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ORIGINAL PAPER

Value creation in post-pandemic retailing: a conceptual framework and implications

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Abstract

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the retail landscape has undergone profound and enduring changes, necessitating a comprehensive examination of its implications for both consumers and retailers. This study provides a systematic analysis of emergent shifts in consumer behavior and the resulting changes in consumer value creation. The authors develop a conceptual framework encompassing five key dimensions that likely will reshape value creation in post-pandemic retailing: hyperfunctional shopping, holistic health, hybrid connectedness, conscious hedonism, and responsible consumption. The authors propose that consumers will prefer retailers that accomplish creating value based on these dimensions through next-level customer experiences rooted in inspiration and social interaction, novel technologies, and innovations in store concepts, services, or retail operations. Critical to successfully delivering next-level customer experiences in this new retail landscape is retailers' engagement in collaborations—both within the industry and with external partners. Accounting for these developments, this study offers implications for retailing practice and provides a roadmap for future retailing research in five key areas pertaining to the management of responsible, health-related, and digital customer experiences, the management of collaborations for creating next-level customer experiences, and the effective monetization of the evolving dimensions of value creation.

Keywords Pandemic · Covid-19 · Retailing · Value creation · Customer experience · Responsibility

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1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed both consumer behavior and retail operations, with some of these changes potentially shaping a new normal for tomorrow's retailing (Beckers et al. 2021; Brüggemann and Olbrich 2022; Gruntkowski and Martinez 2022; Roggeveen and Sethuraman 2020; Verhoef et al. 2022). To lower the spread of the virus, governments have issued regulations that affected retailers directly through forced shutdowns of stationary outlets and indirectly through social distancing requirements that changed consumers' shopping behaviors (e.g., maintaining a physical distance from others, limiting personal contacts, and wearing masks or gloves; Bates 2020; CDC 2020; Kirk and Rifkin 2020).

Initial research addressing the effects of Covid-19 has discussed instant reactions, for example, hoarding or coping activities observable during the early phase of the pandemic, an increased preference for products with authentic advertising messages, the acceleration of online retailing, and the growth of contactless touchpoints (Campbell et al. 2020; Kirk and Rifkin 2020; Park et al. 2022). Other research outlined pandemic-induced changes in consumer behavior with rather unclear consequences for retailers, such as consumers' increased improvisation behavior (e.g., celebrating weddings under restrictions), the discovery of new talent (e.g., cooking or do-it-yourself activities), and the accelerated adoption of new technologies (Sheth 2020). Verhoef et al. (2022) provide an overview of conceptual and empirical research examining pandemic-related effects published in 2020 and 2021. Focusing on the implications of pandemic-related changes in consumer behavior for logistics and supply chains, Cai et al. (2023) summarize existing academic research on consumer behavior during the pandemic.

After the World Health Organization declared the end to the global health emergency state of COVID-19 in May 2023, it is time to reflect on which of these changes might have enduring consequences for how retailers can create value for consumers. Our work ties in with previous research predicting the effects of the pandemic on consumer behavior and retailing (Cai et al. 2023; Verhoef et al. 2022) and adds to research that has examined sources of consumer value creation in pre-pandemic times, including digitalization and new technologies (Dekimpe 2020; Hoyer et al. 2020; Reinartz et al. 2019). Highlighting that the pandemic has accelerated the technology-powered transformation of the retailing landscape, Grewal et al. (2021) examine technology as a key enabler for retail strategies. Accordingly, we propose that while the pandemic acts as a catalyst for already ongoing developments in some domains, such as technology and digitalization, it also acts as a transformer for value creation in other domains rarely considered in pre-pandemic times. The Covid-19 pandemic as a catalyst and transformer requires a systematic reassessment of value creation in retailing with a focus on the long-term consequences of the pandemic from a retailing perspective. In particular, our conceptual examination aims to discuss how initial short-term adaptions will lead to sustained changes in consumer value creation. It develops answers to the following questions:

1. How has the pandemic affected and redefined consumer value creation in retailing? Which dimensions of value creation will shape retailing in the new normal?
2. What are the strategic long-term implications of changes in consumer value creation for tomorrow's retailing landscape and retailing research?

In answering these research questions, our paper addresses the call to investigate the "long-term impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior and provide guidance on how retailers should cope with those changes" (Roggeveen and Sethuraman 2020, p. 169). In doing so, we make several contributions to research and practice. First, we provide a theory-based, structured, and systematic analysis of the many observable changes in consumer behavior that occurred during the pandemic. Specifically, we identify changes in consumer behavior in different areas corresponding to Maslow's (1943) categories of human needs and categorize whether shifts in consumer behavior are grounded in promotion or prevention motivation applying the regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997). Second, through our systematic analysis of changes in consumer behavior, we identify and conceptualize five dimensions of consumer value creation, which likely will reshape value creation in the new retailing landscape: hyperfunctional shopping, holistic health, hybrid connectedness, conscious hedonism, and responsible consumption. Third, our study highlights how retailers can gain a competitive advantage by catering to these five dimensions of value creation. In particular, we propose that retailers should create next-level customer experiences that are rooted in inspiration and social interaction, novel technologies, and innovations in store concepts, services, or retail operations. To put these activities into action, retailers need to establish new collaboration structures with other retailers and external partners. Fourth, we provide paths for further research, identifying five areas with corresponding research questions that especially address the management of responsible, health-related, or digital customer experiences, the role of collaborations for experience creation, and the effective monetization of the value-creation dimensions. Finally, with the retailing ecosystem constantly facing waves of disruption (Gielens 2022), it is important to note that the pandemic only constitutes one example of such a disruption. Accordingly, our conceptual examination provides a structured approach that might be applied to systematically examine how other or future crises can affect consumer behavior and value creation in the retailing landscape.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we develop a theoretical framework for systematically analyzing consumer behavior changes during the pandemic. Our framework structures changes within central areas of consumer behavior (Maslow 1943) and along their underlying promotion- and prevention-based motivations (Higgins 1997). Using this framework, we identify and discuss five emerging dimensions of value creation in retailing and substantiate their plausibility with examples from publicly available data. We then elaborate on how retailers should act on these new dimensions of value creation and discuss implications for retail strategies in the new retailing landscape. We further present potential avenues for future research. Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual approach.

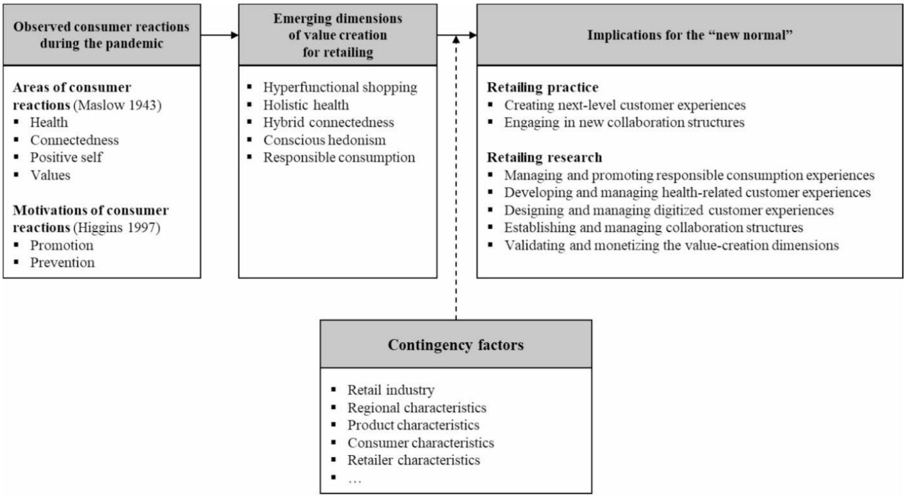

Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

2 Theoretical grounding and framework for conceptual analysis

2.1 Theoretical and methodological foundations

To identify possible dimensions of consumer value creation in the new normal, we systematically analyze numerous changes in consumer behavior that occurred during the pandemic. Specifically, in line with qualitative data analysis procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1967), we followed an inductive approach, as the aim of our investigation was to develop a new framework, rather than to test existing theory. In doing so, we switched between theory and data, resembling a mixed bottom-up/top-down approach.

First, we engaged in an open, bottom-up search for studies on consumer behavior changes during the pandemic. In our iterative discussions, it became evident that the plethora of observed consumer behavior changes—such as in the domains of health, connection, and home—can be mapped onto the fundamental categories of human needs as proposed by Maslow (1943). According to this theoretical grounding, consumer (re-)actions are a result of consumers' motivations to fulfill different needs pertaining to physiological drives, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Individuals can be motivated by only a few or all of the categories simultaneously (Maslow 1943). Maslow's (1943) structure of needs thus served as a rationale for clustering our studies into areas of consumer behavior as they map onto fundamental needs that consumers strive to satisfy. Switching from data to theory at this point allowed us to ensure that our examination of consumer reactions covered all relevant areas of consumer needs and motivations. Corroborating the link between Maslow's hierarchy of needs model and consumer behavior, previous research has relied on this theoretical account to substantiate the motivations for consumer behavior changes during the pandemic and used it as a foundation for structuring observed changes (Cai et al. 2023).

Second, our discussions revealed that consumers might display different behavioral approaches when pursuing the fulfillment of the same need. To account for this observation and to further differentiate consumer responses during the pandemic, we integrated Higgins (1997) regulatory focus theory. Specifically, regulatory focus theory posits that consumers seek end states that either deal with aspirations, advancement, growth, and accomplishments (through a promotion focus) or with responsibilities, safety, and protection (through a prevention focus). A promotion focus is usually associated with behaviors that seek to realize positive outcomes and gains, whereas a prevention focus is associated with behaviors that aim to avoid negative outcomes and losses. Consequently, consumers can display different behavioral approaches when pursuing the fulfillment of the same need, depending on their motivational focus. The combination of Maslow's theory of human needs with Higgins's regulatory focus theory allowed us to understand how consumers go about approaching and pursuing the fulfillment of these needs, i.e., either through a promotion or prevention focus. To illustrate, during the pandemic, consumers exercised to build a strong immune system (promotion focus) or stayed at home to avoid infection (prevention focus). While these behaviors differ, they reflect consumers' pursuit of the same underlying need, namely securing health. Substantiating the link between regulatory focus and consumer behavior, previous research has shown that having a promotion or prevention focus affects consumers' interest in certain product features and product evaluations (Werth and Foerster 2007). Likewise, demonstrating the role of regulatory focus for consumer reactions during the pandemic, previous research has shown that a stronger prevention focus is associated with lower levels of social activities (e.g., going to a restaurant, public event, or bar), while a promotion focus is associated with increased self-care for one's health by, for example, taking vitamin supplements (Nakkawita et al. 2021).

In essence, while Maslow's (1943) model facilitates the identification of consumer behavior areas that correspond to fundamental needs, Higgins's (1997) regulatory focus theory helps to understand the strategies of how consumers pursue the fulfillment of these needs. Combining both theories of human motivation provides a framework that allows a comprehensive view of motivations for consumer behavior reactions during the pandemic. Accordingly, we discussed our set of initial studies against the background of the emerging theoretical framework. Categorizing the diverse consumer reactions reported in these studies into the emerging framework shaped our understanding of the underlying value-creation dimensions and allowed us to identify areas and motives of consumer reactions that might have been underrepresented in the previous collection of our studies. To this end and to further validate our framework, we engaged in a more directed, top-down literature search. Our constant discussions led to the final five dimensions, as reported in Table 1. In line with the procedures of qualitative research, we stopped the search for further studies after reaching a point of theoretical saturation (Perkmann et al. 2018).

2.2 Areas and motivations for consumer behavior change

We reflect changes in consumer behavior during the pandemic in four central areas as they correspond to Maslow's categories of needs. Table 1 provides an overview of the four areas of consumer behavior, the underlying prevention- and promotion-based motivations, and examples of consumer behavior change along the five value-creation dimensions.

2.2.1 Consumer behavior in the area of health

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers faced a globally spreading, novel virus that seemed uncontrollable and was associated with severe disease course and death. This challenged consumers' safety needs (Maslow 1943) and motivated changes in consumer behavior primarily pertaining to the area of health (Campbell et al. 2020; Galoni et al. 2020). In line with regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997), health behaviors motivated by a prevention focus aimed at avoiding a Covid-19 infection, whereas behaviors motivated by a promotion focus reflected consumers' desire to stay healthy or sustain and improve their overall physical and mental health.

2.2.2 Consumer behavior in the area of connectedness

Love and belonging needs pertain to humans' genetically programmed social nature to be in the company of and relate with others (Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Social distancing guidelines challenged this need for connectedness as governments temporarily shut down public spaces and facilities that usually offered consumers the opportunity for social encounters, such as parks, stores, bars, restaurants, theaters, or gyms (Brocato et al. 2015; Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Following official "stay-at-home" orders, many consumers practiced self-isolation and minimized their physical social contact (Galoni et al. 2020). Working from home and the closure of schools and universities also lowered the connectedness with co-workers and fellow students and changed individuals' organizational identification (Ashforth 2020). Accordingly, pandemic consumer behaviors of connectedness were partly motivated by prevention-focused strategies of avoiding or postponing offline interactions, such as staying at home and replacing physical with online interactions. At the same time, consumers sought physical connections and engaged in behaviors driven by promotion-based motivations, such as seeking meaning in the few remaining physical encounters in their immediate environment.

2.2.3 Consumer behavior in the area of positive self

Esteem needs comprise the desire to positively evaluate oneself, to view oneself as worthwhile, and to seek esteem from other people (Maslow 1943). Central to fulfilling esteem needs are experiences of achievement, competence, accomplishment, social reputation, recognition, or appreciation (Crocker and Park 2004; Leary and Downs 1995). Limiting the opportunities to experience self-esteem through mastery in sports, education, and culture, the pandemic challenged the realization of a positive self. Likewise, through the requirements of social distancing, the pandemic prevented various forms of social recognition and appraisal and, for example, limited the opportunities to buy and display status or luxury goods that typically serve esteem needs (Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Consumers driven by a prevention-based motivation

Table 1 Examples of consumer reactions during the pandemic and emerging dimensions of value creation

Area of consumer behavior motivation focus	Core consumer reactions (short-term)	Examples	Dimension of value creation (long-term)
Health prevention focus: avoiding contagion	Online: • more online shopping • new customer segments buy online • first-time online purchases in new categories	• 71% (67%) of consumers who bought consumer electronics (DIY and garden) products for the first time online state that they will possibly also do so in the future (IFH Köln and Capgemini 2020). • 63% of German customers using digital channels for the first time purchased products (esp. grocery and entertainment) (McKinsey & Company 2020). • American consumers over 65 years spent 49% more on online purchases compared to the previous year (Bhattarai 2021). • 88% of consumers agree that they buy more products online to reduce their physical contacts to a minimum (KPMG 2021). • 55% of European consumers report that owing to the pandemic, they bought an item online that they had never bought online before (KPMG 2021). • 18% of European consumers tried out a new digital shopping method (McKinsey & Company 2021).	Hyperfunctional shopping Providing more efficient or more convenient shopping processes or completely delegating the shopping process to technology
	Offline: • more planned shopping • more focus on safety and efficiency • less focus on the shopping experience	• Increased use of automated shopping technology (Business Reporter 2020; Casselman 2021). • 77% of consumers try to reduce shopping frequency (CodeCheck 2020). • 60% of consumers state they use a shopping list for faster shopping (Ernst & Young 2020). • 78% of consumers would prefer self-checkout technology for checkout (Ernst & Young 2020). • 20% of consumers visit an alternate store owing to better hygiene measures (Ernst & Young 2020). • Consumers focus on buying necessities, such as food, hygiene, and cleaning products (Di Crosta et al. 2021). • 40% of American shoppers enjoy shopping in stores far less than before the pandemic (Lai 2021). • 55% of millennials changed their shopping behavior to less frequent but bigger-basket shopping trips (PwC 2021a).	

Table 1 (continued)

Area of consumer behavior motivation focus	Core consumer reactions (short-term)	Examples	Dimension of value creation (long-term)
Health promotion focus: seeking health	• increased demand for health-related products and services • increased demand for healthy nutrition	• 46% increase in health and fitness app downloads worldwide (Ang 2020). • 65% of consumers are now more likely to consider their health in day-to-day decision-making (Lanzi 2020). • As a result of the pandemic, consumers increasingly focus on mental health and well-being (69%), medical needs (64%), and diet (63%) (PwC 2020). • 42% of consumers consider health as a top priority (Callaghan et al. 2021). • Organic food and beverage sales in the US increased by 12.8% in 2020 (Crawford 2021). • 19% growth in sales of scales in Japan (Francis 2021). • 30% of consumers plan to increase their focus on healthy eating in 2021 compared to 2020 (Verschueren et al. 2021). • 55% of consumers are willing to pay more for healthier food options (PwC 2021a). • Tremendous increase in sales of masks, hand sanitizer, thermometers (e.g., 319% increase in medical mask sales in the US at the end of February 2020; Statista 2021a).	Holistic health Supporting consumers in sustaining and improving their physical and mental health
Connectedness prevention focus: avoiding/postponing offline interactions	Taking offline interactions online	• 33% of consumers consider connecting virtually with friends a high priority (Accenture 2020a). • 43% (40%) of consumers increased their use of virtual service consultations for electronics (for personal health), and 78% expect to sustain an increased level of use after the pandemic (Accenture 2020b). • Global virtual events grew by 1,000% (Koetsier 2020). • 36% of US adults report an increase in voice, and 30% increase in video calls with their family and friends (Nguyen et al. 2020). • 15% of Americans attended a virtual event for the first time (Hunter 2021). • 40% of marketing events in 2022 are planned to be virtual (Statista Research Department 2021).	Hybrid connectedness Offering consumers emotional and social benefits from physical and digital interactions and the embeddedness in their local communities
Promotion focus: seeking meaning in physical bonds	• reconsidering the role of physical touch points • stronger bonds with the immediate environment (e.g., neighbors)	• 56% of consumers shop in closer neighborhood stores, with 79% intending to continue after the pandemic (Accenture 2020b). • 62% of consumers think that the pandemic will strengthen local communities (Accenture 2020c). • 54% of consumers would like to see offline stores develop more into meeting places for communities after the pandemic (QVC 2020). • 22% of consumers shopped at a new retailer/store/website to support local businesses (Barchet et al. 2021). • 32% of consumers established closer bonds with their neighbors (Chaker 2021). • 54% of consumers state they buy more online out of necessity rather than conviction, with 67% of online shoppers still preferring to shop at local retail stores (KPMG 2021).	

Table 1 (continued)

Area of consumer behavior motivation focus	Core consumer reactions (short-term)	Examples	Dimension of value creation (long-term)
Positive self Prevention focus: avoiding situational discouragement through hedonic distractions	Hedonic distraction	• 36% of consumers increased their spending on entertainment and media after the pandemic began (PwC 2020). • 48.7% of Italian consumers report increased buying of books, films, video games (Degli Esposti et al. 2021). • 50% increase in the adult puzzles market, and 20% increase in the single-player games market (Matalucci 2021). • 51% of consumers bought smart devices, and 18% bought new technical consumer goods earlier than planned (Xiaomi 2021).	Conscious hedonism Providing enjoyable escapes and hedonic distraction as well as hedonic experiences
Promotion focus: seeking self-esteem	• upskilling: exploring new areas of interest or improving existing ones • upgrading: substituting conventional with high-end products, home improvements • self-treatment	• 48% of consumers have increased spending their leisure time on learning new skills or completing education online (Accenture 2020c). • 48% of consumers have resumed a hobby or started a new one, with 76% expecting to continue (Accenture 2020c). • 51% of consumers increased the time spent on improving their homes (Accenture 2020c). • 44% of German consumers plan to spend more money on rewarding themselves (Barchet et al. 2021). • 44% of global consumers consider it important to "indulge or pamper" themselves regularly (Francis 2021). • Sales for kitchen machines and food processors grew by 53% (Francis 2021). • 35% of global consumers place a higher importance on enjoying life (Mastercard 2021). • 70% of consumers improved their homes (Xiaomi 2021).	

Table 1 (continued)

Area of consumer behavior motivation focus	Core consumer reactions (short-term)	Examples	Dimension of value creation (long-term)
Values Prevention focus: avoiding irresponsible behaviors	• avoiding waste • reducing carbon footprint • avoiding overconsumption	• On average, 25% of consumers postponed buying electronic products, as purchasing devices seemed less important to them (Accenture 2020d). • 43% of European consumers reported packaging guilt, and 29% avoided online retailers with unsustainable packaging (DS Smith 2020). • 57% of German consumers changed their lifestyle to reduce their environmental footprint (Granskog et al. 2020). • 65% of consumers intend to buy more longer-lasting fashion items, and 57% plan to repair items instead of replacing them with new ones to reduce waste (Granskog et al. 2020). • Between 48% and 60% of consumers intentionally buy items with environmentally friendly or less packaging (PwC 2021b).	Responsible consumption Allowing consumers to experience a positive contribution to environmental and societal sustainability through their shopping and consumption
Promotion focus: seeking sustainability	• engaging in responsible consumption • conscious and increased awareness of responsibility	• 56% of consumers buy more locally sourced products, with 84% intending to continue after the pandemic (Accenture 2020b). • 65% of consumers report higher mindfulness for the impact of their consumption (Jacobs et al. 2020). • 40% consider buying local goods more relevant (DS Smith 2020). • 43% of consumers will buy fewer but more sustainable products (IFH Köln and Capgemini 2020). • While 32% of consumers expect governments to be responsible for encouraging sustainable behaviors and lifestyle practices, 20% of consumers believe that consumers themselves should promote sustainable behaviors (PwC 2020). • 54% are willing to pay price premiums for sustainable brands (IBM 2021).	

sought to avoid negative states through, for instance, purchasing home entertainment products, movies, and games for distraction. In contrast, consumers driven by a promotion-based motivation actively sought experiences that would enhance their self-esteem, such as learning or improving skills or hobbies to experience feelings of mastery (Campbell et al. 2020).

2.2.4 Consumer behavior in the area of values

Self-actualization refers to consumers' desire for self-fulfillment and for realizing one's full potential (Maslow 1943). It describes individuals' motivation to achieve personal growth and advanced self-development, create a meaningful life, and assume personal responsibility (Beaumont 2009; Lefrançois et al. 1997). In its traditional view, self-actualization also entails notions of self-transcendence, which include non-self-referent motivations, such as service to others or dedication to a higher cause like environmentalism (Koltko-Rivera 2006). Hence, self-actualization motivates socially conscious consumer behavior that benefits society at large, as it can motivate actions that satisfy both others' and the individual's own needs (Brooker 1976). Therefore, self-actualization can drive consumers' value-based consumption practices. In line with this notion, we propose that consumers' value-based consumption during the pandemic comprised promotion-based motivations, such as engagement in sustainable consumption, and prevention-based motivations, such as avoiding overconsumption and waste.

3 Dimensions of value creation in the new normal

We consider value creation to be tied to the overall shopping experience across all stages of the customer journey rather than to the purchase of a single product (Babin et al. 1994; Reinartz et al. 2019). Hence, consumer value constitutes "an interactive relativistic preference experience … characterizing a subject's experience of interacting with some object. The object may be any thing or event" (Holbrook and Corfman 1985, p. 40; cited in Babin et al. 1994, p. 645).

We propose five dimensions for consumer value creation that will be of pronounced importance for future retailing. These dimensions are hyperfunctional shopping, holistic health, hybrid connectedness, conscious hedonism, and responsible consumption. Clearly, while some of these dimensions reflect pre-existing developments that were accelerated by the pandemic (i.e., responsible consumption and hyperfunctional shopping), some completely new developments emerged (i.e., conscious hedonism, holistic health, and hybrid connectedness). We propose that consumers will prefer to interact with those retailers who accomplish creating value along these five dimensions in the new normal.

3.1 Value-creation dimension #1: hyperfunctional shopping

Hyperfunctional shopping creates value primarily by providing more efficient or more convenient shopping processes or by completely delegating the shopping process to technology. The pandemic has accelerated and intensified the use of technology in retailing, primarily reflected in consumers' prevention-based behaviors aimed at avoiding contagion. As such, consumers increasingly turned to online buying, and new online customer segments (e.g., "silver surfers") as well as new online purchase categories emerged. According to a survey of 1,200 German respondents in 2020, 63% of consumers who had not used digital channels before the pandemic made online purchases during the pandemic, particularly in the entertainment category and in previously less penetrated categories, such as groceries (McKinsey & Company 2020). Substantiating this adoption of digital channels for product categories traditionally purchased in physical stores, 71% of consumers who bought consumer electronics and 67% of consumers who bought do-it-yourself (DIY) and garden products for the first time online stated that they would possibly also do so in the future (IFH Köln and Capgemini 2020). Apart from digital purchase channels, the pandemic also increased the acceptance of virtual service consultations, which often provide convenient and time-efficient solutions (e.g., reduction of search costs). As such, virtual service consultations were increasingly used by 43% of consumers for electronics and by 40% for personal health, with 78% of consumers expecting to sustain this increased use after the pandemic (Accenture 2020c). Likewise, consumers engaged in more planned and outcome-oriented shopping behaviors at stationary retailers during the pandemic. For example, European consumers reduced their shopping trip frequency by 5% on average, while buying more per trip, as evidenced by a 16% increase in shopping basket sizes (Verschueren et al. 2021).

In terms of potential long-term effects, 38% of consumers were likely to continue making fewer shopping trips, and 24% were likely to keep buying larger baskets (Accenture 2020c). These examples illustrate the potential for post-pandemic value creation through the facilitation of hyperfunctional shopping, such as designing touchpoints, channels, processes, and retail operations to enable consumers to realize their shopping mission with minimal effort and maximal efficiency. Particularly, consumers' shift to digital channels that facilitate hyperfunctional shopping might be of permanent nature. Retail data from the UK showed that the rise in online sales remained above pre-lockdown levels once the lockdown ended, indicating a permanent structural change (Panzone et al. 2021). However, there might be notable differences in the adoption of digital channels between retail sectors. Although the pandemic rendered digital channels useful for increasing grocery shopping productivity and effectiveness (Gruntkowski and Martinez 2022), German household data on online grocery shopping showed that almost one-third of the households that had started online grocery shopping during the first lockdown did not continue after the lockdown was lifted (Brüggemann and Olbrich 2022). Nevertheless, on a global level, recent data shows that there has been a steady increase in consumers' preference for shopping online in product categories traditionally bought in physical stores since the beginning of the pandemic, including home and garden and pharmaceutical products (Klarna 2023). Rendering the crucial role of technology in realizing the value-creation potential of hyperfunctional in-store shopping, 61% of consumers would visit physical stores more often to buy clothing in post-pandemic times if they had the option for efficient checkout processes, such as cashier-less or self-service checkouts (NTT DATA 2023).

3.2 Value-creation dimension #2: holistic health

Holistic health primarily creates value by supporting consumers in sustaining and improving their physical and mental health. Holistic health accommodates consumers' promotion-based behaviors of seeking health by offering relevant products and services that help them pursue a healthier lifestyle.

Clearly, the pandemic amplified consumers' health consciousness. Consumers not only purchased more hand sanitizers, hand soaps, and masks (Galoni et al. 2020) but also exhibited greater health consciousness in other domains, such as physical exercise and nutrition. For example, sales of home sports equipment grew dramatically in 2020 (Research and Markets 2020), and 58% of consumers planned to continue with online fitness offerings (McKinsey & Company 2021). Consumer demand for health-related services grew, as shown by a 46% increase in health and fitness app downloads worldwide (Ang 2020). Likewise, during the pandemic, 30% of consumers planned to increase their focus on healthy eating in 2021 (Verschueren et al. 2021), and 65% of European consumers were more likely to consider their health in day-to-day decision-making (Lanzi 2020).

Holistic health might remain a viable source of value creation in post-pandemic retailing, since caring for one's health seems to remain a lasting concern. In support of this, findings from the Health Trends Research survey conducted in mid-2022 by health technology firm Philips in the United Arab Emirates revealed that the pandemic has increased consumers' health consciousness, with 70% of respondents feeling more in control of their healthcare and well-being since the onset of the pandemic, and 88% of respondents being committed to a more proactive approach in managing their health and well-being (Philips 2023). Confirming consumers' post-pandemic commitment to health, a McKinsey study with 8,000 European and US respondents indicates that 70% of consumers crave to be healthier, with 50% prioritizing healthy eating (Grimmelt et al. 2022). A 2022 Accenture study further substantiates the potential to create value through holistic health, as 41% of high-income (and 21% of low-income) consumers intend to increase their spending on health and fitness in the next twelve months (Standish 2022). Given that according to a McKinsey survey by the end of 2022 around 50% of US consumers (vs. 42% in 2020) rated physical as well as mental well-being (including products and services for health, fitness, sleep, mindfulness, nutrition, and appearance) a top priority, holistic health might prevail a relevant value-creation dimension in post-pandemic retailing (Callaghan et al. 2022).

3.3 Value-creation dimension #3: hybrid connectedness

Hybrid connectedness primarily creates value by offering consumers emotional and social benefits from physical and digital interactions and being embedded in their local communities. It caters to consumers' prevention-based motivations of avoiding or postponing physical interactions and their promotion-based behaviors of seeking meaning in the physical bonds that remained during the pandemic.

With limitations on face-to-face interaction, consumers shifted a significant share of physical interaction to digital communication, reflected by the increased use of video- and audio-conferencing tools. Not surprisingly, connecting virtually with friends was ranked high by 33% of consumers (Accenture 2020a). Similarly, 32% of consumers established more substantial bonds with their neighbors (Chaker 2021), and 62% reported that the pandemic strengthened their local communities (Accenture 2020c). A high share of consumers started to prefer shopping in neighborhood stores (Accenture 2020a), and 22% selected a new retailer, store, or website to support local businesses (Barchet et al. 2021).

Hybrid connectedness accounts for consumers' acceptance of online communication and, in parallel, their increased focus on real-world interactions in the immediate environment. For instance, the pandemic fostered the substitution of physical with digital communication channels in new domains, as indicated by a McKinsey study, which reports a 38 times higher telehealth utilization in July 2021 than before the pandemic (Bestsennyy et al. 2021). Likewise, the pandemic fostered a focus on real-world interactions. As such, a survey by the shopping channel QVC revealed a simultaneous increase in sensitivity for the meaningfulness of face-to-face interactions and identification with the local community: 54% of 1,000 respondents would like to see offline stores develop into meeting places for communities after the pandemic (QVC 2020).

Current figures underscore that hybrid connectedness might remain a dimension for value creation in post-pandemic retailing. As such, although lockdown restrictions are removed nowadays, the market for virtual and hybrid events is expected to expand by 21.4% from 2022 to 2023 (Jain 2022). In line with this, a YouGov survey indicates that consumers stick to remote activities they started in the lockdown, with 18% of consumers reporting that they have continued with virtual doctor consultations (and 11% with virtual events) (Shah 2023). Similarly, two surveys in the art sector found that American consumers kept or increased their digital engagement in art events after the pandemic, indicating a permanent shift from in-person to virtual art activities (Angeleti 2023). Rendering the value creation potential of hybrid connectedness in post-pandemic retailing, an Accenture survey shows that 38% of consumers have purchased make-up or hairstyling for an avatar or their digital self and 51% of consumers are eager to buy digital clothes to wear in virtual environments in the next 12 months (Standish 2022). The trend toward hybrid connectedness is also reflected in a recent CMO survey examining the effects of the pandemic on companies' channel strategies in 2023. Highlighting the relevance of face-to-face interactions, 28% of the surveyed companies are expanding their face-to-face channels, while only 6.7% of them have transformed their face-to-face channels to become entirely digital (Moorman et al. 2023). Similarly, a longitudinal study with US data found that 25% of consumers increased their online shopping, but only 8–13% decreased their in-store activities, indicating a rather complementing than substituting relationship between real and virtual interaction (Diaz-Guiterrez et al. 2023).

3.4 Value-creation dimension #4: conscious hedonism

Conscious hedonism appeared in consumer behavior changes in the area of positive self, as these result from prevention-based motivations to avoid situational discouragement and promotion-based motivations to seek self-esteem. Conscious hedonism primarily creates value by providing hedonic distraction (prevention-based) as well as hedonic experiences through, for example, "upskilling" and self-treatments (promotion-based).

To avoid situational discouragement, consumers countered pandemic distress by engaging in hedonic distraction. For instance, they turned massively toward digital in-home entertainment, such as video streaming or video-on-demand (Adgate 2021). Many consumers—especially Generation Z—found hedonic distraction in online shopping and engaged in it for the sake of enjoyment (Koch et al. 2020). Likewise, consumers sought non-digital ways of hedonic distraction through board games, as reflected in the growth of the market for adult puzzles—around 50%, with that of single-player games increasing by over 20% in 2020 (Matalucci 2021).

To promote their self-esteem, consumers consciously engaged in activities providing hedonic experiences at home to help them (re-)gain self-esteem or stable mental health. As such, 35% of American consumers enjoyed cooking more than ever, and 75% reported having gained an increased confidence level in the kitchen (Hunter 2020). Another approach was "upskilling," which refers to improving or professionalizing existing interests and exploring new areas of interest. For instance, consumers engaged more in reading, gardening, and home decoration, with 20% indicating an eagerness to acquire a new skill and 18% seeking to start a new hobby (Sakal 2020). Substantiating this shift to experiential activities and a more conscious hedonic consumer mindset, consumers also started to create hedonic experiences for themselves. For example, consumers traded up their purchases and substituted conventional products with high-end premium versions (e.g., kitchen appliances), engaged in home improvement, or created hedonic moments, such as buying "premium spaghetti sauce or salon-worthy shampoo" (Kapner 2020). Indicating a lasting change, 44% of German consumers planned to spend more on treating and rewarding themselves in the long term (Barchet et al. 2021).

The pandemic also increased consumers' general appreciation of a hedonic lifestyle, as 35% of consumers reported that enjoying life has become of greater importance to them since the outbreak of the pandemic (Mastercard 2021).

Conscious hedonism might remain a plausible source for value creation in post-pandemic times. As such, 33% of consumers surveyed in 2022 indicated that compared to the previous year, they now put more emphasis on embracing self-care by, for example, engaging in indulgent baths or beauty treatments (Accenture 2022). Projections—such as for the beauty market—further reflect consumers' post-pandemic focus on hedonic up-trading through premiumization. For instance, a McKinsey study suggests that the annual growth rate for premium (vs. mass) beauty products is expected to reach 8% (vs. only 5%) between 2022 and 2027 (Amed et al. 2023). This trend toward seeking experiences also extends to other areas such as travel behavior. Here, consumers' preference for experiential activities (e.g., wellness, nature, cuisine, active lifestyle) compared to conventional activities (e.g., arts and culture, nightlife, shopping, family activities) increased by almost 10% points from 2019 to 2023 (Mabrian 2023). Further, evidencing consumers' persisting focus on acquiring or enhancing self-improvement skills, the US market for personal development is expected to witness a significant growth from $45.92 billion in 2023 to $67.02 billion in 2030 (Grand View Research 2023).

3.5 Value-creation dimension #5: responsible consumption

Responsible consumption primarily creates value by allowing consumers to experience a positive contribution to environmental and societal sustainability through shopping and consumption (White et al. 2019). It originates from prevention-based behaviors in the area of values, such as avoiding irresponsible behavior (e.g., avoiding waste), and from promotion-based behaviors actively fostering responsibility (e.g., paying more for sustainable products).

The pandemic disrupted several responsible consumption habits, as illustrated by a survey among German fashion consumers, according to which 57% of respondents changed their lifestyle during the pandemic to reduce their environmental footprint (Granskog et al. 2020). For example, to avoid excessive material consumption, 65% of consumers intended to buy more high-quality, longer-lasting fashion items in the future, 71% planned to throw away fashion items less often, and 57% aimed to repair them instead of replacing them with new ones (Granskog et al. 2020). Other studies indicate that 43% of European consumers experienced "packaging guilt" when receiving orders with too much or unsustainable packaging, and 29% of consumers stopped buying from particular brands due to their unsustainable packaging (DS Smith 2020). The percentage of consumers who view sustainability as a critical criterion for their brand choice increased by 22% during the pandemic, with 54% of consumers being willing to pay a premium for sustainable or environmentally friendly brands (IBM 2021). The pandemic particularly rendered the value of regionality for responsible consumption, as 40% of consumers indicated to consider purchasing local produce to be more relevant since the pandemic, and 48% of respondents assume that local produce will be of higher importance to them in the future (DS Smith 2020). According to a Capgemini survey, 67% of consumers reported that because of the pandemic, they became more careful with dwindling natural resources, and 37% planned to change their consumption preferences based on responsibility considerations such as the social impact, inclusivity, or environmental impact of their purchases (Jacobs et al. 2020).

While the trend toward responsible consumption was already evident in pre-pandemic times, the pandemic has accelerated changes in consumers' attitudes and actions. For instance, 58% of consumers reported being more mindful of their impact on the environment than in pre-pandemic times (Mastercard 2021). The pandemic might have a lasting impact on consumers' responsible consumption values as it taught consumers how individual actions and behaviors can affect the lives of others and the well-being of society as a whole. In an Accenture survey with 25,000 respondents, 50% of consumers agreed that the pandemic made them reevaluate what was important in life, and 42% of consumers agreed that due to the pandemic, they realized that they had to focus on others more than on themselves (Curtis et al. 2021). Indicating the fundamental impact of the pandemic on consumers' responsible consumption habits, research surveying Italian respondents suggests that 40% of consumers became moderately or extremely more aware of how their purchase decisions contribute to environmental issues due to the pandemic and highlights that 20% of consumers perform pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., waste separation, energy saving, zero-waste behavior, and avoidance of plastic waste) more often than before the pandemic (Dangelico et al. 2022). In terms of purchase patterns, 28% of consumers reported having reduced consumption as they recognized that they could live a happy life with less, and 45% reported having purchased higher quality products due to longevity considerations (Standish 2022).

Responsible consumption might not be a temporary pandemic phenomenon, as 55% of consumers intend to keep their new responsible consumption values even in the face of aggravating economic pressure (Standish 2022). Thereby, consumers' responsible consumption values capture both environmental and social consequences. As such, it is important to consumers that brands not only use sustainable materials in their products (42% of consumers) but also ensure fair labor conditions (41%), offer repair services (35%), and actively contribute to combating climate change (30%) (Klarna 2023). Accordingly, a 2022 UK survey revealed that 27% of consumers would be willing to pay more for products of brands committed to respecting human rights, 25% of consumers would pay more for respecting ethical working conditions, and 26% of consumers would pay more for commitments to ensure the protection of biodiversity (Deloitte 2022). The same study demonstrates that consumers have been focusing much more on only buying what they need, compared to 2021. Hence, facilitating responsible consumption likely remains a prominent dimension for value creation in tomorrow's retailing landscape. Given that 64% of consumers experience happiness from buying sustainable products (Jacobs et al. 2020), we propose that responsible consumption creates not only a rational but also emotional value for consumers in the new normal.

Clearly, the potential to create value through each of the outlined value-creation dimensions hinges on the parameters of the buying situation and the retailing context. Thus, the value-creation potential of each dimension depends on product characteristics, consumer characteristics, characteristics of the purchase situation, retailer characteristics, attributes of retail channels or retail formats, and qualities of the retail environment—just to mention some examples.

4 Implications for tomorrow's retailing practice

We propose that the retailers who succeed in the new retailing landscape will be those who create next-level customer experiences and engage in new collaboration structures to effectively address the five dimensions of consumer value creation. Our assumption is that the distinction between online and offline channels will be less important in the future, while smart integration will gain in relevance. We thus treat hybrid connectedness as an implied component for all implications.

4.1 Taking customer experiences to the next level

Customer experiences are typically multidimensional and comprise the "customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings" (Lemon and Verhoef 2016, p. 71). The pandemic has reshaped what constitutes a satisfying customer experience and provided retailers the possibility to deliver next-level customer experiences by addressing the proposed value creation dimensions.

We illuminate four distinct approaches to building such experiences and suggest that retailers will benefit from using new technologies to advance hyperfunctional customer experiences, experimenting with innovations in services for the integration of holistic health, reconsidering the role of inspirational and social-interactive elements for creating hedonic customer experiences, and integrating experiences of responsible consumption through innovations in store concepts and retail operations.

4.1.1 Advancing functional customer experiences across channels

To address the value-creation dimension of hyperfunctional shopping, retailers need to create next-level functional shopping experiences, both offline and online. To meet customers' needs for time-efficient and convenient, effortless shopping, stationary retailers can make use of new technologies (Dekimpe et al. 2020), such as autonomous shopping systems like Amazon Go's cashier-free shopping or Whole Foods's pick-up stations, where customers order groceries online and later collect them in-store (de Bellis and Johar 2020; Valinsky 2020). Similarly, retailers can leverage technology so customers can delegate stages of the customer journey (Hoyer et al. 2020; Reinartz et al. 2019). Examples include voice-based ordering (e.g., Amazon's Alexa) and smart devices that order products automatically, such as smart fridges. While these developments were already evident in pre-pandemic times, the pandemic has fundamentally accelerated consumers' adoption of such technologies, which is also reflected by the growth of touchless commercial interactions during the pandemic (Scates 2020). In line with this, the global e-commerce transaction value made through voice assistants is forecasted to rise tremendously from \$4.6 billion in 2021 to \$19.4 billion in 2023 (Juniper Research 2021). Consequently, retailers face the challenge of balancing the advantages of technology with the dangers of alienation for both customers and employees (Bolton et al. 2018).

In addition to considering consumers' reliance on technology, retailers should reassess their store concepts to foster functional offline shopping experiences. In particular, retailers can make shopping more efficient by establishing functional shopping zones as store-in-store concepts. For instance, the German drugstore chain dm grouped all men's products in a dedicated and differently designed area, allowing male customers to buy all products they need in one place (RetailAnalysis 2019). Catering to consumers' increased interest in hyperfunctional shopping that emerged from the pandemic, grocery retailers can group the most frequently purchased products in a separate "kiosk zone" near the entrance for immediate purchases. To facilitate functional experiences online, retailers should anticipate the needs of their first-time users. For instance, the grocery delivery provider Instacart initiated a "senior support service" to support older first-time customers in placing their online orders (Boyle 2021).

4.1.2 Integrating holistic health in customer experiences

With their brick-and-mortar stores, supply chains, and consumer data, retailers are in a preferred position to create holistic health customer experiences, especially in the field of health prevention. As such, a recent survey by Deloitte with 16,000 European respondents indicated that 44–51% of consumers generally feel comfortable having health interventions like sight or hearing tests and measurements of blood pressure, glucose, or cholesterol carried out in nonclinical retail settings (Hop et al. 2023). Likewise, a growing number of US retailers like Walmart, Target, and Amazon have increased their investments to integrate healthcare products or services into their retail spaces (Monteros 2022). In light of these developments, retailers are advised to define their role and invent novel offers to deliver holistic health experiences in the future. For instance, the American supermarket chain Hy-Vee offers individual nutrition counseling in their stores and online (Douglas Moran 2021). In a similar way, DIY stores could offer services preventing common home improvement injuries, and grocery retailers could analyze customers' purchases and provide a health index of their shopping cart at the checkout or through an online platform. Focusing on employees' mental health, Starbucks offers employees free subscriptions to a meditation app and free therapy sessions (Umoh 2020). Retailers could engage in similar practices that turn shopping into a positive mental health experience for their customers, such as providing chillout zones in garden centers, offering yoga classes during lunch breaks, or organizing meetups that also strengthen the local community. Examples include the UK-based supermarket chain Waitrose, which offers in-store yoga classes to account for the target group's increasing interest in wellness (Pijak 2018), and the UK-based shopping centre:mk Milton Keynes, which recently invested in a zen-style chillout area to provide relaxation for stressed consumers (Murrer 2023). With the pandemic leading to a heightened appreciation for health and self-care, consumers will likely prefer retailers who accomplish to deliver experiences that appeal to customers' health and well-being in post-pandemic times. While retailers that have provided health-related services during the pandemic, such as having test centers or offering vaccinations on-premise, might have particularly positioned themselves as suitable for providing health experiences to their customers, the challenge is to determine which healthcare offerings consumers will value in post-pandemic times. For example, it seems intuitive or reasonable that grocery retailers might venture into offering nutrition advice at their retail locations or providing consumers with a health index of their shopping basket; however, such health interventions might backfire as not all consumers want to be confronted with their dietary habits. Accordingly, it is important for retailers to carefully select those types of interventions that match their target group's needs, the type of retail space in terms of the available floor space and potential visibility or consumer privacy concerns, and the retailing context itself.

4.1.3 Increasing relevance of hedonic customer experiences across channels

Our examination suggests that retailers should deliver inspirational and social-interactive benefits to create advanced hedonic offline and online customer experiences. While inspirational benefits relate to marketing activities that stimulate ideas within customers, which then transform into consumption-related goals (Böttger et al. 2017), social-interactive benefits relate to the conscious inclusion of "social others" in the customer journey (Hamilton et al. 2021). A conceivable approach to providing inspirational benefits in both on- and offline retail environments is the reliance on technology, such as augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) (Heller et al.

2019; Hoyer et al. 2020; Schmitt 2019). For instance, the cosmetics retailer Douglas offers an app to virtually try out products, such as lipsticks and makeup, at home but has also installed "AR Beauty Mirrors" in its physical outlets to enable a COVID-conforming way of testing these products in-store before purchasing them (Douglas 2021; Rondinella 2019). Similarly, the fashion retailer American Eagle introduced a new VR jeans guide on Snapchat that allows customers to assess the fit of the pants from a three-dimensional perspective (Nix 2021). Employing such technologies might significantly foster multisensory product imagination in online retail environments and facilitate mental product simulation as well as shopping inspiration both offline and online. Indeed, previous research underscores the role of AR/VR in enhancing customer experiences (Wedel et al. 2020).

Retailers can further deliver inspirational benefits by rethinking the design of physical and online retail environments as well as the design of product presentations. Some retailers have already initiated corresponding plans. For instance, in its Munich flagship bookstore, the German book retailer Hugendubel appeals to customers not by presenting books in established categories, such as travel, cooking, and religion, but by organizing the entire store layout around larger themes, such as "live and enjoy" or "window to the world," where India travel guides are placed next to books about Indian cuisine and Hinduism (Sieg 2019). Furthermore, to engage their online customers, retailers should leverage new possibilities of video content (Heller et al. 2019; Hoyer et al. 2020; Huyghe et al. 2017; Li et al. 2020). For example, Home Depot inspires its customers to start DIY projects through online tutorial videos (http://videos.homedepot.com), describing activities such as how to lay floor tiles or how to prepare walls for painting. A relatively new format that links online live streaming with e-commerce is referred to as "live commerce" (Arora et al. 2021). For instance, Walmart live-streamed events with famous TikTok creators presenting their favorite beauty products, and users could buy these products directly from Walmart (Perez 2021). This also serves as an example of the importance of collaborations between retailers and external partners. Replacing offline shopping experiences, live commerce usage has grown by 76% during the pandemic and bears the potential of becoming a source for hedonic customer experiences in the new normal (Statista 2021b).

Retailers can provide social-interactive benefits by creating community experiences that integrate and engage others in social customer journeys. The US supermarket chain Giant, for example, offered free virtual cooking classes "to bring the family together around the table" during the pandemic (Browne 2021). Similarly, offering social-interactive benefits during the pandemic, a German grocery retailer combined shopping with dating, encouraging singles to go shopping on Friday evenings (Bobillo 2021). As an illustration of how retailers can engage in online community-building, the home décor boutique The Feathered Farmhouse activates its online community by initiating a "What'd Ya Do With It? Wednesdays!" series on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/thefeatheredfarmhouse). Customers share pictures of Feathered Farmhouse products in their homes and inspire other customers' home decoration. Likewise, to foster social-interactive experiences across on- and offline channels and create a hybrid connectedness, Levi's encourages customers to use an online co-watching video app in-store to virtually shop with friends (Papagiannis 2020).

4.1.4 Responsible consumption as a new dimension of the customer experience

Since consumers increasingly value responsible consumption, retailers have to find ways to integrate responsibility as a new facet of customer experience. Two plausible ways are through responsible store concepts and responsible processes.

The first way creates responsible consumption experiences that depend on new store and assortment concepts built around responsibility. The German grocery retailer REWE, for instance, recently launched a Green Farming Market, housed in an ecologically friendly building, that offers on-premises grown herbs and fish and a local and organic product assortment with market stands where local producers sell their products. Shoppers have access to digital services, such as self-service checkout and pick-up services (Wendorf 2021). This approach illustrates how retailers can combine hedonic and functional customer experiences with responsible consumption. A more extreme example is the Berlin-based department store B-Wa(h)renhaus, which made recycling its core strategy. Its nine vendors offer only recycled and upcycled products—from furniture and clothing to electrical appliances (Broom 2020). More recently, the German outdoor retailer Globetrotter not only launched its first secondhand collection Re:mix 001 but also opened its first Re:Think Store, a store concept that is committed to the continued use of the previous tenant's inventory, repairing or renting products, promoting secondhand equipment, and community-building through workshops and talks (Ersch-Arnolds 2023a, 2023b). These examples illustrate how retailers can promote and motivate customers to repair and reuse products instead of throwing them away—thereby not only fostering more sustainable consumption habits but also building communities of like-minded customers. Clearly, the pandemic did not initiate the transformation toward responsible consumption; however, it acted as a catalyst that tremendously accelerated consumers' awareness and engagement with responsibility and sustainability.

A second way retailers can drive responsible consumption is through advanced retail operations, such as reducing packaging waste through sustainable packaging materials, offering refill stations, and experimenting with package-free products. For example, since mid-2023, the German grocery retailer REWE no longer distributes printed flyers but uses alternative channels for its product promotions, thus saving 73,000 tons of paper (REWE 2022). Retailers can also rely on "green IT," which comprises algorithms that reduce servers' energy consumption (Murugesan 2008), and, together with their logistics partners, foster green delivery. On the product level, retailers can address consumers' heightened interest in responsibility by making sustainability information available and facilitating search behaviors based on sustainability criteria (e.g., online filter systems or an offline assortment arrangement). Importantly, retailers who engage in such practices have to find ways to credibly and authentically communicate their responsibility efforts to their customers to avoid suspicions of greenwashing.

4.2 Rising importance of new collaboration structures

Creating value along the five value-creation dimensions by delivering next-level customer experiences on these dimensions requires new capabilities in very different areas, and retailers cannot efficiently build these capabilities alone. Engagement in new collaborations with other retailers, organizations, or external partners will likely enable retailers to successfully address the five value-creation dimensions.

4.2.1 Engaging in new local and retailer–retailer collaborations across channels

While collaborations between retailers, distributors, and manufacturers are nothing new, the pandemic has led to a new form of primarily local collaborations driven by solidarity and support. For example, while in the second quarter of 2020, McDonald's experienced a drop in sales of almost 25% (McDonald's 2020a), the discount retailer ALDI was severely understaffed owing to increased demand (McDonald's 2020b). McDonald's allowed its employees to work for ALDI, which helped ALDI meet the increased demand, provided consumers with the goods they needed, and compensated McDonald's employees for pandemic-related pay cuts. This collaboration shows how retailers' collaborations can increasingly reflect solidarity and corporate citizenship behavior, illustrating the value-creation dimension of hybrid connectedness. Another example of collaboration is that between the European bike retailer Rose Bikes and a travel agency, in which Rose Bikes rented the travel agent's facilities to open a pop-up store. While such an investment would normally not be profitable, Rose Bikes wanted to "show solidarity with companies that are robbed of their existence by the crisis and support [them] where we can" (Randler 2020). We suggest that retailers establish more collaborations to strengthen their connectedness with the local community in the future. For instance, retailers can rent spaces to new local retailers with a complementary product range, thereby allowing the newcomers to enter the market, extending the product range of established retailers, and providing the local community with an innovative product assortment.

A further form of retailer collaboration is through platforms. For example, Zalando's Connected Retail program allows local fashion retailers to offer their products on Zalando's webstore and then ship orders directly to their customers (Zalando 2020). During lockdowns, this platform helped smaller retailers without their own online channels to continue running their businesses. Through this collaboration, Zalando received a broader assortment without extending products in stock, and local retailers gained a new sales channel. By focusing on the value-creation dimensions of hybrid connectedness and responsible consumption, retailers can establish platforms with a focus on local or sustainable products. For example, during the pandemic, physical farmers' markets set up their own online platforms to make local products available to more customers (Marvar 2021).

4.2.2 Establishing collaborations with external partners

The pandemic especially affected the consumption of services that involve a high level of interpersonal interaction or exposure to other customers, such as at restaurants, gyms, or beauty salons. Many consumers replaced the consumption of such services with purchasing suitable products and performing the appropriate services to or by themselves. For example, consumers turned to DIY beauty service applications like hair coloring, manicures, or self-tanning at home, with many consumers likely retaining this new habit even after lockdowns ended (Culliney 2020). In line with this, the UK Beauty & Grooming Report from 2022 shows that 85% of respondents perform DIY beauty treatments at home, with 45% doing facials, 29% shaping eyebrows, and 28% carrying out manicure or pedicure treatments (Attest 2022). The consequences of such a change in consumer behavior are evidenced by projections of McKinsey for the US beauty market, according to which particularly conventional beauty services (e.g., nail care services) are expected to have a slower recovery to pre-pandemic levels than other beauty services (e.g., luxury spas or skin-related services) given the confidence consumers gained in performing these simple conventional services with at-home substitutes during the pandemic (Adams et al. 2022). Other examples demonstrate how the collaboration of a retailer with a technology partner allows new services that facilitate value creation through hyperfunctional shopping. As such, the telecommunication company Vodafone and the German grocery chain REWE developed a self-driving snack mobile so customers no longer need to go to the store because the store comes to them (Hübner 2021). While REWE is responsible for the assortment and logistics, Vodafone provides the technology for navigation and real-time data transfer.

Retailers can exploit consumers' willingness to replace services through product purchases and thereby address the value-creation dimension of conscious hedonism. To this end, they need to not only offer suitable products but also provide the knowledge required to create hedonic at-home service experiences. To illustrate, Sally Beauty opened its first DIY hair salon in 2023, where consumers not only can buy hair care products of professional quality (e.g., colorings) but are trained by licensed stylist-educators on how to apply these products at home (Canner 2023). Similarly, some retailers already offer the expert knowledge that turns the consumption of products into DIY service experiences (e.g., wine retailers offering wine-tasting kits containing wine, a tasting guide, and a map of wine regions), while others need to collaborate with external partners. As an example, haute cuisine restaurants that offer takeaway menus or "finish at home" kits (West and Henderson 2021) could partner with an interior designer to explain how to set the perfect table and create the right atmosphere for exclusive dining at home. In a similar vein, drugstores could partner with influencers or beauty magazines to explain how to create a home spa day and provide bundles with all products needed. Likewise, to create value through experiences of holistic health, retailers can go beyond carrying health-related products in their assortment and provide health- or wellness-related services through collaborations with partners (Callaghan et al. 2021). For instance, to provide in-store yoga classes or nutritional advice, retailers might have to partner with yoga instructors or dietitians. Other examples of retail-health collaborations include Walmart's partnership with the insurance company UnitedHealthcare to run "Medicare Member Service Centers" (Walmart 2022) and Kroger's collaboration with Performance Kitchen to offer medically tailored meals (PharmacyTimes 2023).

Finally, to create value through responsible consumption, retailers can underpin the seriousness of their responsibility intentions through strategic partnerships with independent NGOs. For example, the cooperation between the German food retailer EDEKA and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) involves co-branding EDEKA's private-label products with the WWF seal to signal that these products fulfill specific sustainability standards (WWF 2020). Similarly, the fashion retailer H&M partners with ThredUP's resale-as-a-service platform to facilitate secondhand sales and to realize its sustainability mission (Edelson 2023).

Clearly, while some of the outlined collaborations might have been a temporary pandemic phenomenon (e.g., that between ALDI and McDonald's), others were more permanent and manifested (e.g., Zalando). Also, while some of the collaborations emerged because they offered equal benefits for both partners during the pandemic, the benefit ratio might change and must be reassessed in post-pandemic times. However, irrespective of whether these collaborations permeated, whether they have been spurred by pandemic solidarity or the desire for an improvement of firm image, they have paved the way for a more collaborative mindset among retailers, which might translate into an increase in collaborations in the future. Specifically, we propose that successful retailers will be those who manage to establish collaboration structures enabling next-level customer experiences on the five value creation dimensions.

5 Implications for future retailing research

The proposed dimensions of post-pandemic consumer value creation raise a variety of questions that require deeper examination. We particularly highlight research questions about responsible consumption, digital customers, holistic health experiences, and the role of collaboration structures for experience creation, as well as about monetizing the value-creation dimensions.

5.1 Managing and promoting responsible consumption experiences

Retailers can address consumers' needs for responsible consumption through diverse retail practices. For instance, they can adjust their assortment and pricing strategy to balance consumers' demand for sustainable product alternatives and the needs of price-sensitive or brand-loyal customers. Retailers can also set new retailing trends by reconfiguring their private-label strategy to meet the needs of specific market segments, such as for responsible consumption (Dekimpe and Geyskens 2019). In this regard, research can explore how retailers can use their data to come up with smart private-label strategies fostering responsible consumption (Gielens et al. 2021).

This variety of approaches shows that more research is needed to better understand the determinants of responsible consumption experiences and the requirements retailers must meet to create them. Investigations can include identifying facets of consumers' responsible consumption, developing a quantitative measurement of the value of responsible consumption, and examining the significance of diverse retail practices to create a responsible consumption experience. Also important is responsible consumption's contribution to the overall customer experience and its interaction with other elements, such as price, brand, or quality perceptions.

Research could also explore success criteria for implementing responsible consumption strategies. For instance, the fashion retailer H&M's recently introduced Conscious Collection line is suspected of "disguising the reality of fast-fashion" (Pearcy 2021), illustrating the need for research about what an authentic retailer-initiated responsible consumption initiative looks like and how it should be communicated to avoid suspicions of greenwashing. Some retailers offer to offset their consumers' purchase-related CO_2 emissions through a voluntary monetary contribution. This practice raises the question of whether well-intended retailer initiatives can dilute long-term responsible consumption habits, since avoiding or reducing new purchases (and not merely assuaging consumers' guilty consciences) would clearly be the "more responsible" alternative (Griebeler 2019). Moreover, research could explore how delivery packaging can create both a positive brand experience and meet consumers' requirements for responsible consumption (Moreau 2020). Thus, questions for future research about value creation through responsible consumption experiences can address the following aspects:

- What is the definition, and what are the determinants of responsible consumption experiences for consumers in a retailing context? How is the value of responsible consumption experiences assessed or measured? Which retail operations or processes contribute most to responsible consumption experiences and a responsible retail brand positioning?
- How does the potential to create value through responsible consumption experiences depend on consumer characteristics, retail sectors, and retail formats or retail channels?
- How can retailers authentically realize and communicate their commitment to responsibility without being accused of greenwashing intentions? Does partnering with an external non-profit organization (e.g., WWF) increase the authenticity of retailers' commitment to responsibility? If so, under which conditions?
- Whether, when, and how do well-intended retailer initiatives to promote responsible consumption (e.g., CO_2 offsetting and sustainable product lines) backfire in terms of greenwashing accusations or dilution of long-term sustainable consumption habits?

5.2 Developing and managing health-related customer experiences

Physical and mental health and individual well-being constitute a strong consumer market that was further nuanced by the pandemic (Callaghan et al. 2021). While research has looked into strategies encouraging healthier choices (e.g., Biswas and Szocs 2019; Nikolova and Inman 2015; Stremersch 2008), a more profound understanding of holistic health in a retail context is still lacking. In particular, research should provide a taxonomy of the various facets of health-related consumption experiences and clarify how consumers perceive these aspects. Health-related consumption needs a framework for research, similar to the framework for understanding consumers' responses to threats (Campbell et al. 2020). Such a framework would differentiate the fields of health (e.g., mental, physical, emotional), the focus of health-related measures (preventive or curative care), and the underlying consumer motivations and needs, and could also clarify what contingency factors or individual traits influence health-related consumer behavior.

In addition, research should investigate the relationship between the offering of health-related value and the impact on the brand. For instance, how does providing such value change consumers' brand perception? Research is also needed to clarify the business model underlying holistic health. For instance, would consumers be willing to pay for these services, or would they expect retailers to collaborate with health insurance firms or other health institutions? Hence, researchers can address the following questions:

- How proactively or reactively should retailers address health issues to avoid being perceived as intrusive? Which criteria determine this positioning?
- What are the criteria for retailers' development of strategies for holistic health, and what success and failure criteria do these strategies need to meet?
- How can retailers build credibility and trust as their consumers' health partners? How should they solve potential conflicts? For instance, a grocery store promoting health and selling unhealthy fast food might lose credibility.
- Especially for food retailers: What is the role of food labeling? How should retailers promote healthy food that tastes good? How to deal with this apparent contradiction of healthy hedonism?

5.3 Designing and managing digitized customer experiences

The pandemic fundamentally fueled retailers' and consumers' rapid adoption of digital technologies and devices. Traditional in-store experiences were digitized or moved completely to the online world, and consumers' homes are increasingly digitized and "smartized" (Consumer Policy News 2021; Smart 2021). In view of these developments, research needs to clarify how retailers can manage value creation within technology-infused customer journeys that increasingly entail additional digital-technological and smart touchpoints. A central topic is understanding how the technology infusion affects the entire customer decision-making process of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Questions arise on a theoretical level, such as:

- Is the linear sequence of the decision-making stages ranging from need recognition to post-purchase behavior still adequate? Are some stages skipped or eliminated, for example, when smart devices take over or assist human purchase decisions?
- How do the stages of established consumer decision-making models have to be adapted to reflect digitized or smartized customer journeys? For instance, can we still refer to "need recognition" in times of "need prediction," and what does that recognition imply?

However, research has to provide insights that improve the understanding of how consumers perceive and interact with digital or smart touchpoints. While previous research suggests that higher levels of smartness have positive implications for consumer self-efficacy (Henkens et al. 2021), researchers also could address broader questions on the contribution of digital or smart touchpoint design to value and experience creation. For example, as inspirational elements become a greater source for value creation, researchers can examine the contribution various digital touchpoints and their respective characteristics make toward consumer inspiration. Similarly, to what extent do avatars or consumer-avatar interactions (Miao et al. 2022) enable consumer inspiration? Further, the proliferation of digital and smart touchpoints requires understanding how new modes of consumer–product/machine interactions (e.g., voice-based interactions) affect consumer experiences, consumer behavior, and consumer–retailer relationships. This understanding requires addressing questions such as:

- How can digital and smart touchpoints be designed to foster conscious hedonism through inspirational and social experiences or the experience of hyperfunctional shopping?
- How does value creation through digitized or smartized touchpoint experiences depend on consumer, product, and touchpoint characteristics, as well as retail sectors?
- What are the determinants of value creation along the five value-creation dimensions? For example, for inspirational experiences (conscious hedonism), which parameters determine consumer inspiration across different touchpoints (e.g., influencer posts on Instagram, e-commerce live streaming) as well as within a given touchpoint? For e-commerce live streaming, to what extent does inspiration stem from the level of community engagement versus close-up product visualizations?
- Can present models of retailer–consumer interaction be applied to digital devices? How do voice-based consumer–machine interactions affect consumers' attachment to retailers?
- What success factors and pitfalls shape the creation of virtual social experiences?

5.4 Establishing and managing collaboration structures

Value creation in the new normal requires retailers to identify, establish, and manage collaborations with various partners. For instance, the proliferation of smart products moves the choice of retailer from the consumer to the manufacturer of the smart product. To ensure their presence on the "smart product channel," retailers have to establish new collaborations with smart product manufacturers. In addition, retailers can venture into collaborations with NGOs or pro-environmental, sustainability-oriented, and health-related start-ups to obtain credible positioning as responsible retailers and to support customers' health. Further, value creation through hybrid connectedness requires retailers to collaborate with external partners, including influencers or e-commerce live-streamers. Given the increasing relevance of such collaborations, researchers need to provide more knowledge about how retailers should establish and manage such collaboration structures. Accordingly, research needs to answer questions such as:

- What are the drivers and success factors of retailer-initiated collaborations? How

do retailers select collaboration partners, and what are the criteria for evaluating the success of diverse collaboration types?
- Which competencies should retailers seek in collaboration partners (e.g., complementary skills, coherent image), and how can retailers become a preferred collaboration partner? How do retailers select and establish collaborations with external social media partners (e.g., influencers, e-commerce live-streamers)? To what extent should external partners promote the retail brand versus the retailers' products?
- How does the potential to establish successful collaboration structures depend on retail sectors, retail formats, and characteristics of retailers and collaboration partners?

5.5 Validating and monetizing the value-creation dimensions

The five value-creation dimensions trigger a variety of fundamental questions for further research. In particular, research is needed to operationalize and validate the proposed dimensions. Also needed is further theory about the relations between the five dimensions. For instance, how is value creation affected when multiple dimensions interact? With regard to the monetization of the value-creation dimensions, which dimensions create the most value for consumers? Questions for researchers include:

- How do the five proposed value-creation dimensions interact?
- Are the dimensions additive or compensatory? For example, can the absence of responsible consumption experiences be substituted with hedonic consumption experiences? Does each dimension have a basic level that has to be fulfilled, or do dimensions follow an "all-or-nothing" principle?

In view of the gap between consumers' attitudes and their actual behaviors (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), research has to examine the monetary worth of the value dimensions by assessing consumers' willingness to pay. This also implies accounting for differences in the attitude-behavior-gap as they might depend on specific customer segments, product categories, or purchase channel preferences. As such, previous research indicates that positive pro-environmental or organic product attitudes do not necessarily translate into purchasing organic, often higher-priced, grocery products for low-income consumers (Schäufele and Hamm 2018) and for convenience-oriented consumers in product categories with high search costs, such as cheese or meat (Schäufele and Janssen 2021). Likewise, previous research has shown larger attitude-behavior-gaps for households that engage in hybrid online and offline compared to offline-only grocery purchasing behavior (Ermecke et al. 2023). Research questions in this context include:

- What price premium are consumers willing to pay for more responsible products or a more hedonic customer experience? Whether, when, and why would serving certain value-creation dimensions translate into monetary outcomes? And how does this depend on customer-level, product-level, or channel-level parameters?

- Do changes in retail operations pay off, and if so, for which customer segments? Are new payment models needed? For example, would offering slots with an exclusive “personal assistant” pay off through higher sales, or would customers need to be charged additionally for such services? Likewise, would consumers pay for a hyperfunctional membership, allowing them access to designated fast-shopping areas?

6 Limitations

Our study is limited by its conceptual nature and, as such, invites future research to validate or challenge our proposed framework and conclusions. Given the dynamic nature of the retailing landscape and macroeconomic trends, only subsequent research can determine the enduring changes from the transient phenomena outlined in our study. At the time being, it is impossible to say which of the proposed changes in consumer behavior and value creation will truly manifest and which of them rather constitute temporary phenomena. Acknowledging the inherent uncertainty in predicting the future validity of our framework and the derived implications, our analysis is a snapshot in time, capturing the nuances of a momentary reflection. Likewise, as we analyze findings from surveys that were conducted between 2020 and 2023, it remains unclear to what extent the observations from different years are comparable. For example, findings from the later period might not solely reflect pandemic-induced changes but might already reflect effects from simultaneously ongoing developments, such as the increasing economic pressure. With the pandemic being just one example of possible disruptions, our approach to structure consumer reactions along need-related areas of consumer behavior and differentiating them based on the underlying motivational focus provides a systematic framework that might be more generally applicable. Future research might build upon our approach to also discuss changes in consumer behavior and value creation for other disruptions beyond the pandemic.

Further, while we acknowledge that the potential to create value through each of the outlined value-creation dimensions is contingent upon various contextual factors, a detailed exploration of these contingent elements—such as retail industry, product category, or regional influences—is beyond the current study’s breadth. Future research could delve into these facets, further elucidating the role of contingency factors in shaping retailers’ value-creation potential. For instance, the potential to create value through hyperfunctional shopping might vary based on product type, especially benefiting fast-moving consumer goods. Similarly, the dimension of conscious hedonism could hold greater relevance for high-involvement products like fashion or jewelry, unveiling unique value-creation prospects. Consequently, factoring in these contextual nuances in subsequent research is paramount, as they not only influence the potential of each value-creation dimension but also impact the resultant implications for retailers. Depending on these contingency factors, the pandemic may lead some retailers into an age of new opportunities, an era of disruption, or an epoch of reinvention.

7 Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed consumer behavior considerably. Adopting a value-creation perspective, our conceptual inquiry suggests potential long-term changes may emerge, determining how retailers can create value for their consumers along the entire customer journey. Specifically, we propose a framework illuminating how the many consumer behavior changes during the pandemic will give rise to new or more pronounced value-creation dimensions, namely, hyperfunctional shopping, holistic health, hybrid connectedness, conscious hedonism, and responsible consumption. Retailers can address these value-creation dimensions through next-level customer experiences that are rooted in inspiration and social interaction, novel technologies, and innovations in store concepts, services, or retail operations. Our examination highlights that the creation of such next-level customer experiences oftentimes requires retailers to establish collaboration structures with other retailers or external partners. Hence, leveraging the emerging dimensions of value creation relies on retailers' creativity, willingness to experiment, and openness to change. While in reaction to the pandemic situation, many retailers displayed creativity and innovation, time will show whether the discovery of this innovative potential will persist and lead to increased retail agility in the future.

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