



CALL FOR PAPERS

Business Horizons Special Issue and [APA Paris Summit](#)
[2027](#) on the Topic

*“Phygital Business Transformation: Navigating Physical and Digital Ecosystems
for Human-Centric Innovation”*

Impact Factor: 7.0 | CiteScore: 15.4

Deadline for 500-words abstract proposal submissions via the website of the [APA Paris Summit](#) is **May 15, 2026**

APA Summit Dates: 25-26 February, 2027, Paris (France)

Guest Editors:

- **Dr. Pierre Berthon**, Bentley University, USA
- **Dr. Wided Batat**, University of Lyon 2, France
- **Dr. Bruce D. Weinberg**, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA
- **Dr. Philip DesAutels**, FruitScout, USA
- **Dr. Tamara Rabinovich**, Quincy College, USA



Overview & Description

The concept of *phygital*—the fusion of physical and digital spaces—has existed in academic literature since the early 2000s. However, its widespread adoption among businesses and organizations surged during the global pandemic, which accelerated the integration of technologies, devices, and platforms to bridge physical and digital environments. Despite its growing prominence, the managerial conceptualization of phygital remains fragmented, often reducing its scope to technological tools without fully capturing its transformative impact on business models and stakeholder relationships.

Many individuals have already encountered phygital interactions in contexts such as 3D attractions at theme parks or immersive 4D movie theaters. While these examples demonstrate aspects of phygital, they represent only a fraction of the broader transformation. In recent years, businesses and media have increasingly fixated on phygital as a hot topic. Defined simply, phygital combines physical and digital elements to create seamless hybrid experiences through technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) tools (Berthon et al., 2024) or virtual and augmented reality headsets (Dey et al., 2018). However, a deeper exploration is required to examine how phygital reshapes human interactions, organizational structures, and ethical considerations beyond digital immersion. Yet, this standard definition—while practical for business and managerial implementations—remains narrow, limiting the full potential of phygital business transformation. Current understandings of phygital often suffer from several shortcomings: (1) They fail to address the complex dynamics of shifting between physical and digital environments; (2) they overlook the various types of connectors and enablers essential to phygital integration; and (3) most critically, they do not prioritize human-centric innovation, reducing phygital transformation to mere technological integration. Thus, a broader and more integrative conceptualization is necessary to capture the holistic nature of phygital business transformation.

The emergence of phygital in scholarly research gained momentum in the 2000s, focusing on young consumers' behaviors across online and offline environments (Batat, 2008). These early studies explored skill development, behavioral paradoxes, and vulnerabilities associated with physical-digital transitions. However, as businesses increasingly embrace phygital transformation, the academic discourse must evolve beyond tech-first focus to include leadership models, strategic frameworks, and industry-specific applications. In the 2020s, a scientific conceptualization of phygital was formally articulated in a special issue of the *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, which defined phygital as (Batat, 2024a):

A holistic and integrative ecosystem that adopts the human perspective as a foundational element while integrating physical, human, digital, and media connectors, alongside platforms, technologies, and extended realities. The goal of phygital is to deliver unique experiences that ensure a seamless continuum of value exchange (intrinsic/extrinsic) between digital and physical spaces.

The Phygital Research Paradigm (Batat, 2024b) extends this definition by exploring human and organizational behaviors, consumption dynamics, and marketplace transformations within hybrid physical-digital and real-virtual environments. *Phygital business innovation* champions ethical experience design and human-centric solutions (Addis et al., 2022), merging the physical and digital realms to enhance efficiency, profitability, and social impact.

Unlike traditional digital transformation initiatives, phygital business models emphasize holistic stakeholder engagement, ensuring all participants—from consumers to employees, suppliers, and intermediaries—are active agents in the innovation process. By placing all stakeholders at the heart of the phygital ecosystem, this phygital business framework advances our understanding of value delivery and human-technology interactions, promoting organizational performance and positive outcomes at individual, community, and environmental levels. Therefore, phygital business transformation transcends omnichannel, cross-channel, and multichannel strategies. It combines these frameworks with additional human-centered design principles to create holistic and meaningful business experiences, ensuring innovation, operational efficiency, and improved well-being for diverse stakeholders including customers, employees, suppliers, partners, and other market participants. A common misconception among businesses is equating phygital with omnichannel strategies, which oversimplifies its broader implications.

In today's hybrid marketplace, businesses should align with the phygital revolution. Thus, it is imperative to reconsider the future of business, moving beyond traditional omnichannel strategies toward a fully integrated physical-digital ecosystem to advance human-centric innovation, strengthen resilience, and drive performance and positive change. Since these transformations gain momentum, companies must adapt or risk obsolescence, demanding a fundamental shift in strategic vision. A critical factor in this shift is the evolution of leadership roles, particularly the introduction of a new function: the Chief Phygital Officer (CPO). Moving from technology-first approaches to human-first models is, therefore, essential to ensuring sustainable business practices that prioritize both innovation and well-being. As a result, the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) function—traditionally focused on technology-driven strategies—is becoming inadequate. With phygital transformation requiring interdisciplinary expertise, the CPO will oversee research, define corporate strategy, implement phygital models, and audit outcomes to ensure seamless alignment between physical and digital environments. This function will be at the core of an organization's vision, mission, and strategic execution. By redefining leadership competencies and decision-making frameworks, businesses can optimize their transition into phygital ecosystems while prioritizing ethical AI adoption and human-centric governance.

This special issue examines key facets of phygital business transformation for human-centric innovation across interconnected physical and digital ecosystems. By addressing efficiency, social change, and well-being, this issue seeks to expand current knowledge on how phygital business models enhance organizational performance while driving positive societal impact. We welcome original research that bridges the gap between academic inquiry and real-world practice. Manuscripts should incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives and business-driven approaches, offering novel insights on topics such as:

Phygital business transformation and a human-centric approach

- How phygital transformation integrates human-centric innovation beyond technological integration
- Why phygital is more than omnichannel and cross-channel models
- Shifting from a technology-first approach to a human-first strategic vision
- Phygital transformation in retail, healthcare, education, and entertainment sectors
- The role of AI, immersive technologies, and digital platforms in shaping phygital interactions
- Addressing accessibility, inclusion, and ethical concerns in phygital business environments

Phygital leadership and organizational strategy

- Why businesses need a Chief Phygital Officer (CPO) to drive strategic phygital integration
- Leadership competencies for managing hybrid physical-digital ecosystems
- Redefining organizational structures for phygital business transformation
- How phygital work environments influence employee productivity and engagement
- Leadership strategies for navigating digital-physical work culture shifts
- Ethical implications of AI-powered decision-making in phygital workplaces
- Balancing automation, privacy, and human-centric leadership in digital ecosystems
- Fostering ethical AI use in phygital business models
- Trust-building phygital strategies for employees, consumers, and stakeholders

Phygital entrepreneurship and business innovation

- The future of entrepreneurial innovation through phygital-first business models
- Funding strategies and venture capital investment in phygital startups
- AI-powered market analysis and predictive strategies for entrepreneurs
- How businesses can integrate sustainability into phygital transformation strategies
- Reducing digital waste and environmental footprint in hybrid business models
- Social impact initiatives and responsible innovation in phygital entrepreneurship

Strategic vision and future trends in phygital business

- Roadmaps for organizations transitioning into phygital ecosystems
- Measuring and optimizing business performance in hybrid digital-physical models
- The role of AI-driven analytics in shaping future phygital strategies
- Emerging technologies redefining human-technology interactions
- The next frontier: Phygital marketplaces, decentralized ecosystems, and AI-powered economies

Submission instructions

We invite all contributors from academia and industry to:

1. Submit a 500-word abstract proposal (excluding references) with contact and affiliation details for the ***American Phygital Association (APA) Summit 2027***, which will be held on February 25–26, 2027, in Paris, France. Authors should submit their abstracts via the [APA Summit website here](#). The deadline for abstract submission to the APA Summit 2027 is **May 15, 2026**.
2. Abstract submission format - **CHAIRE TRACK**

To form a chaired track, the group must consist of a minimum of 8 members—1 chair plus 7 members—with a maximum of 10 members.

Chaired Track: This track is open to senior academic profiles. Only the senior academic track chair can submit a proposal for all participants. Abstract proposals should include:

- Working title of your article project
- Chair's full name, position, affiliation, email, country, and a 150-word bio
- Co-chair's full name, position, affiliation, email, country, and a 150-word bio
- Track members' full names, positions, affiliations, countries, and emails

- Abstract (not exceeding 500 words excluding references) that includes purpose and novelty, contribution to phygital research, societal and industrial impact, theoretical advancements, and expected practical implications in phygital research.

We recommend for inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment of young academics and professionals that each track should follow these guidelines to ensure inclusivity and bridge the gap between academia and society:

- Track chair: Senior academic profile
- Co-chair: Mid-career academic profile
- Balance of senior and junior academic profiles
- At least one industry profile
- At least one public policy or non-profit, activist profile
- At least one PhD student profile
- Balance of participants from developed and developing countries

Note: While following these guidelines is not mandatory, they are offered as a suggestion to foster inclusivity, collaboration, and diverse perspectives.

IMPORTANT. For the chaired track format, if you wish to have your coauthored article considered for publication in the special issue of the APA Summit, published by our top journal partners, all accepted participants must register and pay their registration package (Summit + Gala) fees for the summit. The final date to register is **August 14, 2026**. Failure to comply will result in the withdrawal of your submission, making it ineligible for publication in the journal.

Submission information. Inquiries should be directed to special issue guest editor Wided Batat (wided.batat@univ-lyon2.fr).

References

- Addis, M., Batat, W., Atakan, S. S., Austin, C. G., Manika, D., Peter, P. C., & Peterson, L. (2022). Food experience design to prevent unintended consequences and improve well-being. *Journal of Service Research*, 25(1), 143–159.
- Batat, W. (2008). Exploring adolescent development skills through Internet usage: A study of French 11–15 year olds. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 32(4), 374–381.
- Batat, W. (2024a). What does phygital really mean? A conceptual introduction to the phygital customer experience (PH-CX) framework. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(8), 1220–1243.
- Batat, W. (2024b). The Phygital Research Paradigm: Philosophical foundations for examining consumer experiences and behaviors in hybrid physical-digital realms. *Qualitative Market Research*, 27(3), 357–365.
- Berthon, P., Yalcin, T., Pehlivan, E., & Rabinovich, T. (2024). Trajectories of AI technologies: Insights for managers. *Business Horizons*, 67(5), 461–470.
- Dey, A., Billingham, M., Lindeman, R. W., & Swan, J. E. (2018). A systematic review of 10 years of augmented reality usability studies: 2005 to 2014. *Frontiers in Robotics and AI*, 5(37). Available at <https://doi.org/10.3389/frobt.2018.00037>