Omni Channel Retailing: An Opportunity and Challenges in the Indian Market

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Abstract—The promising OC - Omni Channel interactive technology is presently perceived by several retailers as enabling the tool to compete in the marketplace more rigorously and effectively. This review paper is to discover, ascertain, and structure the research that distinctly clarifies the purpose and significance of omnichannel retailing. It provides a dynamic social strategy, an active mobile experience, with a lively converting website, to customers to offer a seamless shopping experience, by operating together, in coordination, with an advanced logistics and supply chain management perspectives; and reveals the omnichannel retailing intellectual foundation and research.

This study employs a multi-technique approach, methodology and conducts a content-analysis-literature review making use of numerous academic papers. Depending on the list of references, the citation is performed, while the analysis of co-citation depends on the most recent and regularly cited papers. This includes multidimensional cluster analysis, scaling, and factor analysis. However, there is a research gap, because; beneath these hypes and confusions lay a very crucial proposition. When the customer channels have inflated, the customer journey progressively diverts in different channels from where they started. Hence, the branding of the company is the most essential criteria so as to stitch every interaction together to generate a seamless experience. The study reveals that all customers anticipate the retail stores to be adequately integrated with retailer’s every digital capability, potential, competency and to succeed. They feel that, regardless of how, the retailers must serve all the customer needs, whenever and where ever they shop, without limiting considerations in the omnichannel retailing foundation and research. These findings can support and trigger future research evolving better understanding of OC retail business.

Keywords: OC, Omnichannel personalized technology, Digital marketing & advertising, Online retail, Offline retail, E-marketing, Digital wallet, Social media, Mobile phone promotion, Data aggregation.

JEL Classification: L81, M31

1. Introduction

Innovations and creativity have become embedded in our value and culture in many different ways. Particularly, in the age of e-commerce marketing, the customer can easily peruse, search, and research his needs at various places to eventually make a decision to purchase from a completely different place (Roblek, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to get a holistic approach, understand various challenges, grab the opportunities by applying a dynamic omnichannel marketing process and strategy in India, where the OC- Omnichannel concept and experience is obtained (Birkett, 2017).

In the era of big data and predictive analytics, the opportunity and marketing engines are recommending merchandise offerings based on individual customer preference to generate a revolutionary retail
business impact making personalization services a reality (Ellis, 2005). It has a clear sign that the OC retailers try to develop an exceptional 360-degree consumer understanding at the personal level. Retailer timely adaptation of customer frame of mind and recommendation machinery has achieved a competitive advantage with targeted marketing, sales increase, and customer loyalty.

This review paper investigates and explores to conduct elaborate market research on opportunities and Challenges in the Indian Market of online and offline retail, and take an overview of industry situation, industry trend, competitive landscape, market size, major vendors of proposed engines with differentiated technologies (Thoeni et al., 2016). Also will investigate the unknown customer needs on the basis of the voice of customer recommendations and proposed solutions. This procedure in combination with the big data technology is widely established and proven successful in online retail, and also transform the business structure of brick and mortar offline retail (Cluley, 2016).

Fig.1: Concept and Scope of Omnichannel Retailing
(Source: https://medium.com)

The OC uses cross-channel strategy to integrate user experience with better communication, orchestrated and designed to cooperate. Therefore, OC supplants multichannel like e-commerce, social media, mobile applications, and physical locations, to enhance customer values and engage them with multiple avenues for application in healthcare, government, financial service, and telecommunication industry. The method and technology the retailer use of their communication to select and offer the product, customer needs are critical and decisive to customer involvement, engagement, and competitive success (Lazaris, 2014).

Several retail brands are now mushrooming to focus their attention and develop the innovative OC marketing and sales strategies, and from a customer viewpoint, they only signify one segment of their brand journey. From the retailer perspectives, customer service is the most crucial aspect of the brand experience, which eventually makes or breaks the customer relationship. There are various customer service conduits, together with SMS, social media, screen sharing, virtual agents, and click-to-chat, which have generated unprecedented options for the customer to select the brand he needs, but such selection creates considerable challenges from the viewpoint of providing a correctly integrated brand experience (Varadarajan et al., 2010).

The Omni Channel Retail marketing in India provides research insights on digital, ICT- Information and Communication Technology, displays Multichannel-Omnichannel concepts, sprouting retailing landscape, and emphasizes on Multi-channel to Omni-channel retailing transformation (Brynjolfsson, et al., 2013).
Mc Grorty says, “this finally gravitate into and compel companies to take into consideration what exactly the customer wants, and induce companies to provide humanity with highly encouraging shopping experience so that, the companies can apply an earnest emphasis to valuable customer service.”

2. Problem Statement

The prime Omnichannel problem statement is to evaluate the inventory conditions and under what conditions the online store to be left open. The fundamental decision is to consider whether the online store should remain open even with low inventory status, when the retailer gets exposed to a great risk of canceling certain online accepted orders, incurring the cancellation of the order and heavy loss of customers and company values.

3. Objectives of Research

There are certain key tenets to evaluate and justify for the OC functional idea to turn into reality:
1. To understand the value and importance of omnichannel marketing;
2. To investigate the companies using the omnichannel retail marketing methods and to analyze the overall impact OC shopping experiences to develop consumer loyalty;
3. To understand the benefits and fundamentals of the omnichannel market.

4. Value and Importance of OC Marketing

There are very important established facts concerning omnichannel customer experience if we take a look at several statistical realities from a recently conducted study in the Omni-Channel campaign traits:

4.1) 22% of consumers have utilized their mobile phone to locate and redeem discount coupons and search for information on products while they were physically present in the store.

4.2) Personalized messages promoted through mobile improve sales. The consumer is more inclined to conduct in-store purchases if they get access to promotions and rewards through their mobile. A large number of consumers are fascinated by accessing this kind of add-on resources directly to their digital wallet (Ansari, et al., 2008).

4.3) 54% of retailers constantly monitor and involved in social media activities. 42% are of them adding SKU- Stock Keeping Unit for distinct kinds of products and items for sale. 38% enhance e-commerce sites and are presently implementing such initiatives.

4.4) The Retailers are far behind to improve inventory visibility in their normal course. To this end, around 35% have identified as training and preparing in-store employees provided with mobile phone apps to gain access to inventory and make an itemized report. In addition, the other initiatives have taken to impart visibility of cross-channel inventory, within their topmost three omnichannel priorities (Bucklin et al., 2006).

4.5) All online and offline experiences normally permit retail and customer to identify the prevailing brand with an opportunity to access many preferences (Boehm, 2008).
5. Companies using the OC Retail Marketing

In the big data era of predictive analytics, as the progress in technology, the opportunity, and the marketing engines are recommending an extensive merchandise offering. Based on every individual customer need, they expect to generate a revolutionary kind of retail business impact to make personalization service a reality. As per the Annual PwC’s global retail survey of 2016 published in Mumbai on 10th February 2016, they tracked a drastic change in consumer activities regarding retail marketing avenues, bringing forth several changes advanced by multichannel retailing. Starting from selecting the favorite channels to remaining skeptical about certain channels, the Indian consumers are quickly moving with rapid pace to embrace the omnichannel approach of life (Mathur, 2016).

The study of omnichannel consumers suggests that they are very unique, adhering to all three Logistics Service Quality (LSQ) dimensions of availability, conditions, and timeliness that generate a distinct impact on their loyalty and satisfaction (Murfield, et al., 2017).

Digital change is the largest disruption that has changed the entire retail industry outcome in the last five decades. This has greatly created an impact due to the omnichannel concept of marketing, by online shopping, using mobile devices, social networking and that has completely revolutionized the way consumers shop, what they need and expect, and how consumers operate. In India, around 33 million additional smartphones started functioning in the last two years. Therefore, the consumers have started researching and sourcing new products, started reading reviews to compare product prices online. This is mainly due to the digital network and omnichannel concept of marketing, which generated more than 50% retail sales, as per Times magazine survey (Rigby et al., 2012).

The new technology is a fundamental of omnichannel; There is an evolution of conversion tool with Google’s store visits; Mergers and acquisitions have driven omnichannel progress managed by Amazon and Whole Foods; Walmart recently acquired multiple digital-intuitive companies in India, like ModCloth, JetCom, and Bonobos to impart a seamless and trouble-free shopping experience to their Indian market (Gensler, et al., 2012).

There are several benefits of omnichannel marketing. The Crate & Barrel company offers seamless shoppers and customer involvement by using their wedding card gift registry. The company recognizes the shoppers switching tendency from the smartphone, to tablet from an e-commerce website while conducting research on customer completing every purchase. Hence, the Crate & Barrel app saves customer sign in details of an e-commerce shopping cart and access their every information around several mobile browsers and devices. This feature permits them to conduct further shopping process (Trout, 2017).

The reward app of Starbucks has frequently pointed out the “top” list of their omnichannel efforts with proper reasons, as this coffee company does a fabulous work by providing an effortless user experience around every channel. The South Indian vibrant marketplace opened Omni Channel Retail summit 2017, where the Vinculum Group, a foremost SaaS-based Product software Company provides omnichannel Experience, with Offline to Online, Online to Offline, Multi-brand Retailers, Brands, Sellers, uses omnichannel fundamentals (Gensler, et al., 2012). The body shop of India provides an online shopping experience of natural beauty and body care products! Omni Channel Retail (Vinculumgroup unleashing Omni Channel Success in South India retail; The Bodyshop products on display) (Gensler, et al., 2012). Pretty Secrets is a fun loving, young, and provides online sexy lingerie product brand that supposes lingerie need not be a boring subject. You can buy any Bra online along with Lingerie, Panty, Swimwear, Nightdress, at a discounted price (Girish, 2016).
6. Review of the Literature

Digital technology has provided many relevant success features, along with several opportunities and challenges to implementing with strategic use of omnichannel systems. With high-quality digital technologies, many omnichannel system initiatives, these issues have surfaced to provide values and importance of OC marketing to achieve excellence in the omnichannel system (Öztürk & Okumus, 2018). There are several companies presently operating the techniques of OC distribution. They also use retail marketing methods and that has generated an overall impact of OC shopping experiences to develop consumer loyalty (Doyduk, 2018).

Once the OC marketing fundamentals, Business ethics, and essential elements are known, they can be applied to gain maximum benefits. (Hübner, et al., 2016). Although the OC- Omni Channel term initially emerged six years back (Rigby, 2011), the main concept and idea expressing the ways something can be done and accomplished, that can lead to the expected results of OC functioning remained unclear. This is because of their indistinct and inarticulate use and application of the Cross, Multi, and OC concepts provided in various literature (Beck & Rygl, 2015). When multi-channel marketing is referred as having integrated several channels and exhibiting their presence by operating separately, just as opposite, in the OC system all the integrated channels work together, so that, the customers can make use of all the digital channels to research, and gain experience of every physical store in one single transaction practice (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). This is because all the channels are collectively operating, and jointly managed, while the customers count on having various brand experience whenever and wherever they interact with the company website (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

Therefore, the concept of OC is possibly the most valuable, practical and important revolutionary progress in the recent business strategies, with both theoretical, viable and practical implications (Bell, Gallino, & Moreno, 2014).

Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, (2015) states that companies competing in the global scenario have already transformed the entire markets, with their new marketing concepts and advanced technology. The advances made in the communication and IT- Information Technology has resulted in increased and added quantity of retailing formats by which any consumer can conveniently contact the company with their secured customer journey (Klaus, 2013). Furthermore, apart from the traditional online and physical stores, the latest mobile channels with several mobile devices, social media, branded apps, and the related, connected components and objects, the touch-points have further converted the entire consumer buying procedures and experience (Agatz, Fleischmann, & Van Nunen, 2008).

This new omnichannel term originated within the business house and practitioners. However, of late, it has drawn more attention in the academic field as well. It has completely changed the retailing concept and perceptions of changing consumer habits and shopping manners of the prevailing retailing wave (Banerjee M. 2019). Therefore, omnichannel management is continuously facing an acute challenge for various brands, due to customer excessive demands and better expectations of the companies to offer them an exclusive shopping experience in their customer voyage (Juane-Da-Ayensa, Mosquera, & Sierra Murillo, 2016). With the propagation of social media crazes, and mobile technology, the customer passage has turned highly complicated; where the simultaneous application of various communication channels and the selection methods of customers are facilitating new behaviors (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2019). In the absence of literature consensus on retailing omnichannel management, there are advanced communications and discussions to understand what precisely omnichannel retailing management is all about and to explain them with research, the status quo of omnichannel. Hence, based on this, there were several contributions. Initially, it reduced the vagueness of the omnichannel concept of a marketing term, and conclusively demarcating the cross-, multi-, and OC views. Secondly, it offered a consolidated view of the existing knowledge and experience of the omnichannel procedure of shopping and the newly indulged customers. Thirdly, it proposed the future research terminology concerning the strategic aspects of omnichannel retailing. Ultimately, it concludes with the theory and phenomena of
omnichannel practical implications that proposed new open questions regarding this subject, which has drawn and illustrated remarkable attention of the research group recently (Tetteh & Qi, 2014).

7. Research Gap

The retailer websites do not lie. The digital world of retailers is under constant pressure to deliver around several channels permitting shoppers to get a specific product, from any website platform, from anywhere, and at any required time, and they also expect the products to be delivered in a particular way. The intense research is in progress in this regard how to implement all together. There are several stages of omnichannel marketing and implementation strategies. However, there are gaps in the strategies to move further and generate appropriate measures. Therefore, the retailers must identify all the barriers to implement them and elaborate on the methods to overcome (Peltola, Vainio, & Nieminen, 2015). The retailers have promised customers to provide shopping on their own terms, while the retailers are observed struggling to maintain the speed of such operations. Hence, perfect decisions are needed to keep their brand promise and deliver the products. There appears an apparent speed deficit between retailer’s decision-making and customer expectations (Frederick, Lim, & Srai, 2018).

8. Research questions

Due to literature research gap, three prime questions arise and can be stipulated as follows (Gioia et al. 2013).

RQ1: Which Omni Channel issues a suitable platform with Values and Importance of OC Marketing to achieve excellence in OC systems?

RQ2: Which prevailing companies operating the techniques of OC distribution, retail marketing methods and how the overall impact OC shopping experiences develop consumer loyalty;

RQ3: What are the OC marketing fundamentals that can be applied to gain maximum benefits? (Hübner, et al., 2016).

9. How Excellence in OC distribution techniques can be achieved?

9.1) Development and optimization delivery modes;

9.2) The significance of improving delivery speed depends on the reality that almost all customers expect the delivery the following day of placing the order;

9.3) Inventory transparency is the major issue to be carefully managed and streamlined;

9.4) The purpose of improving the cross-channel procedures in stores is basically to streamline omnichannel retailing operations;

9.5) The Inventory allocation and integration are the major critical issue and consolidating offline and online inventories can reduce the entire inventory level, and reduce logistics costs (Hübner et al., 2016).

10. Research Method

PwC Global Consumer and Retail administration, management and performers, in concurrence with R2I managed global survey and research organization have conducted an elaborate investigation to understand, scrutinize, and compare the latest behavior and trends of consumer shopping method,
fashion and tendency to use various retail channels around 25 territories across the world (Rippe et al., 2015).

Over the past couple of years, PwC’s have conducted a complete retail survey and it has constantly signified a rise in online shopper’s frequency, the latest trend, which continued this year. There is an increased number of respondents expressing more and frequent shopping daily or weekly online and also in-store. The analytical and investigative study is an indication of the constantly increasing consumption pattern of people driven by the production, and propagation of multiple retail channels (Rippe et al., 2015).

As per the survey, the debit cards are mostly used and became a popular payment system in India instead of mobile wallets and credit cards. Further, the study and survey of Indian respondents demonstrate higher acceptance of mobile / smartphone based methods of payment, when compared with the global payment methods as a sample average. Obviously, mobile phones and similar devices have evolved and become the primary tool for all purchase activities, when compared with global measures (Oberg, 2014).

The survey was conducted to evaluate the factors and intends that drive consumer to select their preferred retailers, the survey consistently observed that the reasonable and good prices in the deal by the retailers is the topmost priority factor, subsequently by the trust, the retailer has generated confidence concerning the brands they supply, adequate and prompt delivery, a perfect return policy and availability of required products, which can be obtained from home or office, at any time and from anywhere (Saghiri et al., 2017).

11. Future of omnichannel retail in India

The India’s future of the retail industry revolves around omnichannel strategies as it provides a smooth journey to consumers with a holistic and a single view of the entire retail business from home or office, applying various channels that provide an extensive shopping experience to customers like online stores, telephone sales, physical stores, mobile, mobile apps, and different methods of transactions with customers (Izogo & Chanaka, 2018).
Now, customers are more inclined to research and search more online, check out various, opinions and reviews online on social media and try to engage with popular companies on multiple platforms because, the customers started thinking differently concerning their needs and purchases (Bullock, 2017).

In India, the omnichannel environmental design of SCN- Sustainable Supply Chain network provides an effective service to customers by the flexible distributed processing network. Therefore, they incorporate the distribution through multiple-channel in the design network of SC- Supply Chains. There are practical implications to this because the customers can freely access any product and service as per their need of channels to enhance their reach, convenience, and satisfaction (Yadav, Tripathi & Singh, 2018).

12. Discussion
The impatient temperament of the omnichannel customers clearly indicates that they need an instant delivery of products and service. As per the research and survey, 65% of the customers replied that they expect a virtual-time support irrespective of the service channel they utilize, with 68% of Indians expects it. Even though companies are increasingly investing in branded products in their omnichannel campaign, they surely risk wasting that asset and investment in case they fail to provide the requisite service levels across service channels. Indeed, the brands fail to provide adequate after-sale service and support concerning immediate sales are sure to be doing additional harm than they expect (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2019).

Presently, India has become the second largest smartphone users in the world (Singh & Srivastava, 2019), and for online shopping, users started embracing mobile devices to operate mobile channels further to prevailing traditional channel like computers. Therefore, there is a need to investigate and assess the product characteristics of each channel capability and its consequences on the behavior of online consumers so that the e-retailers can generate an improved online shopping experience for their valued consumers (Izogo & Chanaka, 2018).

13. Scope for future research
The existing and future AR- Augmented Reality of OC roles can be further explored to enable more experiences of every customer journey. This can provoke to advance further conceptual awareness and management operations of AR and to synthesize prevailing research, which illustrates how several online applications can merge constantly to provide better online and offline experiences to customers. This triggers the future agenda for the research to facilitate and take advance measures to develop the art in AR, because, AR provides myriad prospects to customers with an artful and flawless omnichannel journey, removing prevailing obstacles, with an exclusive embedded combination of extended and embodied customer experience (Hilken et al., 2018).

14. Conclusion
It is very important to understand the Value, ethics, implementing elements and the importance of OC Marketing. Several companies have already investigated applying the retail marketing technology very effectively and carefully and that have been analyzed in this study and what overall impact OC shopping has developed to gain consumer loyalty (Wasserman, 2015). They have done so because they clearly understood the benefits and fundamentals of the omnichannel market and hence apply cross-channel as a business model to increase customer experiences. This approach has should tremendous vertical benefits in government, healthcare, retail industry, financial services, and telecommunication industries, to obtain physical locations as well (Fallon, Nicole, 2014). Companies using the omnichannel assert that the
company enhances the customer values by having the ability to remain in regular contact with customers, through numerous avenues simultaneously (Solomon, Micah, 2015).

Regardless of the variation between several Indian states and regions, consumers maintain a very clear view regarding what they anticipate from branded products in views of customer service, and mostly, they feel let down by the companies who fail to meet their expectations (Verhoef, et al., 2007). Understanding that the reward for obtaining it correctly includes higher spend, with better customer loyalty, cultivating valuable brand promoting diplomats, it becomes startling that branded products need not make more efforts to please their customers, but the after sales service aspects are particularly demanding concerning the real-time, customer service option. It becomes clear that there is a wide gap between performance and expectations and they can turn wider if remained unchecked. All the voice solutions and call centers are prepared to stay with and convince customers to meet their demand, reverting to their “failsafe phone” method, when substitute channels fail to meet customer needs. There is an increasing need for the speed of work and response to complaints and solutions, and also to provide a single stage of contact, regardless of which channel is used. Offering better customer service becomes fruitless if all the activities of the company in omnichannel marketing are not appropriately integrated when the brands cannot take a single customer at each sale and the touch point of customer service. Therefore, taking the fundamental business aspect, the company should work harder and provide a seamless service occurrence for customers. The journey of customers doesn’t merely halt at the product supply and check out point, but its consequences carry on several years thereafter (Rosenbloom, 2007).

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