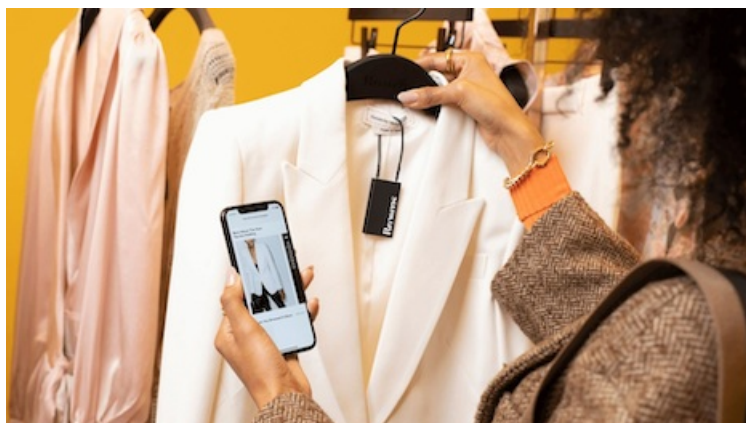


MARKETING

## Businesses need to embrace tech to become human centric: Forrester

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*Expanding digital services can help brands personalize the in-store experience. Image credit: Farfetch*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As boundaries between online and offline activities dissolve, consumer expectations are evolving.

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During a "Predictions 2022" webinar by Forrester, researchers and analysts discussed the challenges and opportunities facing businesses this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many consumer trends and companies that fail to respond risk falling behind.

"The pandemic crisis has made organizations starkly aware of how employee experience drives customer experience, and the need to create brand ambassadors for the organization," said Jennifer Ross, vice president and research director for CMO strategies at **Forrester**. "All of that is expanding the footprint of marketing across the entire ecosystem."

### Digital divide dissolves

As consumers started spending more time online at the onset of the pandemic, habits changed even among the most tech-savvy.

In an effort to adapt to the pandemic, 63 percent of consumers did at least one online behavior for the first time in 2020.

While 40 percent of U.S. consumers reported screen fatigue in the early days of the pandemic, they eventually adapted and adjusted to this more online lifestyle. Now, 48 percent of consumers are more convinced that technology has a positive impact on their quality of life.

According to senior analyst Anjali Lai, "technology optimism" is expected to grow in 2022 as consumers continue to expect digital capabilities to be incorporated into standard offline experiences.

This will develop in a few different ways.

First, more offline behaviors move online, resulting in new preferences and business opportunities. Second, consumers will continue integrating online resources with offline activities.

Finally, digital experiences will become more humanlike and intimate. More consumers will also opt for mobile experiences rather than traditional desktop websites, preferring the immediacy and accessibility.

"This disappearance of the digital and physical experiential divide in 2022 will mean that the traditional early adopter and digital holdout consumer excitement will no longer exist," Ms. Lai said. "And it will enable consumers to do more things in more places."

This year will also see more organizations embrace accessibility, benefitting both consumers and companies' bottom lines.

This has accelerated the growth of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs and increased hiring for jobs and careers in accessibility.

Accessibility has grown in importance for several reasons, including a growing elderly population in need of more accessible accommodations. By embracing accessibility, companies further benefit by attracting and retaining consumers, improving employee productivity, limiting legal dispute and improving customer experience.

"Forrester has highlighted a strong connection between employee experience and customer experience," said Fiona Mark, principal analyst at Forrester. "The more engaged your employees are, the better the experience that they offer your customers."

"And during this period of creativity and volatility with turnover and attrition and high levels commitment to employee experience, centering the people in your organization is going to reap dividends create value, create excellent experiences enable brands to increase their level of customer obsession."