainability is driving their purchasing and the answer is yes: 56% say that they have changed their shopping habits due to concerns about global warming and the environment – that’s up from 52% in 2023.

56%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THEY HAVE CHANGED THEIR SHOPPING HABITS DUE TO CONCERNS ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Consumers are looking more closely at products too. Seemingly, businesses who are modifying their products to improve sustainability are favored, with two-thirds (66%) of consumers saying they like brands that are adapting their products and services based on climate change.

CHAPTER 2:

Consumers want better practices

In line with last year's results, 67% of consumers wish that retailers offered better environmental practices such as less packaging. This chimes closely with the results over the last four years we've tracked the number: in 2023 it was 66%, in 2022 it was 68% and the year before that, it was 71%.

When it comes to seeking less packaging with online orders, the percentage remained the same as last year at 69%.

With the advances being made, and claimed, by businesses, we might be hoping for these percentages to decline. Instead, we can perhaps speculate that consumers still believe that businesses simply aren't doing enough.

However, it would appear that certification might help. Consumers are clearly looking for some third-party accreditation, rather than business-made claims, to prove sustainability credentials – with 62% of consumers saying that they are more likely to purchase a product that has a sustainability certificate. Additionally, 54% of consumers said that products labeled “climate friendly” on marketplaces influence their decisions too.



CHAPTER 3:

Purpose

So, what about the role of purpose? For several years businesses have been encouraged to think beyond just selling their products and services, and to consider and articulate a greater contribution impact. Is this still an important consideration?

With 63% in agreement, there's a clear message that consumers like to shop with brands and retailers that have a purpose beyond simply selling products and services, while a similar percentage (64%) say that they try to buy from brands with ethical labor practices.

63%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAY THEY LIKE TO SHOP WITH RETAILERS AND BRANDS THAT HAVE A PURPOSE BEYOND JUST SELLING PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

This focus on purpose also touches upon diversity and social issues, and once again, more than three in five consumers (62%) say they are more likely to buy from a company that speaks and acts positively about diversity and social issues.

CHAPTER 4:

Understanding impact

There is a huge amount of noise around carbon impact and footprint, and consumers are certainly interested in understanding more, with 60% welcoming the idea of being shown the carbon output and impacts of their purchase decisions, and 62% saying that they would like to understand more about the impact of how their product reaches them (CO2 produced, materials used, distances covered, etc.).

60%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS WELCOME THE IDEA OF BEING SHOWN THE CARBON OUTPUT AND IMPACTS OF THEIR PURCHASE DECISIONS

However, there is still an education job to be done, as while most consumers understand that higher carbon emissions are bad, almost half (48%) do not understand what constitutes high or low carbon output.



CHAPTER 5:

The environment and returns

As we all know very well, what consumers say and what consumers do can sometimes conflict. Take the issue of returns. Earlier on in this report, we talked about the importance of returns, and particularly free returns in driving purchasing. This in turn has a negative impact on the environment.

So, it's interesting to see that almost half (49%) of global consumers say that they are more likely to over-order when returns are free.

On the flipside, this does seem to be something that preys on the minds of consumers, as 45% claim they have not returned an item as they believe returns negatively impact the environment. Of course it's worth considering what impact keeping the item has on the environment too.

Clearly consumers are conflicted when it comes to the convenience and ease that they crave, versus the impact that this will have on the environment. Balancing these countering desires could be a key to unlocking conversion.

CHAPTER 6:

Sustainable delivery options

Given the importance of delivery when it comes to online shopping, we also like to track how delivery and sustainability demands match up. And for a number of years, we have used a very simple metric to judge this: namely the uptake of sustainable delivery options.

Why is this important? Because, as we mentioned before, what consumers say and do are often at odds. Using sustainable delivery options shows a willingness of consumers to take a personal hit, and have their deliveries arrive slightly later than they could.

So, what's the news? In 2021, 34% of consumers had used sustainable delivery options; in 2022 it was 43%, in 2023 it was 46%, while this year, the percentage has risen to 49%.

49% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS HAVE USED SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY OPTIONS WHEN ORDERING ONLINE (UP 3% FROM LAST YEAR)

This is good news, but perhaps not as strong a rise as we might have hoped.

Of course, the other side of the coin is that 41% of consumers have not used sustainable delivery methods! It is perhaps proof that while sustainability does drive purchase behavior and brand and retailer love, other factors (price, availability, delivery, returns, etc.) also play vital roles.



CHAPTER 7:

Sustainability: who's responsible?

But while many consumers are cognizant of their purchasing on the environment, there is a sense that perhaps the same cannot be said of retailers and brands.

An overwhelming 61% of consumers believe that when it comes to sustainability, too much responsibility is with consumers instead of companies (that figure was 58% last year). While 63% claim that companies are not doing enough to offset their impact on the environment, that figure was 59% last year.

Clearly over the course of the last 12 months, the issue of businesses taking more responsibility has not been thoroughly addressed according to today's consumers.

And as we see across all of our reports, despite many factors influencing purchasing, price is ever-important. And consumers are demanding more from businesses, with 67% believing they should absorb the costs of making their products carbon-neutral and not pass these costs onto consumers.

67% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS BELIEVE THAT BUSINESSES SHOULD ABSORB THE COSTS OF MAKING THEIR PRODUCTS CARBON-NEUTRAL AND NOT PASS THESE COSTS ONTO THEM

Key takeaways

1

Consumers want sustainable practices and products: A growing number of consumers prioritize sustainability, favoring brands that adapt products and practices to be more environmentally friendly. This includes reducing packaging and offering transparent certifications.

2

Purpose-driven brands resonate: Consumers actively seek out brands with a strong purpose beyond profit, including ethical labor practices, diversity, and social responsibility. This highlights the importance of brand values and actions.

3

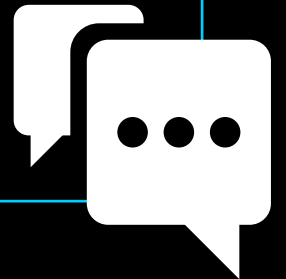
Consumers want more action, less talk: While aware of their own environmental impact, consumers feel businesses aren't doing enough. They demand greater transparency on carbon footprint, affordable sustainable options, and for companies to bear the cost of environmental responsibility.

4

Sustainable choices remain complex: Despite good intentions, consumers grapple with balancing sustainability with other priorities like price and convenience. This emphasizes the need for brands to make sustainable choices easy and accessible.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- **Sustainable ShelfMaster** (bridging consumer and business needs on sustainability)
- **Carbon footprint calculator**
- **Creative Commerce**
- **Inclusion Experience**
- **Sustainability gap analysis**
 - Carbon accounting scores
 - Compliance reporting
 - Sustainability certifications
 - Digital Product Passports (DPP)
 - Sustainable supply chain scenario modeling
 - Sustainable product content





SECTION 10

Social commerce / social media

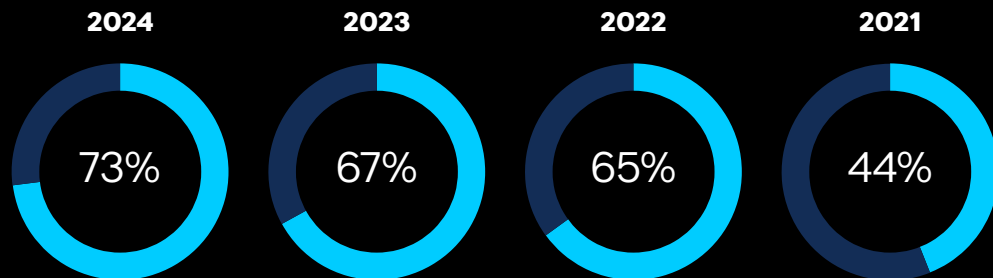
Social commerce is a channel that is waiting to explode – albeit seemingly for a number of years now! In terms of global revenue, it's set to reach \$913 billion this year and predicted to grow by 31.6% per year to reach \$6.2 trillion by 2030. So, it goes without saying that it carries a heightened sense of opportunity.

As social platforms become more embedded in our lives, it makes sense that retailers and brands should look to convert a captive audience into a buying audience. So, let's look into the current situation and the feelings towards social commerce.

CHAPTER 1:

Buying through social commerce

Over the course of the last four years, we've been tracking "buying" through social media channels. The data highlights a clear trend that social commerce is on the up:



It's interesting to note the regional differences too, with the European countries particularly being much slower to embrace this form of purchasing.



It won't come as a huge surprise that it's being driven by younger consumers – with the highest percentage (87%) being in the 16-24 age category and decreasing as consumers get older.

73%

OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS CLAIM TO HAVE BOUGHT SOMETHING THROUGH A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

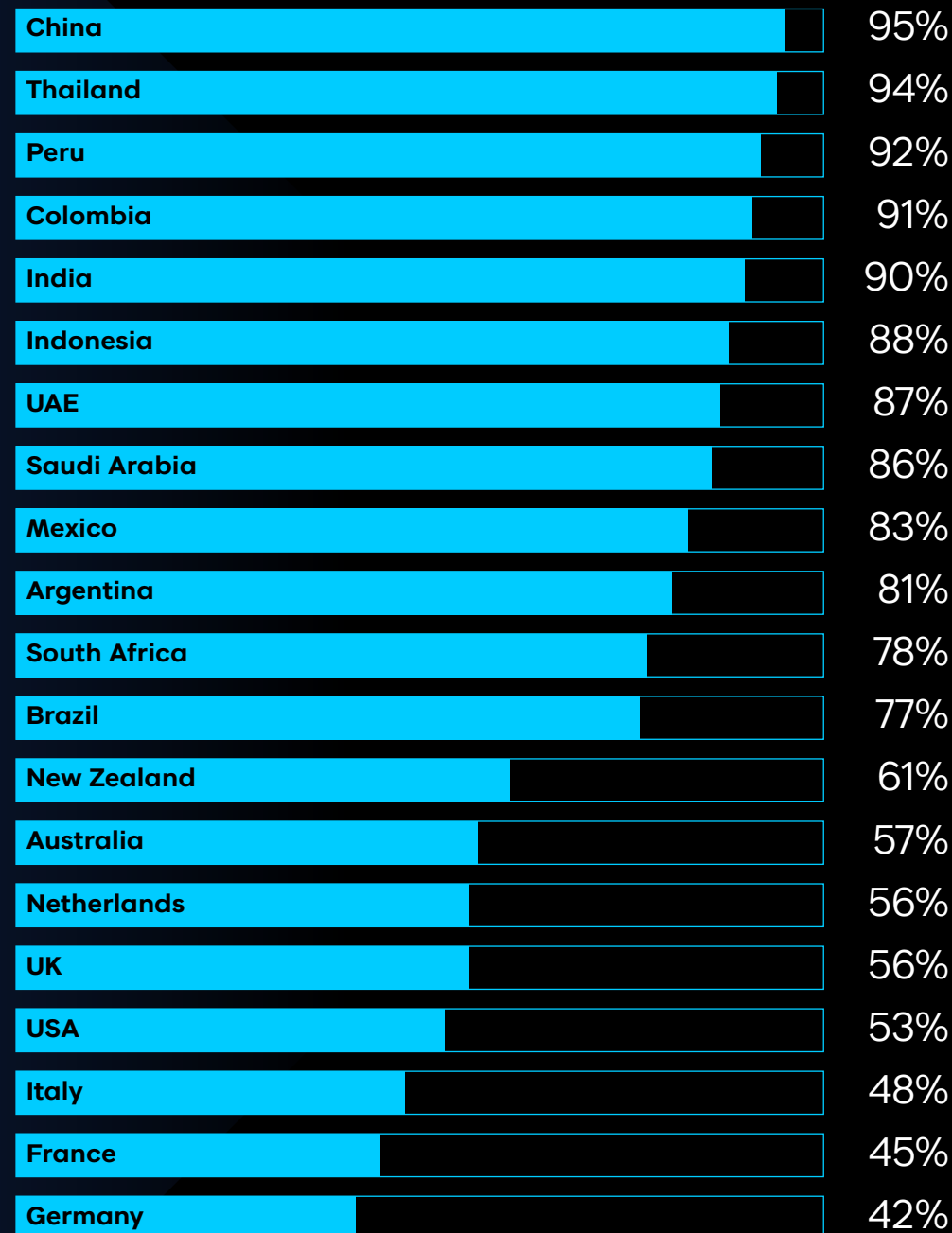
But where and how are these purchases taking place? Are they on-platform or is the consumer being linked to a retailer or brand site? This is important to know because true social commerce lies, ultimately, with the user remaining on the social media platform and transacting there. And this is what the majority of consumers crave – 59% of global shoppers want to buy from within a social app, rather than having to leave to complete the transaction.

Our finding is quite surprising – 48% of shoppers claim that they purchased on the platform (despite the limited availability of this) and 36% say that they have bought off-platform (i.e. pushed to another platform or site).

We also wanted to gauge how much live shopping events – watching brands, retailers and influencers discussing products to buy on social media platforms – were influencing purchasing. Amazingly, 53% of global shoppers said they had purchased via one of these live shopping events, with only 3% admitting they didn't know what it was.

There is a clear geographical split though. Unsurprisingly shopping via live events is most popular in APAC. China sits at the top of this list (87%), with Indonesia next (83%), followed by Thailand (82%) and India (77%). It is the European countries where uptake is lowest, with Italy at the bottom (23%), then Germany (25%) and France (26%).

The percentage of consumers who have bought through social commerce



CHAPTER 2:

Social commerce growth

There is clear evidence that the appetite for social commerce is growing, with 62% of global consumers saying that they intend to shop more through social media platforms in the future. This is up from last year's figure of 53%.

62% OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS SAY THAT THEY
INTEND TO SHOP MORE THROUGH SOCIAL
MEDIA IN THE FUTURE

The country with the highest percentage of consumers who intend to shop more on social commerce in the future is China (93%), while the lowest percentage is France (26%).



44

EXPERT OPINION:

Why social commerce might not have exploded in the West yet, but could become the commerce channel for the future

There is a common misconception largely in the West that social commerce is purely a paid ad, or a buy button, which is likely to have contributed to the slower than anticipated take up. However, social commerce is a full funnel experience, with platforms playing a big role in the purchase journey. So, whilst you might not feel you are 'doing' social commerce – chances are, you probably are, especially given that 73% of global shoppers claim to have bought something through a social media platform.

More people find products through social than through search engines, so getting your social customer journey nailed is paramount to ensure a seamless CX, and increasing your chances of conversion. It's important to remember that the customer journey is not linear, with social platforms serving as touchpoints throughout the path to purchase. And it goes without saying that each platform has its own unique culture, vibe and audience expectations, so – as a brand – understanding these nuances and tailoring your content to suit each space is key to knocking your social media strategy out of the park.

With two of our surveys having both found that social commerce is set to be the leading growth channel within the next 5 years, now is the time to optimize your strategy for the commerce channel of the future.



Chloe Cox

Head of Social EMEA

E: chloe.cox@vml.com

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EXPERT OPINION:

Why social commerce is way ahead in the East, and what can businesses in the West learn from this

It is no secret that many developing countries in the East skipped the desktop era and jumped straight into smartphones, which are very affordable and accessible to most consumers. Indeed, consumers in these markets tend to spend lots of time on social channels and, for many of them, these social channels are just like any other app on their smartphones – as if Facebook, Instagram and even TikTok is the internet! So, buying from social channels and livestreaming to them is the same as buying from the internet.

Furthermore, leading apps like WeChat and Line in APAC are not just chat apps – they have the ability to offer full D2C-like experiences. Hence buying from these social platforms has no significant distinction for consumers from Brand.com D2C platforms.

Businesses in the West should keep in mind that the younger generation – from Gen Z to Gen Alpha – are very much glued to their mobile devices and are constantly online on multiple social channels, including the likes of Discord, Twitch and others. So, now is the time to experiment and build a social commerce presence even if it is just for top-of-funnel purposes. The smarter brands and retailers will be building these channels over time before the competition does – because they surely will.



Nick Pan

Chief Commerce and Strategy Officer,
VML APAC

E: nick.pan@vml.com

””

CHAPTER 3:

Which social platforms?

So, with appetite growing, which social platforms are in pole position to take advantage of this demand?



The social platforms consumers are most likely to shop from and which offer the best experience

	Most likely to shop from	Best experience
Facebook	24%	23%
Instagram	20%	19%
There is no platform I would be most likely to purchase from	14%	17%
TikTok	13%	13%
WhatsApp	8%	7%
YouTube	7%	7%
Other	2%	1%
Pinterest	2%	2%
Reddit	1%	2%
Twitter / X	1%	2%
Telegram	1%	2%
WeChat	1%	2%
Snapchat	1%	2%
Twitch	1%	1%
Line	1%	1%
ShareChat	0%	0%
BeReal	0%	1%
Signal	0%	0%

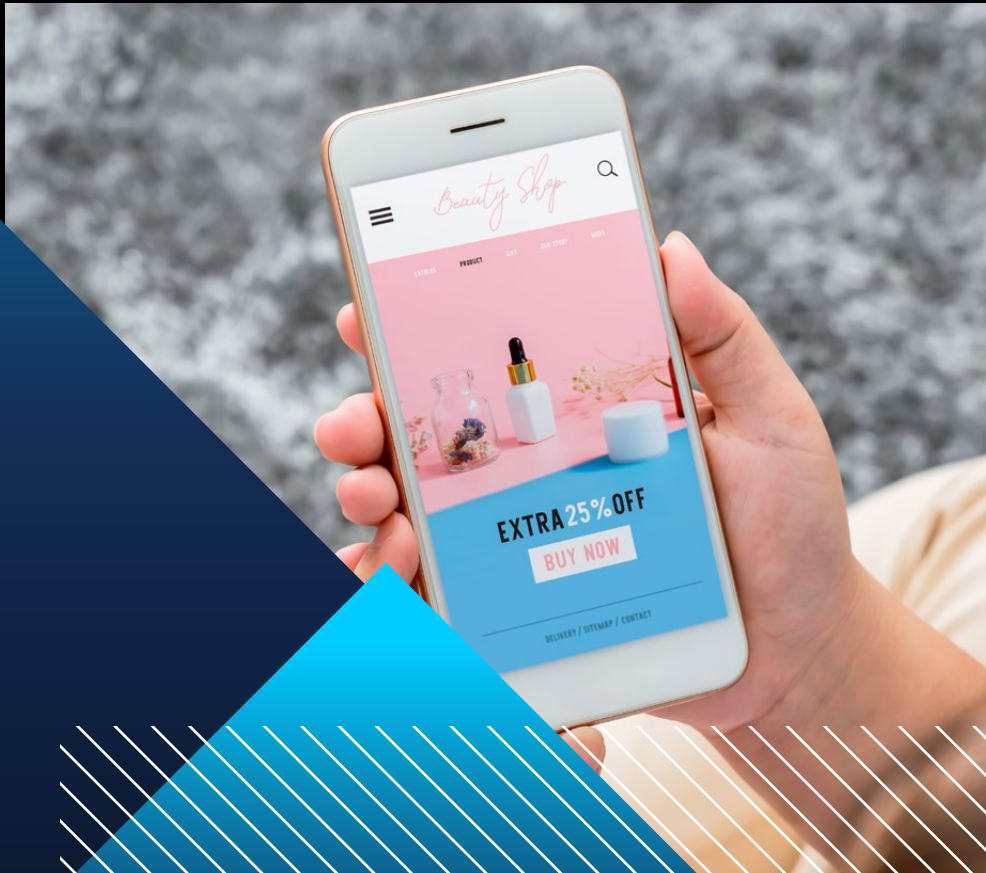
CHAPTER 4:

Buying more through social commerce

Although the affinity for social commerce appears clear, what would encourage consumers to buy more through social platforms?

The number one reason, as it has been for the last few years, is deals and discounts (43%), while reason number three is exclusive offers. Despite the more content rich nature of social, it's clear, as it's always been, that consumers are heavily price-driven.

Ease of purchase also features highly, identified by 38% of global consumers. As we've always maintained, once social platforms really nail the purchase experience, their captive audience is likely to love the speed with which they can transact from within the platform.



Top ten reasons that would encourage consumers to spend more on social platforms

01	Deals and discounts	43%
02	Ease of purchase	38%
03	Exclusive offers	32%
04	More customer reviews	27%
05	Greater product availability	26%
06	Seeing the products on real customers	24%
07	Service / delivery updates	22%
08	Faster payment / more seamless payments	21%
09	Buy now pay later	21%
10	Early access to products	17%

Percentages have been rounded, so reasons with the same percentages are likely to have very small differences.

EXPERT OPINION:**Why social is a critical part and potentially the biggest driver of omni-channel commerce**

Social commerce has shortened the gap between inspiration and conversion like never before – allowing consumers to buy as soon as they discover inspiring content in the places where they spend their time.

Indeed, the reach that social commerce offers, alongside the immediacy of purchase (often with just one click), are just two of the reasons why it should be right at the top of the agenda for consumer brands. It represents an unrivaled chance to connect with shoppers across multiple revenue-driving touch points, rather than simply relying on traditional direct-to-consumer or third-party retail sites.

For example, brands can set-up social media store fronts – such as TikTok Shops – for people to buy products within the social media app itself, rather than redirecting them to an external website. (Removing friction in the purchase experience increases the likelihood of a sale). Brands can also look to create their own social commerce experiences too – as Walmart did at Holiday Time, when they released fully shoppable movies that showcased a vast catalog of products that people could buy, all from the comfort of their sofa! Moreover, brands can look to leverage an ever-evolving channel landscape and tap-into behaviors. For example, WhatsApp, the messaging platform, is adding shop-by-text-message functionality in some countries so that people can buy groceries via a simple and well-known mechanic. Other avenues include livestreaming and even gaming platforms like Twitch. If done correctly, each of these offers seamless ways to integrate conversion moments across a wider-reaching digital ecosystem.

In addition, channels like Instagram and Tik Tok are seeing a rise in savvy influencers that act like affiliates; promoting products and directing their followers to brand stores to buy – and subsequently taking a cut of the sales. This approach has been hugely successful in China and will only increase elsewhere too.

The alchemy of social commerce is that it opens the aperture of purchase across the customer experience, providing a myriad ways to generate income. It is a trend that will continue as shoppers become more comfortable with the process (especially those from outside Gen Z); the channel offering increases; and, crucially, brands lean-in to the opportunity.

**Charlie Wade**

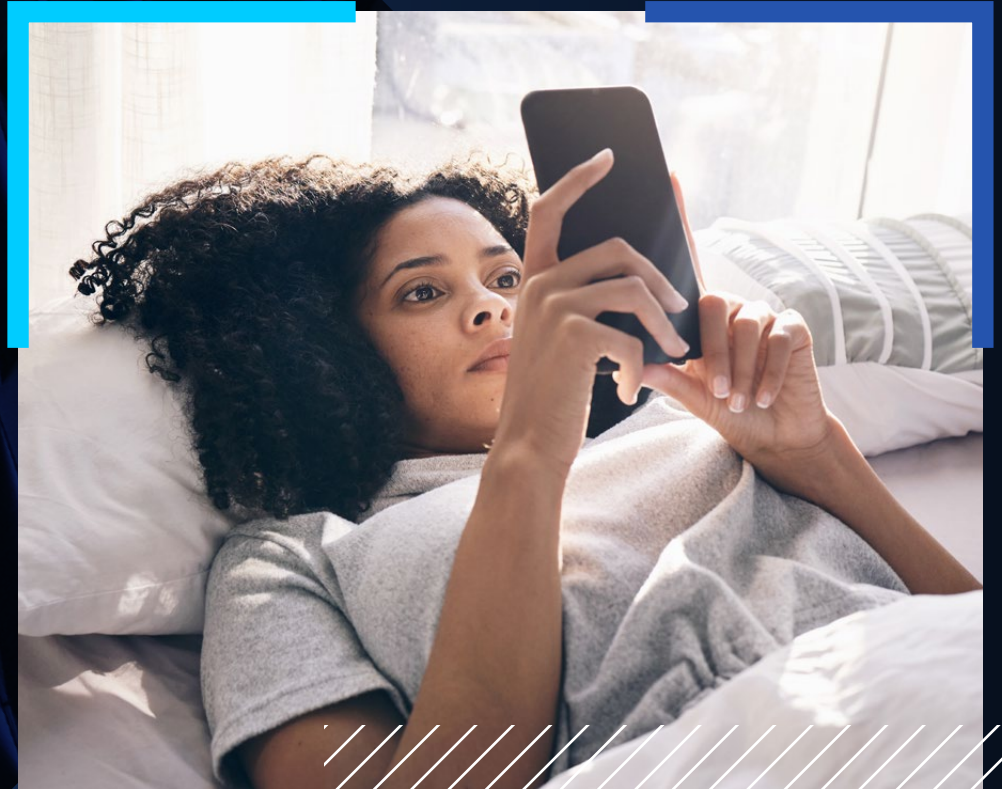
Global Executive Director Growth and Innovation

E: charlie.wade@vml.com

CHAPTER 5:

But it's not all good...

Social media (and by default social commerce) has its challenges too: with over half (51%) of global consumers saying that the constant evolving stream of trends through social media leaves them feeling stressed. So, while this channel may eventually take off, businesses and brands need to act with respect, sensitivity and transparency ensure they are not exploiting consumers and compromising their mental health by using it.



Key takeaways

1

Social commerce is gaining momentum: A growing number of consumers, particularly younger demographics, are embracing social media as a shopping channel, driven by its convenience and integrated experience.

2

Consumers favor on-platform transactions: While purchases currently occur both on and off social platforms, consumers express a strong preference for completing transactions without leaving the social media app, highlighting the importance of seamless integration.

3

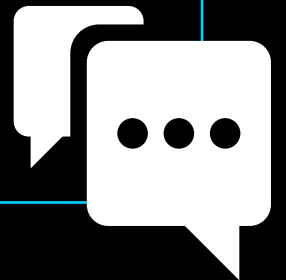
Price sensitivity remains a key driver: Similar to other online shopping contexts, deals, discounts, and exclusive offers are the primary motivators for social commerce purchases, emphasizing the need for competitive pricing strategies.

4

Social commerce presents both opportunities and challenges: While social commerce offers significant growth potential, brands must navigate the ethical considerations surrounding social media use, ensuring they prioritize consumer well-being and minimize trend-driven stress.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- Social commerce
- Social strategy (incl. content & campaign strategy)
- Social listening
- Media activation
- Influencer marketing
- Live events & Activations
- Live streaming



A photograph of two young men sitting on a bed in a dimly lit room, playing video games. The man on the left is wearing a striped t-shirt and holding a black controller, looking intently at the screen. The man on the right is wearing a light purple t-shirt and holding a black controller, also looking at the screen. The room has a wooden headboard and a circular light fixture on the wall. A large blue diagonal graphic is overlaid on the left side of the image.

SECTION 11

Gaming commerce

Gaming has, for a long time, been a major industry. To put a number on it, from a 2022 valuation of \$350 billion, the global gaming market is expected to reach a mighty \$1065 billion by 2032. And it's becoming more than just games. It's a place to socialize. A place to engage. And more and more, a place to shop.

But let's start by finding out just how many "gamers" there are. Or to put it more simply, what percentage of global consumers play games on any of their electronic devices?

The answer is a staggering 89%, up 4% from 85% last year.

With The Future Shopper predominantly surveying buying behavior, of the respondents who said they played games, what percentage spend money in games? This year, the answer was 60%, up from last year's 57%.

89% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS ARE "GAMERS",
AND 60% OF THESE SPEND MONEY IN-GAME

CHAPTER 1:

Gaming and devices

So, what devices are being used? In first place is the mobile phone, driven by its sheer ubiquity and used by 71% of gamers. In a distant second position is computers, while console is in third position.

Mobile Phone	71%
Computer	46%
Console	32%
Tablet	31%
I don't play games on any platform	11%
Virtual Reality headsets	9%
None of the above	2%

CHAPTER 2:

The physical and digital crossover

One area of huge commercial opportunity is in the physical and digital crossover.

For a number of years, we've been tracking the trend of digital lives, and how increasingly consumers' avatars are viewed just as importantly as consumers' physical beings. With more of our lives spent in the surrounds of the digital world, it follows that our digital beings are becoming more important too.

Take 'looking good'. In last year's report, 49% of gamers told us that looking good in-game was just as important as looking good in real life. This percentage has increased in 2024 to 55%.

55% OF GAMERS TELL US THAT LOOKING GOOD
IN-GAME IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS LOOKING
GOOD IN REAL LIFE

The concept of buying items in games could also lead to cross-over products. Products that are available both in-game and in real life. 54% of consumers told us that they would be interested in buying real-world items inside games, while 56% said that they loved the idea of brands selling digital items in games.

56% OF GAMERS SAID THAT THEY LOVE THE IDEA
OF BRANDS SELLING DIGITAL ITEMS IN GAMES

But what about the other way around – from digital to physical? Again, 54% said that they would like their in-game avatar's items (skins, accessories, etc.) to be available to purchase in the real world.

CHAPTER 3:

Gaming, brands and the sales opportunity

So, it's clear that an opportunity exists, and it's one that brands would do well to grasp.

While it could be the ability to buy products in games, it could also be about advertising. With a captive and engaged market, showing up at the right time, in the right place is an opportunity not to be missed for some brands, especially as 52% of gamers say that they are more likely to purchase from a brand they see advertise within a game.



CHAPTER 4:

Gaming and events

This blurring of the lines also extends into events. Take for instance the trend of music events taking place in games. For instance, across two days in June 2024, Metallica joined Fortnite for a virtual concert – a playable concert with six of Metallica's popular songs matched with themed gameplay married to the intensity of the music.

This trend is likely to continue if our data is anything to go by, as over a half (53%) of gamers said that they liked to take part in collective experiences online versus 21% who did not. And to show the alignment of these two realities, 52% of gamers said they would be just as excited to go to a virtual concert as they would be to go to a real-world event!

52%

OF GAMERS SAID THEY WOULD BE JUST AS
EXCITED TO GO TO A VIRTUAL CONCERT AS
THEY WOULD TO A REAL-WORLD EVENT

But as in the real world, events need to be properly prepared for and managed. The demand for Eminem's Fortnite event was so huge, that like in real-life, many gamers weren't allowed access, as Epic's servers struggled to cope with the demand, leading to widespread disappointment. We asked gamers about this and 60% said that they found it frustrating when brands or games create experiences which they can't get onto due to server overload.

And what about the future? It appears that this trend will continue as 55% said they saw themselves spending more time participating in non-gaming related activities within games. This should put retailers and brands on high alert – offering them another immersive channel through which to engage with potential consumers.

Key takeaways

1

Gaming is ubiquitous and lucrative: With the vast majority of consumers engaging in advertising, and in-game spending on the rise, the gaming world presents a significant and growing market for brands.

2

The lines between physical and digital continue to blur: Gamers increasingly value their digital identities, with many considering their in-game appearance as important as their real-world one. This opens up opportunities for brands to offer both digital and physical goods that seamlessly transition between these worlds.

3

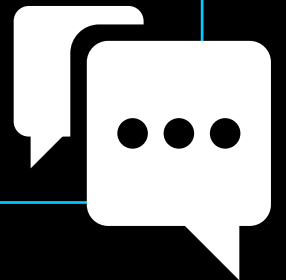
Gaming offers unique advertising and engagement opportunities: Gamers are receptive to brand interactions within games, making it a valuable channel for advertising and building brand affinity. Events within games further enhance engagement and offer immersive brand experiences.

4

Brands must navigate gaming's technical challenges: While the potential of gaming commerce is vast, brands need to address technical limitations, such as server capacity, to avoid frustrating gamers and to ensure positive brand experiences.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- Partnerships enablement
- Technology assessment
- Creating your own in-game space
- Selling digital items
- Streaming ad segments
- Brand-building in-game



SECTION 12

New channels and new technology



We stated earlier on, particularly in the section on experiences, that shopping experiences can sometimes be underwhelming. In this section, we'll look at what the future might hold and what consumers want. And this is important because 59% of consumers told us that if a brand is digitally innovative, they are more likely to purchase from them.

59%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAID THAT IF A BRAND IS DIGITALLY INNOVATIVE, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO PURCHASE FROM THEM



CHAPTER 1:

Physical retailing

We talked earlier on about the continuing and important role of the physical shopping experience. This too could do with some additional razzmatazz, with 60% of global shoppers saying that they want their physical shopping experiences to be immersive, futuristic, and to showcase creative flair.

60%

OF GLOBAL SHOPPERS SAY THEY WANT THEIR PHYSICAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCES TO BE IMMERSIVE AND FUTURISTIC, AND TO SHOWCASE CREATIVE FLAIR

We've already seen many retailers embrace new technologies. The likes of Amazon Go (despite some negative PR around how its tech really works) is seen as a positive, with 66% of shoppers saying they are excited about stores where you don't need to queue. As another example, Sam's Club – Walmart's membership warehouse club – has deployed AI and computer vision tech in over 120 stores to streamline and accelerate the exit and receipt verification process.

The idea of cashless is also seen as a positive, with 59% of consumers saying that they are excited about the future being cashless payments, and 52% of consumers liking the idea of being able to make payments using parts of their body like their face, their palms and eyes.

CHAPTER 2:

The return of the QR code

And how about the QR code for an example of old tech that keeps on giving? The QR code was reinvigorated by the ability to scan them directly from a phone's camera. In fact, 60% of global consumers say that they are more likely to use QR codes now that they can scan them from their phone camera.

And it appears that these scans are happening at pace and scale. Over half (55%) of consumers say that they regularly scan QR codes versus just 20% who say they do not.

What's more, it's set to gain a new lease of life, with the traditional UPC barcode being replaced in 2027. The new code can be scanned both in checkout systems and with a mobile phone, empowering brands by improving supply chain transparency and boosting consumer engagement opportunities.



CHAPTER 3:

Smart assistants and voice technology

We've been talking about voice technology, often referred to as "zero UI" for almost a decade now. The wow-factor of voice-activated smart assistants has faded, and we are still waiting for them to mature as a serious commerce channel, but perhaps the introduction of AI to assistants like Siri will change this. Being able to conduct a conversation with your AI will make these devices more like a shopping concierge. Something that will certainly turbo-charge their commercial potential.

But what about today? What is clear is that a great many consumers own these devices. In 2023, 46% of global consumers said that they owned a smart assistant. This figure has risen to 49% this year.

49% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS OWN A SMART ASSISTANT, UP 3% ON LAST YEAR

But are they actually being used to order products? After all, from a commerce perspective, this was always the aim. The answer is that 23% of global consumers claim to use smart assistants to make purchases on a regular basis, while a further 19% have used smart assistants to order in the past. Their usage as sales devices is being driven by consumers under the age of 45.

The highest regular users of smart assistants are found in India (42%), with China next (34%), and then the UAE and Brazil (32%). The lowest are located in the Netherlands and New Zealand (9%).

CHAPTER 4:

Spending from beyond the grave, redefining consumers and the metaverse

Increasingly, the world around us is forcing us to question, challenge and redefine consumers and interactions. Ring a customer care line of a large corporation and chances are you're speaking to an AI driven chatbot. Want to buy something from the newest drop from your favorite fashion brand? Chances are that bots have got there before you.

So, over the last few years we've been re-imagining the world, and asking ourselves "do you even need to be alive to make a transaction or purchase?" Which leads us to the concept of "post-death consumerism" – the ability to purchase from beyond the grave. If you can train an AI to 'learn' a person's financial and shopping habits while they are alive, they can carry on controlling a digital estate and making purchase decisions once that person has passed on.

Each year we are surprised by the percentage of global consumers who are interested in shopping from beyond the grave. This year the percentage is up to 47% from last year's 45%. Whilst the notion has been typically framed around the idea of being able to support and purchase for loved ones after one's passing, it's interesting to note that the older the consumer, the less interested they appear to be.

And what about countries? In which country does the highest interest lie?



The percentage of consumers who would be interested in the ability to buy from beyond the grave

	2024	2023	2022
Thailand	74%	71%	78%
India	70%	72%	72%
UAE	67%	72%	70%
Saudi Arabia	66%	N/A	N/A
China	58%	61%	50%
Peru	57%	N/A	N/A
Mexico	52%	52%	50%
South Africa	51%	54%	60%
Colombia	50%	50%	51%
Indonesia	49%	N/A	N/A
Brazil	45%	45%	47%
Argentina	41%	39%	36%
UK	37%	36%	31%
USA	36%	45%	50%
Netherlands	35%	39%	41%
Italy	33%	N/A	N/A
Germany	32%	33%	32%
Australia	32%	30%	31%
France	31%	36%	33%
New Zealand	31%	N/A	N/A

47%

OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS SAID THAT THEY WOULD BE INTERESTED IN BUYING FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE (AKA "POST-DEATH CONSUMERISM")

It would also seem that the concept of living on, using tools like AI and the cloud are popular, helping to coin a new field of innovation, namely "grief tech". 45% of consumers claimed they would be interested in uploading their personalities to the cloud or metaverse, so that they could be brought back to life, as an avatar, using AI after they die.

And thinking beyond ourselves, using AI, we can bring back to life historical figures. We've likely all been asked the question "if you could bring back three historical figures for a dinner party, who would they be?" Now that concept could not only be feasibly realized, but the consumer appetite is there too. Almost half (46%) of consumers said that they would be interested in having a virtual dinner party in the metaverse by bringing back historical figures using AI. In fact, just 30% said they were not interested.

But it needn't just be famous historical figures. Many of us long to talk to friends and loved ones we've lost over the course of our lives, and 46% of consumers say they would like to be able to talk to those that have passed on by using AI to bring them "back to life". By comparison, 31% said they were not interested.

46%

OF CONSUMERS SAY THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO THOSE THAT HAVE DIED USING AI TO BRING THEM "BACK TO LIFE"

But when it comes to the metaverse, a channel that was spoken about ad-infinitum a few years ago, there are mixed feelings.

Surprisingly, 43% of global consumers claim to have used the metaverse, while 49% predict they can see themselves using the metaverse in the future as part of their shopping experience. Although at this point it's worth saying that the definition of the "metaverse" is still unclear. Is it a connected 3D computer environment, something immersive, or both?



This lack of real definition may be impacting these percentages.

The flipside of this is that there is also some trepidation, with 49% believing that only tech-savvy individuals will be able to navigate and participate in the metaverse.

But what about the situation today? A significant 13% of global consumers claim to be using the metaverse right now, while an additional 17% have used it in the past. Last year this combined figure was 23% – so there has been a significant rise. The adoption is backed up by the declining percentage who say they will never use this channel in the future, falling from 34% down to 29%.

30%

OF CONSUMERS CLAIM TO BE BUYING, OR HAVE BOUGHT, VIA THE METAVERSE (UP FROM 23% LAST YEAR)

Given that the ability to purchase through the metaverse is currently quite limited, these figures must be taken with a pinch of salt. Nonetheless, they paint an increasingly positive picture of the metaverse as a sales channel of the future.

EXPERT OPINION:

The metaverse is just another channel, but it is how it will redefine what we sell, and who we sell to, that is the really interesting part about it

While a fully realized version of the metaverse might seem like a distant future, it's essential to understand its potential impact on the commerce experience for consumers. From my perspective, at its most basic level, the metaverse is likely to emerge as another channel for customers to learn, purchase, or seek advice from, so long as it is integrating seamlessly into the existing commercial ecosystem.

But the metaverse isn't just a new channel – it represents a paradigm shift that will usher in fresh revenue streams for many businesses. As we immerse ourselves more fully into connected, omni-channel ecosystems, brands need little convincing on the ever-more critical importance of digital goods. Especially as consumers, led by gamers, continue to see real value in digital items.

For me, if you're a brand currently selling physical products, there's a high probability that you'll be selling digital versions of those same products in the next decade. And while the metaverse may seem a long way from its fabled promise, it's crucial for businesses to consider its implications now.

Its potential to serve as a new channel for customer interaction and a source of novel revenue is something that forward-thinking companies are not just contemplating, but planning for. In a rapidly digitizing world, the metaverse could be the next frontier for business – your business!



Naji El-Arifi

Head of Innovation

E: naji.el-arifi@vml.com



CHAPTER 5: VR (virtual reality)

We can't really call VR "new", in fact, headsets have been around for over a decade now with technology slowly being honed into something usable and useful. But what do consumers think? A buoyant 52% said that they would like to use virtual reality headsets to do their browsing and shopping in the future, suggesting a positive outlook for VR headsets.

On the flipside, 49% said that they don't believe that VR headsets will take off because they don't like the idea of wearing a computer on their face.

49% OF GLOBAL CONSUMERS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT VR HEADSETS WILL TAKE OFF BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF WEARING A COMPUTER ON THEIR FACE

Clearly, the jury is still out on VR, and we will need to keep watching this space.

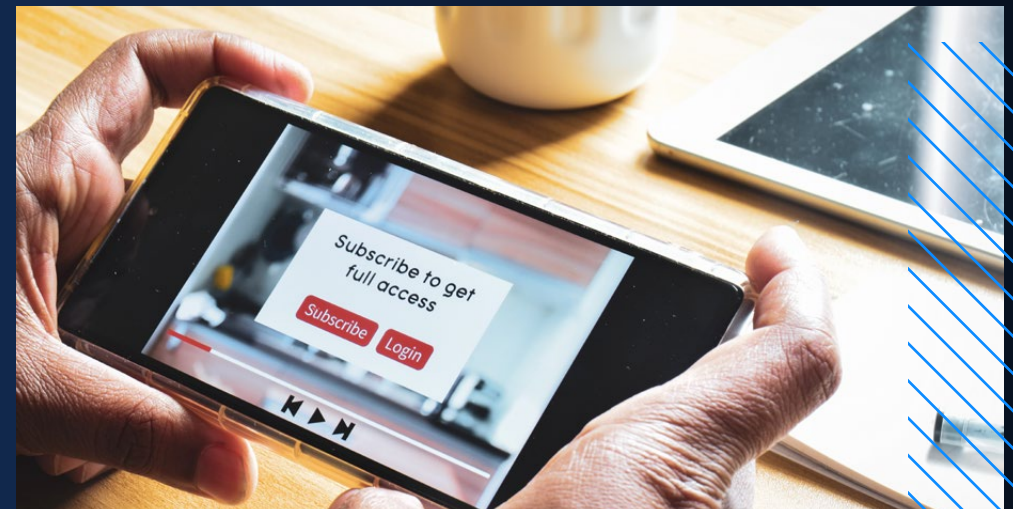
CHAPTER 6: Subscriptions

There are many examples of subscription services across the world – but the debate rages on about how successful these services really are. It's a difficult area to unpick in general terms. Recent years have shown higher costs of acquisition and higher churn rates, whilst also attracting the likes of retail giants such as Amazon. This makes it far from a level playing field; also the cost of living crisis has meant many consumers have paused or canceled subscription schemes.

What did we find? The percentage of global consumers who have a subscription remains exactly the same as last year – 56% – as does the average number of subscriptions – 1.24.

1.24 AVERAGE NUMBER OF SUBSCRIPTIONS PER GLOBAL CONSUMERS

Based solely on this, subscriptions remain a viable sales channel, albeit showing little sign of growth.



Key takeaways

1

Consumers embrace innovation – both physical and digital:

Shoppers crave immersive and futuristic experiences, both online and in physical stores. Cashless payments, QR codes, and cashier-less concepts are well-received, indicating a readiness for frictionless and technology-driven shopping.

2

Voice commerce sees slow but steady growth: While not yet mainstream, smart assistants and voice technology are gaining traction as shopping tools, particularly among younger demographics. This suggests a gradual shift towards voice-based commerce in the future.

3

The metaverse sparks curiosity and trepidation: Consumer sentiment towards the metaverse is mixed, with a growing number exploring its potential for shopping, but concerns remain around accessibility and adoption. While still early days, the metaverse presents both opportunities and challenges for brands.

VML can help – talk to us about:

- Technology assessment
- Platform & technology build
- Technology immersion, education and understanding
- Future trends presentations and inspiration sessions
- Future product development
- Connecting physical and digital offerings
- Developing a voice strategy
- Development of proof of concepts (POCs)



CONCLUSION

The future of shopping: a balancing act

The 2024 Future Shopper report reveals a consumer landscape in flux, where established trends are challenged and new opportunities are emerging. While online shopping remains a dominant force, its growth is slowing, and consumers are increasingly discerning in their expectations – and acting on them.

Key takeaways

1

The pendulum swings back to physical: After years of online dominance, physical retail is experiencing a resurgence. Consumers crave the immersive, multisensory experiences that brick-and-mortar stores offer, highlighting the need for brands to create engaging, innovative and integrated offline environments.

2

Convenience and speed remain paramount: Consumers demand frictionless shopping journeys, from streamlined mobile experiences to rapid delivery and hassle-free returns. Marketplaces continue to set the benchmark in these areas, challenging other retailers to keep pace.

3

Sustainability and purpose drive brand affinity: Consumers are increasingly conscious of their environmental impact and seek out brands that align with their values. Sustainability is no longer a niche concern but a core expectation, demanding transparency, ethical practices, and affordable sustainable options.

4

Emerging technologies offer untapped potential: AI, the metaverse, and VR hold promise for transforming the shopping experience, but consumers remain cautious and widespread adoption is lacking. Brands need to address concerns around accessibility, control, and authenticity to unlock the full potential of these technologies.



The path forward

The future of shopping is not about choosing between online and offline, digital and physical. It's about creating a seamless and integrated ecosystem that caters to evolving consumer needs and expectations. Brands must embrace a balanced approach, leveraging technology to enhance the customer experience while retaining the human touch that builds trust and loyalty.

Key areas for businesses to focus on:

1

Mobile-first mindset: Prioritize mobile optimization, ensuring a seamless and intuitive shopping experience across all devices.

2

Omni-channel excellence: Create a unified brand experience across all channels, allowing consumers to move friction-free between online and offline touchpoints.

3

Sustainable practices: Embed sustainability into every aspect of the business, from product design to packaging and delivery.

4

Transparent communication: Build trust by being open and honest about pricing, product origins, and the use of AI and other technologies.

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→ [The Future 100](#)

→ [Trailblazers of Tomorrow](#)

→ [Marketplaces – the Good, the Bad and the Unfulfilled](#)

→ [Controlling Content Chaos](#)

→ [The Brave New World of Creative Commerce](#)

→ [The Gen Z Paradox: Conscience vs. Commerce](#)

The future of shopping is a dynamic and evolving landscape. By understanding the changing consumer, embracing innovation, and prioritizing authenticity, brands can navigate this complexity and create meaningful connections that drive long-term success.



About VML

VML is a leading creative company that combines brand experience, customer experience, and commerce, creating connected brands to drive growth. VML is celebrated for its innovative and award-winning work for blue chip client partners including AstraZeneca, Colgate-Palmolive, Dell, Ford, Intel, Microsoft, Nestlé, The Coca-Cola Company, and Wendy's. The agency is recognized by the Forrester Wave™ Reports, which name WPP as a “Leader” in Commerce Services, Global Digital Experience Services, Global Marketing Services and, most recently, Marketing Measurement & Optimization. In addition, VML's specialist health network, VML Health, is one of the world's largest and most awarded health agencies. VML's global network is powered by 30,000 talented people across 60-plus markets, with principal offices in Kansas City, New York, Detroit, London, São Paulo, Shanghai, Singapore, and Sydney.

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Connect with us

T: UK +44 (0)20 3858 0061 **NA** +1 816 283 0700

E: futureshopper@vml.com