

# Product availability insight as an omni channel strategy for retailers

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## 27 Product Availability Insight as an Omni Channel Strategy for Retailers

The economic crises and growth of online shopping has led to increasing vacancy rates in Dutch shopping centers and a negative impact on shopping centers' liveliness. However, nowadays, retailers have multiple channels to provide their consumers with a complete, so called omni channel, experience. The aim of the present study is to examine online product availability insight as an omni channel strategy for retailers to attract consumers to their offline shop.

To measure and predict consumers' preference for an online product availability insight a stated choice experiment was conducted. Hypothetical choice situations, including an online and offline channel, were created based on an experimental design. The online channel was described by the attributes delivery time, appointment, costs, and return effort. For the offline channel travel time, friendliness of personnel, product availability insight, and personalized service were varied. For both channels product price was included. Moreover, product category (apparel (jeans) and electronics (hard disk)) and time constraints (with and without a time pressure) were used as context variables. The choice situations were presented within a web-based survey to 618 respondents during November 2015-January 2016 in the Netherlands.

The data was analyzed by estimating Multinomial Logit (MNL) and Latent Class (LC) models. Results showed that the online product availability insight has significant influence on consumers' channel choice decisions. Specifically, in case of a high involvement experience good (such as a jeans) consumers perceive this insight as useful. Furthermore the utilitarian related attributes, delivery time, costs, and travel time are important in channel choice decisions. However, friendly personnel in physical stores is an important factor when buying a jeans as well. In case of time pressure, consumers are willing to make more costs if it concerns a high involvement experience good. Furthermore, three segments were found for each product category, for jeans: offline shoppers, aversive shoppers, and multichannel shoppers, and for the hard disk they are: online shoppers, aversive shoppers, and offline shoppers.

Based on the findings of this research, several managerial implications for retailers are given. A product availability insight would be an effective strategy for funneling consumers to the offline channel, especially when it concerns a high involvement experience good.

**KEYWORDS:** retailing, choice modeling, omni channel shopping, stated choice experiment, product availability insight