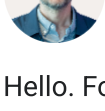




# Tech Decoded

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**Daniel Thomas**  
Editor, Tech Decoded

Hello. For years we've been told that online shopping is killing bricks-and-mortar retail. But there are signs to suggest the trend may be losing steam as e-commerce sales slow in many markets. I unpack the evidence below. Plus, we ask if small is the new big when it comes to data centres, explore whether violent video games have become too realistic, and watch the return of four astronauts after a medical evacuation from the International Space Station.

## THE DOWNLOAD

### How e-commerce lost its edge



Some consumers have tired of the hassle of online returns. Credit: Getty Images

Like many countries, the UK has seen a huge shift towards online shopping over the last decade which has contributed to **the closure of countless physical stores**.

Yet research from property consultants Knight Frank suggests that bricks-and-mortar retail bounced back last year.

It found British retailers and investors had re-allocated capital back into physical stores, either by opening new shops or upgrading existing ones. Meanwhile, the national shop vacancy rate fell to its lowest level since 2020 in the third quarter.

Experts say our shopping habits have normalised since the pandemic, when millions of us depended on e-commerce. Online retail sales growth has slowed sharply - not just in the UK, but in North America, Europe and parts of Asia.

Nick Carroll, senior retail analyst for Mintel, said physical shops had narrowed the gap on issues like price, convenience and range. Meanwhile, some consumers had tired of online deals that were "too good to be true".

"We should also not forget the importance physical shopping has for socialisation and community," Carroll added. "Physical stores remain critical in providing shoppers places to connect."

Reflecting this, retailers are investing in making their shops more attractive to visitors by offering "experiences" that can't be replicated online.

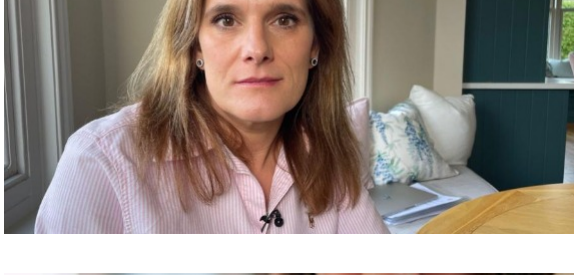
It would be wrong to suggest online shopping had peaked. The global e-commerce market is expected to continue growing, just more slowly than before.

Innovations like social shopping and rapid delivery services have seen strong growth, while agentic AI could further disrupt the market.

Yet retailers do seem to be betting on an "omni-channel" future in which physical stores play a central role - and that's not something many would have banked on five years ago.

***The download:*** Evidence suggests consumers still really value physical shops - and that e-commerce may not be the unstoppable force it once was.

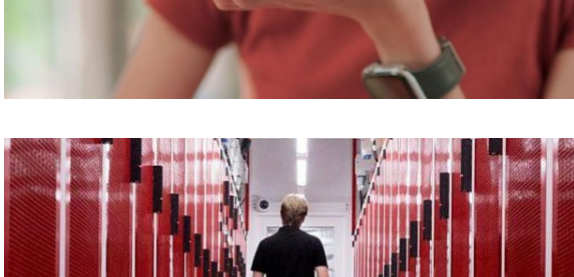
## TOP STORIES



**Mother of Musk's child sues xAI over deepfakes**

Ashley St Clair alleges the Grok chatbot was used to make sexually explicit pictures of her on X. Musk's firm did not respond to a BBC request for comment.

[Read more >](#)



**Bereaved mother hopes for TikTok 'accountability'**

A group of parents are suing the platform over the deaths of their children, claiming TikTok promoted and amplified dangerous content.

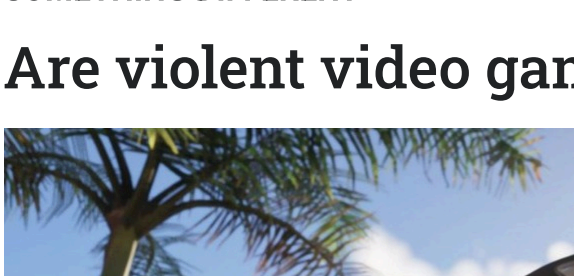
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**Apple turns to Google to power AI upgrade for Siri**

The tech giants announced a "multi-year" partnership. But has Apple's cautious approach to AI left it reliant on other companies?

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**Is small the new big when it comes to data centres?**

Some tech experts are questioning the idea that AI requires a massive amount of computing power to work well.

[Here's why >](#)



**The sub-zero temperatures needed for nuclear science**

One of the world's most sophisticated scientific facilities is turning to ultra-low temperatures to try and unravel hidden secrets of the universe.

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## SOMETHING DIFFERENT

### Are violent video games too realistic?

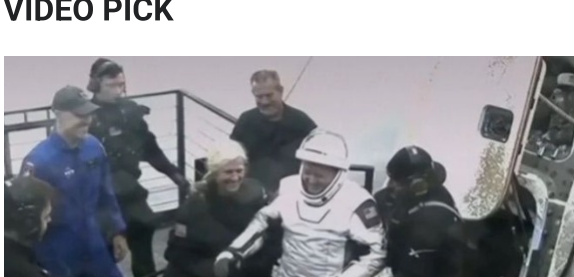


Grand Theft Auto 6 is set to be the biggest games launch of the year. Credit: Rockstar Games

Violent or gory video games like Death Stranding 2 and Alan Wake 2 have graphics so sharp they look highly realistic. And this year we're set to see a host of blockbuster releases that further blur the lines between the real and virtual worlds. Some see it as the natural evolution of gaming, but others warn we're going beyond fun escapism towards something more sinister.

**Thomas Hobbs investigates.**

## VIDEO PICK



**Astronauts splash down after ISS evacuation**

A Nasa crew was forced to evacuate the International Space Station due to one of the crew members being ill.

[Watch it here](#)

## And finally...

Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey has decided to trademark his image and voice to protect them from AI misuse. Clips including his famous catchphrase "alright, alright, alright" from the 1993 film, Dazed and Confused, have been patented, according to the Wall Street Journal. It comes as Hollywood stars have endured a wave of fake video, audio and images online.

**Read what McConaughey said.**

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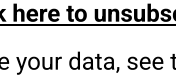
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