

Analyzing the Impacts of Omni-Channel Strategies on Augmenting Customer Experience in the Retail Domain

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Abstract

Omnichannel commerce offers a smooth buying experience from the very first to the very last customer touchpoint. Omnichannel retailing is a practice of conducting business across a variety of channels, such as social media, marketplaces, physical stores, and more. This study aims to investigate the implication of integrating multiple channel platforms in the modern retail landscape to enhance the overall customer experience. The study identifies key factors influencing customers' agreement with Omni-channel strategies and reveals the mediating effect of these strategies on customer experience. The methodology used to develop the proposed model is the Partial Least Square Equation Modelling Technique. A quantitative research process was adopted, and the data was collected through a questionnaire from 506 respondents.

Methodology – The research collects data through an online and offline mode. At the beginning of the questionnaire, a screening question was set up to ask whether the respondent is an Omni-channel shopper i.e., using more than one mode in their purchase process. We received a total of 525 responses from Omni-channel shoppers out of which a total of 506 responses were considered for analysis after deleting duplicate items.

A systematic sampling technique was used for selecting the sample and the selection of the respondents was done both offline and online based on the type of sales channel used during the shopping journey. The partial least square–structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) software were employed to analyze and test proposed hypotheses.

Findings - The findings reveal the importance of perceived value, social influence, and perceived uncertainty/risk as primary factors of customers' willingness to adopt Omni-channel strategies. The findings also demonstrate a strong mediating effect of Omni-channel strategies on usage intention, suggesting they stimulate customers to engage across different channels. However, it is important to note that while these strategies significantly contribute to encouraging usage intention, their mediation effect on customer experience is only partial, indicating a moderate impact on enhancing overall customer satisfaction.

Originality- The insights gained from this research offer valuable guidance for retail managers aiming to develop and implement effective Omni-channel strategies.

Keywords: Omni-channel strategies, Customer experience, Omni-channel usage intention, SocialInfluence, Perceived value, Channel integration.

Introduction

An enormous adoption of digital technology in the last two decades has changed consumers' psychology concerning their buying behaviour. Smartphone-driven digital innovations and applications have undoubtedly changed customers'

shopping behaviour (Agrawal and Gupta, 2022). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has led to a fast transition into a digitally equipped society. As the global economy starts to recover, the reforms that are made will have an ongoing impact on the society. The globe has left no stone unturned to transition from the pandemic stage to the recovery stage, and the acceleration of internet buying internationally highlights the need to ensure that all nations can take advantage of digitization (UNCTAD, 2020). Digital disruption has reshaped the retailing landscape and Omnichannel Retailing is an example of a massive digital disruption that has altered consumer expectations (Riaz *et al.*, 2021). When all the sales channels and customer touch points are integrated by the retailer with the objective of offering a seamless customer experience, this type of strategy is called Omnichannel Retailing (Beck *et al.*, 2015). The word omni-channel retailing was coined by (Rigby and Kirby, 2011) who raised the bar for traditional “multi-channel retailing” and “cross-channel retailing” models of selling. According to this concept, omni-channel retailing is a business concept that includes all currently used channels to create a seamless consumer experience and sway their purchase decisions thus providing an integrated approach across all channels (Shen *et al.*, 2018).

According to statistics, when an omnichannel ecosystem is developed within an organization for the benefit of the customers, the customer's purchase frequency increases by 250%, their order value rises by 13%, their customer retention rate rises by 90%, and their engagement rate rises by 13.5% when compared to a single-channel system (Collins, 2019). The response of consumers toward their shopping journey is greatly influenced by the scope of technology and fashion choices available in the retail domain thus resulting in a better brand experience, which further asserts that the consumer shopping journey should be revised and not discarded (Lynch and Barnes, 2020). Researchers have emphasized the fact that today customers prefer to utilize a variety of channels to make even a single transaction, whether the transaction happens at a brick-and-mortar store, or websites, catalogues, social networking sites, call centres, kiosks, and networked appliances (Barwitz and Maas, 2018; Hossain *et al.*, 2019). This seamless service experience eventually leads to customer delight and an omni-channel retail environment has evolved as the most preferred medium that offers customer delight through the amalgamation of offline and online commerce (Rigby, 2011).

Evolution of Channels

With the dawn of online channels and advancement on digital platforms, the retail environment has led to a humongous change, and the COVID-19 pandemic has worked as a catalyst for the change. The digital channel has become extremely prevalent and dominant in several retail markets and experts consider it a disruptive development model (Christensen and Raynor, 2003). Against the backdrop of a constantly changing multi-channel retail environment, the growing acceptance of alternative business-to-consumer retail channels in both conventional and leading-edge retail settings has altered retail practices and consumer buying behaviour which has led to a large and insightful research scope.

Multi-channel Retailing

Multiple channels in the retail sector are considered a systematic approach adopted by retailers to interact with their target customers. It includes the design, deployment, coordination, and evaluation of the different channels through which the firms interact with their customers, with an agenda or objective to increase customer value through relationship building, maintenance, and development (Neslin *et al.*, 2006). Different firms test out various tactics to get people to shop. One such technique is called multichannel retailing where the retailers sell the products across various channels (Zoho, 2022).

Omni-channel Retailing

Omnichannel retailing is defined as a retail approach that integrates all available channels through which a consumer interacts with the market to have a seamless experience and thus removes the physical barriers in the shopping journey (Shopify, 2022). It is a comprehensive approach that ensures that a customer has communication with the retailers across all the channels such as physical stores, e-commerce websites, mobile apps, and social media. Today customers demand persistent experiences that are curated according to their shopping needs which has encouraged retailers to implement an omnichannel ecosystem in their business to survive the competitive market.

Omni-channel Consumers

A research study by Sopadjieva *et al.*, 2017 on 46,000 shoppers for a 14-month period from June 2015 to August 2016 (offline and online) revealed that customers are loyal to retailers' touch points in all possible combinations. They prefer to use digital applications to compare product prices or to retrieve a coupon or a voucher, they are also avid users of in-

store digital tools such as interactive catalogues, a price checker, or a tablet or a kiosk. They buy online pickup in-store buy their product online and get it shipped to the nearest store. Further, the study suggested that retailer omnichannel shoppers are more valuable on multiple counts. They spend an average of 4% more on every shopping occasion in the store and 10% more online than single single-channel customers.

Some popular initiatives as future strategies taken by marketers in the retail domain include harnessing the power of big data analytics and cloud technology, effectively utilizing social media marketing platforms, and constructing agile and adaptable supply chain systems with omni-channel ecosystems so that future items are sustainable (Rao *et al.*, 2021). With technological advancements, the retail landscape has continued to evolve, leading to a major change in consumer habits. Specifically, customers now expect a seamless experience across all channels within their purchasing journey. Extensive research conducted by (Briedis *et al.*, 2021) explored the customer experience and merchandizing factors that drive consumers to search, consider, and ultimately purchase in each channel through an apparel omnichannel survey. Insights of this survey focussed on channel equity and personalization factors that make omnichannel consumers hungry for innovation and better engagement with retailers. Omni-channel retailing is described as ‘the synergetic management and optimization of the sales channels and customer touchpoints in such a way that the customer experience across all the channels and the performance is enhanced for the consumers (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). In the fluid retail landscape, digital advancements like the Internet of Things (IoT), robots, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Metaverse have bolstered the customer with multiple purchase options and have magnified the strength of the retail environment. Moreover, it is also crucial to understand which browser, operating platform (Android, Apple, or Windows), or device (laptop, tablet, or mobile phone) is being used by shoppers to provide a seamless shopping experience. Retailers are experimenting with multi-channel strategies such as BORIS, BOPIS, BOPS, etc. This experiment is mainly aimed at optimizing operating costs and improving the customer experience. Omni-channel marketing perceives that consumers often jump between the channels in a specific transaction like comparing the price of the commodity through a mobile application or in-store kiosks or looking for a different article through social media sites or from an in-store inventory. This type of hopping between the channels due to the availability of different channels and touchpoints is constantly and simultaneously used by both customers and firms in the transaction process (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). A common trend in omni-channel ecosystem of hopping between the channels where the consumer searches the product details from a different channel and makes the final transaction from a different channel is called Research Shopping (Verhoef *et al.*, 2007). Retailers utilize this concept of research shopping adopted by omnichannel shoppers to offer a seamless experience during their purchase journey regardless of whether the customer browses a web application, walks into a store, or places an order via a social media website.

Despite all the investments made by retail enterprises, they are not entirely sure how their investments will get returns. This behavioural change is either a short-term or long-term behavioural change. Which Omni-channel strategies are effective in meeting shopper expectations and do these strategies mediate the customer experience?

This study will be an attempt to find the answer to these pertinent questions.

The research study has three levels. *The first level* identifies the factors that drive a client to purchase apparel on Omni-channel platforms and the determinants that are responsible for Omni-channel shopping intentions, *the second level* explores the shopping journey that a customer experiences while using Omni-channel platforms and *the third level* look at how Omni-channel strategies moderate the customer experience.

A model is developed on the buying intentions of the Omni-channel and its determinants using the S-O-R framework and the statistical tools applied to test the model. The results, impressions, and future scope of the study were discussed in greater detail.

Literature Review

The literature review section discusses relevant work in this field and based on previous studies, the proposed model and hypotheses are developed. Accessed from a wide range of papers and studies, the paper intends to discuss the Stimulus - Organism-Response framework which was developed by (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974) on the consumer decision process, and different attributes of consumers that affect the purchase intention in an Omni-channel shopping environment. The proposed framework emphasizes any emotional state that can be anger or anxiety which is defined in

three independent dimensions- Arousal-Nonarousal, Pleasure-Displeasure, and Dominance -Submissiveness. Based on the S-O-R framework, it describes the connection between stimuli (such as external factors) that will affect organisms and the response consumers have to the stimulus- like consumer behaviour.

Today customers are more demanding, they seek more options, variety, offers, etc. Research studies show that omni-channel marketing involves the proliferation of channels that let customers tailor their customer journey, whereas conventional multichannel management is restricted to physical channels, websites, and brochures alone (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). The rise of the Internet and new technologies has transformed the way people communicate with each other in the purchasing process. With the rising use of online and physical stores simultaneously, consumers and retailers share a common platform to interact with each other, omni-channel shoppers are more prone to express their reviews and word-of-mouth with others about offline to online commerce. (Eroglu *et al.*, 2001; Morin *et al.*, 2007; Pantano and Viassone, (2015).

Consumer Decision Process

Every person assumes the role of a customer and makes several purchases each day. Understanding whether an issue or a need requires professional marketing effort is pivotal. Additionally, from the viewpoint of a marketer, understanding the target customer and comprehending how people perceive a product in comparison to the rival is important (Stankevich, 2017). Consumer activity procedures or purchase choice processes have remained its primary focus, according to the research that has been conducted while consumer behaviour is still up for discussion (Zhang *et al.*, 2018

Customer Experience

According to Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, it is imperative to conduct in-depth research on customer experience in order to get a detailed understanding of the parameters of customer experience. As per Verhoef *et al.*, 2009, the consumer's cognitive, sensory, relational, emotive, and behavioural responses to the merchant or brand are all part of the customer experience. Companies have lately centred their focus on customer experience to preserve a competitive edge in the market (Bascur and Rusu, 2020). Academics and practitioners of marketing agree that any company will eventually gain a distinctive competitive advantage from a seamless customer experience (De Keyser *et al.*, 2015). Customer Experience in a retailing environment is an interaction between a customer who acts as a subject and an experience provider who acts as an object, and the act of co-creation between the two. It is popularly said by (Maya Angelou, 2013) "that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel", Considering this, customer experience forms the backbone of an omnichannel retailing environment. Consumers demand seamless interactions with marketers, and they are not ready to compromise on any front when it comes consumption or experience of a product or service. With advances in digital technology like virtual reality, metaverse, augmented reality, and chatbots, many retailers are incorporating customer experience as a component of their offerings (Sachdeva and Goel, 2015). Thus, it is imperative to study the role of customer experience in an omnichannel retailing environment.

Transition phase from Multichannel to Omnichannel- The pathway to implement Omnichannel Strategy.

The transition phase from one channel to another requires a strong level of integration and cohesiveness. Retailers apply strategies in an incremental manner when transitioning from multi-channel level to omni-channel level and they undergo four phases- Crawl, Walk, Run, and Sprint. The level of integration between the retailer and the consumers increases with each phase thus the first stage has the least amount of amalgamation between the customer touch points and retailers and the last stage provides the highest degree of amalgamation. It is not an easy task for a brick-and-mortar retailer to switch to an online platform or vis-a-vis. This transition requires detailed research and investments in infrastructure, products, services, customers, and employees.

As illustrated by (Cao and Li, 2015), cross-channel integration was separated into major four stages. The first stage is referred to as Silo which depicts distinct prices, features, and services across the channel. The second stage is called Limited Integration which maintains a consistency in the brand message across the channels. The third stage is referred to

as moderate integration where the inception of omnichannel strategies begins and the fourth stage is called Complete Integration where a customer is completely immersed into an omnichannel ecosystem with seamless experience and integrated touchpoints.

2.4 A detailed study on the implementation of Omni-channel Strategies level-wise:

Level 1: In this stage, channel integration works in silos. Retailers advertise and sell goods and services through multiple channels, but each channel works independently and fails to provide unified information across all channels. Lack of coordination, inventory sharing, joint planning, and uniform customer information across channels causes the retailer to work independently without any cohesion. The promotional tools and appeals may vary on multiple channels thus it becomes difficult to break these silos as most of the operations and distribution channels of the retailers are established independently (Gallino and Moreno, 2014; Rigby, 2011).

Level 2: In this stage, there is minimal integration across channels. Company logos, product taglines, fonts, and colours of the product, and descriptives are available among all devices i.e., laptops, mobiles, desktops, and tablets but there is a lack of sharing of customer data and information. There is a minimal level of partial integration between the available channels for example a mobile coupon that can be sent to the customer to encourage him or her to visit the nearest store and redeem the benefits of the coupon or voucher (Cao and Li, 2015).

Level 3: In this stage customer information, pricing data, and order/inventory availability-related information are integrated. This stage refers to order fulfilment where omnichannel strategies play a key role in establishing communication between the consumer and the company across channels. Consumers can check the inventory in the store via a tablet, they can Buy Online Return in Store, Buy Online Ship to Store, Buy Online Pickup in Store, and Buy Online Ship to Home. This strategy called BOPIS minimizes the friction point for the consumers which means an uncertainty which gets developed in the mind of the consumer about whether the good is available in the store and what price it may cost. In this stage, both stores and online sites stock the same goods with common SKU to provide a seamless view to the consumer.

Level 4: In this stage, channel integration is at the highest level. Customers experience a very smooth and comfortable shopping journey across any device and touchpoints. This stage adapts to cross-channel integration. Retailers can use previous purchases as a reference from all the channels and can refer to specific purchases based on consumer choice and preference. It is not that easy for the retailers to upgrade to this stage of multichannel strategy as it requires a thorough integration and full cross-functional alignment. It is perceptible that a retailer may straddle at different levels while moving from multichannel to omnichannel and each channel will have its own product assortment, returns, and shipments that may vary differently, but if all the efforts are streamlined into one single direction i.e., seamless customer experience, then the journey becomes easier.

Hypothesis Development

Perceived Value and Omni-channel Shopping Intention

Perceived value is one of the key measurements for obtaining a competitive advantage (Parasuraman, 1997). Perceived value is a multidimensional concept and has a dynamic structure. Perceived value can be identified as the value of a product that is determined by the customer's opinion about its value. A customer's perceived value can be defined from the perspective of money, quality, benefit, and social psychology. Perceived value is defined as the customer's overall appraisal of the net worth of the service, based on the customer's assessment of what is received (benefits provided by the service), and what is given (costs or sacrifice in acquiring and utilizing the service). Perceived Value is one of the important measurements for understanding a competitive advantage (Parasuraman, 1997). The meaning of buyer's perception of value is defined as "a trade-off between the quality or benefits they perceive in the offering relative to the sacrifice they perceive by paying the price for the offering" (Monroe, 1990, p. 46). Perceived value of Omni-channel experience increases customer loyalty, business revenue, and business agility and academia also attaches great importance to Omni-channel management and ranked it third in topic's importance in service research. Perceived value is a complex phenomenon and cannot be measured or observed directly, academicians have developed a compositional method to model it (Kumar and Venkatesan, 2007). In the compositional approach, perceived value is a function of the

perceived benefits and the corresponding perceived sacrifices. The previous literature suggests that perceived value can be increased by increasing the usage of multiple channels and creating a seamless experience for the shoppers.

Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived Value (PV) has a positive influence on Omni-channel Shopping intention.

Perceived Risk and Omni-channel Shopping Intention

Perceived risk refers to overall assessments of uncertainty and potentially adverse consequences during the shopping process, previous studies have confirmed that perceived risk affects customers' shopping channel preferences (Herhausen *et al.*, 2015). Engaging in online and offline channel transactions and activities entails a certain degree of uncertainty and consumers are not crystal clear about the diverse types of risk (Silva *et al.*, 2019). A recent qualitative study has revealed that customers perceive Omni-channel shopping as risky because it is an innovative service that may lead to risks and errors (Kazancoglu and Aydin 2018). Referring to e-commerce, three types of risks are expected: performance risk, financial risk, and transaction /monetary risk. While shopping from e-commerce platforms these risks are inevitable as companies keep track of their customers' movements, preferences, financial credentials, names, addresses, etc. Therefore, customers are increasingly concerned about their privacy and monetary factors (Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014). Perceived risk causes a negative impact on the attitude and intention of consumers toward online transactions; thus, retailers and merchandisers are expected to reduce this risk for a better shopping experience. customer perception of shopping (including showrooming and webrooming) behaviours, compatibility, and risk to their intention towards Omni-channel shopping, implying a profound understanding of designing effective Omni-channel retailing strategy. Channel transparency and uniformity help reduce customers' perceived risk and perceived risk has a negative impact on customer channel selection intention in the Omni-channel retail environment. Perceived risk causes a negative impact on the attitude and intention of consumers toward online transactions; thus, retailers and merchandisers are expected to reduce this risk for a better shopping experience. Therefore, our study expects that if customers perceive less risk during Omni-channel shopping, they will regard Omni-channel shopping as a wise choice because they expect more benefits than the loss.

H2: Perceived Risk has a negative impact on Omni-channel Shopping Intention.

Social Influence and Omni-channel Shopping Intention

Social Influence is the extent to which consumers perceive that people who are important to consumers believe it is good to buy products from different channels. Social influence contains all the explicit and implicit notions that individual behaviour is influenced by how other people will view them as a result of having used the technology (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). It is said that social influence is others' view of the individual using new technology, thus the importance of processes of social influence, quality of service, trust, loyalty, motivation, and time, among others, are key factors for determining the acceptance of an Omni-channel environment that leads to enhanced purchase intention (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2012). The social influence variable has become the influencing factor on purchase intention in omni-channel services and has become a priority when a company formulates strategies in an Omni-channel. To understand what are the factors that lead to Omni-channel shopping intention, we first need to study the Omni-channel environment followed by the attitudinal characteristics of the customers where social influence plays a vital role.

Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Social Influence has a positive significant impact on Omni-channel Shopping Intention.

Omni-Channel Shopping Intention and Customer Experience

A satisfying and unique experience delivered through any touch point is a key feature of the Omni-Channel Approach (Silva *et al.*, 2018). Innovation is a fundamental concept in the development of attitude to accept a new system (Agarwal

and Prasad, 1998). For instance, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)(Davis,1989) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) discuss the change and the level of acceptance by users towards a new system. The consumer's willingness and intention to engage and explore a variety of channels or platforms offered by the retailers during their shopping journey which provides a seamless customer experience is known as Omni channel Intention. Omni-channel retailing approach is customer-centric approach where the retailer puts the customer in the driver's seat with the intention that they are of utmost importance to any business. An efficient omni-channel retailing approach will offer Agility, Consistency, Empowerment, Relevance, and Convenience for customers thus keeping the customer experience level high (Chib,2024). Today businesses must be exceptional just to remain competitive in the market. Organizations achieve competitive advantage by implementing Omni-Channel approaches and consumers who use these approaches actively are of utmost interest to the marketing practitioners as well as academicians. On the other hand, it is also important to understand that omni-channel retailing complicates customer experience management for companies where the primary task is to offer unique experiences across all channels in a seamless manner. To mitigate this challenge organizations put in their best efforts to synergize and coordinate the relationship between offline and online channels so that service quality and experience can be enhanced.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Omni-Channel Shopping intention is significantly related to Customer Experience

Omni-Channel Shopping Intention and Omni-Channel Strategies

The acceptance of technology has been widely adopted by millennials or Generation Y, who were born between 1984 and 1999 (Bento et al., 2018). Millennials prefer to engage and purchase tailored products using offline and online channels and now businesses are more focused to cater these needs (Nica et al.,2022). The primary intentions of the customers to use omnichannel platforms are seamless experience, curated needs, personalization, and convenience which are offered by the retailers (Hopkins,2022). In earlier times traditional customers used to follow a linear path from need recognition to post-purchase service where they had to bear very less switching cost, in contrast to today's omnichannel shoppers who are on an expedition during their shopping journey where need recognition happens from one channel, search and evaluation happen from another channel and the final transaction takes place from a different channel, thus a consumer is traversing between channels in an Omni-Channel ecosystem (Saghiri et al.,2021).

H5: Omni-Channel Shopping Intention is significantly related to Omni-Channel Strategies.

Omni-Channel Strategies and Customer Experience

An Omni-channel platform is a sales and marketing approach that provides customers with a fully integrated shopping experience, and these strategies unite user experiences across multiple touchpoints, including brick-and-mortar, web, and mobile applications (Keenan,2023). Mobile and social technologies have given more options to consumers to interact with businesses, creating new opportunities for customer engagement and care (Smith et al.,2024). A new multi-device, a multiscreen consumer who is better informed and demands Omni-channel brands has emerged. Research has shown that Omni-channel consumers are a growing global phenomenon (Schlager and Mass, 2013). When shoppers encounter a new technology or digital platform, they can either refuse it or accept it. Prior research shows customers love to explore new opportunities and innovative multiple channels in their shopping journey (Konus *et al*;2008; Rogers,1995; Steenkamp and Baumgartner,1992). Regardless of the platform or channel used, millennials demand a seamless transition between channels that includes brick and mortar store, mobile applications, online stores, and social media websites, depending on their current situation, the time of the day, or the product category (Cook, 2014; Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014)

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Omni-Channel Strategies are significantly related to Customer Experience.

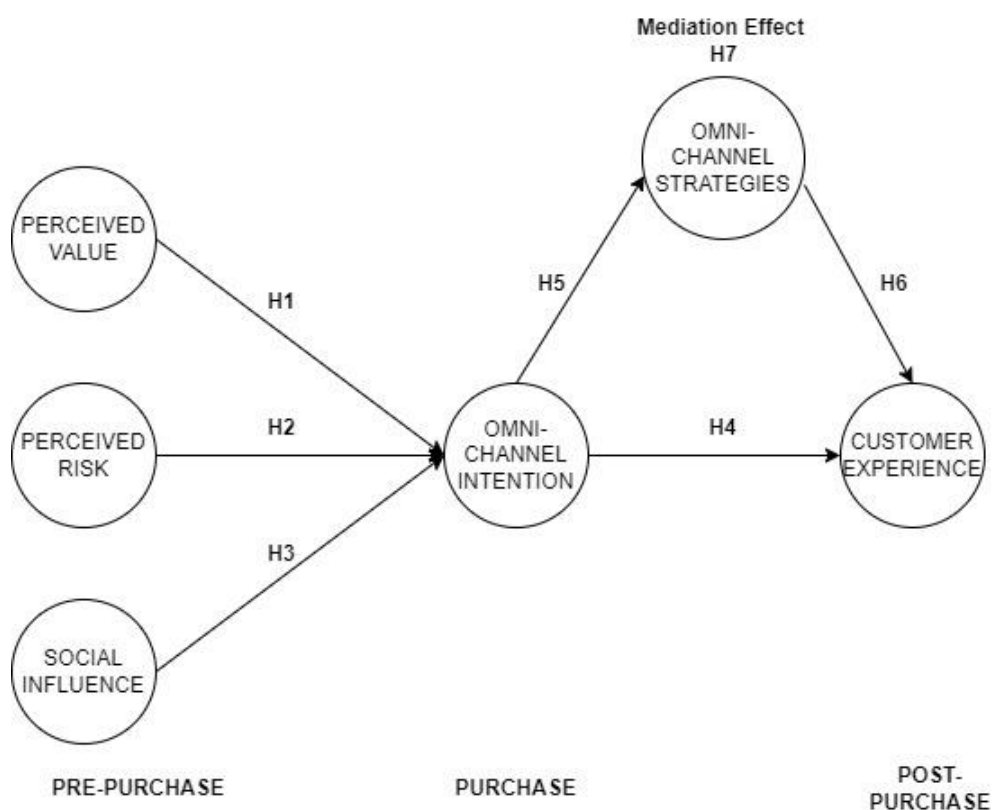
The mediating role of Omni-channel Platforms between Omni-channel shopping intention and Customer Experience- The Mediation Effect

The synergetic management of the numerous choices of channels and customer touchpoints, in such a way that the customer experience across channels and the performance over the channels are optimized and refereed to Omnichannel Retailing. as explained by (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). It is crucial for fashion and apparel companies to integrate their offline and online channels (Lorenzo *et al.*, Romero *et al.*, 2020) to retain their existing customers and attract new ones. By utilizing numerous channels, the omnichannel ecosystem assists merchants in displaying all client touchpoints and helps to enhance consumer purchase intention (Kazancoglu and Aydin, 2018). All emerging technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, the use of chatbots, metaverse, and curated retailing are important strategies that are rendered in an omnichannel ecosystem (Cai and Lo, 2020). It is imperative from customers' perspective that they will interact with different touchpoints during their purchase journey and the seamless experience induces them to explore more in the omnichannel environment.

This study thoroughly examines the indirect and direct implications of mediation effect between the variables of Omni-channel usage intention, Omni-channel strategy, and customer experience. In support of Hypothesis 4, this study discovers that Omni-channel usage intention (OCI) serves as a critical mediating factor, establishing statistically significant links between the variables indicated above. The empirical findings highlight the importance of three paths: The Omni-channel intention to Omni-channel strategy path ($t=31.724, \beta=0.764$); the Omni-channel intention to customer experience path ($t=11.209, \beta=0.554$); and the Omni-channel strategy to customer experience path ($t=4.707, \beta=0.290$). It is also demonstrated that these routes exhibit a state of partial mediation among themselves.

H7: Omni Channel platform mediates the relationship between omnichannel intention to customer experience (Mediation effect).

Research Model:



The Rationale of the Study

Formerly the cutting edge of retail, providing an engaging Omni-channel experience is now a need for survival. Academic research is still scarce from a shopping perspective, our study seeks to identify the key determinants of digital natives that lead to Omni-channel shopping intention, further, we explore how Omni-channel strategies mediate the customer experience while purchasing Apparel.

Research Methodology

An Omni-channel retailing is an approach adopted by retailers that is a blend of sales and marketing that provides customers with a fully integrated shopping experience, and these strategies unite user experiences across multiple channels and touchpoints like brick-and-mortar, web, and mobile applications. Mobile and social technologies have given more options to consumers to interact with businesses, creating new opportunities for customer engagement and care. An omnichannel experience enables customers to place an order from several platforms. This process is known as omnichannel order fulfilment and requires the inventory resources to be used in a flexible manner (Taylor *et al.*,2019). By providing the option to “buy online ship from store,” the retail sector was the first sector that examine the capacity of omnichannel retailing. According to (Beck and Rygl,2015) BOPS – Buy Online, Pickup from the store is an essential part of cross-channel retail management; nonetheless, they are not regarded as an omnichannel approach.

Customers are less likely to do their business online and finish their fulfilment in-store, making it less probable that this is a key component of a firm’s strategy, Buy online, pay-in-store (BOPIS) allows customers to make purchases through online medium, but from the standpoint of the supply chain function, the order was placed online and was filled using store resources. The last-mile logistics concept is used by Omni-Channel delivery as a part of the omnichannel fulfillment process to serve online consumers.

Sample and Data Collection

The research collects data through an online and offline mode. At the beginning of the questionnaire, a screening question was set up to ask whether the respondent is an Omni-channel shopper i.e., using more than one mode in their purchase process. (Brick and Mortar, social media website, mobile apps). To calculate the sample and reduce the biases a sample size between 300-500 respondents should be collected to get accurate findings (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). We received a total of 525 responses from Omni-channel shoppers out of which a total of 506 responses were considered for analysis after deleting duplicate items. As per the recommendations of (Faul *et al.*, 2009), 506 responses were found to be adequate to conduct this study.

After completing thorough research, a systematic sampling technique was used for selecting the sample and the selection of the respondents was done both offline and online based on the type of sales channel used during the shopping journey. The data collection was employed with the help of a structured questionnaire.

As shown in Table 1 the sample of customers in this study included more Females (53,7%) than males (46.3%). Most Omni-channel users in the data set were the age of between 20-30 years. Regarding their professional status, 42.6% were students, 37.3% were employed in the service sector, 10% were business/ entrepreneurs and the remaining 10% were in other categories (non-working or retired or any other work). The demographic data of the respondents are shown in Table 1

Table 1

Demographic Profile	Number (N=506)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	272	53.7%
Male	234	46.3%
Total	506	100%
Omni-channel Usage Status		

Both offline and Online Channels	366	72.3%
Offline Channel (Physical Retail Stores)	75	14.8%
Online Channel (Company Website, Social Media Platforms, Mobile Application)	65	12.9%
Most Convenient Channel for Apparel Category		
Both Channels (Offline and Online)	195	38.7%
Online Channels	169	33.3%
Offline Channels	142	28%

Measurement and Questionnaire Design

All constructs and measurement parameters used in this study were taken from previous research studies and were slightly modified to fit the circumstances of the current study. To understand the concept of the perceived value of consumers in determining Omni-channel intention and to prepare the scale, the items were adopted from (Parasuraman, 1997); (Gan *et al.*, 2017). Perceived Risk items were measured and adopted from (Troung, 2022). The Social Influence items were adopted by (Jeong and Jo, 2024). Finally, measurement items Omni-channel Strategy, Omni-channel shopping intention, and Customer Experience were adopted by (Gao *et al.*, 2021) and (Shankar, 2021). All items were measured through a seven-point Likert scale that ranges from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree).

The items of the questionnaire were adapted from the literature which are tabulated below:

Constructs		Items/Statements	Source
Perceived Value	PV1	Using multiple channels during shopping allows me to save time	Gan et al., 2017
	PV2	Using multiple channels are convenient for me	
	PV3	I am enjoying shopping apparels from multiple channels	
	PV4	Using multiple channels throughout my shopping journey offers me benefits	
Perceived Risk	PR1	I feel safe while doing payments using credit cards online	Troung 2022
	PR2	Making payments at different online platforms gives me a safe feeling.	
	PR3	I feel safe to provide my personal data to any e-merchant.	
	PR4	I have an unknown fear while making payments online.	
Social Influence	SI1	People whose opinion value to me, motivates me to use different shopping channels.	Jeong and Jo (2024)
	SI2	People who are important to me think that I should differently shopping channels, choosing whichever is convenient at a given time.	

	SI3	People who influence my behavior think that I should use different shopping, choosing channels which is most convenient at a given time.	
	SI4	People whose opinions I value prefer that I use different channels, choosing whichever is most convenient at any given time	
Omni Channel Usage Intention (OCI)	OCI1	I would continue purchasing from different platforms for Apparel	Shankar, 2021
	OCI2	I will recommend my friends, colleagues, and relatives to use the firm's omni-channel platforms	
	OCI3	I will like to repeat my purchases from omnichannel platforms.	
	OCI4	Using Omnichannel platforms are appealing to me for purchasing Apparels	
Omni Channel Strategy	OCS1	I find using online platforms (websites, Mobile and apps) easy to use.	Gao et al.,2021
	OCS2	I feel comfortable while switching from one platform to the other platform during shopping.	
	OCS3	Navigation and downloading from sites are almost effortless and I don't feel any problem in it.	
	OCS4	I am aware of the existence of all available service channels of this firm	
	OCS5	You have not perceived any boundaries or barriers when moving from one channel to another channel of this firm	
Cognitive Customer Experience (CCE)	CCE1	Using Omni channel services provide information which help me make better purchase decision.	Gao et al.,2021
	CCE2	Retailer's Omni channel services help me to reach to right choice of product/service which I was looking for.	
	CCE3	If I plan to buy a product, this retailer's omnichannel service would help me to find what I was looking for.	
	CCE4	Using this retailer's omnichannel service gives me more information about product, price and promotion	
Affective customer experience (ACE)	ACE1	Shopping for Apparel via omnichannel is entertaining	Gao et al.,2021
	ACE2	Shopping for Apparel via omnichannel service is pleasurable	
	ACE3	The retailer's omnichannel service induces feelings and sentiments	
	ACE4	My shopping journey is contented after shopping from different channels	

Table-2

Naturally, a well-crafted questionnaire might produce useful data in addition to reaching target people. In this study, the filter question is used to assess a respondent's suitability or level of experience to carry out the survey ("Do you Shop apparel from retailers through offline (Physical Stores) and online stores (Websites, social networks, mobile applications and e-commerce," etc.). The survey was conducted in two phases. The offline collection of data was done by visiting the physical stores under the apparel category. The sampling technique was probability systematic sampling technique where every 2nd respondent was asked to fill the questionnaire with the help of a tablet. The second phase was through an online medium where the link was sent to the respondents on their email id. The questionnaire is divided into two main sections, the first of which asks questions relevant to demographics (gender, age, income) and multiple channel shopping experiences (Do you seek information regarding a product through an online website and purchase it from a physical retailer store?), while the second one questions about research variables (Perceived value, perceived risk, omni-channel shopping intention, shopping habits, social influence, Omni-channel strategy, and customer experience). We chose the PLS-SEM model because it facilitates the identification of novel insights in complicated data. PLS-SEM helps to develop a linkage between latent and observed variables and supports to be useful in composite-based models (Dash, & Paul,2021). In the PLS-SEM analysis study, two models are used Measurement Model and Structural Model Analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis would be used in the first measurement to examine the validity and reliability of the latent variables as well as model fit indicators. Table 3 below depicts the measurement model. The analysis would provide a confirmatory evaluation of the measurement model's reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Investigating the values of the model's variables' loading factors was the first stage in measuring the model.

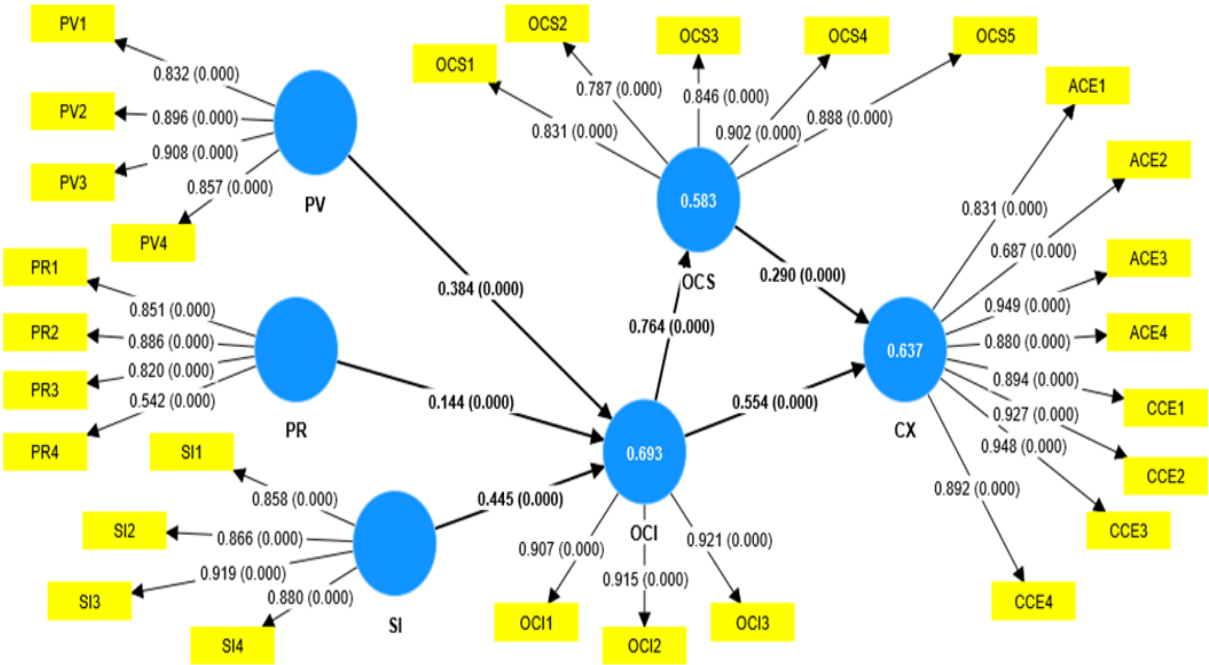


Figure:1 Path coefficient Graphical model

Table3:Measurement Model Analysis

Constructs	Items	Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Perceived Vale	PV1	0.832	0.763	0.928	0.896
	PV2	0.896			
	PV3	0.908			
	PV4	0.857			
Perceived Risk	PR1	0.851	0.619	0.863	0.783

	PR2	0.886			
	PR3	0.820			
	PR4	0.542			
Social Influence	SI1	0.858	0.776	0.933	0.904
	SI2	0.866			
	SI3	0.919			
	SI4	0.880			
Omni-channel Intention	OCI1	0.907	0.836	0.939	0.902
	OCI2	0.915			
	OCI3	0.921			
Omni-channel Strategy	OCS1	0.831	0.725	0.929	0.905
	OCS2	0.787			
	OCS3	0.846			
	OCS4	0.902			
	OCS5	0.888			
Customer Experience	CCE1	0.894	0.774	0.964	0.957
	CCE2	0.927			
	CCE3	0.948			
	CCE4	0.892			
	ACE1	0.831			
	ACE2	0.687			
	ACE3	0.949			
	ACE4	0.880			

The recommendations from (Hair *et al.*, 2016) were used in this investigation and Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), convergent reliability, and discriminant reliability were used to examine the reliability of the measures. Table 3 shows that Cronbach's α values range from 0.928 (PV) to 0.957 (CX). Once we examined the factor loading, the individual item reliability was calculated torange from 0.542 (for PR4) to 0.949 (for ACE3). The individual item reliability as well as composite reliability of each construct is above the value of 0.7, thus it can be concluded that the reliability of the model is acceptable. The findings demonstrate that scales reach internal consistency when CR and Cronbach's alpha are higher than 0.7. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) value for each construct is higher than 0.50. Thus, we can conclude that our analysis has met both convergent and discriminant validity. (Fornell & larcker,1981).

Table 4: Correlation matrix and square roots of average variance extracted.

	OCI	OCS	PR	PV	SI	CX
OCI						
OCS	0.843					
PR	0.649	0.668				
PV	0.803	0.814	0.544			
SI	0.834	0.726	0.626	0.679		
CX	0.828	0.76	0.604	0.688	0.677	

Structural Model Analysis

SEM, or structural equation modelling three steps have been taken in the structural equation modelling (SEM) process: assessing the measurement, analyzing the relationships in the structural model, and presenting and estimating the model, followed by assessing the final structural model. Prior to estimation, hypothesis testing, and conclusion making, this

sequencing helps to confirm the latent variables' reliability and validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hulland, 1999). The structural model evaluation comes next in the analytical process. To assure stability, this is accomplished by applying the bootstrapping resampling procedures 50000 times (J. Henseler, 2009). The structural route coefficient and the R-squared values of the endogenous variables used to gauge the explanatory power of a structural model have been tested using SmartPLS 3.0 statistical software. The bootstrapping approach was used to test the hypothesis, and a significance threshold of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) was used. At a significance level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), the path coefficient (β) and t-statistics were used to assess the validity of the hypothesis linking the dependent and independent variables.

This provides the analyses of the hypothesis and construct's relationship based on the examination of standardized paths. The result of the assessment is as follows.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	Hypothesis	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	β – Value	t- Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
PV -> OCI	H1	0.042	0.384	8.734	0	Supported
PR -> OCI	H2	0.03	0.144	4.38	0	Supported
SI -> OCI	H3	0.045	0.445	9.383	0	Supported
OCI-> CX	H4	0.049	0.290	11.209	0	Supported
OCI -> OCS	H5	0.024	0.764	31.724	0	Supported
OCS-> CX	H6	0.062	0.290	4.707	0	Supported

PV-Perceived Value, PR-Perceived Risk, SI-Social Influence, OCI-Omni-Channel Intention, OC-Omni-Channel Strategy, CX-Customer Experience

As shown in Table 5, perceived value ($t = 9.438$, $\beta = 0.384$), perceived risk ($t = 4.94$, $\beta = 0.144$), and social influence ($t = 10.69$, $\beta = 0.445$) have a significant effect on Omni-channel usage intention. Thus hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were accepted statistically. The result of the structural model signifies that omnichannel usage intention has a direct relation with the customer experience of omnichannel shoppers ($t = 11.209$, $\beta = 0.290$), thus hypothesis 4 is accepted statistically. Omni-Channel usage intention is significantly related to Omni-channel Strategies with ($t = 31.724$, $\beta = 0.764$), which reveals that hypothesis 5 is statistically significant and accepted. Omni-Channel Strategies are an integral part of this study, and the result of path analysis model reveals ($t = 4.707$, $\beta = 0.290$) that omni-channel strategies are effective in creating customer experience thus Hypothesis 6 is significant and statistically acceptable. The Mediating effect of OCP between OCI -> OCS ($\beta = 0.764$, $P < 0.05$), OCS -> CX ($\beta = 0.290$, $P < 0.05$) is significant, and the direct effect of OCI->CX ($\beta = 0.554$, $P < 0.05$) is significant.

Thus, there is a partial mediation of Omni channel platforms between Omni channel usage intention and customer experience.

Discussion:

Modern corporate operations must now include an Omni-Channel strategy to create smooth and integrated customer experiences across a variety of touchpoints. Omni-channel methods provide a win-win situation for the retail company as well as the customer. Convenience for the client and cost-effectiveness for the retail company drive the win-win scenario. This study demonstrates the advantages of Omni-channel strategies and their mediating role in improving the consumer experience.

Perceived online-offline channel interaction increases customers' patronage and cross-channel integration helps in consumer retention (Mishra *et al.*, 2024). Omni-channel retailing elements (integration, individualization, and interaction) generally retain customers by influencing customers' brand experience differently. The key factors affecting channel

choice and switching behaviour are perceived risk and social influence (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). This study has taken these items as constructs element and results indicate the significance of perceived value ($\beta = .384$, $p = 0$), perceived risk ($\beta = 0.144$, $p = 0$), and social influence ($\beta = 0.445$, $p = 0$) in Omni-channel usage intention.

The Omni-channel strategies like buying online and pick-in store enhance customer perceived value as an additional level of shopping assurance. However, the distance to the market affects the intensity of impact of Omni-channel strategies simplify the customer journey by providing various channels for customers to interact with a company. Customers can choose the channel that best meets their interests and needs, boosting their overall experience. For example, a customer may study a product online, and then visit a physical store to view it in person before making a purchase using a mobile app.

The relationship between the Omni-channel usage intention and Omni-channel strategies was found very strong in the study ($\beta = 0.764$, $p = 0$). It means the Omni-channel strategies are mediating the Omni-channel shopping intention. However, the mediation effect of Omni-channel strategies on customer experience is not that much as strong. This may be due to the lack of technical know-how of the customers using Omni-channel platforms or the apps and Omni-channel platforms are not providing the service level which is expected by the customer from such platforms, or the Omni-channel strategies mediation effect is partial on the customer experience. It explains that customers were initially hesitant to use the Omni-channel because they could not perceive the value of convenience and service support.

According to (Yang *et al.*, 2024) describe the Omni-channel as a unified approach that allows retailers to manage their channel as intermingled touch points (in-store, website, mobile devices). The benefit of consistency in messaging and service quality supports trust and reliability.

Managerial implications

Implications for Industry Practitioners

This paper contributes to the practical knowledge base of Industry practitioners by empirically testing a conceptual framework, identifying the determinants that lead to omni-channel usage intention. Customer experience is influenced by several factors including but not limited to perceived value, perceived risk, and social influence. Here in this study, the perceived value, perceived risk, and social influence are considered exogenous variables that influence Omni-channel usage intention. Social influence is the most important among the other variables to build Omni-channel usage intention. Retail Marketers should make a point to understand the social influence factors contributing to developing the intention to use the Omni-channel. The study shows that the current Omni-channel strategies partially mediate the strength between Omni-channel intention and customer experience. This means that the existing Omni-channel strategies (BORIS, BOPIS, BOSS, BOSH, etc.) are not very effective so customers value them which enhances their shopping experience. Retail firms need to devise new Omni-channel strategies that can significantly enhance customer experience.

The approach presented in the study ought to encourage businesses and other organizations to invest funds and efforts in concentrating management attention on good customer experience to fortify relationships with the customers.

Academic Implications

This study has important academic implications, it encourages the facilitation of Omni-Channel Retailing purchasing processes in which the consumers can choose between the different channels offered and take advantage of the benefits. The study contributes to the existing body of literature on the Omni-Channel Ecosystem and offers new insights into Omni-Channel strategy formulation. Academicians can use the study to explore the nuances of the Omni-Channel Ecosystem and contribute to new horizons of study.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The study is subject to possible limitations: Firstly, it was designed during the coronavirus crisis, which may have increased consumption of digital channels. Future researchers are recommended to use longitudinal studies can be conducted in post-COVID-19 periods, based on panel data, to assess whether consumer experience is maintained over time because this type of shopping experience has already been learned and adopted as a habit. Additionally, the study

applies to retail(B2C), and it may be interesting to measure how the model works in the industrial sphere(B2B). Finally, the object of the study was the retail sphere, and in future the model could be applied to other domains or sectors.

Conclusion

The aim of the study is twofold. First, the determinants are identified that create an intention among consumers to use omnichannel platforms, and second, the relation between omnichannel usage intention and customer experience is examined. Additionally, our objective was to investigate the mediating role of omnichannel platforms between omnichannel usage intention and customer experience. A combination of economic changes amalgamated with evolving consumer needs has compelled the retailers to upgrade the operating models to adapt new customers. Our proposed framework positions the factors that perceived value, perceived risk and social influence are key factors that determine the usage of Omni-Channel Ecosystem. Our results reveal that Omni-channel strategies are indispensable in channeling the Omni-channel drivers towards customer experience. The model presented in this paper demonstrates the desirability of a proactive, forward-looking strategic perspective in which the company actively seeks to anticipate future demand and find new opportunities.

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