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Engaging with omnichannel brands: the role of consumer empowerment

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Purpose – The study aims to integrate brand and retailer levels variables to examine the direct and indirect relationships between omnichannel retailing and consumer engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Survey data is collected from a sample consumers of different omnichannel retailing brands operating in the skin care industry. Partial least squares structural equation modelling is utilized.

Findings – The study finds brand channels' integrated interactions (process & content consistency) to increase consumer brand engagement. Findings show retailer consumer empowerment to intensify the impact of omnichannel retailing on consumer engagement. Results also show brand channels' integrated interactions to increase consumer brand familiarity, which mediates the effect of omnichannel retailing on consumer engagement.

Originality – This study suggests that integrating brand level and retailer level variables is vital to understand the effect of omnichannel retailing on consumer engagement. The study concludes that for successful omnichannel strategy, collaboration between brands and retailers is imperative.

Keywords Omnichannel retailing; integrated interactions; consumer engagement; consumer empowerment; brand familiarity; S-O-R framework

Engaging with omnichannel brands: The role of consumer empowerment

Introduction

Retail is a turbulent industry because the improvements emerging across new and traditional channels, providing brands with a greater ability to integrate these channels to maintain content and process consistency (Hossain *et al*., 2019; Li *et al*., 2018). The integration of online and offline channels has led to the emergence of omnichannel retailing in retailing and consumer services (Savastano *et al.*, 2019). In an omnichannel retailing, available channels are integrated and administered as one, making consumers to flawlessly engage with brands (Gao and Huang, 2021). Omnichannel retailing is referred to as the assimilation of channels to offer consumers an all-in-one journey through the tactical administration of all channels and consumer touchpoints (Picot-Coupey *et al*., 2016). According to a recent study conducted by BigCommerce and Retail Dive, 46% of retail executives and marketing managers surveyed see that investment in omnichannel retailing is increasing[i].

Brand channels' integrated interactions are regarded as the consistency of interactions experienced by consumers across various channels manifested through the consistency in and process (Sousa and Voss, 2006). With the integration of online and offline channels, consumers can make better purchase decisions as interactions with brands and retailers are better assimilated (Asmare and Zewdie, 2022; Gao and Huang, 2021). This general approach effects brands since it alters the organization and use of resources, followed by a deeper transformation in consumer engagement and marketing programs (Berman and Thelen, 2018; Guerreiro *et al*., 2022). Hence, to remain engaged with consumers, brands are adopting omnichannel retailing (Banerjee, 2019) as transformative and evolutionarily approach (Barbosa and Casais, 2022).

Engagement is one of the major factors affecting the way retailing is moving forward (Kumar *et al.*, 2017). For brands, consumer engagement is a way they use to capture value from consumers, since it results from satisfying consumers' needs and building quality

relationships with them (Itani *et al.*, 2019). Consumer brand engagement (CBE) is conceptualized as "the level of the customer's (or potential customer's) interactions and connections with the brand or firm's offerings or activities, often involving others in the social network created around the brand/offering/activity" (Vivek *et al.*, 2014, p. 406).

Prior research on CBE in omnichannel retailing has been concerned with engaging consumers through a personalized shopping experience using technology (Lawry and Bhappu, 2021) or demonstrating the positive effect of the quality of the cross-channel purchasing experience on CBE, but lacks complete understanding of the mechanism of omnichannel retailing. In the context of the relationship between the integrating interactions of different channels and CBE, Payne *et al.* (2017) call for "conceptual and empirical research that investigates moderation and mediation effects" (p. 193). The gap is particularly large in the area of channels' integrated interactions and their role in supporting brands' efforts to engage consumers (Lee *et al.*, 2019). In unison, previous literature has focused on retailer or brand level when investigating omnichannel retailing and consumer empowerment (Cheah *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2019). This study fills these gaps by integrating brand level and retailer level variables in one model and by employing omnichannel brands that use the strategy of integrating different channels.

In this connection, we develop and test a model drawn on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) – which is applicable to the omnichannel retailing context (Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021) — to determine how brand channels' integrated interactions in omnichannel retailing affect consumer brand familiarity (CBF) and CBE, while considering the contingent role of retailers, specifically retailer consumer empowerment. Previous studies have overlooked the possible interplay role between brand and retailer factors, focusing on one of the levels and mainly on testing the mechanisms of brand channels' integrated interactions (Cheah *et al.*, 2020; Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021). Appendix A includes a

summary of selected studies of omnichannel retailing and consumer engagement, and highlights the new findings this study adds to the literature.

The S-O-R is sequential in nature (Kühn and Petzer, 2018), whereby the stimulus is the starting phase of the consumer's state of organism and ultimate response behaviour in a shopping or consumption setting. Marketing – and omnichannel – related factors are external stimuli that can initiate the S-O-R process (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). In recent advancements, the organism component was extended to involve alterations in internal cognitive and affective states that are considered as transitional states between stimuli and responses (Kim and Lennon, 2013). CBF, which describes the expertise and knowledge consumers accumulate about the brand through the various channels available, expresses the organism component of S-O-R process.

CBF represents the brand-related experience and knowledge that consumers accumulate through different touchpoints with the brand (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). The concept of familiarity is a key concept in omnichannel retailing literature (e.g., Hickman *et al.*, 2020). It relates to factual knowledge that increases with consumers' experience with brands, which plays a key role in consumers' decision-making (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Familiarity with a certain brand is expected to act cognitively in consumers' minds to enhance engagement with the omnichannel brand. Here, we discover a new role of CBF, a mechanism of the impact of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE.

Retailer consumer empowerment (RCE) is defined as the control consumers have over their shopping process and decision-making when dealing with a retailer (Mishra and Vishvas, 2019; Zhang *et al*., 2018). Within the omnichannel retailing context, empowerment is expected to influence consumer overall experience (Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021). In fact, it "is intrinsically peculiar to the individual consumer psyche" (Tiu Wright *et al.*, 2006, p. 926). Consumers who better control their purchase decisions may influence the mechanism by which channels'

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integrated interactions in omnichannel retailing influence CBE differently from consumers that

do not control their purchase decisions. As a result, RCE can act as a moderator in our extended

S-O-R framework. Despite the vital role it may play in omnichannel retailing, the RCE

construct is overlooked in the literature (Mishra and Vishvas, 2019), with a rather limited

number of papers studying it (Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

To conduct our study, we focused on a major product segment, perfumery and skin care, in

a major market for this segment, the European Union (Statista, 2021). This product segment

represents the second largest product segment in Europe (European Commission, 2021).

The findings of our extended S-O-R framework will contribute to omnichannel retailing

brand theory by improving general understanding of the mechanism that links channels'

integrated interactions and CBE.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Omnichannel Retailing

Neslin *et al.* (2006) defined multichannel as the "*the design, deployment, coordination, and*

evaluation of channels to enhance customer value through effective customer acquisition,

retention, and development." This approach provides convenience to the consumer while

enabling the company to maximize the value of each channel separately (Thaichon *et al.*, 2020).

An omnichannel approach is on the other hand based on a seamless integration of the channels

of communication that delivers a heightened consumer experience (Melero *et al.*, 2016). Unlike

a multichannel approach which operates the channels in siloes, a full synergy is achieved when

using an omnichannel direction (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015).

Omnichannel retailing progresses from multichannel retailing – in which digital and

physical channels are clearly separated – to the integration of these channels to provide

consumers with a better experience (Thaichon *et al.*, 2020). Brick-and-mortar retail stores are

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exclusive in letting consumers touch, sense, and feel products, offering an instant gratification experience (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013). Online channels attempt to induce consumers with an extensive offering assortment, reduced prices and consistent content such as offering ratings and reviews (Zhang *et al*., 2022). Consequently, retailing progresses towards a unified omnichannel experience, eliminating the divisions between physical and digital; channels, making the world a big showroom with no borders (Tyrväinen *et al.*, 2020).

Omnichannel retailing is described as a joint consumer-brand relationship with frequent interactions through traditional and new channels that affect consumers' experience and engagement. It includes a process of conjoined operations, supply chain, info sharing, and supply through channels to support a merging of actions (Hübner *et al.*, 2016) through online and offline channels (Gao *et al.*, 2022). It is important for brands to integrate their different interactions with consumers through online and offline channels by maintaining content and process consistency (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions as Stimuli

Channel integration is the extent to which diverse channels consolidate each other (Bendoly *et al.*, 2005) and firms cooperate with them for achieving the same objectives. Firms, including brands, manufacturers and retailers, coordinate the objectives, design, and deployment of the available channels to reach consumers and offer them particular value and benefits (e.g., Cao and Li, 2015). Sousa and Voss (2006) describe channel integration quality using two factors: channel-service configuration and channel integrated interactions (the latter is of two dimensions: "content consistency" and "process consistency"). To integrate consumers' interactions through different channels, there should be a consistent content and process offered to consumers across various channels, creating less doubt and confusion for them during the shopping process (Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021).

The value of incorporating various channels is the focus of many studies (e.g., Cao and Li, 2015). This incorporation carries a competitive advantage in comparison to single-channel competitors, as consumers can interact with employees and other consumers who support social interactions. Cao and Li (2015) claim that channel assimilation can increase sales. The reason for this lies in the positive relationship between omnichannel integration and consumer satisfaction (Hamouda, 2019).

An omnichannel consumer uses several channels before making the final decision (Li *et al.*, 2015). For that, omnichannel retailing requires brands to integrate their efforts through various channels by maintaining content consistency (e.g., product information, prices, promotion material, and stock availability) and process consistency (e.g., consumer service and performance) (Sousa and Voss, 2006). Founded on the S-O-R framework, this expected consistency in process and content operates as external stimuli in consumer's mind (Roschk *et al.*, 2017). In turn, the stimuli will lead to change in the consumer's internal cognitive state, such as CBF (e.g., Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021) (see Figure 1).

{Insert Figure 1 here}

Consumer Brand Engagement as Response

Van Doorn *et al.* (2010) emphasize precise CBE actions by relating them to explicit types of engagement aspects consumers take part in. Pansari and Kumar (2017, p. 295) suggest that CBE is "the mechanics of a consumer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution".

CBE is often regarded as a multidimensional concept formed of several perspectives (Dessart *et al.*, 2016). In this study, we follow the conceptualization of Vivek *et al.* (2014) and measure CBE as a second order construct – comprising conscious attention, enthused participation and social connection – to capture the rich dynamics of this concept. The first expresses the consumer's level of interest in integration with the retailing brand. Enthused

participation reflects the consumer's enthusiastic positive feeling when interacting with the retailing brand. The last consists of enhancement of the interaction by including other consumers in the process.

CBE is critical in omnichannel retailing (Kassim and Hussin, 2019). Thus, it is imperative to understand how brands and retailers need to work together to support omnichannel approach that can enhance CBE. This overall approach influences brands as it alters the organization and resource utilization, followed by a deeper transformation in CBE (Payne *et al.*, 2017).

Consumer Brand Familiarity as Organism

The sequential nature of the S-O-R framework suggests a kind of mediation of the stimuli and response through the resulting organism (Kühn and Petzer, 2018). The organism factor of the S-O-R framework means the conversion of external stimuli (e.g., integrated interactions) into meaningful knowledge that changes consumer's cognitive state resulting in behavioural reactions. The organism component includes cognitive and affective states that are considered as impermanent conditions that transfer the effect of a stimuli and make it to cause a response (Kim *et al.*, 2020). In line with previous studies that recognize the organism plays a mediating role in the link between stimulus and response (Roschk *et al.*, 2017), we consider CBF to mediate the impact of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE. CBF can be regarded as cognitive states that represent consumers' mental processes involving the acquisition, management, and retrieval of information about the brand (Kühn and Petzer, 2018).

When consumers are exposed to external stimuli, inner organism changes precede consumers' behavioural responses. Changes in consumer cognitive state that represents the organism component of S-O-R mediates the stimuli effect of brand channels integrated interactions on the response, CBE (e.g., Vieira, 2013). This, in turn, offers consumers more opportunities to become aware of and familiar with brands' offerings.

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The consistency of the content across channels is a key determinant of a brand's value and image over time (Keller, 2008). In the absence of experience, familiarity with a brand that is based on a set of given information becomes crucial for the customer to rely on (Laroche *et al.*, 1996).

CBE plays a major role in omnichannel retailing (Gao and Huang, 2021). The process consistency within integrated channels facilitates the course of CBE by enhancing consumer enthused participation and social connection. A consistent process through multiple channels helps the link between consumers and brands. The more intimate brand information consumers acquire, the deeper is the relationship with the brand (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). For that, brand engagement is mainly driven by a content that is strategically consistent and that becomes more persuasive through the coordination of messages across the different channels (Keller, 2008).

Hence, we suggest that CBF is a mediator of the omnichannel retailing process. In particular, we argue that the effect of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE will be intermediated by CBF. Therefore, we propose the following mediated relationship:

H1: The positive relationship between brand channels' integrated interactions and CBE is mediated by CBF

Retailer Consumer Empowerment as Moderator

Shopping is not simply about obtaining products, but is also a consumption process of experience and enjoyment (Tiu Wright *et al.*, 2006). In a retail environment, consumers experience empowerment from retailers when they can control their dealings and can influence retailers' assortments. Thus, retailers can empower consumers by adapting to consumers' level of participation (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, RCE is influential in an omnichannel context since consumers can attain additional options and increase their knowledge

(Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014) and knowledge during the search process (Pires *et al.*, 2006), which play a key role in enhancing the service and shopping experience (Xie *et al.*, 2020).

Consumer empowerment is deemed to be a major pillar of consumers' experience (Le and Nguyen-Le, 2021), as it supports consumers in their ability to use the information they gain, protect their rights, and practice their skills. In their study, Cheah *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that RCE can support trust between consumers and retailer, thus enhancing the relationships consumers have with brands. When consumers interact with well-integrated retailers operating within an omnichannel context, they feel empowered and more effective. Their purchasing decisions will be easier as they can increase their information, speak out, and choose from a wider range of products (Cheah *et al.*, 2020). This will indirectly influence their levels of engagement with brands. For example, consumers who feel empowered by retailers will be able to voice their concerns and ask for their preferred brands to be provided by retailers through the different channels available. Empowerment encourages consumer interactions with brands and retailers, and supports brands' strategies including service co-creation, consumer knowledge sharing, and participation in service design (Xie *et al.*, 2020).

The moderating role of consumer empowerment has recently attracted more attention from scholars because of its important contingent effect (e.g., Nam, 2020; Xie *et al.*, 2020). What makes it important to examine the moderating role of RCE in this study is the possibility of consumer empowerment playing an unexpected role, as unfavourable effects are found (e.g., Heitz-Spahn, 2013; Nam, 2020). In our study, we suggest that RCE will support an omnichannel strategy, specifically the integration of consumer interactions across different channels, thus backing this strategy to make consumers engage effectively with brands. Accordingly, we advance the following:

H$_{2a}$: RCE will strengthen the influence of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE

H$_{2b}$: RCE will strengthen the influence of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBF

H2c: RCE will strengthen the influence of CBF on CBE

Methodology

Pre-test

The European Union is the main market for perfumery and skin care products worldwide (Statista, 2021). The skin care industry is the second largest in market with (25.7%) of the business volume (European Commission, 2021). Therefore, the current study uses omnichannel retailing by skin care brands to test the proposed model for two major reasons: (1) it is a very relevant segment in terms of business volume in Europe, (2) this segment is well represented in an omnichannel retailing context, where consumers use both online and offline stores, thus serving the purpose of the current study.

To choose retailing brands that best exemplify the skin care industry, a questionnaire is administered to 115 respondents, who are part of in the final sample. This pre-questionnaire includes the following questions: (1) "Which of the following brands do you know?" and (2) "What is your level of knowledge regarding these brands?" The pre-questionnaire includes a list of 16 brands of which only the top five selected by respondents are presented in our study.

Data collection and Measures

An online survey is conducted on the SurveyHero platform. The questionnaire consists of multi-item measures for each of the omnichannel retailing brands chosen. To select potential participants, a sampling condition is employed: (1) respondents have to pick one of the five brands under study; (2) they have bought products from that brand. Respondents who provide relevant answers are presented with the questionnaire for the brand selected. A sample of 477 completed surveys is used for analysis. Since participants are given the option to pick one of

the five brands when completing the survey, we check for any differences between respondents based on their brand choice. To do so, a one-way ANOVA test compares the means of all the variables in the model for the five groups of respondents (Eau Thermale Avène n = 98; Bioderma n = 86; Eucerin n = 84, Neutrogena n = 122, and Vichy n = 86). The results of this test show no differences to exist between the groups. Appendix B summarizes the sample characteristics.

The measures are adapted from prior studies. Two questions are used to capture *CBF*. The questions capture respondents' familiarity with the brand and are answered based on two-adjective pairs "1= not known to me; 7 = known to me" and "1 = not familiar; 7 = familiar", with higher scores representing more familiarity with the brand (Hirschman, 1986).

Then, brand omnichannel *"content consistency"* and *"process consistency"* are added as two dimensions to capture the *brand channels' integrated interactions*, which is operationalized as a second order construct comprising the two dimensions of consistency. The measure is adapted from Sousa and Voss (2006). RCE is adapted from Zhang *et al.* (2018) to capture the control, power, and freedom consumers perceive when dealing with retailers.

CBE is captured using a measure developed by Vivek *et al.* (2014). CBE is operationalized as a second order factor comprised of three dimensions: *"conscious attention*, *enthused participation*, and *social connection."* Brand channels' integrated interactions, RCE, and CBE constructs are captured using a 7-point agreement Likert scale. Appendix C summarizes the measures with their items and loadings. Similar to prior studies, the effects of consumer age, income, and gender are included as covariates that can influence CBE (Itani *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2019).

Results

Measurement model

We use partial least squares-path modelling with the reflective measurement model to test the hypotheses. The outer model is tested with a factor weighting scheme to examine the measures' reliability, internal consistency, and validity. The bootstrapping algorithm (5000 subsamples) is conducted. The items load significantly on their designated factors with no items that highly cross-load on other constructs, demonstrating convergent validity. The findings show Cronbach's Alpha (α) of the measures to be higher than (.7). Composite Reliability (CR) to be higher than (.8). rho_A for all the measures are above (.7). Thus, all the multi-item measures demonstrate reliability and internal consistency.

Next, we check the HTMT ratios to find none to be greater than the (.85) threshold, providing confirmation of discriminant validity. Moreover, the highest variance inflation factor is 1.59. Table 1 includes the correlation matrix, reliability, HTMT ratios, and variance inflation factor values.

{Insert Table 1 here}

For detecting CMV, we implement the marker variable method. As an ideal marker variable, we choose 'attitude toward the colour blue'. This variable is attitudinal in nature, which makes it susceptible to CMV. No significant change in the results is evident. Thus, CMV is not a concern in the current study.

Structural Model

In our analysis of the path coefficients and their significance, we run multiple structural models. First, we test the direct effects of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBF and CBE, while accounting for the effects of the control variables. The findings show positive effects of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBF ($\beta = .46$, $p < .01$) and CBE ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$). The results of the direct effects model, mediated effects model, and full model are summarized in Table 2.

{Insert Table 2 here}

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Second, the mediated effects model is examined after adding the effect of CBF on CBE. The effect of CBF on CBE is significantly positive ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, we find the indirect effect of channels' integrated interactions on CBE through CBF to be significant ($\beta = .07$, $p < .001$). In this model, the direct effect of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE is reduced from ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) to ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), ($\Delta\beta = .06$, $p < .05$). The mediated effect is a complementary mediation, which supports H1.

Finally, we test a full model in which RCE variable is included as a moderator. The full model SRMR is (.08). Here, two interaction terms are created. The first interaction is between RCE and brand channels' integrated interactions. The second interaction is between RCE and CBF. The results from the full model show RCE to moderate two relationships in the model. Specifically, RCE is found to strengthen ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) the impact of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE, supporting H_{2a}. In addition, RCE is said to strengthen the influence of CBF on CBE ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) in line with H_{2c}. The moderating effect (H_{2b}) of RCE on the relationship between brand channel's integrated interactions and CBF is non-significant ($\beta = .07$, $p > .1$). To look further into the moderating effects of RCE, we plot these effects based in Figures 2 and 3.

To plot Figure 2, the Simple Slope Analysis is followed. Brand channels' integrated interactions, as the predictor of CBE, is grouped into three groups that represent the values of brand channels' integrated interactions at the: (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, and (3) mean plus 1 SD. In addition, the RCE is grouped into three groups similar that of brand channels' integrated interactions. This has led to nine conditions/points that are used to plot the graph. The graph describes the relationship between brand channels' integrated interactions and CBE for (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, and (3) mean plus 1 SD of RCE. In the presence of significant differences between the slopes representing the (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, and (3) mean plus 1 SD of RCE, the moderating effect hypothesized in H_{2a} is supported.

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Figure 2 demonstrates the amplification effect of RCE on the positive relationship between channels' integrated interactions and CBE. Specifically, the positive effect of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE is stronger when consumer experience higher empowerment from retailers. Thus, RCE complements the positive effect of brand channels' integrated interactions on CBE. The most engaged consumers with the brand are those who experience high levels of brand channels' integrated interactions and high levels of RCE. The results show the vital role retailers can play in supporting brands' omnichanneling strategies through the empowerment they can provide to consumers.

Likewise, we conduct the Simple Slope Analysis for CBF as the predictor of CBE. CBF is grouped into three groups that represent the values of CBF at the: (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, and (3) mean plus 1 SD. Similarly, the RCE is grouped into three groups like that of CBF. This has led to nine conditions/points that are used to plot the graph. The graph describes the relationship between CBF and CBE for (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, (3) and mean plus 1 SD of RCE. The presence of significant differences between the slopes representing the (1) mean minus 1 SD, (2) mean, (3) and mean plus 1 SD of RCE provides support in favour of H_{2c}.

Figure 3 demonstrates the increase in the effect of CBF on CBE caused by RCE. Specifically, the positive effect of CBF on CBE is stronger when consumer experience higher empowerment from retailers. Thus, RCE complements the positive effect of CBF on CBE. With higher empowerment from retailers, consumers familiar with a given brand will be able to increase their engagement with it. The most engaged consumers with the brand are those who are highly familiar with it and experience high levels of RCE.

{Insert Figure 2 here}

{Insert Figure 3 here}

Discussion

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Brands need to focus on omnichannel retailing to engage their consumers across all the relevant touchpoints established during the shopping journey. The importance of assimilating digital and physical channels by administering consistent content and process is huge and brings a novel reality for both consumers and brands. If a brand is looking to make its consumers share affirmative thoughts with others, unceasingly buy its offerings, and engage greatly with other consumers, the brand will need to provide a seamless experience that depends on integrating interactions through different channels. The advantages of this integration extends to make consumers more familiar with brands and their offerings.

Although many channels are not directly administered by brands, the contact between consumers and retailers is critical since consumers receive a kind of empowerment from those retailers. Nevertheless, prior studies have focused on single level, retailer or brand, when examining omnichannel retailing and consumer empowerment (e.g., Cheah *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2019; Mishra *et al.*, 2021). This research fills this gap by incorporating brand and retailer levels variables in one study. Consumers have the need to influence and control their shopping journey through the empowerment provided by retailers. Such empowerment helps those who are familiar with a brand to engage more with it through conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection.

In the particular case of skin care and perfumery, offline channels are crucial to provide customers with the tangible experience they seek with the product. Indeed, customer service, sampling, fragrance smelling, and skin testing are crucial steps in sales conversion for that industry. Accordingly, retailer empowerment in such context would have a major contingent influence on omnichannel-CBE relationship, whereby a high empowerment would encourage higher familiarity, increased interest, active participation, and enhanced social connection with the brand.

Within the context of omnichannel retailing, the findings show that consumer knowledge and empowerment complement each other. This is in line with the notion that power shift, in which consumers have gained the upper hand over retailers in the relationship, has led retailers to look for ways to maintain their connection with the end shopper (Ramadan, 2021). As the digital world continues to grow, it will further open up additional possibilities for brands and retailers to focus their consumer services through those newly integrated channels.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the omnichannel retailing literature. First, we demonstrate that CBF is a mediator between brand channels' integrated interaction and CBE. Brands can enhance CBE by making their consumers familiar with them through integrating their different channels. By extending the S-O-R framework in omnichannel retailing, we improve the understanding of the mechanisms by which brand channels' integrated interactions support CBE. Other studies have either examined no mediating effect of brand channels' integrated interaction-CBE relationship (e.g., Gao and Huang, 2021; Lee *et al.*, 2019) or have tested CBF as an antecedent of omnichannel shopping (Hickman *et al.*, 2020).

Secondly, though scholars have studied the brand consumer empowerment concept intensively to highlight its effect on consumer decision-making (Tiu Wright *et al.*, 2006), we extend the knowledge on consumer empowerment by studying the RCE concept and relating its effects to brand omnichannel strategy. Moreover, omnichannel studies that examine brand consumer empowerment have focused on studying it as a mediator (Cheah *et al.*, 2020), overlooking the importance of studying consumer empowerment at the retailer level and as a contingent factor. Incorporating brand and retailer levels variables in omnichannel retailing is an important aspect that researchers need to consider for greater understanding of omnichannel retailing.

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Thirdly, RCE acts as a moderator. Particularly, consumer empowerment moderates the effect of channels' integrated interactions on CBE and the influence of CBF and CBE. While previous studies find that consumers are more satisfied with retailers that empower them (Vogel and Paul, 2015), we demonstrate that consumers will engage with brands that work with retailers that empower them, highlighting the importance of studying the complementary role of brands and retailers in brands' omnichannel retailing strategies.

Managerial Implications

Three relevant managerial implications emerge from this study. Integrated interactions influence both perception of familiarity with the brand and consumer engagement. Brand and retail managers should carefully prepare brand information and display similar signals across all channels. The starting base would be for the company to know their audience through effective segmentation. Targeted relevant content through a consistent brand voice and image across the different platforms should be then focused on while leveraging the potential ensuing relationships. Indeed, content and process consistency will give consumers correct knowledge about the product/brand while becoming more familiar with it. Information consistency encourages consumers to conduct social connections with other, be more enthusiastic about the purchase and more attentive to the brand. Original content and active posting done on a regular basis would be key for the brand to stay top of mind and increase its familiarity with consumers.

Second, in this study we show favourable impacts of RCE in omnichannel retailing. As a result, brands looking for success in omnichannel marketing need to work with retailers to maximize success and overcome barriers associated with the implementation of omnichannel retailing approach (e.g., de Borba *et al.*, 2020). In fact, retailers today are providing customers with information and tools that are empowering them in the selection of brands. Such tools include user reviews and ratings, comparison tools, retailer's employees' feedback and recommendations that are all integrated across different channels. Indeed, retailers support the

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integration of online and offline channels to make consumers more aware about omnichannel retailing brands, leading to enhanced engagement with brands. RCE is achieved via providing pleasant retailing environments, proper information, relevant communication, convenient stores, and increasing consumer control (Mishra and Vishvas, 2019; Tiu Wright *et al.*, 2006). RCE should be considered a solution supporting the omnichannel strategy implemented by retailing brands to enhance CBE. Accordingly, brands have to make sure that they are addressing the following key points:

- To monitor reviews on the retailer's sites so as to directly and effectively respond to issues that might lower the rating of the brand.

- To constantly check the head-to-head comparisons made by the retailer between the company's own brand and its direct competitors in order to stay competitive on the key features that the customers are looking for.

- To develop a brand ambassador program and reward scheme with the retailers' employees. Under such a scheme, the brand may provide free samples and more technical knowledge to retailers' employees in order to enhance their recommendations to the customers.

Third, this study reveals that the simultaneous roles of brands and retailers are fundamental for the success of an omnichannel journey (e.g., Haag *et al.*, 2022). In the context of this study, skincare and fragrance brand managers should use first a combination of traditional and digital media channels to build brand awareness and technical knowledge (specifically for skincare products) before venturing into retail-specific activities. Once proper knowledge is formed, consumers considering those brands in a more advanced journey stage would be using retailers' channels, leading to higher CBE. Accordingly, brand managers are advised to work closely with retailers on shopper marketing initiatives that take into consideration the familiarity and knowledge of the brand in order to boost CBE. Such in-store activities could feature, for

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example, brand-related activities and games that could be voted/chosen by consumers themselves as a way to enhance the feeling of empowerment. Sampling and personal testing in the in-store environment is also highly recommended in order to increase consumers' feeling of empowerment, which would heighten the sense of engagement with the brand.

Limitations and Future Studies

The limitations are possible avenues for future studies. First, while our study complements the existing knowledge on omnichannel retailing (Mishra *et al.*, 2021), the focus is limited to the context of skin care brands. Analysis of the same model in other retail contexts is needed for generalization. Second, we consider CBF as a mediator. In the coming research, other mediators can be considered, such as perceived value and emotional states at the consumer level, as well as channel service transparency and familiarity at the retailer level (e.g., Ürgüplü and Hüseyinoğlu, 2021).

Third, prior studies suggest that empowerment may result in negative outcomes (e.g., Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014) making it important to examine the dark side of empowerment. Other moderators can also be considered, such as the level of emotional attachment that consumers feel towards retailers. Fourth, skin care brands tend traditionally to be more associated with females. Therefore, future studies can be more devoted to understand the specific male segment.

Fifth, the conceptualizations of CBE are many in the literature, thus captured using different measures than the one used in this study (i.e. Vivek et al., 2014)[ii]. Thus, we recommend researchers to consider different measures to capture CBE taking into consideration the context of the study and the type of brands to be examined. Finally, we encourage future studies to consider the other component of omnichannel retailing: Channel-service configuration with two dimensions "Breadth of channel choice" and "Transparency of channel service configuration" (Sousa and Voss, 2006) that can explain further variation in CBF and CBE.

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[i] https://www.bigcommerce.com/articles/omnichannel-retail/#what-is-omnichannel-retail
[ii] We are thankful for one of the anonymous reviewers for this hint.
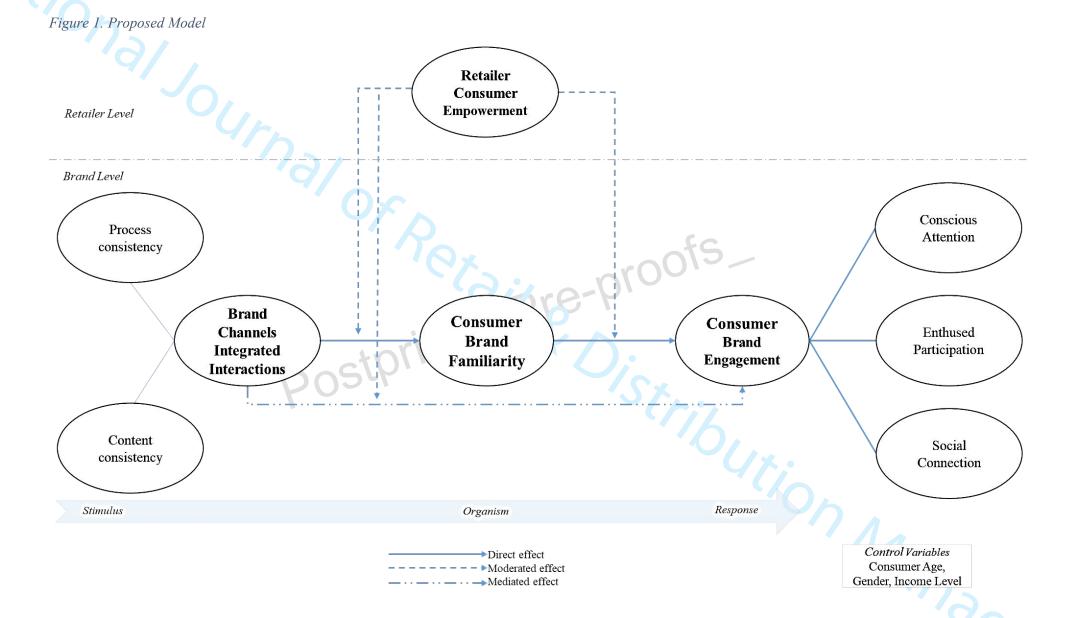
Figure 1. Proposed Model

Figure 2

Moderating effect of retailer consumer empowerment on

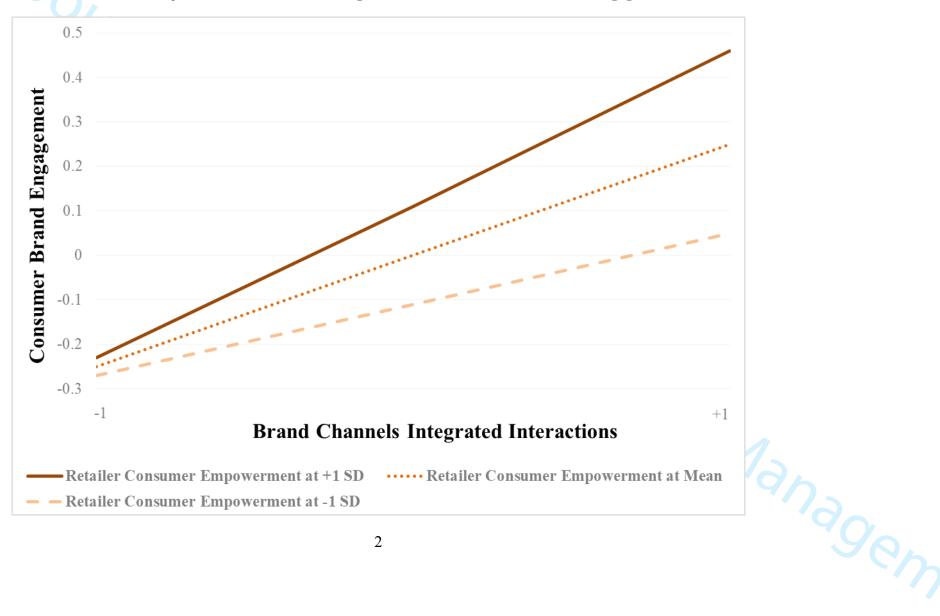*the relationship between brand channels' integrated interactions and consumer brand engagement*

Figure 3

Moderating effect of retailer consumer empowerment on

the relationship between consumer familiarity with brand and consumer brand engagement

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

	Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions	Consumer Brand Familiarity	Consumer Brand Engagement	Retailer Consumer Empowerment	Consumer Age	Consumer Gender	Consumer Income
Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions	*.78*	.51	.40	.47	.20	.03	.11
Consumer Brand Familiarity	.46	*.95*	.32	.25	.16	.14	.08
Consumer Brand Engagement	.36	.29	*.76*	.3	.08	.13	.08
Retailer Consumer Empowerment	.38	.21	.24	*.72*	.05	.05	.05
Consumer Age	-.19	-.15	.03	-.04	_	.08	.58
Consumer Gender	.03	.13	.13	-.02	-.08	_	.21
Consumer Income	-.10	-.08	-.06	-.02	.58	-.21	_
Cronbach's Alpha	.91	.89	.94	.76	_	_	_
Composite Reliability	.93	.95	.95	.84	_	_	_
rho_A	.91	.89	.94	.79	_	_	_
AVE	.61	.9	.57	.51	_	_	_
Variance Inflation Factor	1.45	1.3	1	1.17	1.57	1.07	1.59

Notes: Correlations are added below the diagonal

Correlations $\geq |.13|$ are significant at p < .05

Square root of average variance extracted values (AVE) are included in italics on the diagonal

HTMT ratios are added above the diagonal

_ Not applicable

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Table 2. Results

Relationship	Direct Effects Model	T-Value	Mediated Effects Model	T-Value	Full Model [95% Coefficient Confidence Interval] *(coefficient with marker variable)*	T-Value
Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions → Consumer Brand Engagement	.38***	8.92	.32***	6.43	.25***[.14;.36] *(.25***)*	4.72
Brand Integrated Interactions → Consumer Brand Familiarity	.46***	12.95	.46***	12.79	.42***[.33;.51] *(.43***)*	9.76
Consumer Brand Familiarity → Consumer Brand Engagement			.15***	2.88	.15***[.05;.24] *(.15***)*	3.15
Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions → Consumer Brand Familiarity → Consumer Brand Engagement			.07***	2.9	.06***[.02;.11] *(.06)*	3.2
Retailer Consumer Empowerment x Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions → Consumer Brand Engagement					.11**[.02;.19] *(.1**)*	2.27
Retailer Consumer Empowerment x Brand Channels' Integrated Interactions → Consumer Brand Familiarity					.07[-.24;.23] *(.07)*	.54
Retailer Consumer Empowerment x Consumer Brand Familiarity → Consumer Brand Engagement					.11**[.04;.19] *(.1**)*	2.19
Retailer Consumer Empowerment → Consumer Brand Engagement					.11**[.01;.2] *(.11**)*	2.14
Retailer Consumer Empowerment → Consumer Brand Familiarity					.05[-.05;.14] *(.04)*	.83
Consumer Age → Consumer Brand Engagement	.16***	3.05	.17***	3.31	.18***[.08;.28] *(.18***)*	3.55
Consumer Gender → Consumer Brand Engagement	.11**	2.49	.09**	2.07	.09**[.01;.18] *(.09**)*	2.24
Consumer Income → Consumer Brand Engagement	-.09*	1.7	-.09*	1.81	-.1**[-.21;-.01] *(-.1**)*	2.07
R² (Q²)						
Consumer Brand Engagement	.17 (.08)		.19 (.1)		.24 (.13)	
Consumer Brand Familiarity	.22 (.19)		.22 (.19)		.24 (.19)	

Notes: Significance level = *p < .1; **p< .05; ***p< .01

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Appendix A. Selected Studies of Omnichannel Retailing and Consumer Engagement

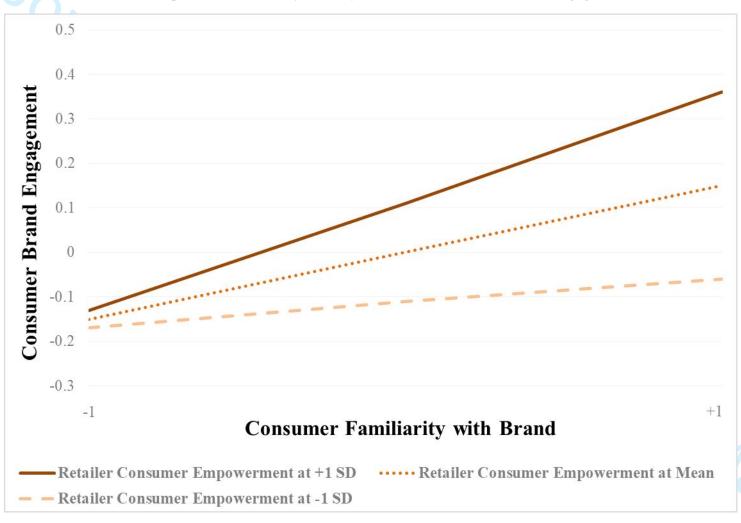| Citation	Study type	Constructs explored	Theoretical lens	Study focus level	Sample country	Offering	Main findings
This Study	*Empirical - quantitative*	*Brand channels' integrated interactions; Consumer brand familiarity; Consumer brand engagement; Retailer consumer empowerment*	*Stimulus–Organism–Response*	*Brand & Retailer*	*Multiple European countries*	*Perfumery and skin care*	*The integration of consumer interactions through multiple channels allows brands to drive higher consumer engagement. Consumer brand familiarity is found to play a mediating role by facilitating the effect of channels' integrated interactions on consumer brand engagement. The effects of channels' integrated interactions and consumer brand familiarity on consumer engagement are moderated by retailer consumer empowerment.*
Gao & Huang 2021	Empirical - quantitative	Channel-service configuration; interaction consistency; assurance quality; relationship program receptiveness; consumer engagement; consumer loyalty	Not specified	Retailer	China	Multiple	Omnichannel integration quality has positive effect on customer engagement and relationship program receptiveness, which increase consumer loyalty. A positive effect of consumer engagement on relationship program receptiveness is found.
Mishra et al. 2021	Empirical - quantitative	Cross-channel integration; consumer empowerment; consumer	Stimulus–Organism–Response	Retailer	India	Multiple	Channel integration positively impact the consumer's phygital experience by enhancing empowerment and satisfaction levels leading increase

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		satisfaction; consumer retention; retailer unreliability					consumer retention. The retailer unreliability negatively impacts the positive relationship between cross-channel integration and consume retention.
Cheah et al. 2020	Empirical - quantitative	Consumer perception of channel integration; Consumer empowerment; Trust; Patronage intention; Privacy concerns	Stimulus–Organism–Response & Psychological Reactance Theory	Retailer	Malaysia	Multiple	Consumer perception of channel integration increases patronage intention through customer empowerment and trust. When privacy concerns are low, consumer perception of channel integration and consumer empowerment have stronger impact on trust.
Shakir Goraya et al. 2020	Empirical - quantitative	Channel integration; Perceived empowerment; Perceived assortment; Perceived benefits; Showrooming; Webrooming; Online patronage intention; Offline patronage intention; Search products; Experience products	Not specified	Retailer	China	Multiple	Empowerment, assortment, and benefits mediate the relationships between channel integration and online patronage intention. Only assortment and benefits mediate the relationships between channel integration and offline patronage intention. Webrooming and showrooming moderate the impact of channel integration on consumer patronage intentions.
Heitz-Spahn 2013	Empirical - quantitative	Cross-channel free-riding; Convenience orientation; Need for flexibility; Price comparison orientation; Variety seeking orientation;	Not specified	Retailer	France	Multiple	Consumers use one retailer's channel and then shift to another retailer's channel to purchase the same product as a phenomenon the author describes as cross-channel free riding. From a consumer empowerment perspective, consumers engage in free riding

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		Shopping enjoyment orientation					behavior to fulfil price comparison, convenience, and flexibility needs. The author suggests that the findings highlight a negative consequence of multichannel retailing.
Hickman et al. 2020	Empirical - quantitative & qualitative	Brand familiarity; Customization; Perceived value; Technology readiness; Omnichannel shopping	Not specified	Retailer	United Kingdom	Multiple	Omnichannel retailing includes shopping in-store, online, and through mobile. Brand familiarity, customization, perceived value, and technological readiness have different effects on the three channels of omnichannel shopping.
Lawry & Bhappu 2021	Empirical - quantitative	Consumer engagement; Mobile in-store experience; Behavioural targeting; Social networking	Activity theory	Retailer	Multiple	Multiple	A measure to capture mobile in-store experience was developed. Mobile in-store experience can enhance consumer engagement in omnichannel retailing when they are given high autonomy.
Le & Nguyen-Le 2021	Empirical - quantitative	Channel integrated interactions; Channel service configuration; Customer empowerment; Customer experience; Patronage intention; Internet usage	Not specified	Retailer	Vietnam	Multiple	Channel integrated interactions and service configuration enhance customers' shopping experience with omnichannel retailing. Customer empowerment mediates the effect of channel integration quality on customer experience. Customers' internet usage plays a contingency role in a dynamic mechanism.
Lee et al. 2019	Empirical - quantitative	Channel integrated interactions; Channel service configuration; Customer engagement;	Social exchange theory	Brand	United States	Electronics & groceries	Channel integration quality dimensions increase customer engagement which leads to positive word-of-mouth and repurchase intention.

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Mishra & Vishvas 2019	Empirical - quantitative	Purchase intention; Positive word-of-mouth Retailer shopper empowerment - retail environment, store convenience, relevant communication, and expansion & control over choice; Consumer power; Consumer confidence; Product expertise; Freedom of movement; Attitude to choose the best	Not specified	Retailer	India	Multiple	The authors developed the retailer shopper empowerment construct as a second order factor with four dimensions: retail environment, store convenience, relevant communication, and expansion & control over choice
Payne et al. 2017	Conceptual	Consumer non-personal touchpoints and personal touch points; Brand engagement; Customer profitability	Integrated marketing communication theory	Brand	Not specified	Not specified	The authors identified five major research areas including the need to understand how on- and off-line consumer brand touchpoints affect consumer engagement and brand profitability.
Sousa & Voss 2006	Conceptual	Multichannel service quality; Channel-service configuration; Integrated interactions; Customer experience	Not specified	Brand	Not specified	Not specified	The authors developed a framework for conceptualizing service quality in multichannel services (physical and virtual) and distinguishing between physical, virtual, and integration quality.
Ürgüplü & Hüseyinoğlu 2021	Empirical - quantitative	Omnichannel capability, channel consistency, cross-	Stimulus–Organism–Response	Retailer	Turkey	Multiple	Omni-channel capability increases consumer satisfaction. This effect is partially mediated by consumer

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		channel, and social media; Consumer empowerment; Customer satisfaction; Channel service transparency					empowerment. Channel service transparency moderates the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction.
Zhang et al. 2018	Empirical - quantitative	Consumer perception of channel integration; Consumer empowerment; Trust; Patronage intention	Stimulus– Organism– Response	Retailer	China	Not specified	Consumer empowerment mediates the positive effect of consumer perception of channel integration on consumer trust and satisfaction.

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Appendix B. Sample Characteristics

Sample Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	392	82.2
Male	84	17.6
Prefer not to say	1	0.2
Age		
18-24	182	38.2
25-34	65	13.6
35-44	82	17.2
45-54	88	18.4
55-64	57	11.9
≥ 65	3	0.6
Education		
High school or lower	72	15.1
Bachelor degree	239	50.1
Postgraduate (e.g., MBA)	66	13.8
Master degree or higher	100	21.0
Occupation		
Student	175	36.7
Private Sector Employee	179	37.5
Public employee	76	15.9
Entrepreneur	34	7.1
Retired	3	0.6
Unemployed	3	0.6
Other	7	1.5
Personal income (monthly)		
Less than 635€	143	30.0
636€ - 1000€	119	24.9
1001€ - 1500€	127	26.6
1501€ - 2000€	59	12.4
2001€ - 2500€	15	3.1
2501€ - 3000€	6	1.3
More than 3000€	8	1.7

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Appendix C. Measures

Measures & Items	Loadings
BRAND CHANNELS' INTEGRATED INTERACTIONS (α = .91; CR = .93; rho_A = .91; AVE = .61)	
Content Consistency (α = .86; CR = .9; rho_A = .86; AVE = .7)	
The Brand provides consistent product information across the online and physical stores.	.87
The product prices are consistent across the online and physical stores.	.85
The Brand provides consistent promotion information across the online and physical stores.	.87
The Brand provides consistent stock availability across the online and physical stores.	.77
Process Consistency (α = .86; CR = .91; rho_A = .87; AVE = .71)	
The service images of the brand are consistent across the online and physical stores.	.77
The levels of consumer service are consistent across the online and physical stores.	.9
The feelings of service are consistent across the online and physical stores.	.89
All the online and physical stores have consistent performance in the speed of service delivery.	.8
CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT (α = .94; CR = .95; rho_A = .94; AVE = .57)	
Conscious Attention (α = .91; CR = .93; rho_A = .92; AVE = .69)	.89
I like to know more about the Brand.	.81
I like events that are related to the Brand.	.78
I like to learn more about the Brand.	.81
I pay a lot of attention to anything about the Brand.	.89
I keep up with things related to the Brand.	.85
Anything related to the Brand grabs my attention	.86
Enthused Participation (α = .88; CR = .91; rho_A = .89; AVE = .67)	.91
I spend a lot of my discretionary time visiting stores selling the Brand products.	.83
I am heavily into the Brand.	.64
Visiting stores selling the Brand products is part of my schedule.	.85
I am passionate about the Brand.	.87
My days would not be the same without the Brand.	.89
Social Connection (α = .88; CR = .93; rho_A = .89; AVE = .81)	.85
I love talking about the Brand with my friends.	.86
I enjoy visiting stores selling the Brand products more when I am with my friends.	.94
Visiting stores selling the Brand products with my friend is more fun.	.9
CONSUMER BRAND FAMILIARITY (α = .89; CR = .95; rho_A = .89; AVE = .9)	
What is your level of knowledge regarding the Brand?	.95
What is your level of familiarity with the Brand?	.95
RETAILER CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT (α = .76; CR = .84; rho_A = .79; AVE = .51)	
In my dealings with the retailer, I feel I am in control	.72
The ability to influence the goods and services of the retailer is beneficial to me	.79
I feel good because of my ability to influence the choice set offered to me by the retailer	.83
During the shopping process, I can select product and service freely	.53
My influence over the retailer has increased relative to the past	.68

Notes: α = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted

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