



THE FUTURE OF CONSUMERISM

Two Contrasting Scenarios

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between consumption and sustainability stands at a critical juncture. Digital transformation, changing demographics and evolving values are reshaping how people interact with products and services. Meanwhile, environmental pressures and resource constraints demand urgent reconsideration of traditional consumption patterns.

The decisions we make today about how we produce, consume and dispose of goods will determine the health of both our planet and society. While we cannot predict the future with certainty, exploring possible scenarios can help guide the solutions we create and the choices we make.

To spark imagination and dialogue, we have developed two contrasting scenarios. One as a continuation of the present and the other as a shift towards a more transformative future.

Together they explore the forces that are impacting the consumer landscape in advanced economies and how consumption patterns might evolve by 2030.

These scenarios hinge on whether we prioritise short-term economic growth over long-term sustainability and whether technological advancement enables or hinders sustainable practices.



Kelly Evans, MSOD is passionate about imagining possible and preferred futures and inspiring others to take action to bring them to life. With a career spanning futures thinking, innovation and operational leadership, she helps organizations anticipate change, imagine preferred futures and take bold, practical steps toward them. Her work weaves together research, sensemaking and narrative to illuminate emerging trends and reframe challenges as opportunities. Drawing on cross-industry experience and a systems lens, Kelly empowers leaders to navigate uncertainty with clarity, creativity and purpose.

Natalie Lehoux, PhD is fascinated by how we'll shop, share and consume in the future. She combines strategic foresight with human-centred design to help organisations navigate digital transformation and emerging issues. Whether working with tech giants or startups, she brings a refreshing perspective on how businesses can thrive while creating meaningful experiences for people and planet. When not imagining possible futures, you'll find her exploring the edges of innovation.

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CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The world today is marked by rapid technological, social and environmental shifts. Some signals point toward more sustainable and conscious consumption, while others suggest an acceleration of resource-intensive consumerism.

Two contrasting scenarios explore how these forces could shape the future:

The Consumption Continuum

represents our current trajectory. A world where advertising-driven consumption continues to strain environmental resources, despite growing awareness of sustainability challenges. This scenario explores the tensions between convenience, personalisation and environmental impact.

The Age of Regenerative Consumerism

shows how technological innovation and changing values could enable a transformation toward sustainable consumption patterns that benefit both people and planet. In this future, precision medicine extends lifespans, while digital technologies optimise resource use and enable sharing economies.



Each scenario is examined through multiple lenses:

- Current Conditions and Trends
- Emerging Issues
- Key Drivers
- Business, Societal and Environmental Implications
- Strategic Considerations

By understanding these potential futures, organisations can better prepare for and shape the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, while individuals can consider how their own consumption choices might shape the world of tomorrow.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

As digital technologies and global supply chains create unparalleled convenience, consumers are becoming more conscious of the environmental and social costs of their choices. This tension between ease and ethics is shaping the evolution of consumption.

Several fundamental questions guided our scenario development:

Technology's Role: How will advancing digital technologies reshape consumption patterns? Will AI and automation either drive efficiency and sustainability or enable ever-more-targeted consumption?

Demographic Shifts: How will aging populations and changing household structures affect consumption patterns? What role will emerging markets play in shaping global consumption trends?

Changing Values: How will consumer values evolve regarding ownership, experiences and sustainability? Will younger generations' preference for access over ownership become the dominant paradigm?

Resource Constraints: How will businesses and consumers adapt to increasing resource scarcity and the fragility of global supply chains? Will circular economy principles become mainstream or remain niche practices?



The future of consumption isn't set. It's being shaped in real time by the choices we make today. The scenarios presented here are not predictions, but rather tools for strategic thinking about possible futures and are designed to:

- Challenge existing assumptions about consumption patterns
- Identify potential risks and opportunities
- Guide long-term strategic planning
- Inspire innovation in business models and practices

THE CONSUMPTION CONTINUUM

2030 is a world where advertising-driven consumerism prevails, prioritising convenience and personalisation despite increasing environmental concerns.





Welcome to 2030. A world where advertising still promises a better-looking, happier and more successful you and consumer demand for highly personalised, on-demand goods continues to soar. Technology has supercharged this reality. AI and automation help brands cut costs and optimise efficiency, though often at the expense of low-skilled jobs. Meanwhile, companies fiercely compete for top-tier tech talent to stay ahead.

Despite growing awareness of the environmental consequences of mass consumption, large-scale action remains elusive. While governments and businesses acknowledge the urgency, true collaboration and systemic change fail to materialise, leaving the planet to bear the cost.

Yet, a shift is brewing. A new wave of values-driven consumers, especially younger generations, prioritise well-being over GDP, digital experiences over material goods, and transparency over brand loyalty. While these voices grow louder, the dominant forces of consumerism remain firmly in place.

The Consumption Machine

More is always better. At least, that's the story consumerism has been telling for decades. Buy more, upgrade often and happiness will follow. A booming economy depends on it.

The promise is simple. The more you own, the better life becomes. But beneath the gleaming storefronts and endless product launches, cracks are beginning to show.

The planet groans under the weight of an economy built on endless consumption. Supply chains stretch thinner, ecosystems struggle to recover and the very air we breathe carries the cost of convenience. Biodiversity loss, extreme weather and environmental crises aren't anomalies anymore. They're everyday headlines.

Of course, there are efforts to shift gears. Some companies have embraced sustainability with ESG initiatives, pledging to do better. But consumers, armed with information and sharpened skepticism, are calling their bluff. A recyclable logo on a fast-fashion tag? A 'green' delivery option that still ships overnight? The demand for true transparency grows, yet

THE CONSUMPTION CONTINUUM

many brands hesitate to pull back the curtain too far. Meanwhile, the pace of life accelerates. The world runs on fast everything, fast food, fast fashion, fast transportation, fast decisions. Time is the ultimate luxury and anything that saves it, is worth the price. Convenience trumps consequence. The 'buy now, pay later' culture extends beyond shopping carts. It's a mindset, a way of life. The hidden costs? Anxiety, burnout and a dwindling planet.

Still, the machine churns forward. AI and automation ensure businesses sell faster, cheaper and with fewer human workers in the equation. Hyper-personalised ads whisper in your ear, perfectly predicting your next desire before you even realise it. Brands continue to profit, even as disposable incomes shrink. Growth must continue, so new markets open up. China and India, the next rising middle class. Western consumerism is repackaged, rebranded and exported to fresh audiences eager to climb the economic ladder. But growth comes at a price.

Retailers are beginning to face hard questions. Can business models built on endless expansion survive in a world of finite resources?

The e-commerce boom has made shopping effortless. Yet the environmental cost of digital consumption, AI energy use, last-mile deliveries and warehouse sprawl threatens to unravel the very efficiency it was built upon. Consumers demand that companies account for the true cost of production, forcing entire industries into financial free fall. Those that rely on fragile global supply chains, scarce materials, and non-renewable resources begin to stumble. Some don't recover.

As Earth's resources dwindle, survival takes on new meaning. The focus shifts to resilience, better materials, better homes, better ways to grow food. Some look beyond our planet entirely. Space tourism thrives, youth space camps rise in popularity and billionaires double down on interplanetary ventures. The conversation shifts from how we live on Earth to whether we'll need to live somewhere else entirely.

This is the world of the Consumption Continuum. A world still driven by desire, still racing forward, but increasingly unsure of where the finish line leads.



Beneath the momentum of progress, opposing forces create friction, challenging the path forward. These pressures aren't just temporary disruptions, they are structural shifts that reshape consumer behaviour, test business resilience and redefine economic stability.

Understanding these forces isn't just about risk mitigation, it's about anticipating change and adapting to a future where resilience is as important as innovation. Let's examine the forces shaping this more uncertain landscape.



Ecosystem Disturbances: A Fragile Balance

Biodiversity loss accelerates, fuelled by climate crises and increasingly fragile supply chains. While sustainability is no longer a niche concern, consumer-driven growth still overshadows large-scale environmental action. Retailers tinker at the edges, experimenting with bundled deliveries, recyclable packaging and carbon offsets, but these piecemeal efforts barely dent the problem. Without a fundamental shift, the pursuit of convenience and consumption continues to take its toll on the planet, forcing businesses and governments into a reactive cycle of damage control.



Shifting Values: The ESG Tightrope

Consumers demand more than performative sustainability, they want action, transparency, and measurable impact. Brands scramble to prove their green credentials, investing in ESG initiatives that go beyond marketing slogans. Yet, skepticism runs deep. Greenwashing scandals erode trust and even well-intentioned efforts struggle to keep up with the scale of environmental challenges. As a result, consumer loyalty becomes increasingly tied to a brand's ability to walk the talk. Those that fail risk irrelevance in an era of values-driven purchasing.



An Aging World: The Longevity Dilemma

Living longer doesn't necessarily mean living better. As life expectancy rises, so does the pressure on outdated pension systems, healthcare infrastructure, and social safety nets. Many older adults work well past retirement age, not by choice but by necessity, while investing in wellness solutions to maintain independence. The financial burden of longevity reshapes spending habits, pushing consumers toward products and services that promise resilience, whether through mindful living, financial security or new models of aging in place.



The Digital Shift: A Virtual Escape

As technology advances, so does the pull of the digital world. What started as convenience-driven adoption accelerates into a full-fledged lifestyle shift, with consumers spending more time in immersive online spaces. Pandemic-driven isolationism lingers, shaping behaviours that favour virtual ownership, AI-driven experiences and digital-first economies. Younger generations, unbound by traditional work models, embrace a borderless, nomadic existence. Yet questions around data privacy, digital rights and the long-term effects of hyper-connectivity remain unanswered.



The Circular Economy: Fighting Built-In Waste

Decades of planned obsolescence catch up with brands as consumers push back against disposable culture. Products are designed to break, updates render devices obsolete and fast fashion continues to churn out clothing destined for landfills. In response, a grassroots movement emerges: the fight for the right to repair. Consumers demand longer-lasting goods, repairability laws gain traction and second-hand marketplaces thrive. Yet, the struggle remains. Corporate resistance and outdated business models slow progress, leaving many trapped in the cycle of waste.



Economic Uncertainty: The New Frugality

Rising costs, stagnant wages and geopolitical instability reshape consumer habits, shifting priorities from indulgence to necessity. Inflation eats into disposable income, prompting trade-down behaviours. Luxury gives way to budget-conscious choices and large purchases are postponed indefinitely. Yet, for some, this forced simplicity sparks a deeper cultural shift: a rejection of excess in favour of intentional, minimalist living. Whether by choice or necessity, the era of "more is more" gives way to a mindset where having less means living more deliberately.

THE AGE OF REGENERATIVE CONSUMERSIM

In 2030 technology and shifting social values enable sustainable consumption, leveraging innovations like precision medicine, resource optimisation, and the sharing economy.



THE AGE OF REGENERATIVE CONSUMERSIM



By 2030, a new era of consumption has taken root. No longer is sustainability a tradeoff with profitability, growth or productivity, it's just how things work. Shopping, eating and even aging have been reinvented, not through sacrifice, but through innovation. Technology and shifting values have transformed everyday life, making it easier than ever to live well while doing good for people, business and the planet.

Gone are the days of mindless consumption. Instead, smart systems ensure that everything we buy is needed, used and reused. AI tracks resources like a backstage crew, keeping supply chains humming efficiently while cutting waste. Products last longer and when they don't, they're repaired or repurposed, not tossed aside.

People are living healthier, longer lives thanks to precision medicine and AI-powered healthcare. The 100-year life is no longer an exception, but the norm and industries have stepped up to meet the needs of an aging-yet-active population. Cities are built with walkable neighbourhoods, co-living communities thrive and brands cater to connection, purpose and well-being over mere possessions.

THE AGE OF REGENERATIVE CONSUMERSIM

Forget GDP as the gold standard of success. Now, nations measure their prosperity in happiness, environmental health and social connection. The best-performing economies are the ones that support their people and the planet.

*Welcome to a future in
which the best choice for
you is also the best choice
for business and the planet.*

A New Narrative for Consumption

The "buy-use-dispose" model has faded into history, replaced by a culture of care. Care for our belongings, our communities and the world around us. People don't just shop, they choose. They choose brands that align with their values, favouring quality over quantity, repair over replacement and sharing over stockpiling.

Government policies and industry standards have caught up, too. Companies now account for the full environmental impact of

what they make and green tech quotas have made extractive production a thing of the past. Fast fashion, planned obsolescence and excessive packaging? Relics of another time.

Meanwhile, AI-powered smart homes handle the little things, automatically refilling essentials only when needed and optimising energy use without anyone lifting a finger. Food waste is nearly nonexistent and cities run on clean energy, with greenery woven into every street and skyline.

And with longer, healthier lives comes a new way of thinking about work, retirement and community. People aren't just planning for old age, they're designing their next chapter. Whether it's starting a second career, traveling the world or joining vibrant intergenerational communities, the future is full of possibilities.

This isn't about living with less. It's about living smarter, healthier and with purpose.



Beneath the surface of this rapidly shifting world, driving forces are reshaping the future of consumerism. These aren't fleeting trends or short-term market shifts, they're the deeper currents steering everything we buy, how we buy it, and even what ownership means in the first place.

As we step into this new era, understanding these forces is no longer optional, it's essential. Let's take a closer look at what's driving this transformation.



AdEcosystem Disruptions: The Tug-of-War Between Progress and Preservation

The planet is fighting back, but so is science. Climate and environmental crises remain pressing concerns, yet breakthroughs in renewable energy, regenerative agriculture and circular design offer glimmers of hope. These innovations aren't just about damage control; they're about reshaping how we produce and consume, finding a delicate balance between economic growth and ecological preservation. As technology steps in to restore biodiversity and reduce our dependence on raw materials, a new question emerges: Can we innovate our way out of the damage we've done or are we just buying time?



Shifting Values: Consumption With a Conscience

Buying things isn't just about price or brand prestige anymore, it's about purpose. Younger generations, raised on a steady diet of climate realities and social responsibility, seamlessly integrate their purchasing power with their values. Thanks to education, digital transparency and even personal carbon quotas, ethical consumption is no longer a luxury. It's just how things are done. The old trade-off between affordability and sustainability? A thing of the past. Today, you can have both and consumers expect nothing less.



An Aging World: Longevity Meets Lifestyle

With people living longer healthier lives, the market is evolving to keep up. AI-powered health tracking, predictive medicine, and personalised wellness solutions transform aging into a science-backed, proactive experience. No longer just about managing decline, longevity is now an opportunity, whether through eco-friendly wellness products, sustainable financial planning or new co-living models that bring generations together. In a world where community is currency, shared spaces and resources become the foundation for a more connected resilient way of life.



The Digital Leap: Reality, Reimagined

Why go to a store when you can browse a fully immersive, AI-personalised marketplace from your couch? Virtual shopping experiences, complete with haptic feedback, bring the tactile world into digital spaces, letting you 'feel' fabrics, try on outfits or tour a vacation rental before booking. Art, music and entertainment flourish in hyper-realistic digital environments, making experiences more accessible while reducing unnecessary production and waste. Meanwhile, smart home ecosystems track inventory, automate purchases, and optimise consumption, blurring the lines between the physical and digital worlds.



The Circular Economy: Redefining Ownership

Ownership isn't what it used to be. With regulations pushing for true cost accounting and sustainable development goals (SDGs) shaping corporate priorities, businesses experiment with models that prioritise resource efficiency over mass production. Consumers, in turn, shift towards circular commerce, choosing products designed for reuse, repair, or regeneration. Whether it's renting tools, swapping clothes or investing in products made from up-cycled materials, people increasingly see waste as an outdated concept. Sharing isn't just caring; it's the smarter, more sustainable way to live.



Economic Uncertainty: Resilience in the Face of Change

While automation and AI drive efficiencies, making goods and services more affordable, economic instability remains a constant undercurrent. In response, consumers turn to local, community-driven initiatives that foster self-reliance and sustainability. From neighbourhood co-ops to decentralised production hubs, people look for ways to insulate themselves from global market fluctuations. In this world, empowerment isn't just about having money, it's about having access, adaptability and a strong local network to lean on when times get tough.

CONCLUSION

The future of consumption is in our hands. As the exploration of these two possible futures illustrates, one thing is clear. Consumerism is no longer just about what we buy, but about the systems that shape those choices. The forces driving change are already in motion and whether we continue toward an extractive, unsustainable model or move deliberately into an era of regenerative consumerism depends on the choices made today.



In the **Consumption Continuum**, we see a world where the default path leads to increasing pressure on the environment, on economies and on individuals navigating a fragmented and uncertain future. Without intervention, the burden of overconsumption, ecological strain and economic instability deepens.



The Age of Regenerative Consumerism offers a vision of a potential future. One in which technology, business innovation and evolving values work together to create a more balanced, circular and connected world. In this future, economic growth goes hand in hand with well-being, data and AI are used to optimise rather than exploit and communities flourish supported by new models of collaboration and sustainable living.

CONCLUSION

Neither of these futures is inevitable, they're possibilities. They represent just a few of the many futures that could unfold, shaped by the decisions of businesses, policymakers and individuals alike.

As brands rethink their role in society, as governments implement policies that balance progress with protection and as consumers demand more transparency and responsibility, the landscape of consumption will evolve. The question is no longer just what kind of consumers we will be, but what kind of world we choose to create.



***“We are called to be the architects
of the future, not its victims.”***

— R. Buckminster Fuller

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Original Work

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Disclaimer

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While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information provided is based

on current trends, key drivers, emerging issues and expert insights, which may evolve over time. Readers are encouraged to critically assess and adapt the insights to their own strategic planning and decision-making processes.

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