

# The consumer transformed

Reimagine the retail and consumer landscape: Southeast Asia

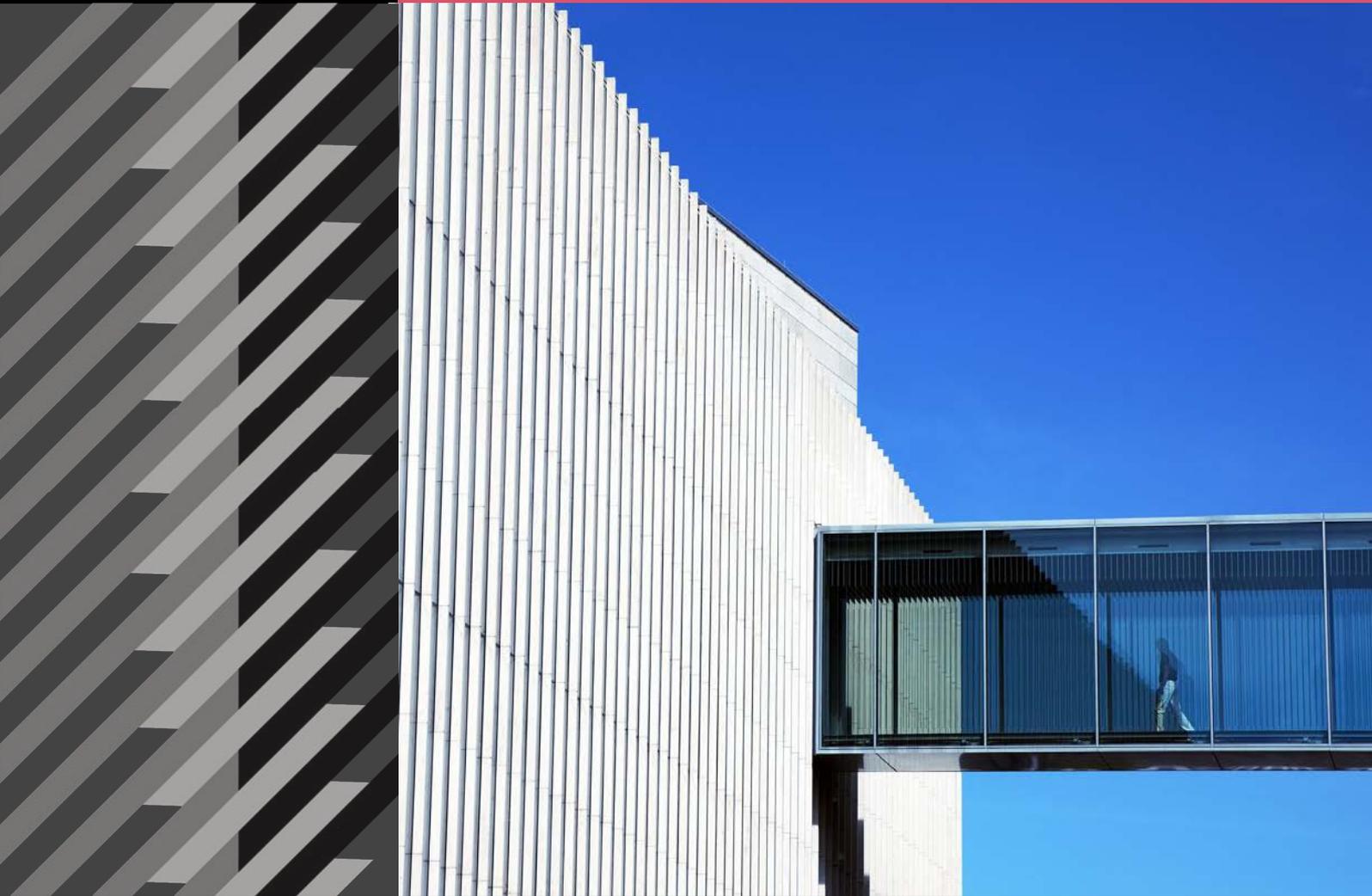




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# Introduction



Consumer needs and expectations have taken a seismic shift since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fast pace of behavioural changes – how people work, shop, dine, communicate and play – have impacted consumption patterns across categories, be it groceries, consumer goods, entertainment or healthcare.

It is imperative for businesses to understand the new dynamics of today's customer journey, as well as the extent to which it might change further, and quickly re-align their business models.

But this is just one side of the story. There are other global mega trends impacting the business landscape, such as:

- China's 'New Retail' propelled by data driven insights and customer centricity, that is transforming the entire retail value chain. Chinese internet giants are steering traditional retailers toward building new capabilities through build, partner and acquisitions model.

- Increasing protectionist approaches in the wider marketplace, in addition to the US-China trade tensions, disrupting supply and demand of goods, and causing supply chains to shift bases to emerging markets in Asia.
- Disproportionate growth across Southeast Asia (SEA), dependent the countries' management of their economies and the pandemic. OECD's Economic Outlook report projects the SEA economy to contract in 2020 by 2.8% before a potential take-off to 5.6% in 2021 [1].

In a nutshell, today's digital world consumers stand transformed, even as the mega global forces continue to sweep through the business landscape. Organisations not only need to understand how this new world affects all their customer touch points, but must also actively reinvent their growth path to avoid being at the mercy of external events.

In this publication, we take a closer look at the top retail and consumer trends in SEA and their impact, as well as the strategies for businesses to emerge stronger in the post-COVID-19 new world.



# Key consumer trends: Southeast Asia



## Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020

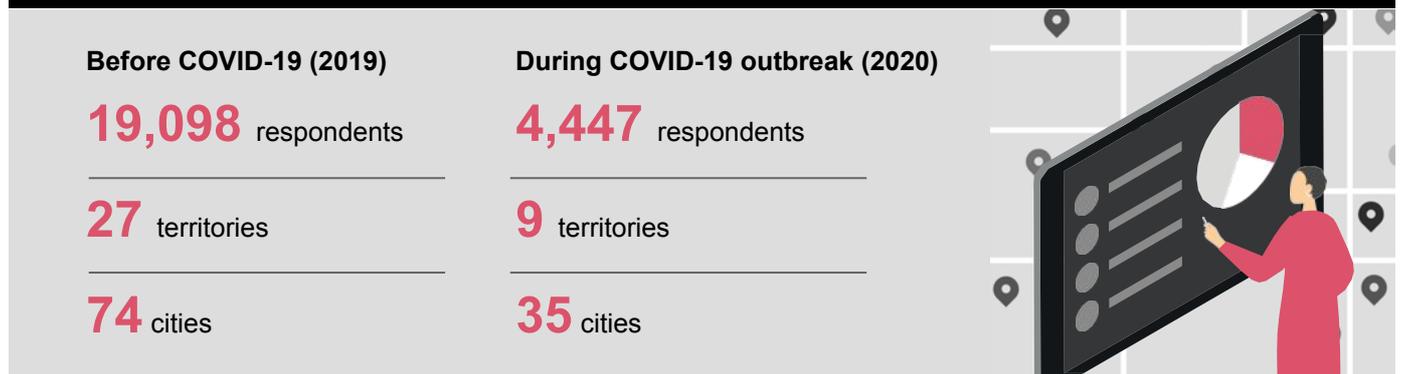
This is the 11th consecutive survey of global consumers undertaken by PwC Research, our global centre of excellence for primary research and evidence-based consulting services.

We polled city dwellers across 27 territories around the world, including consumers in six SEA cities, on their

purchasing behaviour in two separate studies, one before (2019) and one during the COVID-19 outbreak (2020) (Figure 1).

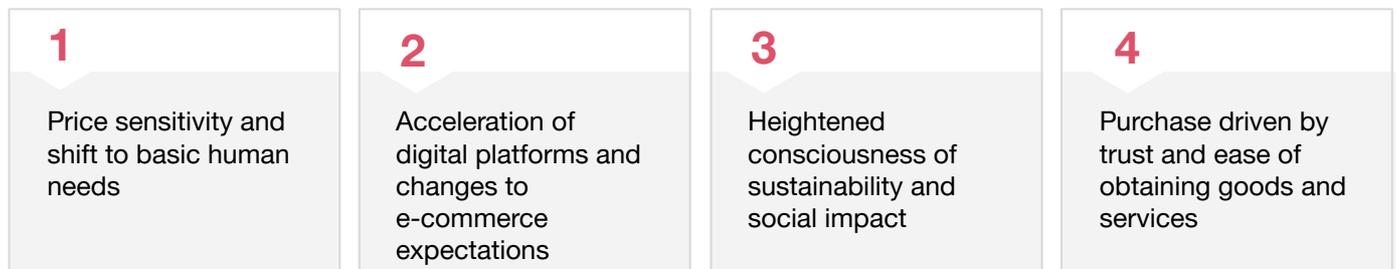
City dwellers are the main drivers of global consumption. Cities are vibrant centres of education and innovation, seedbeds and greenhouses for new ideas, as well as the convergence of economic activity. Looking at the trends in the cities would provide deeper understanding of how organisations could respond.

Figure 1: About the Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020



## Four key insights

After analysing the results of PwC's Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020, along with other third-party local and regional research, we see 4 key trends solidifying in SEA. These are largely consistent with trends globally.





## 1. Price sensitivity and shift to basic human needs

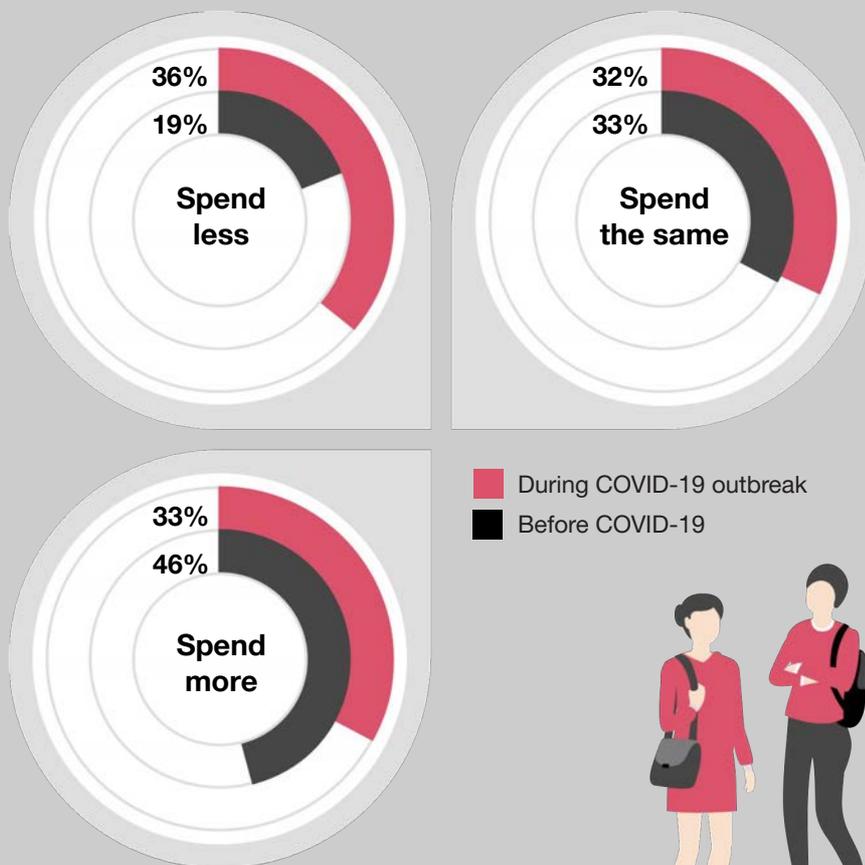
The COVID-19 crisis has deeply affected urban consumers' views on spending amid job losses and pay-cuts leading to reduced disposable income. Discretionary spending has reduced while the spending on essentials and health-related have increased.

PwC's Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020 [2] revealed that consumer confidence prior to the

pandemic was sky-high, with nearly 60% of respondents in SEA expecting to spend more for the next 12 months.

During the pandemic, the percentage of those (globally) who said they were going to spend less in the next few months almost doubled, and the number of those who said they were going to spend more dropped by more than 10 percentage points (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: During the COVID-19 outbreak, global consumers who say they will spend less almost doubled**



**Question, 2019:** In terms of your personal spend for the next 12 months, do you expect to...

Note [before COVID-19]: 4% of those who said 'spend less' said they are already holding back spending. 3% stated 'don't know.'

**Question, 2020:** As a result of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation, how do you expect your household spend to change over the next few months?

■ During COVID-19 outbreak  
 ■ Before COVID-19



Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020

Prior to the pandemic, majority (61%) of respondents in SEA ranked shopping as their top activity to spend their disposable income on, followed by dining out (51%) and travel/excursion (51%) (Figure 3). However, since the outbreak, **people are spending the most on groceries, in-place entertainment and home projects globally.**

Much in line with the global trend, Singapore's Supermarkets & Hypermarkets, Furniture & Household Equipment and Computer & Telecommunications Equipment industries registered sales growth between 16% and 22%. Sales of motor vehicles also rose by 12%. (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Prior to COVID-19: Top 3 activities SEA consumers preferred spending on**

Shopping		61%
Dining out		51%
Travel/Excursion		51%

**Question, 2020:** Which of the following activities, if any, do you prefer to spend your disposable income on? (Ranked Top 3)

Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020

**Figure 4: Singapore retail sales by category (Year-on-Year)**

Supermarkets & Hypermarkets		+22%
Furniture & Household Equipment		+19%
Computer & Telecommunications Equipment		+16%
Motor Vehicles		+12%
Wearing Apparel & Footwear		-29%
Cosmetics, Toiletries & Medical Goods		-29%
Department Stores		-35%

Source: Retail Sales Index and Food & Beverages Index, Aug 20, Singapore Department of Statistics



## 2. Acceleration of digital platforms and changes to e-commerce expectations

The lockdown during the pandemic has driven the surge in e-commerce and increased adoption of mobile and digital platforms as it was the main alternative for consumers to obtain their goods and services.

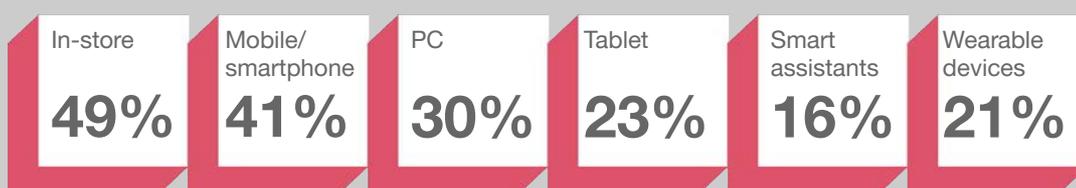
Normalisation of digital platforms and increased reliance on e-commerce has had a permanent impact on

consumer behaviour. With delivery services becoming a part of consumer's lifestyle, especially among city dwellers, the consumption of goods and services is now less limited by geographical boundaries and shopping can be done much easily on-the-go.

According to our Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020, prior to the pandemic, the preference globally and in SEA for using mobile phones, PCs and tablets to shop online were already comparable (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Prior to COVID-19, mobile shopping was already comparable to other types of online shopping in SEA**

Before COVID-19, mobile shopping was comparable to other types of online shopping.



**Question, 2019:** How often do you buy products (e.g., clothes, books, electronics) using the following shopping channels? (Showing "daily" and "weekly" replies)



Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020

The during-COVID-19 responses show that 50% of global respondents are likely to decrease their in-store shopping, and at least 90% are likely to maintain or increase their use of their mobile phone, computer, or tablet (Figure 6). We expect SEA will see a similar trend and online shopping will be a permanent shift in consumer behaviour.

However, despite the digital shift, it would be premature to write off physical stores — even though retail foot traffic has plunged during lockdown, our research shows that 49% of urban consumers globally believe their in-store shopping activity for nonfood items since the outbreak has stayed the same or increased.

**Figure 6: During COVID-19, mobile shopping grew in popularity globally**

**During the COVID-19 outbreak, mobile shopping grew in popularity** Likely to maintain current increased use

Online via mobile phone



93%

Online via computer



90%

Online via tablet



90%

TV shopping



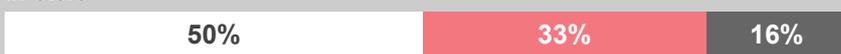
Smart home voice assistants



Wearable devices



In-store



**Question, 2020:** Still thinking about how you've been shopping for items other than groceries/food, how likely are you to continue to use this channel to the same extent when social distancing/social isolation measures are removed?

**Question, 2020:** Thinking about how you've been shopping for nonfood items (eg. items other than groceries, such as clothes, books, electronics, health and beauty, and household products) while social distancing/social isolation measures have been in place, how has your use of the following shopping channels changed, if at all?

Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020

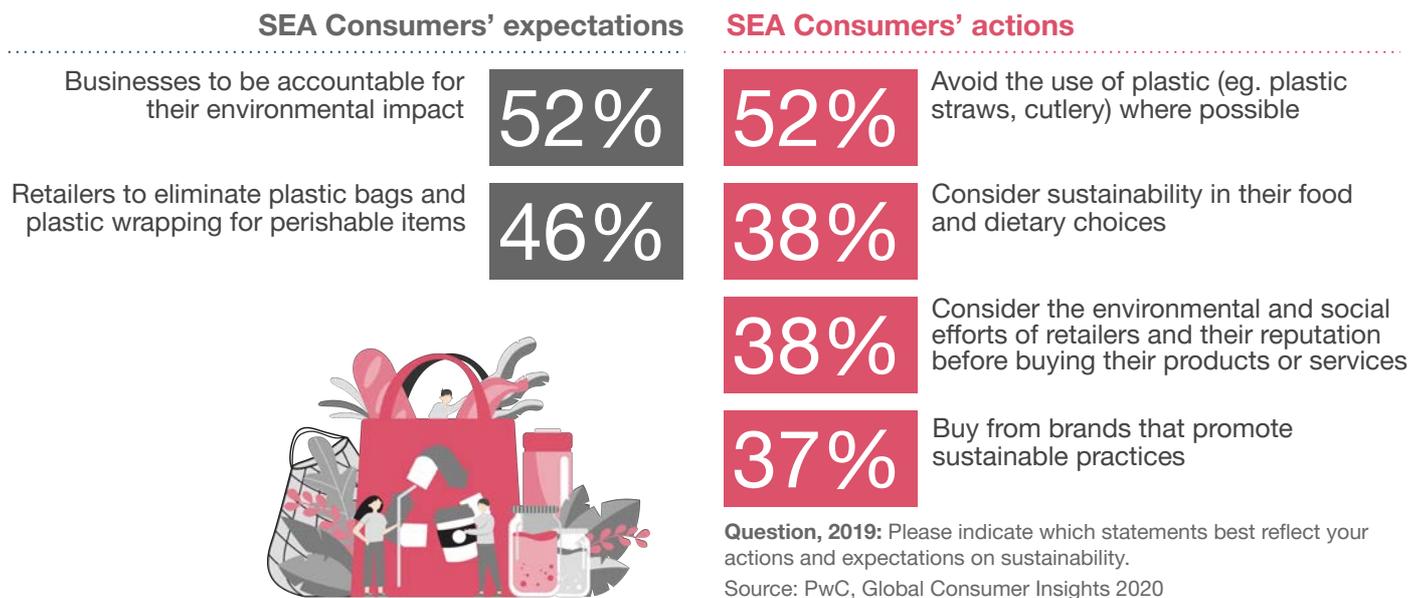
### 3. Heightened consciousness of sustainability and social impact

Prior to the pandemic, consumers were already showing more care towards sustainability and social impact. Signs of reduced air pollution and more vibrant biodiversity during the lockdown may spur on consumers support for sustainability. Consumers today

expect the government and businesses to care greatly for the planet (Figure 7).

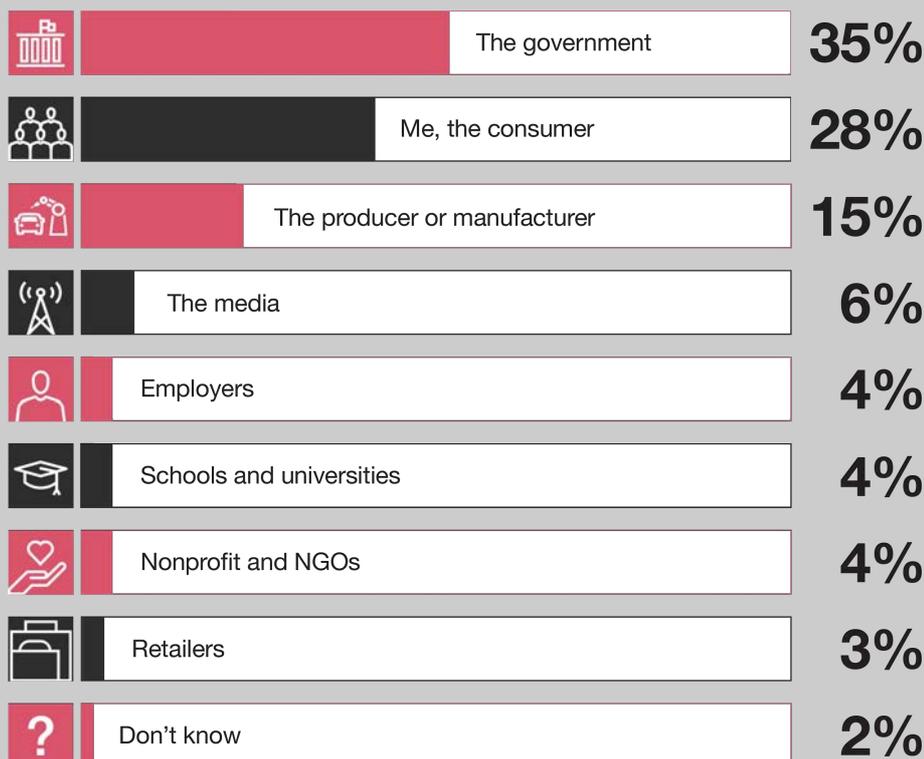
While the lockdown has resulted in an increase of medical waste and plastic pollution [3] due to increased reliance on delivery services and wastage due to packaging, according to PwC research, 65% of CEO believe the shift towards disposable products will be temporary [4].

**Figure 7: Consumers' consciousness of sustainability includes taking actions and expecting businesses to do the same.**



Our Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020 data before the onset of the pandemic showed that 35% of respondents in SEA hold their government accountable to drive sustainability, followed by 28% who hold themselves accountable (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Consumers look to their government to drive sustainable behaviours**



**Question, 2019:** In your opinion, who should take the biggest responsibility for encouraging sustainable behaviours and/or lifestyle practices in your city/country?

Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights 2020

## 4. Purchase driven by trust and ease of obtaining goods and services

PwC's Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020 highlights that SEA consumers' purchase behaviours are driven by a combination of trust and ease of obtaining the goods they need. The ability to test a product in-store and the assurance that the goods they want are in stock, as well as the "social aspect" and "fun pastime" are part of the top factors that would motivate consumers to visit a physical store rather than shop online.

The top 3 features that attract customers across SEA to physical stores are the ability to test products in-store,

proximity of store, and having in stock the customers' desired items (Figure 9). Retailers who are able to best position their shops with ready stock near their consumers would better meet the needs of consumers.

Interestingly, the same survey found that an innovative exciting store experience (e.g. showroom stores, pop-up stores) is a low priority in SEA. Automated check-out, personalised offers sent to smartphones upon entry into the store, and totally employee-free shopping experience (AI-powered tracking of shopping cart, automated checkout, automatic email receipts) are the top 3 technologies that would enhance the SEA customers' in-store experience (Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Top reason for a SEA consumer to enter stores is to test products**

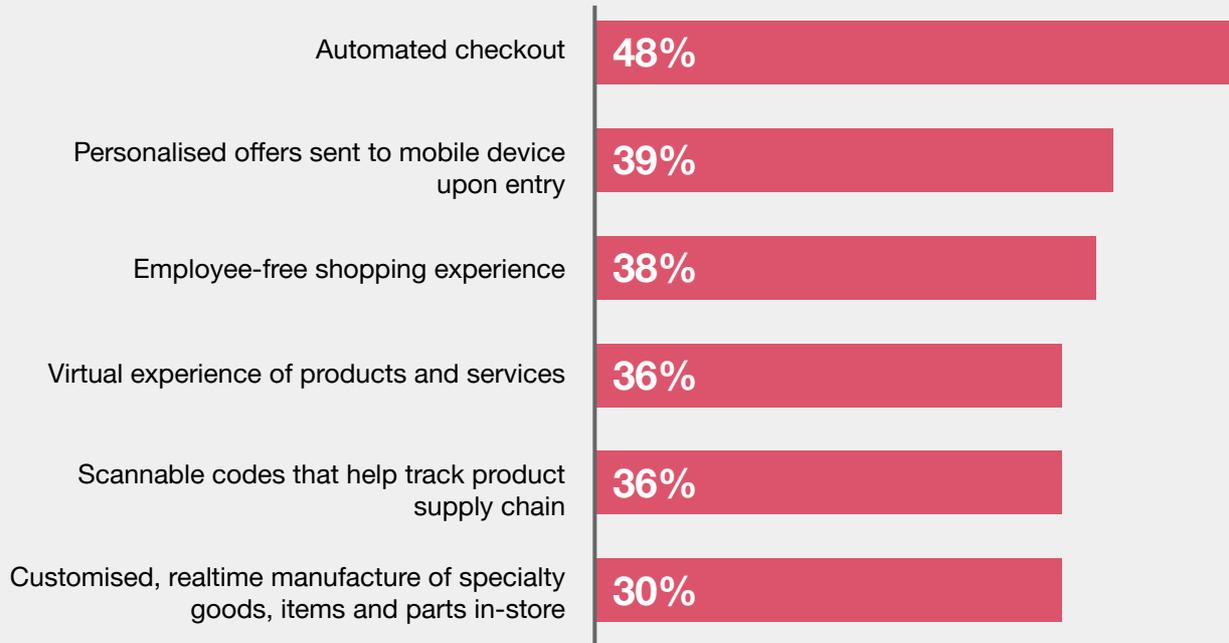


**Question 2019:** What brings you into a physical store in your city, rather than researching or purchasing online?

Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020



**Figure 10: Automation and personalisation are most preferred technologies that enhance in-store experiences for SEA consumers**



**Question, 2019:** What new technologies would enhance your in-store experience?

Source: PwC, Global Consumer Insights Survey, 2020

# Thriving in uncertainty





### BXT philosophy

Shutdowns during the pandemic have greased the digital runway. As some new consumer habits become ingrained, businesses that build value based on informed and relevant ideas, and have the technology and imagination to create engaging and inspiring experiences, will clearly stand out in the game. This is the underlying premise of the Business-Experience-Technology (BXT) philosophy (Figure 11).

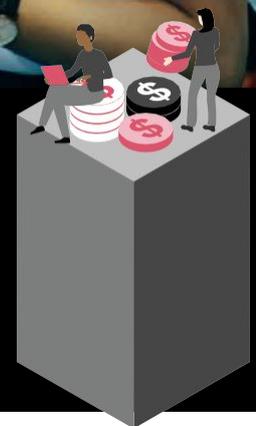
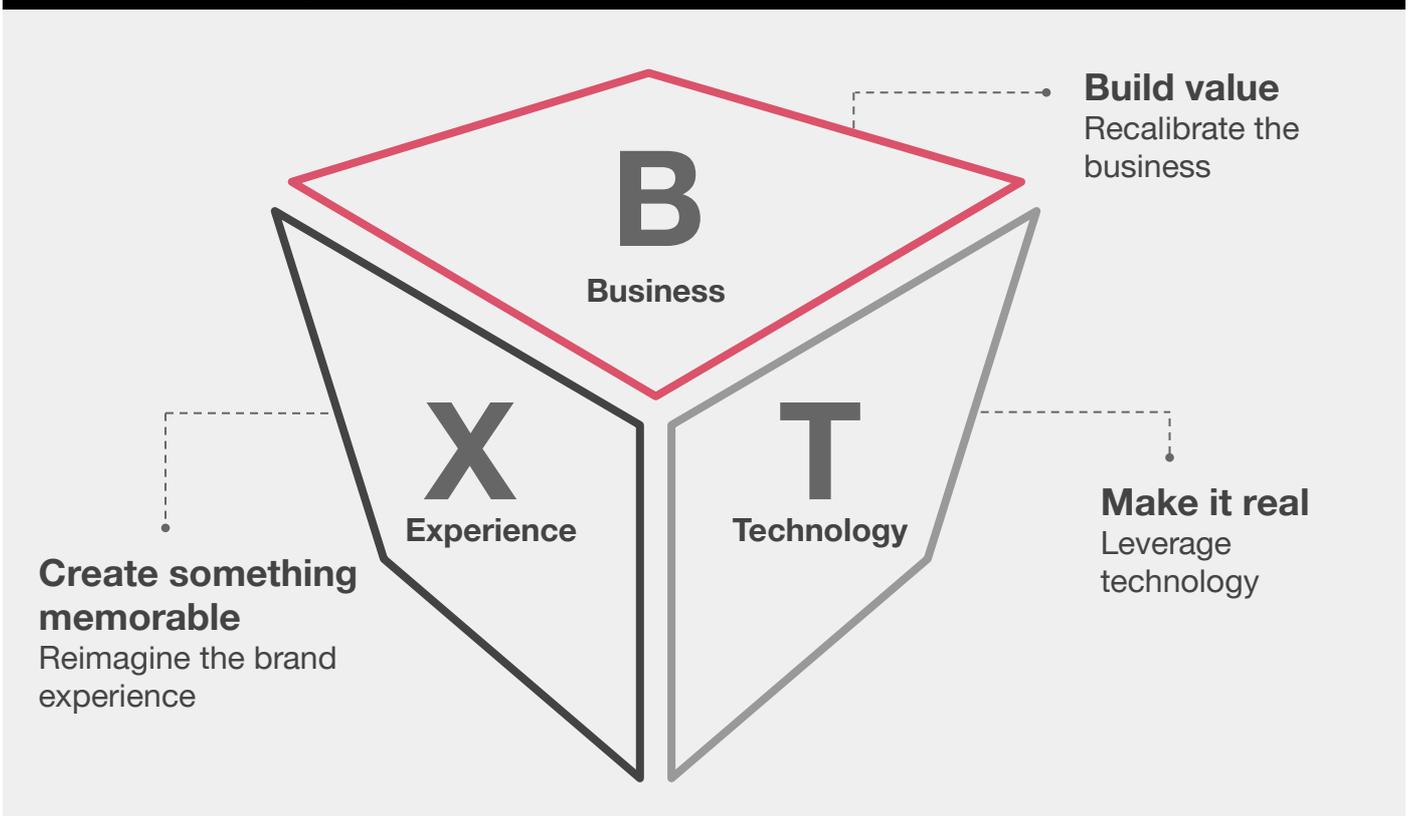


Figure 11: PwC's BXT philosophy



## 1. Recalibrate the business

With detailed understanding of the changing consumer landscape, organisations need to re-evaluate their business strategies and operating models to deliver the proposition.

### Key considerations:



#### A. Unlock business value by redirecting spend to maximise return on experience (ROX)

With customers spending on essentials, companies need to unlock new business value to appeal to their needs. Often times, customer experience (CX) is viewed in silo. But measuring ROX will help to understand earnings on investments in the parts of the company directly related to how people interact with the brand.

#### Build predictive intelligence using ROX to steer investments for greatest impact

Much consumer journey data is required to identify the potential increase in desirability of your product/service. Adopting predictive intelligence will help to spot the strengths and vulnerability in a customer journey.



#### Pivot from a functional investment approach to a journey-led portfolio

Traditional top-down, functional structures are changing to service end-to-end customer journey. The spend structure will need to evolve to a portfolio-based structure, centered around stages of the customer journey or different

customer journeys.

Combining this shift with the ability to predict ROX provides leaders with the foresight to rethink the cost structure while maximising experience impact.



Customers are willing to pay up to 16% price premium for a good customer experience.”

PwC Future of Customer Experience Survey 2017/2018 [5]



#### B. Digitally enable the workforce and develop new ways of working

Automation is listed as the top preferred choice for consumers' experience. The retail scene has been adopting new technology to transform their behind-the-scenes and in-store experiences. Upskilling and re-skilling the employees are therefore necessary for organisations to adapt. Technological, social and emotional skills will be essential as demand for manual skills decreases.

Traditional store manager and retail assistant roles will also evolve. Self-checkout terminals, self-serve lockers, unmanned automated convenience stores, vending machines are already a common sight. The employees need to be trained to work alongside robots and take on a more diverse set of responsibilities.



#### C. Explore partnership and merger & acquisitions (M&A) agenda

The customer expectations of digital experiences are high, and they expect sustainable and responsible business practices. Having a value-creation mindset from the early pre-deal stage is crucial to make M&A a successful growth lever. This market is for the brave, but as previous recessions have shown, some of the best deals are made in volatile times.

#### Focus on core

Companies can choose to focus on core assets and divest non-core assets to raise funds and re-invest in emerging winners



## Diversify your investment footprint and re-invest in emerging winners



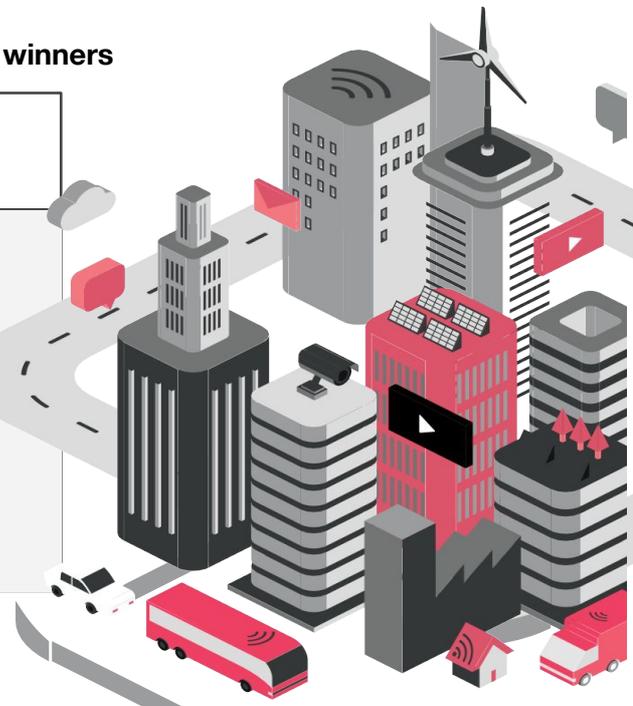
### End-customer geographies

Investors can look to increase their exposure in developing markets in ASEAN to leverage the underlying consumption growth. (e.g. Myanmar, Vietnam, The Philippines)



### Supply chain

With the supply chain disruption, companies have started to relook at their sourcing strategy. There is an opportunity to invest in supply chain capabilities close to existing assets to facilitate quicker and more flexible stock management.



## Invest in resilient/winning businesses



### Online brands/retailers

The accelerated uptake in online adoption has brought about strong revenue growth for online pure-plays and direct-to-consumer (DTC) models. Despite the uncertain times, the growth in this sector has attracted investment e.g. In June 2020, Temasek invested in Social Bella, an Indonesian beauty-tech startup.



### Tech enablers

As more companies move towards providing an omni-channel experience, companies are seeking innovative technological solutions to boost their online presence. Opportunities for investment span across the supply chain from warehouse solutions to customer facing e-commerce platforms or website solutions.



### Winning sub-categories

With the change in frequency and type of occasions to go out, categories such as comfort wear and athleisure have been outperforming the wider apparel industry, the same way skincare and personal care have been outperforming the wider beauty and personal care industry. Identifying these areas can help to gain an advantage.



## 2. Reimagine the brand experience

Consumers no longer view in-store and digital experiences the same, but as complementary. Organisations should (re)imagine the brand proposition and experience accordingly to remain attractive to consumers.

### Key considerations:



#### A. Relook at the consumer mix

Identify segments, and consider consumer personas for segments that you want to reach. Digitalisation has enabled variety of segmentation away from the traditional ones. Consider more precise consumer segments and use data analytics to enable the identification of these segments.

##### Emerging micro-segments

The lines dividing traditionally strong segments are blurring, allowing for micro-segments to form. These micro-segments could help to expand your market outreach.

##### Example:

The mass affluent may be further divided into financially resilient, financially impacted and structurally displaced mass affluent sub segments as the impact on them is uneven.

##### New borderless segments

With more services delivered virtually, geographical and physical boundaries are less significant. Services traditionally bound by geography can reach out to more consumers, or even go global.

##### Example:

A ticketing and event agency changed their entire customer segment from 'in-person event goer' to 'virtual/ never-sold' to before customer groups across ages and family profiles.



#### B. Consider brand proposition as a platform for fast experimentation

Being able to conduct quick testing and refine the product/service will be crucial to thrive in the market. Nonetheless, the first-mover advantage creates significant leverage only if the experience is pleasant, meaningful and convenient to the consumer.

##### Repurpose existing products/ services

Re-evaluate your product/services portfolio for relevance to consumer needs, and bring out new products or services rapidly.

##### Consider new pricing strategies

Pay-per-serve or pay-as-you-use subscription-based strategies can help to increase the Customer Lifetime Value. Reward consumers who engage with the brand to drive greater loyalty and advocacy.

##### Purpose-driven business

Embed societal purpose into the experiences offered, driving sustainability and social impact.

This will allow customers to connect with the brand at a deeper level where it resonates with their own sense of purpose.



Example: Targeting the 260 million children at home during the COVID-19 lockdown, Lego released a 'Build & Talk' range in July 2020 to promote online safety discussion at home. Parents can build characters online based on the child's interest and use the starter kit to have useful conversations on online safety.



## C. Create seamless and frictionless experiences

With many emerging technological options for consumers, the role of physical retail spaces is changing. Be it automation or personalised in-store offers, the consumer experience need to adapt to the changing expectations to establish brand trust and reliability of services.



### Rethink the role of physical retail spaces

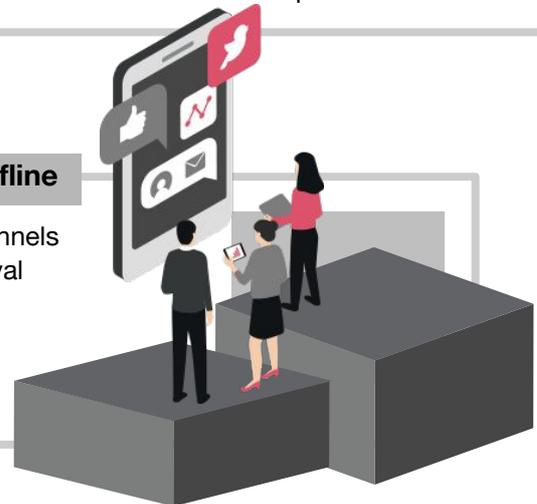
Create meaningful human interactions for consumers to gain respite from information overload, join the community, and experience the product as part of their lifestyle. Retail spaces need to ensure environmental safety and convenience to retain consumer base.

In the short term, pay-and-collect services are in demand to limit the number of in-store consumers. Stores need to calibrate their layout to ensure smooth experience.

### Delivering personalised experiences both online and offline

Consider crafting personalised messages via specific online channels to reach out to new consumers and sustain engagement with loyal consumers.

Personalised in-store experiences increase brand engagements and can draw traffic to stores or your website.



### Use data to build competitive advantage

Data is the differentiating factor for brands as it provides deeper understanding into consumer's preferences. It enables retailers to achieve precision in targeting, messaging and response to meet the consumer promise.

### Build digital trust

Digital trust between consumers and brands can easily be corroded with misinformation or fake news, especially in light of exponentially higher digital presence and instancy of news.

Brands must respond quickly and establish trust in the consumer experiences at every step.



### 3. Leverage technology

For more sophisticated customer engagement and delivery of brand promise, investing in new technologies to accelerate digital innovation is key to differentiating capabilities for players in the retail sector. There are three prominent technological enablers for the industry to prioritise - supply chain innovation, precise engagement and secure experience, and boosting e-payment capability.



#### A. Supply chain innovation

As seen in earlier sections, customers expect reliable and positive experience in their purchase journey. Supply chain transformation and integration with multiple value chain partners can help build on brand trust and create positive experience.

Supply chain of the (near) future will be connected and self-orchestrated ecosystems, where partners receive near-real-time and simultaneous access to relevant information, enabling optimised and informed decision-making.

Consumer companies must be able to leverage the supply chain ecosystem to increase responsiveness and provide a reliable experience in line with consumer expectations. Retailers can extract more specific data



to better forecast product and inventory needs, improve and advance their services, shaping warehouse management, or implementing self-managing inventory systems. An intelligent supply chain can also provide better customer experience by providing the customer with real-time delivery status and order-tracking capabilities.



Companies who have achieved external integration or end-to-end orchestration of their supply chain reported 6.8% supply chain cost savings coupled with a 7.7% revenue increase last year.”

PwC Connected and autonomous supply chain ecosystems 2025 [6]



## Four supply chain innovations to capitalise on



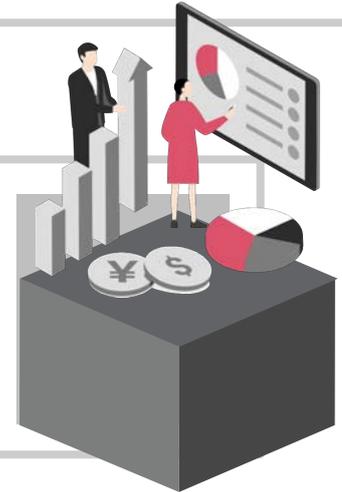
### End-to-end supply chain visibility and digital twinning

Most leading retailers have visibility over product contents, key financial metrics and logistics flows in near-real-time.

Consider expanding the capacity to use a control tower to generate a digital twin - a virtual replica of the supply chain used to run simulations, to better understand what is happening across your supply chain.

### Dynamic supply chain segmentation

This enhances customer centricity and balances service levels, costs and margins. Having a deep understanding of customer desires is the foundation to design the supply chain and to prioritise services for each customer group. Businesses are now moving towards a flexible, requirement-driven configuration in which each transaction can be dynamically allocated to one of the supply chain segments.



### Demand forecasting and demand sensing

Invest in software to automate order processes, enhanced by machine learning. Leading retailers have taken one step further to use algorithms to automate order processes without reliance on rules-based programming. Having more than 50 parameters factored into their analysis, they are able to make more precise demand forecasts and more cost effective orders.

### Closed loop integrated planning and execution

Visibility over end-to-end planning (from customers to sub-suppliers) across time horizons, integrating financial and volume plans, enable you to balance demand and supply. This information can directly connect to execution through collaborative workflows and automated decision-making using advanced analytics.





## B. Precise engagement and secure experience

While incorporating technology will enable the retailers to gain access to key information on consumer behaviour with precision, it must be implemented with customer-centricity to ensure convenient and pleasant experiences.

### Experiment with emerging technologies

- Virtual and digital assistants including chatbots to provide immediate responses to the queries
- Augmented or virtual reality tools to enable consumers to try the product or visualise them in their selected environment
- Robotics and drones for last-mile delivery
- Body-scanning or 3D imaging technology for accurate measurements to customise or recommend products
- Visual or voice search options to help consumers streamline search
- Wearables/sensor-based technology to monitor health and fitness
- Internet of Things – connecting various capabilities together and providing new services

### Securing customer data

Increasingly, organisations are investing in data analysis to enable more precise engagement. However, to power personalised experiences throughout the customer journey with accuracy, retailers need to secure consumers' consent for data collection. The issue of data privacy and security of personal information will become more prominent as consumers gain awareness of the risk of sharing personal data.



Our Global Consumer Insight Survey 2020 shows that the majority (52%) of businesses in SEA agree with sharing their consumer data with organisations if it enables them to receive a better customised or personalised experience.

However, almost 30% of respondents from both SEA “neither agree nor disagree” to sharing their consumer data with organisations, implying the need to improve transparency, or security assurance in data sharing and handling processes.

Hence, investments in anti-fraud tools can help build brand credibility and trust.





### C. Boosting e-payment capabilities

With the blur in online and offline divide, there will be continued convergence in experience towards invisible payments, which is expected to maintain its strong current trajectory. Moreover, the industry has seen a surge in click-to-collect service and a preference of contactless payments due to convenience and reduced risk of the virus transmission.

High friction in e-commerce sites, high incidence of fraud, high cost-to-serve for businesses are some current obstacles in adoption of e-payments. Regulators and financial institutes are working to roll-out offerings that leverage and bring differentiation using standards



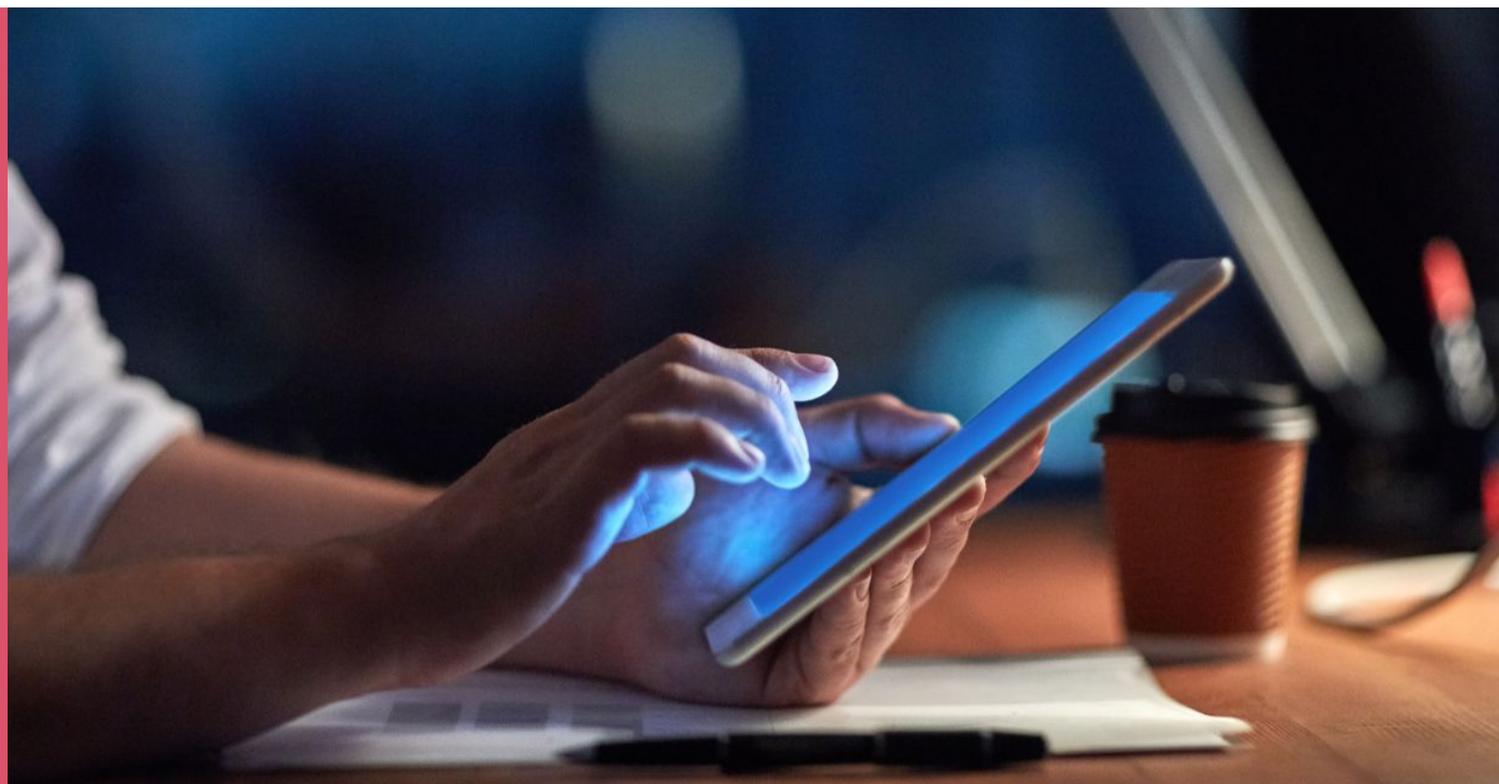
**The most common form of mobile payment made by SEA consumers was made in-store (57%), followed by order-and-pay (48%).**

PwC Global Consumer Insights 2020



such as EMVco's Click-to-Pay (formerly Secure Remote Commerce), tokenised Card-on-file that simplifies compliance. As these methods harmonise the baseline experience, the resulting simplification of the operating model will also translate to improved margins, bigger shopping basket sizes and increased share of mind. The new baseline capabilities will fuel further innovation with invisible payments across different usages and interaction patterns.

Whilst the adoption of e-payments is getting stronger, it is also broadening the divide between those who are technologically sophisticated and the rest (e.g. senior people, those with any impairment, those that are cared for and also those from lower socio-economic background). Viable solutions need to be identified so that society as a whole can benefit.



## What's next

The permanence of the behavioural changes accelerated by COVID-19 remains anyone's guess. But our recent consumer research is pointing to an increased desire among citizens for transparency, sustainability, cleanliness, community living and social consciousness. The need for all consumer-facing companies to establish trust with the consumer remains clear.

Our insights suggest that the pace of change and industry disruption underway will drive the emergence and establishment of a new cohort of winners and laggards in our industry over the next decade, with the consumer at the centre as never before. Understanding the pace of consumer change can put companies in a position to navigate the disruption.

## Survey methodology

For our 2020 Global Consumer Insights Survey, PwC set out to understand urban dwellers' experiences. We polled more than 19,000 consumers globally, covering 74 cities in 27 territories (Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Middle East, Netherlands, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, UK, US, Vietnam).

The survey was translated into 19 languages and fielded in August and September 2019. The respondents were at least 18 years old and were required to have shopped online at least once in the previous year.

While the existing retail landscape is being tested, there are still pockets of opportunities for businesses to tap into. Emerging stronger requires resilience at reimagining new business models, experimenting with the customer experiences and leveraging technology as your growth levers.



The quantitative findings were supplemented by extensive interviews with prominent economists, business executives and city leaders from around the world.

After COVID-19 hit, we worked closely with an online panel to reach consumers from key cities in nine territories (China, France, Germany, Italy, Middle East, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, UK), collecting responses from 4,447 consumers. The territories were selected because they were at different stages of recovery from COVID-19.

Fieldwork was completed in April and May 2020.

<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/consumer-markets/consumer-insights-survey.html>



# Let's get started today



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