Moving from Multi-Channel to Omni-Channel Retailing: Special issue introduction

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Abstract

In this special issue *"Moving from Multi-Channel to Omni-Channel Retailing"*, the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* presents a series of papers covering topics to gain a better understanding of research and practices in the move toward Omni-channel retailing. The aim of the special issue is to gain a better understanding of marketing theory and practice in multi-channel and Omni-channel retailing. The topics for the special issue include, but are not limited to (1) The impact of channel integration on consumers' channel preferences; (2) Service integration in Omni-channel retailing; (3) Customer touchpoint in the context of Omni-channel retailing; (4) Consumer behaviour in Omni-channel retailing; and (5) Building and maintaining customer relationships via Omni-channel retailing.

Keywords: Multi-Channel; Omni-Channel; Multichannel; Omnichannel; Technology; Retailing.

Overview

From the retailing commercial perspectives, the Internet has significantly transformed the retailing landscape over the last few decades (Quach et al., 2016). At the same time, the demand for using the Internet has increased and has been a common practice in daily activities (Thaichon et al., 2014). In particular, there has a higher demand in the digital technologies in the past few years as per availability of new developments in digital technologies and platforms (Behera et al., 2020; Cluley et al., 2020; Thaichon and Quach, 2016). Besides, the dominance of online channels in many sectors has led to a large number of retailers and businesses to adopt multi-channel strategies (Beck and Rygl, 2015; Thaichon et al., 2018).

Besides, multi-channel is considered as the design, deployment, coordination, and evaluation of the different channels through which the firms interact with their customers, aiming to increase customer value through relationship building, development and maintenance (Neslin et al., 2006). It focuses on handling and enhancing the performance of each channel (Ailawadi and Farris, 2017). Multi-channel retailing offers customers convenience with multiple touchpoints such as online and brick-and-mortar stores. It is indicated that multi-channel retailing is moving towards an Omni-channel model in which the total integration of various platforms shapes the service interface and creates a seamless experience for the consumers (Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015; Yurova et al. 2017). Also, as stated by Verhoef, Kannan and Inman (2015) that Omni-channel retailing is taking a broader perspective on channels and how consumers could be influenced, guided and move through channels in their search and purchasing process.

On the other hand, although multi-channel and Omni-channel retailing has gained a lot of interest among marketing researchers (Mena et al., 2016), due to the complexity of the topic there is still a need to advance our knowledge in this area. This is especially in the transition from multi-channel to Omni-channel retailing (Jocevski et al., 2019; Verhoef, Kannan, &

Inman, 2015). For instance, retailers and businesses are faced with the questions of how to identify customer preferences and maximise customer engagement value using various channels, and how consumer behaviour varies in multi-channel and Omni-channel retailing. For example, Harris, Riley and Hand (2018) indicate that the high level of diversity and complication in shopper journey configurations across different platforms poses a challenge to marketing researchers and retailers. Furthermore, the use of multiple channels has altered company structure including the roles of sales forces and might result in a risk of cannibalisation and potential conflicts in resource allocation and distribution (Kollmann, Kuckertz, & Kayser, 2012; Yan 2010; Yan, Wang & Zhou, 2010).

Therefore, it can be difficult to manage and determine the role and effectiveness of individual platforms as well as the optimal level of channel integration. Moreover, the emergence of new technological trends and advancements such as virtual and augmented reality, multiscreen and blockchain technology has a number of important marketing implications including customer experience, customer to customer connectivity and channel management (Kumar, 2018). However, there is a lack of theoretical and empirical knowledge on this subject. Hence, their impact needs to be further conceptualised and evaluated.

For these reasons, the Special Issue focuses on two major themes of (1) Channel integration and Omni-channel retailing, and (2) Consumer behaviour and Omni-channel retailing.

Channel integration and Omni-channel retailing

The first theme, *Channel integration and Omni-channel retailing*, involves the use and impact of channel integration Omni-channel retailing and on consumers experience. Opening the first theme with *"The Omni-channel approach: a utopia for companies?"* by Hajdas, Radomska and Silva. The study aims to identify the barriers faced by firms to implement the Omni-channel approach. They have identified a number of internal and external obstacles. The internal

obstacles including operational and strategic barriers (employee-related, organizational and vision-related factors). On the other hand, the external obstacles including product-related, customer-related, legal and competitive drivers. Moving on to the next study by Goraya et al. *"The impact of channel integration on consumers' channel preferences: Do showrooming and webrooming behaviors matter?"*. The paper examines investigates the relationships between channel integration, consumers' online and offline patronage intentions. Their results conclude that channel integration significantly affects consumers' channel preferences. Interestingly, the mediating roles of empowerment, assortment, and benefits have been confirmed except for the mediating effect of empowerment on the relationship between channel integration and offline patronage intention. In addition, showrooming and webrooming moderated the positive impact of channel integration on online and offline patronage intentions.

Next is *"Service integration in omnichannel retailing and its impact on customer experience"*. This is a paper by Quach et al. and sheds light on the effects of service consistency and service transparency, on customer experience (flow and perceived privacy risk), and customer loyalty. Their findings indicate that service consistency has a direct and significant impact on flow and perceived risk. Then, flow and perceived risk are related to customer loyalty. It also found that showrooming behaviour and location-based service usage moderate the relationship between service consistency and privacy risk.

A study *"Can't Touch This? Conceptualizing the Customer Touchpoint in the Context of Omni-Channel Retailing"* by Barann et al. next in line. This article provides an overview review of relevant constructs and concepts to customer touchpoint in the context of Omni-channel retailing. The conceptualization has implications for researchers and practitioners as a tool to design and evaluate touchpoints. At the same time, the study provides a good roadmap and future research directions for customer touchpoint and Omni-channel retailing. "Marketplace, Reseller, or Web-store channel: The impact of the return policy and cross-

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channel spillover from marketplace to web-store" by Allayi et al. is the last, but not least in this theme. The study examines three different e-channels and the conditions that manufacturers adopt the marketplace or reseller channel. The authors find that offering return policy in web-store channels has no effect on the choice between the marketplace and reseller channel, but it has an impact on the number of manufacturers' profits in each channel. Interestingly, the paper also demonstrates that regardless of the offering return policy, as the coefficient of cross-channel effect increases. The manufacturers' profits would increase whether they choose a reseller channel or marketplace channel. This study then offers interesting findings and business implications.

Consumer Behaviour in Omnichannel Retailing

Consumer Behaviour in Omnichannel Retailing is examined in *"Search, Purchase, and Satisfaction in a Multiple-Channel Environment: How Have Mobile Devices Changed Consumer Behaviors?"* by Kim and Natarajan. The paper determines how the effects of consumer perceptions of channels (i.e., mobile devices, computers, and offline stores) on their choices of search channels, purchase channel and satisfaction level with the purchase channel. The study finds that the perceived purchase benefits and costs of stores affect the purchase channel selection of mobile devices and computers, respectively. Besides, customer satisfaction levels were highest when purchases were made on mobile devices. The insights from this study can help businesses to increase the effectiveness of advertising in different media and target distinct segments of consumers who rely on multiple channels for search and purchase.

Next*, "Are Privacy Concerns Still Relevant? Revisiting Consumer Behaviour in Omnichannel Retailing"* by Cheah et al. advances the knowledge of privacy concerns and consumer behaviour in omnichannel retailing. The study explores consumer behaviour in

omnichannel retailing and uses Psychological Reactance Theory as the theoretical basis to examine the moderating effect of privacy concerns. The findings of this study show that consumer perception of channel integration, consumer empowerment, and trust significantly affect patronage intention in omnichannel retailing. Additionally, when privacy concerns are low, the effects of consumer perception of channel integration and consumer empowerment on trust would be stronger.

Furthermore, a paper by Holdack et al. *"The role of perceived enjoyment and perceived informativeness in assessing the acceptance of AR wearables".* It is true that the augmented reality or AR wearables smart glasses are an upcoming trend in retailing. Yet, little is known about the factors that drive customers' acceptance of these wearables as a channel in stores. This is especially the case of perceived informativeness, perceived enjoyment, and usage intentions the technology. The results of this paper showcase that perceived enjoyment largely mediates the influence of perceived informativeness on attitude and usage intention. Correspondingly, perceived enjoyment and perceived usefulness act as direct predictors for attitude. Next *"Identifying multi-channel value co-creator groups in the banking industry".* The aims of this paper is to provide a value co-creation management framework in the banking industry using the data analysis.

Lastly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all authors who submitted their work to this special issue *"Moving from Multi-Channel to Omni-Channel Retailing", the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* and to all reviewers who provided their service to ensure the quality of the special issue. We have received a large number of submissions (i.e. close to 100 submissions) but only a handful of papers have been accepted after a rigorous review process. The end result represents a deep thought-provoking edition for the journal.

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