# Omni-Channel Purchase Journey with Multi-Device Paths

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Significance. Omni-channel consumers research, access, and shop at their convenience anytime and anywhere, and they receive goods in the most convenient way possible through many devices, from smartphones to desktops and from laptops to tablets. While in a store, one out of five consumers with smartphones purchases from a competitor (IDC Infographic, 2014). In addition, purchases in the apparel category were found to be among the most popular purchases for omni-channel shopping activity (MarketingCharts, 2014). With increasing consumer demands at the center of omni-channel activity, apparel retailers need to develop customer-centered omni-channel strategies and prepare to align their whole operations with omni-channel retailing, from marketing to distribution. The purpose of this study was to understand omni-channel consumers' decision processes with multi-device paths during their purchase journey, from the source of the firm's messages to their post-purchase behaviors.

Theoretical framework. A theoretical framework of this study is the Nicosia model of consumer decision processes (1966), explaining (a) field 1: firm's attributes and consumer's attributes, (b) field 2: search for and evaluation of means and ends, (c) field 3: act of purchase, and (d) field 4: the feedback of the consumer responses to the firm. We applied this framework in the context of omni-channel consumers' apparel purchase journeys.

Method. A phenomenological research method in qualitative approaches and purposive sampling were employed. Depending on the degree of easy access to diverse brick-and-mortar apparel stores, consumers' propensities for omni-channel shopping will be different. To generalize research findings, U.S. consumer panel members who live in rural and city areas participated. A market research company recruited omni-channel consumers from a U.S. consumer panel through an email invitation-only process that described the qualifications for participation. Omni-channel consumers responded to open-ended questions via an online survey. Data were analyzed using a process outlined by Creswell (2007). Clusters of formulated meaning from the important statements were developed into themes. Those important statements and themes were used to write a combination of the textural and structural descriptions. Two coders were used for data analysis and inter-coder reliability equaled 96.1%.

Participant characteristics. We obtained a usable sample of thirty-five omni-channel consumers comprised of 37.1 percent men and 62.9 percent women between the ages of 18 to 44. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian (71.4 %), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (14.2%), and bi-racial/mixed race (5.7%). Respondents had earned bachelor's degrees (42.9%) or graduate degrees (45.7%). A range of household income levels was represented, with 25.7% of participants having incomes between $70,000 and $79,999 (25.7%), followed by incomes between $50,000 and $59,999 (17.1%).

Results. In terms of firms' attributes (field 1) across all channels, price promotions and discounts (30%), website interface and quality (13%), and brand image and reputation (13%)

were found to be the most important factors of apparel firms affecting consumers' omni-channel shopping. When it comes to omni-channel consumers' attributes (field 1), respondents were likely to be price-oriented (27%) and ease of use/access- and convenience-oriented consumers (22%). Their social influences for apparel purchase were found to be social groups such as family, friends, and coworkers (47%), which affected purchases the most, followed by other customers' product reviews (16%).

In terms of the search for and evaluation of means and ends (field 2), respondents were likely to use mobile apps prior to visiting the store or while in the store in order to check quickly to see how the price in the store compared with the online price, access third-party websites, and see if promotion codes were available (59%) and in order to check customer reviews (22%). In terms of act of purchase (field 3), when checking a price of a product they would like to buy via their smartphone in a store and finding that the product was offered by an e-retailer at a cheaper price, most respondents reported that they would leave the store and go home and then purchase it from an e-retailer via their desktop or laptop (43%); some of them would purchase it from an e-retailer immediately via their smartphone in the store (20%). In addition, pricing (41%) and quality (26%) were the omni-channel consumers' main criteria for apparel purchase.

When it comes to the feedback of the consumer responses to the firms (field 4), most respondents reported themselves as flip-floppers between lurking and posting depending on circumstances (50%) and lurkers (47%). Although respondents were likely to see other consumers' product review postings, surprisingly they were not likely to provide feedback and product reviews about products purchased because they were afraid of wrongly influencing other consumers' purchase decisions.

<u>Conclusions and implications</u>. Based on the findings, this study suggests that omni-channel apparel retailers need to facilitate consistent price promotion strategies across all channels using special store events, automatic emails based on purchase history, and store/online/mobile/social media coupons and deals through an integrated IT platform. To strengthen brand awareness and drive sales growth across all channels, omni-channel retailers need to refine digital presence for online and mobile web and social media interfaces, focusing on social sharing, ease of use, and convenience through the wider range of options of delivery and fulfillment. They need to broadly present across their own and third-party websites, such as big online marketplaces, product review sites, price comparison sites, and social media, to increase sales opportunities. Installing in-store technology should be furthered in order to allow customers to browse their catalogues, websites, social media, and alternative offers conveniently in the store. They need to improve mobile-specific technologies such as location recognition and barcode scanning for customer-centric omni-channel marketing.

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