

Rebuilding the Fashion Retail Industry with the Omni-channel Concept

Vidushi & Radha Kashyap

Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to study the synchronisation between the services being offered by online and offline channels during customer's shopping journey in an omni-channel approach. Synchronisation plays an important role in the functioning of omni-channel brands.

Design/methodology/approach- This study has been conducted in Delhi using 450 customers who are using multiple channels for apparel shopping. A self developed questionnaire is used to identify the services received by customers from online and offline channels during the different phases of their shopping journey.

Findings- A 3-dimensional structure has been prepared to understand the services across channels. This structure includes 3P's of a customer's shopping journey- pre purchase, at point of purchase and post purchase phase. During customer's pre purchase, online channel is providing better services, at point of purchase, offline channel is providing better services and while post purchase, both the channels (online and offline) are providing better services. There is a positive relationship between the online and offline channel's services in an omni-channel approach.

Practical implications- Retailers can use this structure to identify the degree of services received by customers across channels. This instrument can help in assessing the performance of Omni-channel brands.

Originality/value- This study focuses on the phases of customer's shopping journey and the associated sub-dimensions specific to the context of Omni-channel approach. Theoretically, the developed dimensions can serve as building blocks for further studies in omni-channel retailing.

Keywords: Customer shopping journey; Fashion retail; Offline channel services; Omni-channel and online channel services.

Introduction

With the emergence of technologies, customers become more tech-savvy which in turn shifts their way to buy the products. This digitalization changes the behaviour of customer and modifies the buying of various products such as food, beauty, grocery and fashion. Retailers need to shift their business strategies to meet this shifting behaviour of customers by providing more than one option to sell their products, otherwise customers would buy elsewhere. Due to the digitalized realm, many retailers such as Zara, H&M, M&S and Tommy Hilfiger have sold their products through multiple channels, especially online and physical store (Huang and Jin, 2020). According to survey conducted by Deloitte (2014), one in three consumers uses multiple channels while making a purchase. Now-a-days, omni-channel is not an option for a retailer but it is a need to provide highly personalized experience to customers across channels. Both online and offline retailers must come up with unique ways to integrate the online and offline channel services. They have to serve their customers seamlessly across all channels. Earlier, customers use a single channel (physical stores) to buy the product. With the advancement in technologies, a new channel (online channel) has been provided to customers to shop the products.

In this era of advanced technologies, a number of channels such as television shopping, catalogue, kiosk, e-commerce marketplace (Jabong, Mynta, Flipkart and Amazon), online website and mobile application have been provided to customers to buy the product (Wallace et al., 2004). Customers are now demanding unique ways from online and offline retailers to shop the product. In order to keep the loyal customers, retailers are moving their step towards omni-channel approach.

“Integration of online and offline platform creates omni-channel environment”

Omni-channel concept provides the similar product, prices, information, offers and services to customers across channels. Using this concept, many online retailers are moving towards offline platform and vice versa. Zivame and Nykaa are the online retailers who are using the same strategy to attract the customers to shop from them. Earlier, they were using only online platform to sell their products but due to this shift in business, they have opened their offline store as well. This move by both these brands re-iterated the importance of omni-presence amongst retailers. Various brands such as Shoppers Stop Ltd, Aditya Birla Retail Ltd. and Future

Group are already present on both the platforms (online and offline) to provide customized services to customers during each and every phase of their shopping journey. Fashion brands are now realising the importance of this concept and want to be present across all retail channels and formats in order to survive in the market.

“Omnipresence is a way to revamp the retail industry”

Omni-channel approach will increase the growth of retailing and help in attracting the new customers not only the repeated ones. This approach provides the customer to buy the product through any channel, anywhere, at any time, at similar price and with similar services. The integration of both the channels not only provides seamless experience but also strengthens the relationship with the customers and hence, enhances the brand performance (Oh et al., 2012).

Various studies have been conducted for finding the experience of customers with the services offered by online and offline channel separately. Beauchamp and Ponder (2010) found the services offered by online and offline retailers separately during different phases of customer's shopping journey. Jiang, Yang and Jun (2012) investigated the services of online retailers provided during different phases of customer's shopping journey. However, services offered by Omni-channels have not been reported yet. The aim of this study is to identify the synchronisation between the services offered by omni-channel retailers (both online and offline channels). This study also investigates the better service provider during the different phases of customer's shopping journey.

Review of Literature

Omni-channel Concept

Omni-channel retail concept merges both online and offline platforms to provide a seamless shopping experience to customer.

This helps in blurring the space between the online and offline channels which in turn offers the customers to use different channels simultaneously for shopping. An online channel can be complementary to offline channel and vice versa (Herhausen et al., 2015).

Customers can start their shopping journey from one channel and ends it on another channel. For example, customer can search the product in-

formation, select the required product and complete the payment process from online channel but want to feel and touch the product then they can use BOPIS (Buy Online Pick up In-store, also called as click and collect), which is one of the facilities provided to Omni-channel customers wherein customer can use the offline channel to pick the product.

Using this facility, they can reduce the delivery time and even get the product within few hours instead of the normal delivery time of 6-7 days. This also helps in reducing the shipping charges from the final cost.

Following are the few facilities given to customers to enjoy the services from Omni-channel brands- BOPIS (Buy Online Pick up In-store/Click and collect): In this facility, customer can book a product using click and collect option provided on online website/mobile application. After completing the payment process, they can visit the nearby store, examine and pick the product. According to Giannopoulos (2014), in-store pick up allows the retailer to use the existing inventory effectively and efficiently.

BORIS (Buy Online Return In-store): In this facility, customer can return the online purchased product in store. Using this facility, they do not have to wait for many days to get the required product. For example, if they want to return the product due to incorrect size/colour then they can return the product in store and buy the required product. According to NRF (2018), BORIS has become popular among retailers and consumers and can help retailers integrate their online and offline channels after sales services.

Ship from store: This option provides the customer to get the product at their doorstep by using the ship from store option available on the website/application of the brand. Using ship from store feature, retailer can use the existing inventory effectively in order to decrease the excess stock (Giannopoulos, 2014).

ROPO (Reserve Online Purchase Offline): This facility provides the opportunity to reserve the products on online platform and purchase it from offline store. In this case, customer will complete the payment process from offline channel after examining the product there only.

Omni-channel Strategies followed by Brands-

- **Nike App at Retail**

This platform links the feature of Nike app (online channel) to

the physical store (offline channel) experience. They have merged the experience of online channel in the offline channel. This application provides the customers to scan the product availability once they entered the store and to complete the payment process without standing in the queue. It also helps in reserving the product on the app and get it from the store locker to try before buying.

- **Walmart Mobile Express Return** This platform provides the customer an opportunity to get the refund immediately from the store. In this facility, they have to scan the payment receipt from their smartphone or I-Pad, start a return by selecting the item in question, go to the store with the item, locate the desk, join the express lane, scan the QR code and get the refund on the spot.

Customer's shopping journey Customer's shopping journey has been divided under three phases and these phases can be used to understand the services provided by retailers. These are:

1. **Pre-purchase Phase:** This phase includes the services being offered by retailers before purchasing the product such as information search related to the product (Description, price, inventory (quantity), offers etc.) and consistency of products. According to Akalamkam and Mitra (2017), pre-purchase information search is the most critical stage among the five stages of customer's shopping journey- problem recognition, pre-purchase information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase evaluations.
2. **At-point of purchase Phase:** This phase has been used to understand the services being provided during purchase stage. Gallino and Moreno (2014) found that the customers who are using buy-online-and- pickup-in-store (BOPIS) functionality can buy the additional products from store.
3. **Post-purchase Phase:** This phase can be used to understand the services being offered after purchasing the product such as promotion, returns and loyalty etc. According to Oh et al., 2012, omni-channel promotions can be defined as offering consistent promotion information across channels in order to facilitate and encourage combined channel use. Coupon promotion in omni-channel retail has become increasingly popular (Li, et al., 2020).

Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory approach to explore and identify the synchronisation between the services of online and offline channels during customer's shopping journey in an Omni-channel approach.

Data collection and analysis-

Primary data was collected using self developed questionnaire based on the secondary data available on the services of online and offline channels. 5 questions and 19 statements related to the services were included in the questionnaire. Five point Likert Scale- Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree has been used to get the responses on the statements. Secondary data was collected through available case studies, documents, reports and published articles. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data. Questionnaire has been shared with 500 respondents from Delhi who are using multiple channels for apparel shopping. However, only 450 have shared the complete data which shows that the response rate was 90%. Mean (M), standard deviation (SD) and correlation were used to analyse the results.

Results and Discussion

In general, the study showed that customers are getting better services using Omni-channel concept.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Omni-channel adoption in Delhi-

Q1. *Which channels do you currently use for apparel shopping? (Check all that apply)*

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	225	50
Female	225	50
Age Group (in years)		
21-30	387	86
31-40	63	14

Occupation		
Employed	144	32
Entrepreneur	24	5
Homemaker	4	1
Part timer	1	0
Student	277	62
Marital Status		
Married	77	17
Unmarried	373	83
Family	Income (yearly income in ₹)	
₹	8,00,000	-
12,00,000	236	52
₹	12,00,000	-
₹16,00,000	105	23
More than ₹ 16,00,000	109	24

Table 2. Channels used for apparel shopping

Channels used for shopping	Frequency	%
Brick and mortar store	263	58
Mobile application	240	53
Catalogue	19	4
Online company website	210	47
E-commerce marketplace	282	63
Television Shopping	16	4
Kiosk	4	1
Online social commerce site	114	25

E-commerce market place has been used by maximum respondents for apparel shopping, followed by brick and mortar store (physical/ retail store),

mobile application, online company website,online social commerce site (Facebook/Instagram etc.) for apparel shopping.

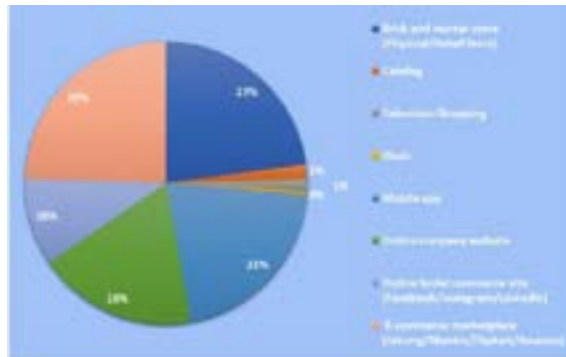


Fig. 1. Channels used for apparel shopping

Q2. Do you use online and offline channels simultaneously for apparel shopping?

Table 3. Simultaneous use of online and offline channel

Use	Frequency	%
Yes	406	90
No	44	10

Maximum respondents are using online and offline channels simultaneously for apparel shopping.



Fig. 2. Simultaneous use of online and offline channel

Q3. How frequent do you use both (online and offline) channels simultaneously for apparel shopping?

Table 4. Frequency of using both channels simultaneously for apparel shopping

Frequency of using channels	Frequency	%
Always	66	15
Once in a month	100	22
Twice in a month	68	15
Sometimes	196	44
Never	20	4

Maximum respondents sometimes use online and offline channels simultaneously for apparel shopping.



Fig. 3. Frequency of using both channels simultaneously for apparel shopping

Q4. Which channel influence your apparel buying decision?

Table 5. Channel influences apparel buying decision

Maximum respondent's decision was influenced by both (online and offline) channel.

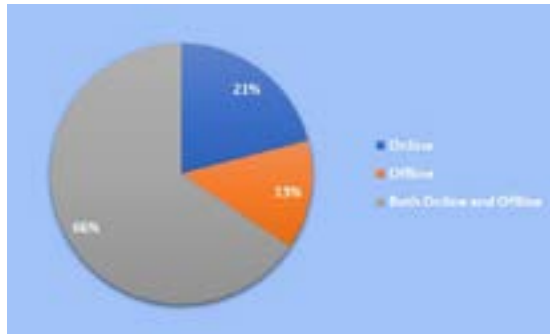


Fig. 4. Channel influences apparel buying decision

Q5. Which channel influence your buying decision while using both channels?

Channel influences decision	Frequency	%
Online	94	21
Offline	61	14
Both channel	295	66

Table 6. Channel influences decision if you are using both channels

Channel influence	Frequency	%
Purely Omni- channel (Both channels)	296	66
Showrooming (Touch and feel offline but purchase online)	91	20
Webrooming (Search online but purchase offline)	63	14

Maximum respondents decision was influenced by purely omni-channel (both online and offline).

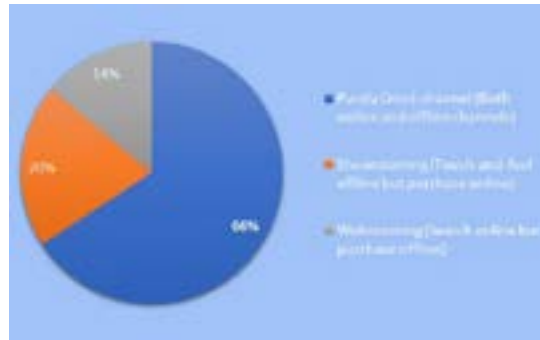


Fig. 5. Channel influence decision if you are using both channels

Customer's shopping journey-

Omni-channel strategy influences customers at each stage of shopping journey. To understand the services clearly, a 3-dimensional structure is prepared which includes 3Ps of customer's shopping journey- pre purchase, point of purchase and post purchase. Following are the service dimensions provided by brand during customer's shopping journey.

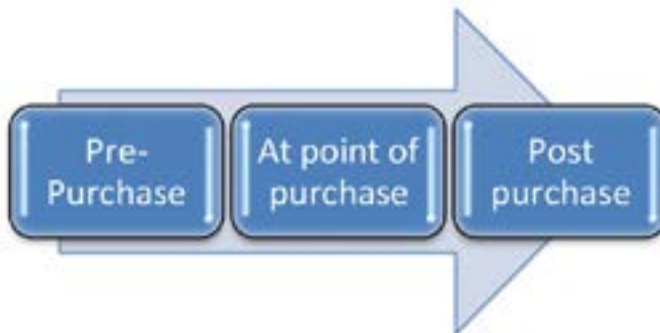


Fig 6. Research Framework

Pre-purchase phase-

Table 7. Search information across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Pre-purchase (PRP)1: Search information of onlineproduct from offline store	3.74	1.01
Pre-purchase (PRP)2: Search information of offline product from online store	3.92	0.91

The above table indicates that customers can easily search the information of offlineproducts from online store as compared to searching the information of onlineproducts from offline store.

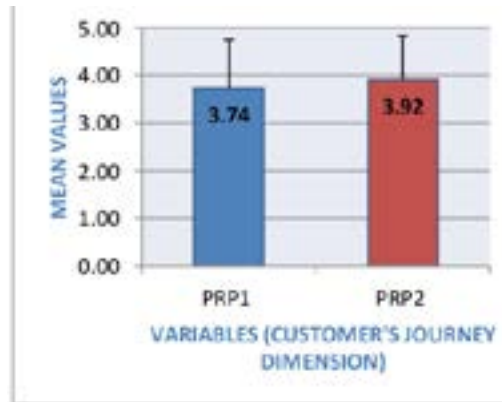


Fig. 7. Search information across channels

Further, the above graph shows that the **online store** provides better information searching facility than the offline store.

Table 8. Check inventory across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Pre-purchase (PRP)3: Check online inventory from offline store	3.51	1.00
Pre-purchase (PRP)4: Check offline (in-store) inventory from online store	3.71	0.96

The above table indicates that customers can easily check the store inventory from online store as compared to checking the online inventory from offline store.

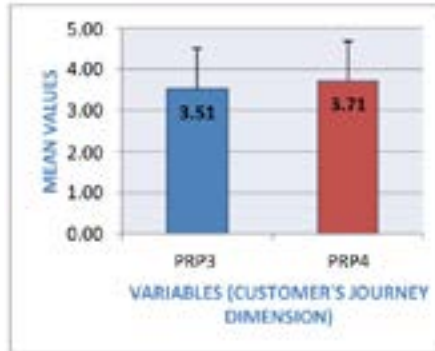


Fig. 8. Check inventory across channels Further, the above graph shows that the

online store provides better inventory checking than the offline store.

Table 9. Consistency across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Pre-purchase (PRP)5: Same products at online and offline store	3.65	0.97
Pre-purchase (PRP)6: Same product price at online and offline store	3.31	1.04
Pre-purchase (PRP)7: Same promotions at online and offline store	3.32	1.06

The above table indicates that both the platforms are offering similar products. However, prices and promotions are not similar across channels.

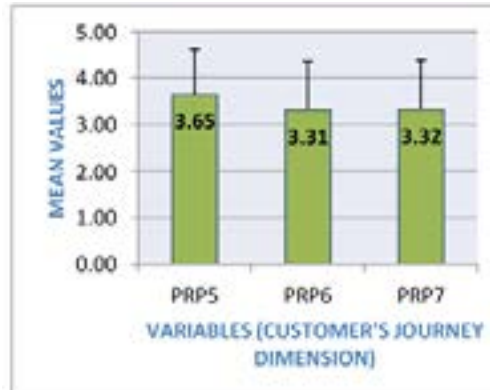


Fig. 9. Consistency across channels Further, the above graph shows that there is consistency of products across channels. Both (online and offline) store provides similar products.

At point of purchase phase-

Table 10. Product purchase across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
At point of purchase (APOP)1: Purchase online product from offline store	3.74	0.89
At point of purchase (APOP)2: Purchase offline product from online store	4.06	0.90

The above table indicates that customers can easily purchase the offline products from online store as compared to purchasing the online product from offline store.

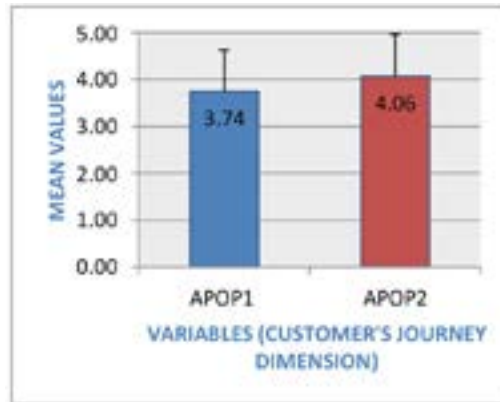


Fig. 10. Product purchase across channels Further, the above graph shows that the online store provides better purchasing facility than the offline store.

Table 11. Payment option across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
At point of purchase (APOP)3: Use digital wallet for purchasing online product from offline store	4.06	0.77
At point of purchase (APOP)4: Use digital wallet for purchasing offline product from online store	3.94	0.80

The above table indicates that customers can use digital wallet easily for purchasing the online product from offline store as compared to using the digital wallet for purchasing the offline product from online store.

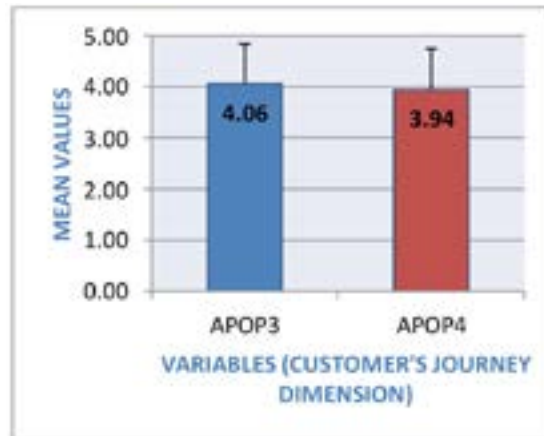


Fig. 11. Payment option across channels

Further, the above graph shows that the **offline store** provides better payment option as compared to online store.

Table 12. Omni-channel facility across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
At point of purchase (APOP)5: Use click and collect/ ship from store for purchasing online product from offline store	3.88	0.90
At point of purchase (APOP)6: Use click and collect/ ship from store for purchasing offline product from online store	3.75	0.91

The above table indicates that customers can easily use click and collect/ ship from store facility for purchasing online product from offline store.

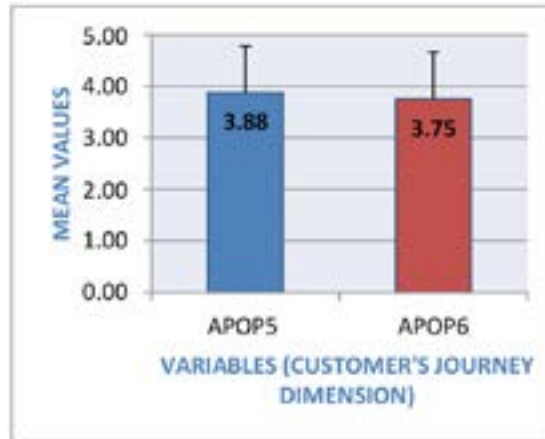


Fig. 12. Omni-channel facility across channels

Further, the above graph shows that the **offline store** provides better Omni-channel facility than the online store.

Post purchase phase-

Table 13. Return across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Post purchase (POP)1: Return the on-line product from offline store	3.73	1.06
Post purchase (POP)2: Return the of-line product from online store	3.49	1.12

The above table indicates that customers can easily return the online product from offline store as compared to returning the offline product from online store.



Fig. 13. Return across channels

Further, the above graph shows that the **offline store** provides better return services as compared to online store.

Table 14. Loyalty program across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Post purchase (POP)3: Use online coupons/ voucher/loyalty points at offline store	3.69	1.01
Post purchase (POP)4: Use offline coupons/ voucher/loyalty points at online store	3.70	1.00

The above table indicates that customers can easily use coupons/voucher/loyalty points across channels.

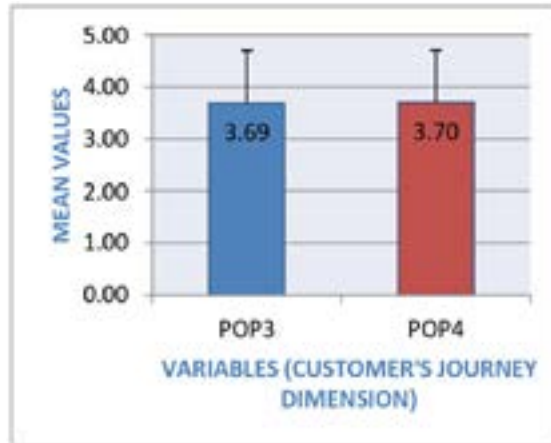


Fig. 14. Loyalty program across channels

Further, the above graph shows that both (online and offline) store provides better loyalty programs to customers.

Table 15. Promotion across channels

VARIABLES	M	SD
Post purchase (POP)5: Use online discount/offer at offline store	3.63	1.05
Post purchase (POP)6: Use offline discount/offer at online store	3.70	1.04



Fig. 15. Promotion across channels

Further, the above graph shows that **online store** provides better promotion facility than offline store.

Purchase Intention

Table 16. Purchase Intention

VARIABLES	M	SD
Purchase Intention (PI)1: Will continue using Omni- channel concept for buying apparel products	4.09	0.76
Purchase Intention (PI)2: Will encourage others to use Omni-channel concept for buying apparel products	4.04	0.81

The above table indicates that customers will use Omni-channel concept in future and also encourage other to use it for shopping apparel products.

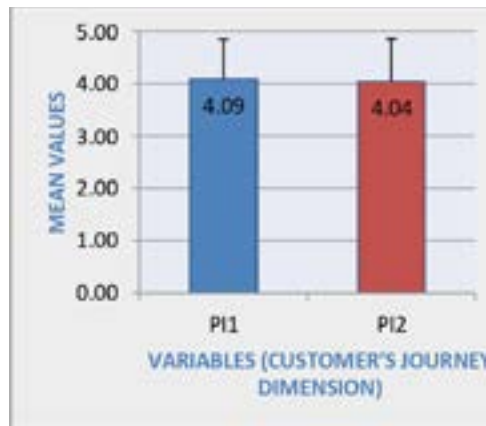


Fig. 16. Purchase Intention

The above results revealed that the online channel is providing better services during pre-purchase phase, offline channel provides better services during purchase phase and both the channels (online and offline) provides better service during post purchase stage. However, the difference between the services received by customers from online and offline channels is very minimal which indicates that omni-channel shopping provides a seamless experience during customers shopping journey.

Correlation between the online and offline channel services in an Omni-channel approach

H1: There will be a positive correlation between the online and offline channel services in an Omni-channel approach

Table 17. Correlation between the variables

		OFFCS
ONCS	Pearson Correlation	0.740**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01level (2-tailed)

ONCS- Online channel services and

OFFCS- Offline channel services

The above table reveals the strength of the relationship between the variables through the correlation coefficient. From the tableXVII, the online channel services shows positive relationship with the offline channel services. Thus it can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between the online and offline channel services in anOmni-channel approach.

Managerial Implications

With the advanced technologies, customerscan easily access information they want at any time, at any place, using any channel. They can even enjoy a wider range of products visibility across channels. Therefore, sustaining in the competitive market, transparency across channelsbecomes a key driver force of Omni- channel retailing. The 3-dimensional structure prepared for this study can be usedas a tool to investigate the performance of Omni-channel brands. This can acts as a Key Performance Indicators of Omni-channel retailing.

Our findings suggest that servicetransparency between channels is positively connected with the purchase intention of a customer. Specifically, the more similar services perceived by customer, the greateris the possibility of becoming loyal customer to a brand. To keep these loyal customer base, both (online and offline)retailers need to improve on the aspects

of the different phases of customer's shopping journey.

First, during pre-purchase phase, online store provides better services. This shows that offline store should improve on providing the information related to products. Store should be equipped with the technologies like digital signage, tablets and I-pads from where customers can easily search the information of a product. Second, at point of purchase, offline store provides better services. This indicates that online store should follow simple and flexible payment methods so that customers could not stop their shopping journey due to frustration.

Third, during post purchase phase, both the stores provides better services in their respective areas like return policy is better at offline store, offers are better at online store and loyalty programs are better at both the stores. Tracking of customers is very important for both the retailers in order to keep their loyal customers and the new ones.

Conclusion

There is a different perspective and motivation of retailers to move towards Omni-channel retailing. While implementing this strategy, many retailers are facing challenges. As a theoretical contribution, this study provides a 3-dimensional framework wherein 3Ps of customer's shopping journey- pre purchase, point of purchase and post purchase is included. This study explores the synchronization of services being offered by online and offline channels during their shopping journey.

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations have been suggested to retailers for adopting Omni-channel retailing-

- a) Retailers are providing various channels to customer for shopping. However, still there is a gap between the services being offered to them. They should focus on providing highly personalized services to customers across channels. They should serve customers where they want and when they want.
- b) During pre-purchase phase, retailers should provide similar product information- price and promotions to customer. This will in turn enhance the profitability of a brand not the channels. Customer wants to see a transparency between the information being provided to them by a brand.

- c) During point of purchase phase, they have to implement various payment options for customers. Earlier, customers refuse to purchase the product at the end of the journey due to long queues and waiting time. With the help of digital wallets, they can get the details electronically as well as can end their journey where they want. This will in turn reduce their waiting time as well. There should be transparency between the services offered by channels. If they want to start their journey from one channel then at the end of their journey they can easily switch the channel. Earlier, if they did online shopping then they got their product after 6-7 days. With the help of various facilities- BOPIS, Click and collect, Ship from store, they will get their products within few hours and even at their doorsteps. This will reduce the delivery charges and time.
- d) During post purchase phase, they should provide similar offers/ discounts/ return policy/ coupons/ vouchers/ loyalty programs to customer. This stage holds an importance in the whole journey of a customer because this stage will be keeping loyalty of customer with the brand. Hence, the interaction of customer with the brand should be clear, customer can avail similar service across channels. If they want to avail the offers of online store at offline store, they can easily avail it. Also, this will attract the new customer towards the brand not the repeated ones every time.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides 3-dimensional structure which retailers can refer before and after the implementation of Omni-channel strategy. Limitation of the study-

- The number of respondents in this study is relatively small. Hence, future research could be done with a large sample size and with each age group.
- Studies can explore the relationship between the service dimensions of customer's journey in future.

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