FROM CLICKS TO CURBS—LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES OF PURE PLAYERS GOING PHYSICAL

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Abstract

The gradual move of pure players into offline retail challenges the long-standing belief that the future of distribution lies in full dematerialization. The decision by digital-native brands to open brick-and-mortar stores instead signals a search for equilibrium between online efficiency (algorithmic power) and offline engagement (sensory experience). This shift pushes pure players toward hybrid models that emphasize the interplay of technological infrastructure, logistical agility, and authentic customer relationships. Competitive advantage now depends less on digital prowess alone and more on the ability to reconfigure expertise, synchronize flows, and embed collective learning into operations management. Drawing on dynamic capabilities theory, this paper examines how pure players attempt to develop adaptive logistical routines—efforts that often prove uneven in practice. The cases of Amazon Go, Shein, and Warby Parker illustrate diverse reconfiguration paths, from technology-driven automation to experience-oriented phygital integration. Logistics thus emerges as a strategic core rather than a back-office function—its neglect can critically undermine omnichannel ambitions.

Keywords

Adaptive logistics, dynamic capabilities, omnichannel strategy, pure players, supply chain

DU CLIC AU MAGASIN—DÉFIS LOGISTIQUES POUR LES *PURE PLAYERS* PENETRANT LE MONDE PHYSIQUE

Résumé

L'incursion progressive de *pure players* dans le commerce physique bouleverse la vision dominante selon laquelle l'avenir de la distribution serait d'être entièrement dématérialisée. L'ouverture de points de vente par des *digital natives* traduit au contraire une quête d'équilibre entre *online* (puissance algorithmique) et *offline* (expérience sensorielle), ce qui conduit les *pure players* originels à s'appuyer sur des modèles hybrides privilégiant l'articulation entre infrastructure technologique, agilité logistique et proximité relationnelle. Le succès ne découle plus uniquement de la performance numérique, mais de la capacité à remodeler les savoir-faire, à synchroniser les flux et à intégrer l'apprentissage collectif dans la gestion des opérations. En mobilisant la théorie des capacités dynamiques comme grille de lecture, le papier indique comment les *pure players* essaient de mettre en œuvre des routines logistiques adaptatives, sans toujours y parvenir. La référence aux trajectoires d'Amazon Go, de Shein et de Warby Parker signale la variété des stratégies de reconfiguration induites par le commerce physique, depuis l'automatisation techno-centrée jusqu'à une intégration phygitale centrée sur l'expérience. La dimension logistique se présente comme un élément clé de la réussite, et non comme une simple intendance, dont l'absence de prise en compte pourrait entraîner des conséquences dramatiques pour les *pure players* tentés par une stratégie omnicanal.

Mots-clés

Logistique adaptative, capacités dynamiques, stratégie omnicanal, *pure players*, chaîne logistique

Executive Summary

While e-commerce once appeared to relegate the physical store to a relic of the past, a reverse trend is now taking shape as pure players rediscover its strategic and relational value. This return to the tangible is not driven by nostalgia but by managerial insight: enduring customer relationships cannot be sustained through digital interactions alone. In an overcrowded online marketplace where attention is costly, competition intense, and loyalty increasingly volatile, the physical store has become a new source of differentiation and credibility. By creating spaces for authentic human connection, pure players bring sensory and emotional depth back to the heart of the brand experience, transforming the store into a living extension of their digital ecosystem. Beyond sales, the store now functions as a brand laboratory—an environment for testing, storytelling, and data collection—where real-world insights complement digital analytics. This hybrid model blends efficiency with empathy, technology with emotion, and data with design. It builds competitive advantage through trust, proximity, and relevance, while reducing dependence on expensive online acquisition channels. The physical reinvention of pure players thus signals the rise of integrated commerce, where digital intelligence and physical experience mutually reinforce strategic coherence and long-term customer engagement.

The shift from pure digital operations to a hybrid model exposes pure players to a new operational reality: the complexity of managing physical flows within a connected ecosystem. Having mastered centralized logistics powered by algorithms and direct-to-consumer efficiency, they now confront the challenge of synchronizing warehouses, local inventories, and in-store operations with speed and precision. Seamless execution depends on total integration—real-time visibility, predictive replenishment, and agile coordination across all channels. In this "phygital" environment, each store becomes both a relational stage and a micro-fulfillment node, where physical and digital processes converge. Data must orchestrate every operational decision, from demand forecasting to returns management, ensuring consistency between promise and delivery. The most advanced players elevate the supply chain from a cost center to a strategic capability, aligning logistics, marketing, and customer experience around a unified value proposition. Their goal is operational harmony—delivering immediacy, reliability, and service excellence regardless of the point of contact. Conversely, those who underestimate the organizational and cultural shift required expose the fragility of their models. Logistics now defines competitive advantage, revealing the true maturity and adaptability of digital-born retailers entering the physical domain.

The move from digital to offline retail is more than diversification; it represents a profound reconfiguration of the business model. In markets defined by constant technological disruption and shifting consumer expectations, performance now hinges less on asset ownership than on the ability to orchestrate and reconfigure them with agility. The most successful pure players demonstrate strategic plasticity—the capacity to detect weak signals, transform insights into repeatable operational routines, and adapt their resource base without losing coherence. Opening physical stores has become a decisive test of organizational maturity, revealing how effectively a company aligns strategy, execution, and customer experience within an omnichannel ecosystem. The store evolves into the tangible expression of digital intelligence: a space where data meets emotion, and technology amplifies human connection and brand authenticity. This managerial agility defines the new frontier of modern commerce—an ongoing capability to learn from the field, simplify complexity, and sustain coherence in motion. The pure players who master this convergence do not abandon their "digital DNA;" they extend it seamlessly into the physical realm, transforming the brand promise from a virtual proposition into a lived experience.

Introduction

As reported by *The Guardian*, in early November 2025 the façades of the BHV Marais department store in Paris were draped with oversized Shein banners, drawing long queues of bargain-hunting consumers while simultaneously igniting intense political debate.[1] The episode was particularly striking because, for more than two decades, digital pure players have epitomized the evolution toward a fully dematerialized, data-driven, and frictionless model of retail distribution. In many sectors, online channels have become so dominant that physical retail formats increasingly appear peripheral, prompting some firms to operate as entirely digital organizations structured around a constellation of online touchpoints (Verhoef, 2021). Yet Shein is far from an isolated case. Amazon, Warby Parker, and numerous other digital-native firms have invested heavily in physical retail infrastructures, launching both temporary and permanent stores in ways that challenge the longstanding narrative of a one-directional transition from brick-and-mortar retailing to e-commerce (Kang et al., 2019). The growing adoption of physical retail formats by firms whose competitive advantages were forged in digital environments therefore raises a fundamental strategic question: why invest in a material presence when digital infrastructures remain their natural domain of operation?

Prior research identifies several complementary drivers behind this trend, including access to customer segments reluctant to purchase online, the strengthening of trust through physical proximity, the provision of sensory and immersive experiences unattainable in purely virtual settings, and the enhancement of customer journeys through the deliberate integration of online and offline channels (Solem et al., 2022). Consequently, channel expansion represents far more than tactical experimentation; it reflects an ongoing search for balance between technological efficiency and tangible customer experience, where channel complementarity increasingly serves as a critical lever for customer loyalty, differentiation, and performance enhancement (Verhoef, 2021). From this perspective, the shift from online to offline can be interpreted as a manifestation of hybrid business model maturity rooted in digital–physical convergence (Solem et al., 2022). The multiplication of physical touchpoints unfolds through a continuous process of experimentation in which e-tailers test retail formats designed to strengthen brand attachment and improve perceived service quality while simultaneously redefining customer value. Competitive advantage increasingly depends on the orchestration of seamless experiences that integrate technological, sensory, and social dimensions of exchange, particularly in environments shaped by emerging technologies, innovative business models, and predictive analytics. Firms capable of effectively combining these dimensions to foster deeper customer engagement appear especially well positioned to achieve sustainable differentiation (Grewal et al., 2017).

The pursuit of local market presence nevertheless confronts digital-native firms with complex logistical realities that have historically remained peripheral to their operating models. Simone & Sabbadin (2018) emphasize that the transition from an exclusively online configuration to an omnichannel model requires profound alignment between physical and digital systems, a transformation that fundamentally reshapes both logistical processes and customer interactions. Local replenishment, inventory management, reverse logistics coordination, and adaptation to spatial constraints disrupt established organizational routines, thereby exposing the inherent tensions of hybrid commerce (Raza & Govindaluri, 2021). Recent developments illustrate the magnitude of these challenges, with Amazon providing a particularly emblematic example. Although Amazon initially announced plans to open several thousand Amazon Go stores across the United States, the network never exceeded a limited footprint and was ultimately discontinued in early 2026, when Amazon announced the closure

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/nov/03/outrage-paris-shein-prepares-open-first-permanent-store (Accessed April 16, 2026).

of all remaining Amazon Go locations, highlighting the difficulty of converting digital automation capabilities into sustainable physical retail performance (Kang et al., 2019). As Solem et al. (2022) argue, success appears to depend less on technological sophistication than on the ability to reconfigure the knowledge systems underpinning urban delivery and operational execution.

Recent research further underscores the structural nature of these transformations. In a systematic review, Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate that omnichannel expansion requires extensive redesign of both logistics and information infrastructures, identifying key optimization domains such as inventory synchronization, cross-channel coordination, infrastructure sharing, and the mitigation of delivery disruptions. These mechanisms increasingly constitute critical capabilities for retailers operating at the intersection of digital and physical environments. Beyond technological adaptation, transformation also encompasses managerial and cognitive dimensions, requiring new forms of collaboration, fluid information exchange, and decision-making agility capable of absorbing operational variability. Competitiveness therefore derives not solely from technological expertise but from the capacity to orchestrate coherent, resilient, and operationally sustainable hybrid systems (Liu et al., 2024). Within this context, the offline expansion of digital-native firms brings a pivotal organizational challenge to the forefront: how can pure players adapt and redeploy their logistics capabilities to ensure long-term viability in physically embedded retail environments?

Against this backdrop, a central research question emerges: *How do pure players develop and reconfigure their logistics capabilities when transitioning from a fully digital model to a hybrid model incorporating physical retail locations?* This research question is particularly salient in a context where stores no longer function solely as points of sale but increasingly serve as logistics hubs contributing directly to value creation through mechanisms such as click-and-collect services. Accordingly, the present paper seeks to identify the principal organizational and logistical challenges associated with this transition and to develop a theoretical explanation grounded in the dynamic capabilities perspective to account for the contrasting trajectories observed among digital commerce firms. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a conceptual approach based on an integrative review of the literature complemented by a comparative analysis of emblematic cases. Rather than empirically testing causal relationships, the purpose is to construct a *theoretically informed explanation* of the logistical challenges encountered by digital-native firms as they expand into physical retail environments.

The analysis draws upon recent academic research on omnichannel retailing, hybrid retail formats, supply chain management (SCM), and dynamic capabilities, combined with an examination of three particularly illustrative cases: Amazon Go, Shein, and Warby Parker. These cases were selected through a theoretical sampling logic, as each represents a distinct configuration of the relationship between digital capabilities and physical retail operations. Amazon Go exemplifies a strategy heavily reliant on technological automation; Shein illustrates the extension of a digitally native fast-fashion model into physical retail formats; and Warby Parker provides an example of advanced integration between customer experience and omnichannel logistics. Comparing the three cases makes it possible to identify the *organizational mechanisms* that facilitate—or constrain—the successful transition toward hybrid retailing. Such an approach is consistent with conceptual research aimed at generating theoretical propositions and advancing future research agendas in SCM and distribution channel strategy.

1. Offline Turn of Digital-Native Brands

Throughout the 2010s, managerial discourse frequently predicted the imminent decline of brick-and-mortar retail, as rapid e-commerce growth appeared to confirm the obsolescence of physical stores often portrayed as vestiges of an outdated distribution paradigm. Redd & Vickerie (2017) show that the struggles of major retailers such as JCPenney and Macy's were commonly interpreted through technologically deterministic narratives in which failure to adopt digital innovation equated to inevitable decline. Over the past decade, however, an inverse movement has gained momentum, with digital pure players increasingly investing in physical retail infrastructures (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2019). Such a reversal reflects growing recognition of structural limitations embedded in digital commerce, particularly sensory distance and relational fragility. In saturated digital environments characterized by escalating acquisition costs, physical stores emerge as strategic assets capable of restoring competitive leverage (Verhoef et al., 2015). When advertising visibility commands premium pricing, material presence paradoxically generates differentiation advantages (Herhausen et al., 2015), as tangible visibility, immersive environments, and human interaction reposition digital-native firms within experiential and emotional domains incompletely replicable through digital interfaces alone (Flavián et al., 2020).

Trust and experience considerations occupy a central role in this strategic reorientation. Tangible interaction remains critical in product categories where sensory evaluation strongly influences decision-making, including fashion, cosmetics, and furniture, while empirical evidence suggests that physical environments reinforce both affective and cognitive dimensions of trust relative to purely digital encounters (Blázquez, 2014). Stores consequently function as spaces of brand embodiment in which digital narratives acquire material expression (Grewal et al., 2020). Glossier provides a particularly illustrative case. Originating as a direct-to-consumer digital-native brand, the firm initially cultivated growth through a highly engaged online community before developing physical retail locations conceived as sensory extensions of its brand universe. Boutique design, characterized by minimalist aesthetics and neutral tones, operationalizes the brand's promise of transparency and simplicity. Zhang (2025) highlights that Glossier's hybrid strategy, anchored in co-creation practices, social interaction, and personalization mechanisms, strengthens customer loyalty while simultaneously generating novel organizational challenges linked to international expansion.

Material presence also mitigates behavioral patterns associated with digital consumption, where online customers frequently navigate across platforms without forming durable attachments. Physical stores contribute to retention, reduce return rates, enhance post-purchase satisfaction, and stimulate cross-channel engagement (Raza & Govindaluri, 2021). Mechanisms such as click-and-collect and in-store returns generate convenience structures reinforcing perceived proximity between consumers and brands (Herhausen et al., 2015), while Fernandes et al. (2026) argue that channels should be conceptualized not as substitutes but as complementary strategic assets. Under such conditions, physical retail operates simultaneously as a demand stabilizer and a profitability amplifier for online channels. Omnichannel integration nevertheless introduces significant operational complexity. Inventory synchronization, last-mile logistics, and order fulfillment processes demand advanced coordination capabilities, challenges extensively documented by Ishfaq et al. (2016). Transitioning from dematerialized logistics systems toward materially embedded operations therefore requires profound organizational reconfiguration in which physical deployment reflects adaptive learning rather than regression (Verhoef et al., 2015). To synthesize the drivers underlying offline expansion among digital-native firms, Table 1 presents the principal strategic and logistical mechanisms identified in recent literature, including the search for tangibility, operational optimization, and experiential equilibrium.

Table 1: Drivers of Pure Players' Shift to Offline Retail

Analytical level	Main issue	Key references	Implications
Strategic vision	Offline retail is re-emerging as a differentiating lever in an overcrowded digital environment.	Verhoef et al. (2015) Herhausen et al. (2015)	Reframe the relationship between online efficiency and offline presence to sustain competitiveness.
Customer experience	Physical stores restore affective and cognitive trust by enabling sensory interaction.	Blázquez (2014) Grewal et al. (2020) Zhang (2025)	Design immersive brand spaces that embody digital narratives and stimulate experiential engagement.
Brand identity	Tangibility extends the digital brand story into an embodied, aesthetic experience.	Flavián et al. (2020)	Integrate physical and digital storytelling into a coherent, cross-channel brand ecosystem.
Logistics and operations	Omnichannel coordination creates major challenges in inventory, fulfillment, and local responsiveness.	Ishfaq et al. (2016) Raza & Govindaluri (2021)	Develop hybrid, adaptive logistics systems to synchronize data, stock, and last-mile operations.
Organizational learning	Transitioning offline requires long-term structural and cultural reconfiguration.	Verhoef et al. (2015)	Embed continuous learning and dynamic capabilities within governance and operational routines.

Source: Own elaboration.

2. Operational Transformation in the Shift to Offline Retail

Accustomed to centralized logistical architectures governed by algorithms and optimized for direct-to-consumer fulfillment, pure players face a fundamentally different operational landscape when expanding into physical retail (Raza & Govindaluri, 2021). Each store introduces localized constraints—including inventory positioning, replenishment cycles, and heterogeneous order preparation practices—that challenge the standardized logic underpinning digitally centralized fulfillment systems (Ishfaq et al., 2016). Furthermore, the coexistence of multiple fulfillment configurations, such as ship-from-warehouse, ship-from-store, and click-and-collect, multiplies exception scenarios while increasing the need for real-time inventory visibility across channels, thereby elevating both operational complexity and execution risk (Verhoef et al., 2015). These coordination challenges extend beyond logistics alone and encompass the integration of human resources, sales operations, and marketing activities, whose alignment remains critical for maintaining consistent omnichannel service quality (Jeanpert & Paché, 2016).

The operational implications of offline expansion are frequently underestimated. Adapting algorithms originally designed for centralized distribution networks to geographically dispersed store systems requires not only sophisticated information infrastructures but also the redesign of local routines, processes, and managerial capabilities. Hübner et al. (2021) argue that digitalization fundamentally transforms operational architectures by imposing stringent coordination requirements among digital platforms, retail outlets, and localized logistics systems. Extending this perspective, He et al. (2025) demonstrate that offline expansion reshapes not only competitive dynamics but also demand structures and pricing mechanisms within physical retail ecosystems, highlighting the systemic nature of channel integration. The introduction of physical stores increases replenishment frequency, intensifies short-term forecasting requirements, and expands in-store picking activities—tasks often poorly aligned with planning models originally optimized

for centralized, long-horizon operations (Snoeck et al., 2023). Additional hidden costs further complicate implementation, including infrastructure maintenance, reverse logistics management, and trade-offs between local product availability and logistics expenditures. As Maier et al. (2023) show, although physical channel expansion may enhance both sales and profitability, such outcomes require substantial infrastructural adaptation and a nuanced understanding of territorial and consumer dynamics. Offline expansion therefore demands a reconceptualization of the supply chain as an integrated hybrid ecosystem rather than the mere addition of a supplementary sales channel (Herhausen et al., 2015). Three illustrative cases demonstrate the magnitude of these challenges:

- *Amazon Go*, previously introduced, provides a particularly revealing illustration of the tension between technological innovation and operational feasibility. By eliminating conventional checkout systems and relying on dense networks of sensors, cameras, and computer vision technologies, Amazon sought to automate the shopping experience and maximize frictionless efficiency. Operational realities, however, substantially tempered this ambition. Detection inaccuracies, recurring human intervention for system verification and recalibration, high infrastructure maintenance costs, and demanding local replenishment requirements collectively exposed the limitations of algorithmic automation in materially complex retail settings (Varma et al., 2024). Internal reports further suggest that the ostensibly cashierless model continued to depend on extensive remote monitoring teams responsible for anomaly management and data supervision. Ultimately, the discontinuation of the Amazon Go network in early 2026 illustrates a broader lesson: technological sophistication alone cannot compensate for insufficient alignment between automation systems, operational processes, and physical retail realities.
- *Shein* illustrates a different yet equally instructive configuration. The company's ultra-fast, globally distributed, and digitally orchestrated supply chain—often described as a "supply chain as a service" model (Kumar, 2024)—demonstrates remarkable efficiency within online environments. Built upon decentralized manufacturing networks and near-instantaneous product launches, Shein's business model relies heavily on continuous consumer data collection and accelerated renewal, mechanisms widely documented in cross-border e-commerce research (Sabio, 2024). The opening of physical stores in France during the fall of 2025 nevertheless revealed structural tensions between digital acceleration and the temporal realities of brick-and-mortar retailing.[2] Three challenges became particularly salient: difficulties in sustaining rapid local replenishment cycles, misalignment between accelerated product turnover and in-store merchandising rhythms, and the burden of inventory holding and returns management costs within localized retail formats.
- *Warby Parker*, by contrast, exemplifies the potential benefits of coherent integration between logistics capabilities and customer experience design. The digital-native eyewear retailer has developed an operating model in which every store remains tightly connected to centralized information systems, enabling continuous inventory adjustments, structured replenishment processes, and seamless returns integration (De Maio et al., 2024). Rather than serving merely as product display environments, stores function simultaneously as fitting locations, micro-fulfillment centers, and reverse logistics nodes. This architecture supports circular logistics processes grounded in real-time visibility and dynamic resource

[2] The decision by BHV Paris's Chief Executive Officer in mid-June 2026 to end the retailer's partnership with Shein, effective December 2026, is best interpreted as a strategic effort to refocus the department store on its traditional areas of specialization, notably home-related goods and services, including home improvement, interior decoration, furniture, lighting, culinary products, tableware, household textiles, creative leisure products, domestic appliances, bedding, and books (https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2026/06/16/le-bhv-marais-a-paris-va-rompre-avec-shein-a-l-occasion-d-un-changement-de-proprietaire_6703534_3234.html [Accessed June 23, 2026]). At the same time, available evidence suggests that Shein's strategy of expanding its physical store presence in France remains unchanged.

allocation, allowing operational flows to adapt continuously to localized demand conditions. Warby Parker therefore demonstrates how disciplined phygital integration can transform logistical complexity into a sustainable source of competitive advantage while preserving a coherent customer experience.

Amazon Go, Shein and Warby Parker collectively suggest that the operational challenges associated with offline expansion cannot be reduced to questions of technology adoption or channel diversification. Instead, they reveal distinct approaches to managing the organizational tensions created by the coexistence of centralized digital infrastructures and decentralized physical operations. The critical issue is not whether firms possess advanced technologies, but whether they can embed those technologies within governance structures, decision-making processes, and logistics routines capable of supporting hybrid retail environments. From this perspective, physical stores act as organizational stress tests that expose the robustness—or fragility—of existing operating models. Firms that successfully integrate information flows, inventory deployment, and local execution capabilities are better positioned to convert channel complexity into strategic value. Conversely, when digital capabilities remain disconnected from operational realities, physical expansion tends to amplify inefficiencies rather than generate synergies. The comparison therefore suggests that sustainable omnichannel performance ultimately depends on organizational integration and executional coherence rather than on technological sophistication alone (Snoeck et al., 2023; Cai, 2024; Radomska et al., 2025). Table 2 summarizes the key insights by comparing the three trajectories and their main logistical implications.

Table 2: Offline Transitions of Digital Natives

Company	Logistical configuration	Key challenges	Adaptive responses	Outcome
Amazon Go	Automated stores relying on AI, sensors, and computer vision.	Detection errors, costly maintenance, need for human supervision.	Combine automation with human oversight; recalibrate processes locally.	*Failure* – innovation offset by high operational complexity.
Shein	Hyper-digitalized, globally distributed fast fashion supply chain.	Slow local restocking, mismatch between digital speed and physical cycle/high local costs.	Reassess localization strategy; adapt inventory models to local demand.	*Fragile adaptation* – logistical friction in offline retail.
Warby Parker	Integrated data-driven omnichannel network.	Balancing data centralization and local responsiveness.	Daily stock updates, real-time data coordination, stores as mini-hubs.	*Successful hybridization* – logistics turned into strategic asset.

Source: Own elaboration.

Beyond their sectoral differences, the three cases reveal markedly different trajectories in the development and deployment of logistics capabilities during the transition toward hybrid retailing. Warby Parker emerges as the most successful example of organizational reconfiguration, having embedded its physical stores within a unified logistics architecture characterized by real-time visibility, coordinated inventory management, and seamless integration between customer-facing and back-end operations. Shein occupies an intermediate position in which highly effective digital capabilities remain only partially transferable to localized retail environments, creating tensions between global responsiveness and local execution requirements. Amazon Go, in contrast, highlights the limitations of a strategy centered primarily on technological sophistication when organizational processes, replenishment systems, and operational routines are not reconfigured with equivalent intensity.

Collectively, these cases suggest that omnichannel performance depends less on the deployment of advanced technologies than on the firm's capacity to realign structures, processes, and resources across channels. The comparison therefore reinforces the view that sustainable hybrid retailing is fundamentally an organizational challenge, requiring the continuous adaptation of logistics capabilities to increasingly complex and interconnected operating environments.

3. Dynamic Capabilities Perspective

Dynamic capabilities theory offers a particularly compelling analytical lens through which to interpret the heterogeneous outcomes observed among pure players transitioning into offline retail. The framework posits that sustained performance depends less on the possession of existing resources than on the organizational capacity to continuously reconfigure them in response to environmental change (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2003; Teece, 2007). In contexts defined by rapidly evolving customer expectations and intensifying logistical constraints, static resource endowments are no longer sufficient. Firms must instead continuously adapt skills, routines, and infrastructures through ongoing processes of renewal. In this regard, the adaptive logic articulated by Helfat & Peteraf (2015) further clarifies the structural complexity underpinning omnichannel transformation. For pure players, store deployment is not a marginal extension of activity but a fundamental redefinition of organizational expertise and architecture. Within this perspective, the three core dimensions of dynamic capabilities—sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring—provide a coherent framework for explaining divergent strategic trajectories:

- *Sensing* captures the organization's ability to detect weak market signals and emerging logistical expectations. High-performing pure players recognize that physical stores increasingly operate as extensions of digitally mediated relationships, reinforcing trust, tangibility, and proximity. Van Crombrugge et al. (2024) demonstrate that physical store openings by digital-native brands enhance local visibility and generate indirect distribution effects, while simultaneously revealing financial and organizational constraints associated with expansion. Accordingly, sensing relies on continuous strategic monitoring, granular analysis of customer behavior, and systematic identification of technological and operational opportunities (Pulsiri & Vatananan-Thesenvitz, 2022). Warby Parker illustrates this capability by translating evolving consumer expectations into a coherent experiential retail model. The firm identified the persistent relevance of sensory evaluation—particularly try-on and personalization—and thus transformed subtle demand signals into strategic direction. By contrast, firms unable to anticipate environmental shifts often experience a structural misalignment between logistical systems and customer expectations.
- *Seizing* refers to the capacity to transform identified opportunities into operational routines and logistical architectures. This process requires cross-functional coordination as well as the reorganization of internal systems linking information flows, demand planning, and execution structures (Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024). Effective seizing entails the rapid mobilization of resources to construct adaptive, localized micro-supply chains capable of dynamically adjusting inventory flows and fulfillment processes (Ellström et al., 2022). Failures at this stage frequently stem from insufficient organizational integration, producing persistent inconsistencies between digital value propositions and physical execution. Recent scholarship underscores the importance of agile governance structures, open-ended change management processes, and cultures oriented toward continuous experimentation in enabling effective resource redeployment (Pitelis et al., 2024; Zabel & O'Brien, 2024). Seizing therefore represents a critical inflection point at which digital competencies are either successfully translated into hybrid operational capabilities or remain constrained by structural inertia.

– *Reconfiguring* concerns the sustained transformation of assets, infrastructures, and organizational capabilities over time. Competitive advantage depends on the capacity to continuously reshape both tangible and intangible resources within hybrid and volatile environments (Teece, 2018; Alzate et al., 2024). It reflects the maturation of dynamic capabilities, whereby firms move beyond episodic adjustments toward systemic redesigns of structures, processes, and inter-organizational relationships. The Amazon Go experience illustrates the difficulty of this transition: despite substantial technological investment, the closure of its 16 remaining stores announced in February 2026 highlights that automation alone is insufficient to achieve fully integrated logistical reconfiguration. Empirical evidence suggests that successful reconfiguration requires governance mechanisms that support cumulative learning, inter-organizational coordination, and tight alignment between innovation, field operations, and customer experience (Shiferaw & Kero, 2024; Kim et al., 2025). Ultimately, it is organizational coordination—not technology per se—that underpins durable hybrid capabilities.

Dynamic capabilities theory therefore highlights the decisive role of organizational plasticity in shaping the performance of pure players entering physical retail environments. Sustainable outcomes depend on the ability to detect environmental shifts, operationalize emerging opportunities, and continuously restructure resource configurations. Within this framework, logistics emerges not merely as an operational function but as a central strategic mechanism through which adaptation is enacted. Firms capable of integrating organizational learning, cross-functional coordination, and experimentation-driven governance develop durable advantages through the continuous recombination of knowledge and practices (Teece et al., 1997). Organizational plasticity enables not only responsiveness to technological disruption but also the conversion of digital data into logistical intelligence and of technological infrastructure into coherent experiential value (Qiu & Chang, 2025). The transition from digital to physical retail thus reflects the expression of advanced organizational capabilities rather than simple channel diversification. Conversely, neglecting supply chain constraints—or relegating logistics to a secondary managerial role—predictably generates structural vulnerabilities. The preceding analysis ultimately yields three theoretical propositions that may guide future research:

P1: The success of pure players' physical expansion depends more on their ability to develop integrated logistics capabilities than on their level of technological sophistication alone.

P2: Dynamic capabilities generate value in omnichannel strategies when sensing, seizing, and reconfiguration processes are aligned with the local operational constraints associated with physical stores.

P3: Physical stores become a source of sustained competitive advantage when they simultaneously fulfill a customer relationship function and a logistics function within the omnichannel ecosystem.

Conclusion

The expansion of pure players into physical retail marks a decisive departure from the longstanding assumption of fully dematerialized distribution. The click-to-store movement represents neither regression nor symbolic repositioning, but a strategic response to structural shifts in consumer behavior and competitive dynamics. In digitally saturated markets characterized by escalating acquisition costs and attenuated relational attachment, physical stores contribute to rebuilding emotional trust and reinforcing sensory engagement. Material presence, however, exposes digital-native firms to unprecedented operational and logistical complexity, requiring rigorous synchronization of flows, localized inventory management, and adaptive last-mile capabilities. Logistics consequently assumes the role of a *strategic*

pillar shaping customer experience fluidity rather than remaining confined to a support function. Competitive advantage increasingly depends on the ability to orchestrate hybrid ecosystems in which stores operate simultaneously as agile logistics nodes and spaces of brand embodiment. This trend is perfectly illustrated by ASOS which, in June 2026, reportedly began exploring the opening of its first permanent physical store in London after more than two decades as an online-only retailer,[3] signaling a strategic shift toward integrating bricks-and-mortar locations within its broader omnichannel and inventory optimization strategy.

Successful transitions toward hybrid retail configurations fundamentally rely on organizational dynamic capabilities, encompassing sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capacities in environments characterized by uncertainty, demand volatility, and intensifying competitive pressure. Divergent trajectories observed among Amazon Go, Shein, and Warby Parker further demonstrate that technological sophistication alone is insufficient to secure durable competitive advantage. Sustainable performance instead depends on integrated supply chain architectures that enable real-time visibility, decision-making agility, and responsiveness to localized constraints. Firms that underestimate the material and operational complexity of offline integration risk exposing themselves to structural fragilities whose long-term implications remain insufficiently understood. For digital-native organizations, offline expansion reflects the maturation of unified business models rather than a departure from digital logic. Neglecting the strategic centrality of supply chain transformation therefore constitutes a critical risk that may undermine the realization of omnichannel ambitions.

Beyond dynamic capabilities, complementary theoretical lenses further refine the analysis of pure players' shift toward physical retail. Neo-institutional theory, for instance, highlights the legitimacy pressures faced by digital firms, for whom physical presence operates as a mechanism of normative conformity, reducing perceived consumer distance and strengthening trust within increasingly scrutinized and institutionally embedded market environments. Similarly, resource orchestration theory complements the resource-based view by emphasizing the managerial processes required to structure, bundle, and leverage heterogeneous assets across digital and physical domains. Together, these two perspectives enrich dynamic capabilities theory by clarifying how sensing and reconfiguration logics translate into concrete omnichannel integration, legitimacy building, and effective resource coordination. More than ever, a robust conceptual framework is required to confirm that click-to-store represents a profound and multidimensional transformation rather than a purely operational extension grounded in supply chain optimization.

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