

exactly what their users like, want, and buy. With more direct insight into customer demands, retailers can maximize their margins and cut waste. Some Chinese tech firms are even using people's digital footprint to influence the way goods are produced.

Western retailers are playing catch-up. For years they regarded the internet as secondary to the store, spending huge sums on store space. America for example has 2.2 square meters of retail space for every single one of its inhabitants, six times the level of China. These retailers historically have had very little data about their individual customers. Online companies have huge amounts of collected data about their customers.

The pandemic brought with it the death of many brands but the companies that did harness the power of their consumers data are thriving. Amazon exceeded 100 billion dollars in quarterly sales for the first time ever in the last three months of 2020. With its established logistical system and smooth purchasing process, Amazon may seem a useful online platform for brands to peddle their wares. Although Amazon passes on the sale to the brand, it doesn't pass on much of the customers data meaning that companies know very little about who is buying their products.

Other companies are going the Amazon way, for example Nike. Nike's loyalty scheme allows it to create customer profiles of its 200 million members, 70 million of whom joined during the pandemic. Nike's apps offer the customer a personalized experience in return for a detailed insight into their behaviour. Their apps let users customize their own shoes and in doing so learn the customer's favourite colours and designs. By tracking how far they run, they let the customer know when it's time to splash out on a new pair of shoes.

As shopping shifted online, the pandemic sparked a greater need for this type of direct-to-consumer selling. Shopify, an e-commerce platform which allows anyone to set up their own online store saw a 60 percent increase in the number of new stores set up in the first six weeks of the pandemic. Inspired by the Chinese model, Shopify aims to create an ecosystem which integrates e-commerce with social media.

By being better connected to their customers brands can work out not just what they want to buy but where they want to shop. This ecosystem is great for providing brand theatre and