

The Evolution of Phygital Retail by Integrating Online and Offline Consumer Experiences

¹Dr. Tushti. P. Bakrania

Assistant Professor & University Coordinator (GTU), Metas Adventist College, Surat, Gujarat
tush.bakrania@gmail.com

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Abstract

There is a major change happening in retail, as physical and digital ways of shopping come together into what's known as "phygital". This progress is more than just a trend; it is a key change that impacts how customers respond to companies. Phygital retail merges everything you see and interact with in a store with the benefits of technology. With customers expecting seamless, involved, and connected experiences, companies are updating their engagement with their customers to maintain their place in the market. This review paper focuses on the basics of phygital retail, discussing what makes it special and the main ideas supporting it, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), augmented reality (AR) and mobile buying. It further studies how consumer preferences move toward enjoying omni-channel interactions, instant solutions, and personalized services. Academic research, industry writing, and case examples are used in this study to describe in detail how phygital retail is developing. In addition, this study examines the difficulties and possible gains in business experience when using physical strategies and predicts what lies ahead for the field. The aim is to show how retail can gain useful insights from phygital approaches to serve customers better, raise their loyalty to the brand and achieve durable results..

Keywords: Phygital, Omnichannel, Consumer Experience, Retail Innovation, Digital Transformation, Online-to-Offline (O2O), Customer Journey

1. Introduction

Digital technology has profoundly transformed the retail industry in the last few decades. Retail businesses were largely dependent on conducting operations in physical store settings, and customers primarily shopped for goods at these establishments. Interacting with merchandise in stores allows consumers to touch and try things, receive assistance from sales associates, and engage with products immediately (Saha et al., 2019). In the 2000s, the introduction and rapid expansion of e-commerce revolutionized retail functions. Platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart have transformed consumer habits by making it easy to choose from a vast range of goods, find the best prices, and obtain items delivered directly to the doorstep. E-commerce has brought numerous benefits but has also identified shortcomings in circumstances where personal engagement, product touch, and a sense of occasion matter most. The retail industry combines the advantages of both traditional and digital approaches (Kleisiari et al., 2021). This merging has led to the emergence of "phygital retail," a combination of physical and digital is Phygital retail combines the advantages of both in-person and online shopping to deliver a cohesive, engaging and customized experience to shoppers. Phygital retail entails much more than just existing digital and physical spaces. The real goal is to merge the two elements such that they work together to improve the overall experience (Jocovski, 2020). Tools such as AR, virtual try-ons, smart mirrors, and interactive kiosks in brick-and-mortar stores provide customers with the same level of detailed

product information, recommendations, and research opportunities they enjoy when shopping online. Simultaneously, many online retailers add functionalities that simulate aspects of physical shopping, such as 3D previews, remote product demonstrations, instant assistance, and algorithmic assistance in product recommendations (Granata & Scozzese, 2021). People's new shopping habits have driven this shift toward physical retail. Modern customers are keen to access information, are comfortable using digital channels, and seek convenience while obtaining a high-quality experience.



Figure 1: Synergy of Physical and Digital Retail

Consumers now want smooth transitions between visiting a store and shopping on a retailer's website. A consumer can use an app to explore offerings, decide on the shop, and then close the deal on the company's website after considering special pricing or delivery options. A single unified approach is required to meet the needs of consumers who shop both online and offline (Lee, 2020). Many retailers are transforming their traditional operating models. Some of the world's leading brands and retailers in India integrate advanced digital services, data analytics tools, and in-store technology to build cohesive phygital retail experiences. Today's retail environment focuses more on creating immersive experiences than on closing sales alone. Advancements in click-and-collect, endless aisle, contactless payments, and AI-driven stock control are transforming the nature of physical retail. This study analyzes the development of phygital retail by examining both academic literature and examples of its implementation in the industry. This study explores what drives this transformation, how it affects consumer behaviour, and the approaches used by retailers to stay relevant and successful in a shifting retail environment (Hagberg et al., 2016). My goal is to add to the ongoing conversation about how retail businesses can thrive amidst swift shifts in the way we consume products and services today.

Current business landscape

Due to the many effects of the Covid-19 pandemic such as limiting in-person meetings and causing delays in shipping, using phygital retail has become a natural and wise choice for many brands. This process has already started taking place. GlobalData research shows that during the same period, more than 43% of people chose easy-to-use online banking and 24% chose to use branches because of their convenience. Digital technology is widely adopted, but it's still important for SMEs and the retail sector to use physical channels in their businesses. By next year, reports predict that about a quarter of all shopping will be online, with most remaining in-person sales. Supporting the view, surveys by GlobalData reveal that over a third of shoppers prefer to assess items in person before making a purchase. Since the phygital economy is expected to top USD 200 trillion in the next five years, companies must develop a solid phygital strategy. Neobanks, banks, stores and

small businesses that adapt to this mixed model are more likely to attract and hold onto both their customers and best workforce (Mele et al., 2023).

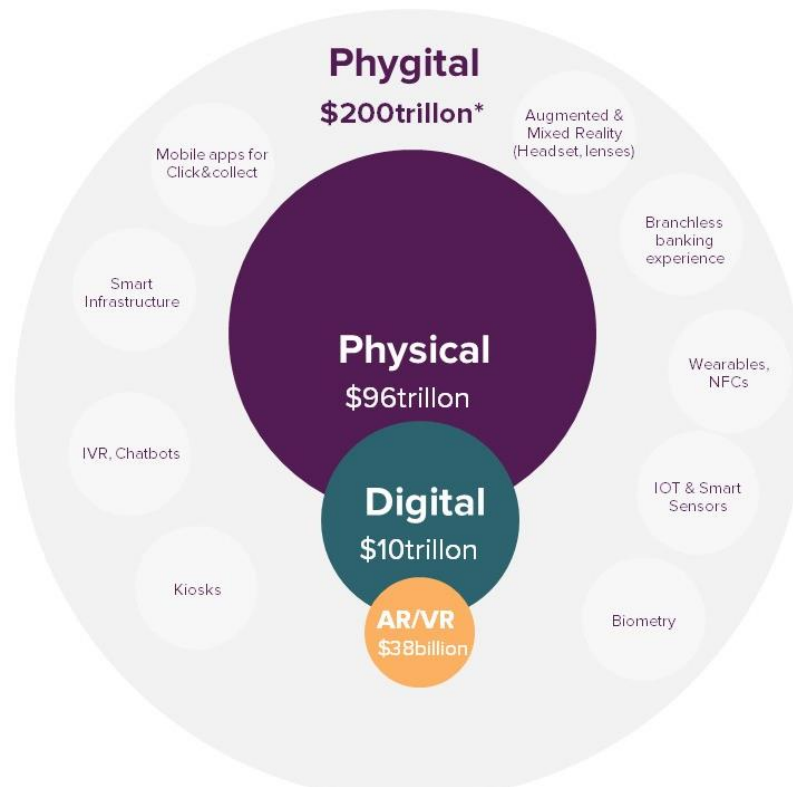


Figure 2: Current business landscape (Source: Market size Value, Leta Capital, State of Phygital, 2022)

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Defining Phygital Retail

Phygital, also called omni-channel retail, uses the power of physical stores and online shopping for a rich and personal buying experience. Shopping in stores and online is involved in phygital, which mixes the best of both retail experiences. The model attempts to combine the features of stores with the additional speed and recommendations from digital tools. Phygital retail brings together practical benefits, emotions, and dynamic communication during the shopping process. The main points behind the phygital experience are fast service, customer involvement, and the use of all senses (Smart Retail Gets ‘Phygital’: How Digital Technologies Enable the Store of the Future, 2023). Today, customers expect to have products, services, or information in their service without delay. A combination of features is available in phygital retail, such as click-and-collect, same-day delivery, and kiosks in-store to make suggestions and check stock status instantly. Building a full sensory world is what is meant by ‘immersion,’ which can attract and engage customers with a brand (Belghiti et al., 2017). For instance, smart mirrors, virtual tours, enhanced products, and AI assistants are used to engage and capture consumers’ attention. The phygital

experience is built by engaging the customer in two ways. It stands out from basic marketing and support because AI chatbots, mobile applications, and social media are used to engage customers in real-time. This allows people to interact one-on-one with the company, which helps build a stronger relationship. Phygital retail combines these components to determine what consumers now look for, in addition to products. they want an immersive experience (Phygital: A Definitive Guide, 2024). Retailers who adopt phygital retail have the chance to grow closer to their customers, ensure greater customer satisfaction, and build stronger loyalty in the retail market.

2.2. Evolution Timeline

There have been major changes in the phygital over the past 20 years. At the start of the 21st century, e-commerce emerged and changed shopping by making things easy and convenient online. Digital solutions were used in retail for some time before they appeared offline. Retailers started using Augmented Reality (AR) around 2010 to enhance how people shopped into their stores. People shopping online were able to test how clothes fit using a digital tool, see what furniture and appliances would appear in their homes, and scan QR codes for more details. As smartphones became more important, in 2015, the retail industry switched to making mobile devices the main tool in its business activities. Companies ensured that their websites and apps worked smoothly, making mobile phones more important for customers at every point during their experience. During the global pandemic in 2020, people’s reliance on digital retail increased. During the pandemic, shops started using digital payments, online trials, and online advisors to meet customers’ needs. By 2023, customers were connecting with businesses differently, using personalized offers, intelligent products and engaging spaces that make the phygital experience smooth and involving (Bueno et al., 2024).

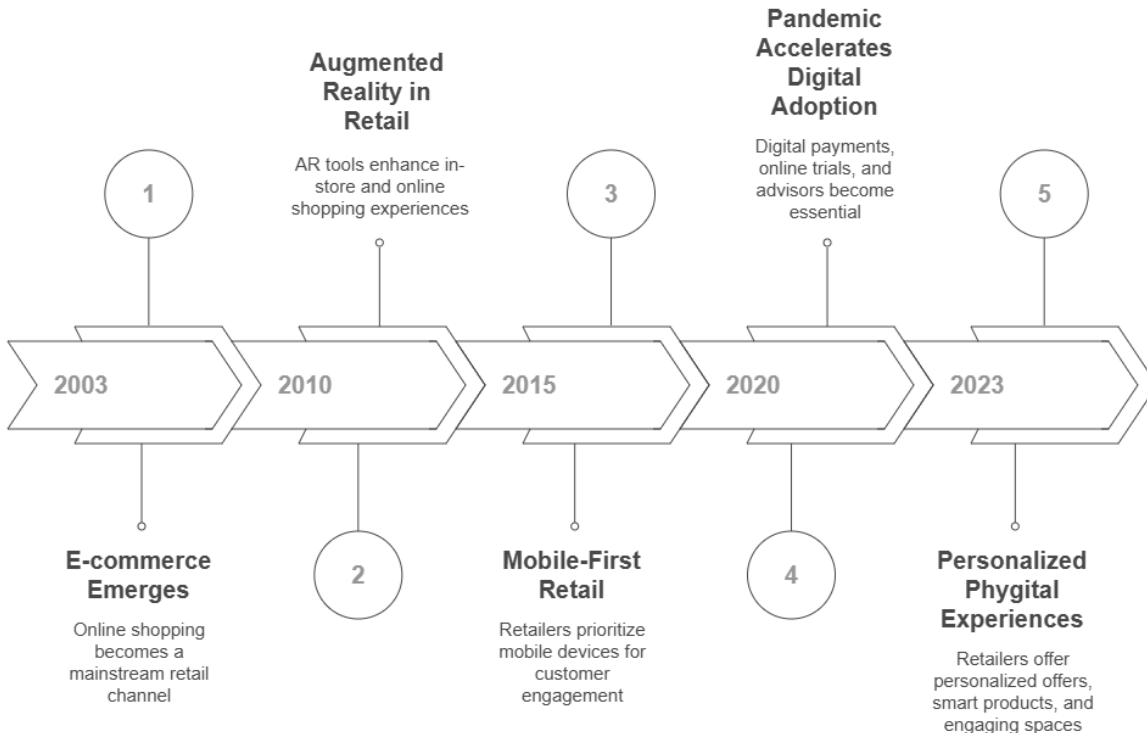


Figure 3: Key Milestones in Phygital Transformation (2003-2023)

3. Drivers of Phygital Retail Evolution

3.1. Changing Consumer Expectations

The way consumers want to experience retail has undergone significant change. Today, consumers are active, well informed, and empowered participants in the shopping process. Consumers expect convenience in every aspect of their shopping experience, whether it involves the brand's website, a mobile application, or a trip to a brick-and-mortar store. Modern consumers want an effortless and consistent experience across all the channels with which they interact, regardless of where, when, or how they use them. Personalization plays a key role in helping businesses meet customers' needs and wants. Many customers want retailers to offer targeted deals, personalize their messages, and use media that fits their shopping style. Currently, people are less interested in ads and products that do not consider their individual needs. People with certain social views are most likely to support companies that are aware of their value (Jackson, 2007). Emotional relationships between consumers and brands have become increasingly important in the present-day market. Brands should care about the same things that their customers believe create a positive impact in the world. Having omni-channel flexibility is essential to making customers happy. They need to meet customers' expectations by blending in-person and online experiences and focusing on strong emotions through every step of the shopping journey (Quach et al., 2020).

3.2. Technological Advancements

New and upcoming technologies are constantly transforming the retail industry. AI, AR, IoT, big data analytics, and other technologies are changing how retailers relate to buyers and add more value for them. Today's Retailers can use AI to customize their services for many customers. AI supports customers throughout their retail journey with quick answers, personal recommendations, and a smooth overall process. Predictive analytics allows companies to identify their customers, manage their stock efficiently, and design successful advertising. AR is bringing together physical and digital shopping. It's possible to see how new clothes or furniture will look in different settings before buying (Rhee & Lee, 2021). As a result, customers are more confident, returns happen less often, and the entire shopping trip is pleasurable. Because of IoT, retail places are smartening up. Now, we can follow the movements of products and shoppers in real-time, thanks to RFID tags and an internet link. Having this data helps retailers manage their products better, reduce lost items, and display things in a way that interests each shopper. Big data analytics now allows retailers to track a customer's journey through shopping in full detail. Retailers can discover problems, foresee upcoming changes, and adjust their merchandise by studying customer actions at every contact stage (Dekimpe et al., 2019). These solutions do more than streamline businesses for retailers; they also change how companies deal with customers and expect them to change over time.

3.3. Post-Pandemic Retail Landscape

COVID-19 completely transformed the way retail operates around the world. The pandemic compelled consumers to alter their shopping habits, precipitated an unprecedented rise in digital use, and compelled retailers to reevaluate their approaches entirely. Retailers turned to the idea of "phygital" to provide a seamless shopping experience for customers both in and out of stores. Customers relied on virtual try-ons in areas such as fashion and beauty due to shutdowns that prevented them from trying on products in-store (Cullumbine, 2024).

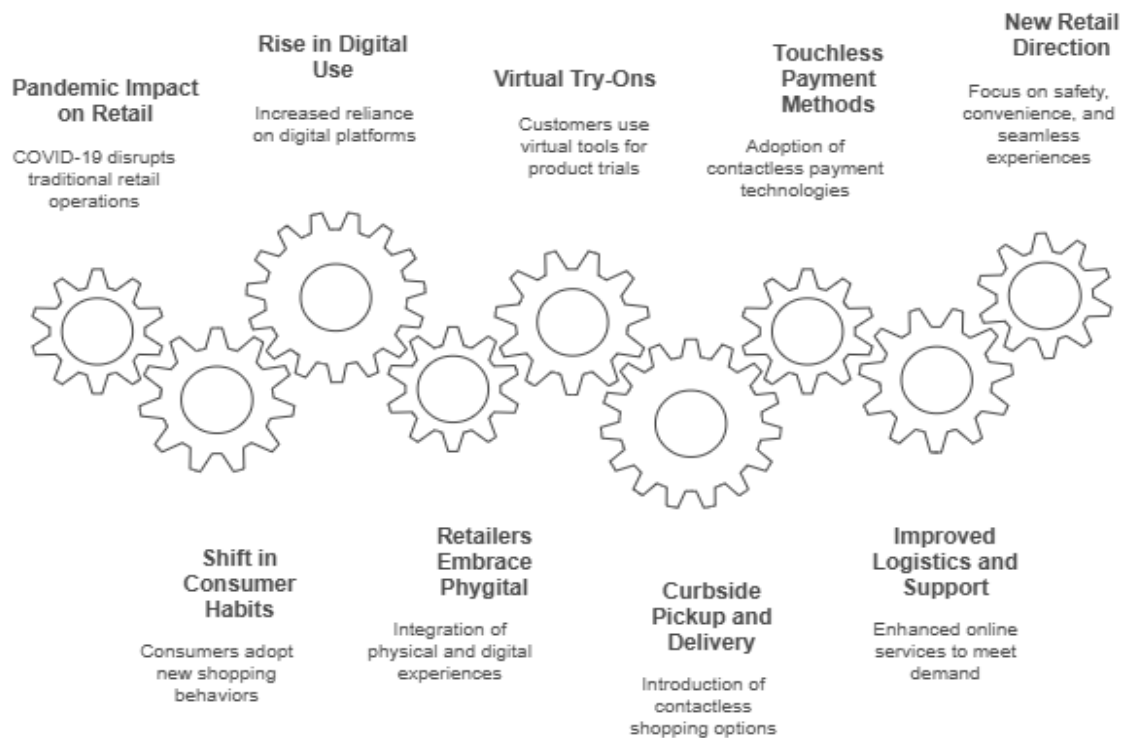


Figure 4: Retail Transformation During COVID-19

Many retailers introduced curbside pickup and home delivery options to cater to customers who wanted to avoid potential exposure to COVID-19. Those companies with already established digital capabilities found themselves more prepared to rise to the challenge, while those who didn't had to catch up or risk being left behind. Touchless payment methods have now become standard practice for many people. Using mobile wallets, QR codes, and tap-and-go methods made contactless shopping easier, faster, and more secure. Online retailers improved their logistics and customer support to meet rising customer needs. Innovations adopted during the pandemic are shaping the new direction of the retail industry. Being flexible, adaptable, and focused on customers' needs is crucial. Companies in the retail sector should build on what they experienced during the pandemic and implement changes that emphasize safety, convenience, and seamless customer experiences across all operating channels (Gupta et al., 2023).

4. Key Components of Phygital Strategy

4.1. Omni-channel Integration

Omni-channel integration is increasingly important for retailers looking to grow profitably in today's market. This strategy integrates physical and digital shopping encounters to ensure customers enjoy a cohesive and harmonized brand relationship, no matter the channel they are using (Aiolfi & Sabbadin, 2017). The underlying principle for omnichannel integration is a unified commerce system that gathers and shares information among all customer interactions online and in-store. Some important systems are CRM, POS, and real-time inventory management solutions. In these situations, changes in available stock made through online purchases must be visible on POS screens and inventory management systems to avoid overselling. Parallel to this, CRMs that aggregate information from online and offline sales points allow companies to tailor their

interactions, understand customer patterns, and share aligned content and promotions across channels. The single customer data set allows all departments and employees to access and use the same information, leading to more informed decision-making and a higher level of personalized service (Guo, 2021).

4.2. In-Store Technology Deployment

Advancements in in-store technologies are now vital to both improving the quality of customer experiences and merging digital solutions seamlessly with the brick-and-mortar setting. Numerous advanced technologies are changing how customers engage with products when they shop in person. Smart mirrors use camera technology to allow customers to virtually ‘try on’ clothes, view alternative options, and obtain personalized fashion suggestions in real time. Customers can experiment with different looks without swapping items and are given a modern and interactive environment in which to shop. Interactive kiosks and touch-screen stations scattered across the store help shoppers navigate product information, determine whether items are available, compare offerings, and make purchases at their own pace. These kiosks save time and leave shoppers in charge of navigating their shopping experience (Iglesías-Pradas & Acquila-Natale, 2023). Technological advancements such as RFID and NFC are transforming the back-end operations and how businesses engage with customers. RFID tags make it possible to automatically monitor the movement of products throughout the store, improving inventory management and boosting productivity. At the same time, NFC-enabled packaging allows customers to instantly learn about products by tapping their phones to review specifications, read testimonials, or see engaging offers. These innovations enhance store efficiency and personalize, speed up, and modernize shoppers’ journeys.

4.3. Digital Personalization

Retailers use data analytics, AI, and machine learning technology to ensure every shopper gets a unique and fitting buying experience. Because of digital personalization, retailers can target, involve, and serve their customers more effectively, improving the value and benefits they get. Using AI to make suggestions for products and services is an important idea in digital personalization. It draws on a customer’s website actions and purchase history to help with accurate recommendations. Afterward, the suggestions are featured on websites, available in mobile apps, and included on in-store screens. Serving our customers well and earning sales are easier with this model. AI can use information on the market and what users are looking for to set real-time prices. It gives companies an advantage, earns more profit, and brings a different experience to everyone in the customer group (Haleem et al., 2022). Such marketing stands out by using customer information to make messages that fit each person’s needs. Customers get communications tailored to them through their personal history, where they are, and their likely needs. Improving customer engagement and conversion depends more on digital personalization today.

Table 1: Phygital Tools Across the Customer Journey

Customer Journey Stage	Physical Tool	Digital Tool
Awareness	Window display	Social media ads
Consideration	In-store demo	Website reviews
Purchase	POS system	Mobile payment app
Post-purchase	Loyalty card	Personalized emails

5. Case Studies and Industry Applications

5.1. Nike Live Stores

Nike Live stores have changed how retail spaces are usually created in cities. To best serve the local area, each store uses consumer data from the Nike app to make shopping personal for its customers. Nike gives customers custom product guidance, special savings, and unique merchandise arranged in response to shopper feedback in every neighborhood. The way the stores are organized makes it easy to shop fast and check out yourself to skip most of the queue. Events, athlete events, and workout sessions are all important ways that communities and athletes engage with stores, making the latter a meaningful part of the brand. Nike unifies both online and physical stores to make shoppers' experiences more unified and build stronger relationships with them (Patov, 2024).



Figure 5: Enhancing Retail Experiences Through Technology

5.2. Sephora

By bringing together online and physical stores, Sephora offers customers a unique shopping experience for beauty items. You can try on Sephora makeup virtually by using the AR option inside their app. Because of this, customers are allowed to test the products before buying them, simplifying the decision-making process. Personalization added to the Sephora app improves their overall strategy for retail. Sephora takes advantage of the data from its loyalty program to create special offers for each shopper and give them a better shopping experience. Because of this information, Sephora can make shopping with them both in-store and online a smooth experience, resulting in stronger brand loyalty and better customer satisfaction.

5.3. Amazon Go

Amazon Go pioneered a new way of in-person shopping, enabling customers to skip those long checkout lines. Multiple technologies, such as IoT devices, computer vision, and AI, work together to identify products as they are taken from or placed back on shelves and record them virtually in each shopper's cart. Shoppers can enter Amazon Go stores using the app, pick up whatever they want, and leave when they finish shopping. Their Amazon account will be billed accordingly. Customers now enjoy unprecedented convenience and efficiency while shopping at Amazon Go. Amazon Go also establishes a groundbreaking new approach to physical retail by demonstrating the potential for advanced technology to decrease the need for human interaction without sacrificing accuracy or customer happiness (mousaviseyedamirreza, 2024).

6. Theoretical Perspectives and Models

6.1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM guides researchers in understanding how people decide whether or not to incorporate a new technological innovation into their lives and routines. TAM is important in interpreting how customers respond to phygital retail technology in brick-and-mortar stores. Following this framework, two main considerations affect a person's technology choice. How easy the technology is to use and how valuable a customer sees it. Perceived ease of use describes how effortless a user expects the experience of using a technology to be, and perceived usefulness represents the degree to which someone feels that a technology will improve their experience or efficiency (Anser et al., 2020). People are more adaptable to tech like smart mirrors when they find them user-friendly and realize the technology enhances their shopping experience or saves them time. Retailers should create user-friendly phygital interfaces that offer obvious advantages, promoting quick acceptance and increased customer participation.

6.2. Experience Economy Framework

The Experience Economy Framework put forth by Pine and Gilmore helps us understand how phygital retail strategies are developed and executed. Customer experiences can fall into one of four categories based on this model: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. Retailers use phygital integration to weave together various dimensions of the customer experience and make outstanding lasting impressions on shoppers. As a result, including interactive displays, AR games, digital tutorials, virtual try-ons, and beautiful store designs enhances the overall experience for customers. Leveraging the dimensions of the Pine and Gilmore framework allows retailers to develop phygital experiences that engage customers, forge intimacy, boost customer loyalty, and encourage them to spend more time in their stores (Jocovski, 2020).

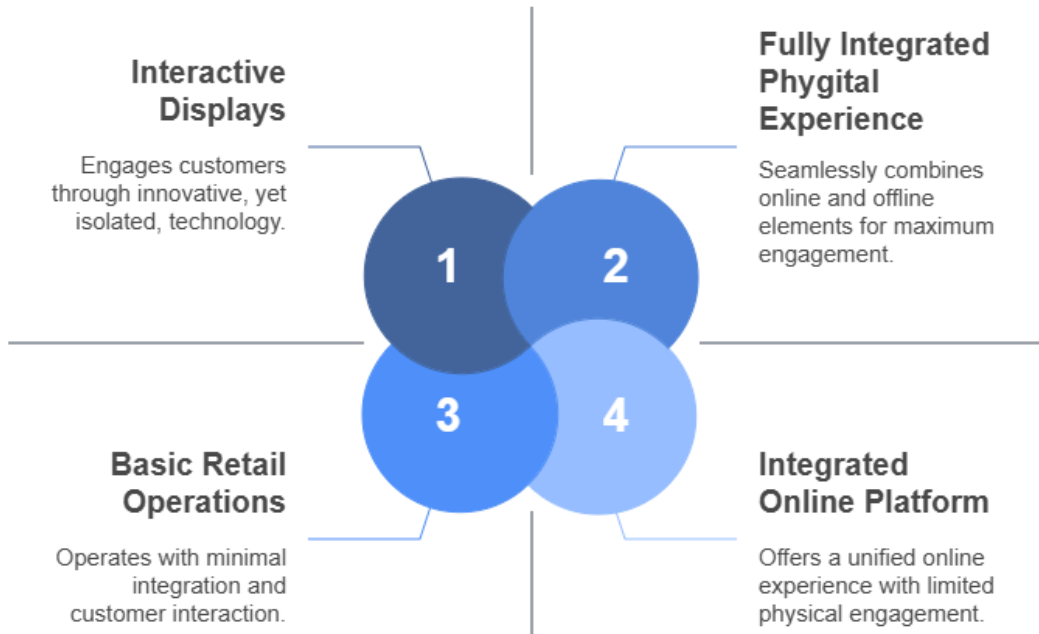


Figure 6: Phygital Retail Strategy Frameworks

6.3. Omni-channel Capability Maturity Model

The Omni-channel Capability Maturity Model provides the steps retailers must take to develop from disconnected channels to fully integrated phygital management. The model starts with a basic stage in which channels function as separate entities. Retailers gradually combine information and services on different platforms to deliver an effortless and unified customer experience. Reaching the highest stage of maturity requires total integration of customer information, interactions, inventory, and service functions throughout the retailer’s online and offline operations (Gerea et al., 2021). In this stage, retailers can deliver tailored, uniform, and spatially aware journeys to customers no matter how they originally engage with the brand. Reaching maturity in this model helps retailers improve their efficiency, delight customers, and keep pace with the ever-changing nature of digital retail...

7. Future Directions and Trends

7.1. AI-Driven Hyper-personalization

Retail is experiencing a transformation driven by AI and machine learning technologies that allow for hyper-personalization. With access to more in-depth customer data, brands can split their audience into highly specific segments. They can engage customers with real-time product suggestions, personalized content, and promotions that enhance CX across every digital and physical channel. AI enables retailers to rapidly respond to real-time customer interactions, creating a flexible environment that encourages customer loyalty and drives more sales (Kumar et al., 2024).

7.2. Metaverse and Virtual Commerce

The metaverse is bringing major changes to how merchants do retail business. Businesses are considering designing virtual stores in digital worlds so that customers can use VR and 3D avatars to interact with their products. Virtual commerce lets Users engage, play games, and view products in all directions. This environment allows retailers to build relationships with people everywhere and impress them with original and interactive setups (Payal et al., 2024).

7.3. Sustainable and Ethical Phygital Retail

People now prefer brands focusing on environmental responsibility, fairness, and clear information when selling goods. Because of this, technology in phygital retail is changing to respond to what customers now prefer. Today, brands must be responsible for the environment, be clear about where their products come from, and ensure ethical sourcing. Using QR codes to find a product's background, accepting digital invoices, and selecting recyclable or environmentally friendly packaging have quickly become standard and contribute to clearer and greener practices.

7.4. Blockchain for Trust and Transparency

Blockchain has shown great value in making retail more open and reliable. Blockchain allows us to accurately confirm a genuine product and monitor its path through the supply chain using its non-changeable data. Using this technology greatly decreases the chances of counterfeiting and helps people trust the product because everything is visible throughout the production and distribution process (Jabbar et al., 2020).

8. Conclusion

The phygital approach to retail makes changes to match the demands that customers now have. This development is more important than simply upgrading technology. People today want clear, personal, and rewarding experiences. For consumers in a phygital world, all their visits to stores and websites feel like one long journey. Now, many customers prefer to combine online and offline services in a convenient, trusted way. Phygital retail is helping businesses change the purchase process using augmented reality, AI, kiosks, and mobile tools. As a result of these developments, customers have better experiences, processes are improved, and retaining customers becomes easier. Accurate and real-time input, data collecting and swift reaction are very important in today's fast-changing consumer world because of phygital spaces. Phygital retail can be much more successful if it means doing more than adding new technology. Success in phygital strategies means customer journeys using online and offline channels are as seamless as possible. Besides, the rules and methods that direct these strategies should put transparency, equity, and sustainable behavior at the forefront to encourage people to trust and support them. Flexibility, understanding the customer, and the need for progress are now the focus of the new phygital retail approach to commerce. Successful organizations are using technology together with a human touch to help employees and teams create unique and adaptable environments that keep in step with new customer focus.

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