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Paper:

Shareef, M., Dwivedi, Y. & Kumar, V. (2016). Exploring multichannel design: Strategy and consumer behaviour. *The Marketing Review*, 16(3), 235-263.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1362/146934716X14636478977674>

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Exploring Multichannel: Strategy and Consumer Behavior

Abstract

This research is engaged in identifying and stitching together different research findings in the wide area of online and offline channel design that is based on the possibility of offering multichannel. Recent marketing trends are showing that suppliers of products/services are very interested in inventing different new web-based channels and social networks as selling channels and communication outlets in addition to the conventional offline channel. This current study attempts to review literature in this area that is addressing the apparently fragmented, but theoretically connected, issues such as channel strategy, multichannel design criteria, optimization of channel switch, consumer channel selection criteria, consumer preferences in adopting any channel, consumer attitudes toward online advertisement, market segmentation based on consumer psychosocial traits for channel selection, and a comparative analysis between conventional and online channels. Through a detailed literature review, this study has identified the limitations of these research articles and acknowledged research gaps. Based on those research gaps, a set of sequential recommendations are stated to advance the theoretical and managerial gap in marketing research on multichannel design reflecting consumer integrative behavior.

Keywords: Marketing channel, Channel preferences, Channel selection criteria, Consumer behavior, Service output demand, Service output supplied, Multichannel behavior, Online channel

Introduction

Marketers use different channels for product and service distribution and communication with consumers. For profit, better sales, and branding an appropriate selection of marketing channels are extremely important. Particularly recently, when consumer relationship contributes substantially in expediting product sales, the channel for product purchase, advertisement, and consumer interactions with companies plays a key role in designing an effective marketing channel (Balan and Zegreanu, 2012; Okazaki and Taylor, 2008). A marketing channel, whether it is used for product distribution or information flow for two way communications to advertise the product or communication with the consumers, is a structured, interconnected system through which products or information flows from the supply stakeholders to the end users (Neslin and Shankar, 2009; Shareef and Dwivedi, forthcoming). Recently, marketing phenomena identify that systematic design of marketing channels is not a rigid static issue; rather it requires an approach of flexibility and dynamic design (Verhagen and Dolen, 2009). In the last century, marketers were engaged in streamlining the marketing channel providing deep insight into consumer preferences and service output demands as well as intermediaries through which products and services will be supplied (Chen and Tan, 2011). However, the present trend in aligning the marketing channel with consumer requirements is rooted

in offering some personalized and customized dynamic channel through which a seamless information flow is guaranteed (Durkin, 2013; Lu et al., 2010).

The overarching effects of the Internet and mobile phone have substantially influenced and reshaped the strategy of channel design taking into account online, mobile, and social networks to interact with prospective customers for advertisement, customer motivation, customer mind-setting, facilitating the decision-making process, continuous two-way interactions, and traditional product and service delivery to end users (Okazaki and Barwise, 2011). Customers are now deeply engaged in identifying product information and finding the product through an online channel mediated by mobile phone SMS, Internet advertisements, or social networks like Facebook or Twitter (Sorato and Viscolani, 2011; Thomaidou et al., 2012). The findings of several scholarly articles (Danaher and Dagger, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2007) have suggested that relative benefits, price advantages, interaction or purchase enjoyment, product assortment, buying convenience, prompt customer service, overarching service quality, purchase risk, and continuous promotional offers are key drivers for customers to select one channel over another channel.

Under the new circumstances of product distribution and consumer interaction through advertisement and two-way communication, addressing channel design and supplier strategic alignment, and new channel development and channel switch from the perspective of suppliers are important issues to be analyzed extensively to identify and conceptualize ontological paradigms of appropriate channel development and selection criteria (Cai, 2010; Wiesel et al., 2011). At the same time, framing consumer behavior for service output demand (SOD) in the light of dynamic and changing media of product, service, and information flow – i.e., changing channel structure through the introduction of online, mobile, and social networks – has the utmost priority for the successful development of an appropriate and dynamic channel reflecting consumer versatile requirements (Forsythe et al., 2006; Konus et al., 2008; Neslin et al., 2006). For effective distribution management and consumer communication, conceptualizing supplier strategy in designing a channel, preferring a specific channel over other possible channels, consumer selection criteria and switching capability, and recent changing requirements from social networks are all potentially important and need to be addressed, analyzed, and integrated to develop a new area of study of a marketing channel for distribution and consumer communication. These factors have long been considered important by marketing managers, practitioners, and academics to reveal consumer behavior and design an effective marketing strategy to provide the core ingredient of competitive advantage (Konus et al., 2008; Neslin et al., 2006).

The prime objective of this study is to synthesize the contemporary, essential, and interconnected issues of this important area of an effective and efficient design of marketing channel that aligns the ever-changing consumer behavior to reveal the present trend of theoretical concepts of channel design for product distribution and consumer communication. This study also aimed to identify the theoretical gaps and recommend a theoretical guideline to advance research for online consumer behavior reflecting a channel structure that should have managerial implications. Explicitly and fundamentally,

this research is engaged in reviewing studies of online consumer behavior, marketing channel design and strategy development, switching of channels from traditional to online or dual channel behavior and strategy, consumer preference for channel and selection criteria, development of online channel rooted in social networks, product distribution, SOD, and new customer radical requirements for personalization of communication, consumer perceptions and exposure to an online channel, and consumer acceptance of online channels when different physical and online channels are offered. It is quite understandable that this research has its own merit to contribute to the gradual progression of shaping online consumer behavior, and channel development and selection criteria from both supplier and demand side stakeholders.

The next section is based on a methodological paradigm, and in it subsequent literature is reviewed, analyzed, and conceptual findings are encapsulated with the identification of the theoretical gap. The following section explains the measure of a theoretical gap with organized discussion for managerial implication. In the next section, a conclusion has been drawn that includes future research directions.

Methodological Paradigm

To identify, grasp, and synthesize all scholarly studies with differential views and perspectives in newly invented, versatile, and multidimensional marketing and communication channels – including traditional, online, and social networks with a special focus on supplier strategies and consumer behavior – the following keywords and phrases were used to perform a search using Google scholar as the search engine: consumer behavior for channel selection, consumer preference, SOD, marketing channel design and strategy development. The search also included some relevant areas like, developing dual channel, switching channels from traditional to an online channel, development of an online channel, social networks as product advertisement, product distribution, service output supplied (SOS) and the cost effectiveness of different channels, customer requirements of personalization of communication, consumer perception and exposure to online channels, consumer acceptance of the online channel when there are different physical and online channels, direct marketing through the Internet, wireless advertising, digital marketing and communication, and mobile advertising. Through extensive search and subsequent screening considering the area of focus, theoretical root, methodology, managerial findings and theoretical progression, we considered 107 research studies from the total 295 articles we investigated; all articles were published in leading marketing and information system (IS) journals, or were proceedings of conferences and books. After deliberating over the studies, it was postulated that a large number of such scholarly articles addressed overlapping theoretical paradigms, and we examined similar issues under a similar context. The analysis also revealed that a significant quantity of research articles addressed only some typologies of distribution channels without detecting state-of-the-art knowledge on channel management for product/service distribution and consumer communication and advertising through different traditional and online-based channels with a focus on consumer behavior and supplier strategies. These articles, fundamentally and heuristically, did not contribute to subsequent research progression in the development of

a conceptual framework; rather, they simply compared different marketing channels from surface views without postulating their root causes and guiding principles. Therefore, although we reviewed those articles for any possible fragmented ideas we did not consider those less valuable articles in our literature synthesis which was engaged in developing epistemological and ontological paradigms of marketing channels for both distribution and communication in the light of consumer behavior. Finally, after detailed screening and reviewing, a total of 83 research articles were integrated (as presented in Table 1) in this emerging area of marketing channels with the radical diffusion of different social networks and online and mobile channels for interlinking theoretical development and streamlining guiding principles for proposing, developing, and effectively launching a set of marketing channels.

Existing Views from Literature

The scholarly articles reviewed in this current attempt to synthesize different conceptual progressions of distribution and communication channels from supplier and demand side stakeholders are from the areas of distribution management, consumer behavior, online channels, social networks and consumer communication, advertisement, psychological behavior, and online technology. These research articles were developed based on empirical studies, literature reviews, qualitative analysis, and theoretical detection. Fundamentally, these articles were broadly divided into two compact areas: 1) addressing supply strategies for developing and launching different channels, and 2) consumer behavior in terms of channel preference based on SOD and channel selection criteria. Again, these two categories were sub-divided based on their distinct subject materials and research focus. Different scholarly articles in this division explored new trends of consumer behavior and channel design after the radical, but not disruptive, innovation of digital technological interfaces such as the Internet, mobile phone, and different social networks like Facebook and Twitter. A few of these studies identified any plausible effect of cross-culture on consumer channel selection criteria. Some consumer behavior and media selection theories – such as media uses and gratification theory, cognitive learning theory, behavioral learning theory, mere exposure theory, and the consumer behavior theory – were also analyzed in these studies to shed light on consumer preferences and exposure for channel selection with particular consideration of personalized and customized communication.

To further categorize the studies in the aforementioned two broad groups with their potential contribution, a fundamental effort was undertaken to analyze the backgrounds of these research articles, the theoretical basis of conducting research, the methodology, key findings, theoretical contribution, and potential research gaps. This resulted in encapsulating four primary groups with one sub-group in the supplier perspective and two primary groups with one sub-group in the demand side perspective. The sequence of this categorization (presented in Table 1) is important to maintain so that a gradual advancement and potential gaps of theoretical progression can be obvious and visible with thoughtful recommendation, which is the central essence of a literature review article (Gabbott, 2004).

Supply Side Stakeholder

This group of studies focused on strategies and design of different channels shedding light on the conventional requirements of a supply side stakeholder to effectively create SOS.

Category 1: Segmenting market for different channels where multichannel is viable based on consumer attitudes

The first category of research is primarily engaged in addressing and postulating market segmentation through a new marketing view of consumer preferences for multichannel. These studies were conducted considering the articulated speculation of manufacturers in designing channels based on consumer preferences for different channels. Advocating for designing different channels or a multichannel considering consumer behaviors or demand of attributes, this group basically focuses on a new concept of segmenting a market and developing marketing strategy.

Several authors (Konus et al., 2008) have conducted an empirical study among 364 Dutch consumers to identify consumer service demands for a different search and purchase channel when a multichannel exists. It identified that consumer segmentation is viable based on consumer psychological, economic, and socio-demographic attitudes for channel selection when multichannel shopping exists. This study (Konus et al., 2008) and some other studies (Inman et al., 2004; Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005; Van Birgelen et al., 2006) discovered that consumer preferences for different products and for different channels varies. Therefore, instead of traditional market segmentation, consumers can be segmented based on their attitudes for different psychological, economic, and socio-demographic factors such as price, innovativeness, social norms, retailer loyalty, time pressure associated with different product/service searches, and purchase channels. Maintaining multichannel is appropriate for a large segment of consumers. The study conducted by Kushwaha and Shankar (2007) recognized that consumers can be segmented based on multichannel behavior since consumer requirements from different channels differ significantly. Many authors (Bendoly et al., 2005; Burke, 2002; Jiang and Rosenbloom, 2004; Neslin et al., 2006; Neslin and Shankar, 2009) addressed ways firms can manage multichannel considering customer requirements and can segment customers. The results of these studies are very similar to the findings of several scholarly articles in this area (Dholakia et al., 2010; Konus et al., 2008; Payne and Frow, 2004) which revealed that different psychological, economic, and socio-demographic attributes affect consumer selection of channels and, thus, consumers can be segmented based on their attitudes towards a channel.

This group of studies has conducted research focusing on the very broad subject area of consumer behavior and selection of multichannel. However, while indicating different consumer psychological, economic, and socio-demographic traits with the special characteristics of different channels, we did not discover any empirical or theoretical proof for this finding. The studies successfully recognized that consumer preferences can be reflected in the selection of multichannel. Nevertheless, they did not provide any epistemological evidence about how specific consumer attitudes can be suited to a specific channel such as an online or conventional channel or different types of conventional channel structure such as wholesaler, retailer, catalogue, etc.

Some authors (Neslin and Shankar, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2004; Venkatesan et al, 2007) also revealed that one channel's effective design can enhance the performance of another channel. It means that although segmentation can be conducted based on customer selection criteria of a channel, channel performance is mutually interdependent and inclusive. This identification raised the validity of the exclusive segmentation of customers based on multichannel behavior. This question is not properly addressed or explored in the studies.

Category 2: Designing industry/culture-specific online marketing channel.

This group of studies encapsulated strategies for an online marketing channel considering industry attributes and cultural traits for both product/service distribution. The researchers also articulated customer relationship marketing for advertisement and communication.

The authors Svoboda et al. (2012) examined the potential of online marketing in higher education based on SOD. Through an extensive study, Svoboda et al., 2012, identified that student requirements for higher education may differ significantly; for example, some students prefer just the tangible product, a degree diploma, while others are interested in the content and quality of the educational process, which leads to intangible knowledge, based on SOD. Because of this difference the design of the online channel for higher education should be customized. Bugge (2011) examined an online advertising strategy tailored to industry/culture. This research revealed that the culture and type of industry play a significant role in designing an online advertising strategy. So a generalized advertising strategy for online use is not effective. The research conducted by the authors Chen and Tan (2011) addressed the necessity of a new media channel by focusing on the integration of product distribution and information flow through the same channel. Several authors (Cao et al., 2011; Yazdanifard and Islam, 2011) encapsulated the idea of a new media channel for online product selling through website building and business channel management. Jamieson (2012), based on a study of consumer perceptions in Korea and Australia, acknowledged that cultural traits should be considered in designing an online channel for communication and interaction. The studies of McDonald and Dahlberg (2010) and Balabanis et al. (2007) also agree with these findings.

While identifying the different attitudes of customers regarding online higher education websites of different universities, based on the requirements and importance of quite different SODs, the study conducted by Svoboda et al. (2012) did not incorporate a customer segmentation approach in developing their theory. However, the paper based on a study in Oslo, Norway, identified the necessity of adaptable and flexible online advertising. The paper argues that in Norway, marketers failed to capture the benefit of online advertising due to the approach of collective learning. However, there may be many other factors responsible for ineffectiveness such as quality of advertisement, product specific advertisement, time, and availability. This study also failed to bring comprehensive evidence of the effect of multidimensional cultural traits on consumer

preference for an online channel. They did not consider the effect of different SODs in the selection of criteria of an online channel.

Category 2a: Keyword based advertising and direct marketing: Strategies for specific online marketing

This is an extension of the studies articulated in group two. Here the authors are addressing and conceptualizing strategies for an online marketing channel where the primary focus is keyword-based advertising and direct marketing.

The researchers Gopal et al. (2011), through an empirical study, exploited keyword-based advertising through an online channel. In this regard, the study investigated two kinds of channel: a search channel and a content channel. Several authors (Animesh et al., 2010; Danaher, 2007; Gopal et al., 2011; Weber and Zheng, 2007) conceptualized that online channels for keyword-based advertisement are popular because customization and tailoring of messages relevant to potential consumers are possible in this context. Their studies also revealed that the interaction of cross channel is more viable for keyword-based advertising and identified that different combinations of search and content channels can be effective based on budget values for advertisement (for a more detailed display). Liao (2011) addressed direct marketing strategies and benefits through an Internet channel. This paper identified the highly expected benefits of direct marketing and selling through online channels, like the benefit of customization and personalization. The paper by Korgaonkar et al. (2000) has addressed a direct marketing approach considering consumer behavior with a special focus on Hispanic consumers. This study, while conceptualizing the effect of direct marketing and successive company strategy, focused on consumer psycho-social behavior. However, they did not compare this behavior with consumer traditional SOD from any marketing channel. The study by Broder et al. (2007) has addressed different approaches to keyword-based online advertisement from two points of view: contextual advertising (or Context Match [CM]) and sponsored search (SS) advertisement. The authors analyzed the different generic benefits and opportunities of this special advertising approach; however, they did not focus on consumer demands from any information flow channel. The study by Gilbody et al. (2005) conducted an extensive investigation of keyword-based direct marketing and both the positive and negative impacts it can have on consumers from the perspective of the pharmaceutical industry. It prescribed that this type of advertisement and marketing has a tremendous positive impact but also negative influences. So before developing this kind of marketing strategy, firms should be concerned about the possible impact on consumers.

This group of studies encapsulated the concept from the financial strategy perspective only. Consumer psychological behavior, company reputation (Danaher et al., 2003; Tse and Yim, 2001; Verhagen and Dolen, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2007 – these four studies highly recommend that company reputation is a significant factor for online channel selection), and type of product, which need a detailed analysis, can all have an impact on channel selection. However, these authors did not incorporate the conjoint effect of those attributes into their studies.

Category 3: Multichannel development and channel switch strategy

Similar to the second group, this third category of studies acknowledged that preference might vary based on individual requirements and behavior. Consequently, suppliers of a product or service must develop and implement an appropriate multichannel strategy, and an explicit strategically alignment with the criteria of channel switch is recommended. This group of studies analyzed different implied benefits of online and traditional channels and how these different channel structures can supplement each other. Suppliers of products should develop their strategy for using multichannel for product distribution and communication based on consumer preference considering their perceptions, attitudes, and exposure, (Arya and Sappington, 2007; Biyalogorsky and Naik, 2003; Coelho et al., 2003).

Bernstein et al. (2008) addressed a classical comparison between online and conventional channels and recommended an excellent framework for an equilibrium between these two distinct ways of distribution channels. Cai (2010) addressed the effect of channel structure on the performance of supply chain management. This paper (Cai, 2010) revealed that adding an online channel in the single line traditional distribution channel can benefit company performance. A research study conducted by Banyte et al. (2011) explored strategies for selecting a marketing channel based on different benefits. This paper argues that because channel selection criteria depend on heterogeneous factors a channel should be organization-, market-, customer-, and product-specific. The study conducted by Chen and Om Narasimhan (2008) explored the effect of channel switch and compared different distribution channels from supplier perspectives. This study (Chen and Om Narasimhan, 2008) empirically identified that for the sports drink market in terms of profit, market share, cost incurred, and consumer SOD, there are significant differences in different channel structures. The study by Chun (2014) addressed manufacturer bargaining power and multi-channel strategies. While selecting a channel for product distribution, this paper (Chun, 2014) focused primarily on channel cost. The authors Wiesel et al. (2011) investigated the profit impact of multi-channel marketing (online and offline). Wiesel et al. (2011) identified that online and offline channels have a mutual impact on channel profit and online customer-initiated contacts have a substantially higher profit impact relative to offline channels.

This group of research postulated that company benefits and selection from different channel structures depend on several factors such as ability to provide SOD, channel cost, and consumer demand. A generalized recommendation is not viable, but rather depends on product, efficiency, and strategic differences. SOD and SOS, channel conflict, and overall channel profit. These potential elements must be considered in developing a multichannel strategy; nevertheless, this group of studies did not consider those factors in identifying a manufacturer channel selection strategy.

Category 4: Consumer communication: Developing online advertisement strategy

This group of studies attempted to develop a channel strategy only for communication with consumers through online advertising. Based on product quality, consumer behavior for perceptions of online advertisements can vary significantly. Consequently, advertising policy in any online media should be tailored to product type and other attributes of the intended product.

Several authors (Goldfarb and Tucker, 2011a; Goldfarb and Tucker, 2011b) have addressed the advertisements of lawyers to communicate with clients through an online channel. Goldfarb and Tucker (2011b) identified that online advertising is stronger in markets with fewer customers. The study conducted by Zhang and Zhuo (2011) compared two kinds of advertising online for pricing: auction versus posted. They identified that if the marketers have a clear idea about consumer behavior and purchase decision patterns, marketers will provide a better pricing option for online advertisement for a high quality product auction mechanism; however, for a low quality product a posted price is better suited for online advertisement. The authors Yan et al. (2009) explored consumer behavioral attitudes and recommended that the success of online advertisements can be significantly affected by consumer attitudes toward the online channel. The findings of the studies conducted by Zhang et al. (2008), Drossos et al. (2007), and Tomaskova (2010) supported this concept.

This group of authors, while identifying the relative benefits of different online channel advertisements based on certain consumer behavior, did not consider the heterogeneous pattern of consumer behavior and cultural traits and detailed product attributes.

Demand Side Stakeholder

Regarding development and implementation of conventional and online channels – including the Internet, mobile phone, and social networks – many scholarly articles, while investigating and identifying how to create effective a channel to gain a competitive advantage over competitors, focused on consumer requirements for different channel structures such as SOD, consumer preferences, and channel selection criteria; in other words, they examined the overall channel behavior of consumers.

This broad category of scholarly articles were engaged in identifying different issues of conventional and online channel focusing of demand-side stakeholders, i.e., consumer behavior.

Category 5: Comparison between online and offline channels: Consumer preference and selection criteria

Studies included in this group have attempted to disclose the overall characteristics of consumers in selecting any specific channel and their relative preference in comparing online and offline channels. The authors have their own theoretical analysis augmenting extensive empirical studies among consumers of different countries and the pros and cons to the practitioners for implementing appropriate strategies. They initiated a line of debate regarding the relative benefits of conventional off-line channels and different

Internet-based online channels for product distribution and communication as the marketing channel.

The paper of Tse and Yim (2001) deals with the factors affecting the choice of channel: online vs. conventional. It is fundamentally based on the 25 factors of channel selection criteria developed by Keeney (1999). For offline channels, consumer preferences are highly affected by the ability to see the products. Trust, security, and access to information are potential factors for consumer selection of an online channel (Tse and Yim, 2001). The study conducted by Verhagen and Dolen (2009) investigated the factors that influence selection of an online channel where an offline channel exists. They conducted an empirical study among 630 consumers of a music store that has both conventional and online distribution. The authors Verhagen and Dolen (2009) identified that consumer purchases through an online channel largely depends on the image and reputation of the conventional channel store.

The scholarly article written by Danaher et al. (2003) explored consumer brand loyalty and compared the phenomenon between customers of online and conventional channels. The study (Danaher et al., 2003) reflects the same results as the study done by Verhagen and Dolen (2009). Verhoef et al. (2007) investigated a special characteristic for channel selection by customers, named “research-shopper phenomenon.” The research developed a framework to understand the attributes of the channel that attracts customers to choose it to use for search and purchase. It conducted an empirical study among 396 Dutch customers. The findings of the research article by Verhoef et al. (2007) (supported by Danaher and Dagger, 2013) suggested that benefits, cost, enjoyment, assortment, convenience, customer service, service quality, purchase risk, and promotional offers are key drivers for customers to select any channel, particularly an Internet channel. The authors Laroche et al. (2013) investigated the effects of multichannel marketing on consumer online searches through an empirical study among consumers. The empirical studies conducted by Danaher and Rossiter (2011) and van de Wijngaert, (2011) explored consumer behavior/perceptions for channel selection criteria considering the multichannel effect. The authors identified that the conventional channel is still popular among consumers particularly for government service. However, online channels can be effective if socio-psychological factors of consumer characteristics are properly investigated and incorporated into the channel design (Qureshi et al., 2012).

So the studies of this category of articles reiterated similar concepts that for online channels, a company’s previous reputation plays a vital role for consumers to select that online channel. The findings of this study conducted by Verhoef et al. (2007) are quite similar to the findings of several scholarly articles (Danaher et al., 2003; Tse and Yim, 2001; Verhagen and Dolen, 2009); however, it added some more attributes, such as that relative benefits are a potential factor for selecting any channel when multichannel service is offered. The study of Danaher and Dagger (2013) supports that attributes associated with different channels can affect consumer selections of channels. These studies support the findings of similar research that the existence of multichannel can influence consumer searching intentions for an online channel. However, the findings can be remarkably different for private organizations as compared to public entities which are

not investigated appropriately. So the findings of this study cannot be generalized. Danaher and Rossiter (2011), while comparing online (web mail) and offline (television, newspapers, and radio) channels did not consider the multidimensional effect of product type. Many researchers suggested that product type can be an effective tool to select a marketing channel.

Category 6: Marketing and communication channel: consumer preference of different Web search tool and social networks.

This category of studies while capturing consumer behaviors was particularly focused on different social networks and web-based online tools for product distribution and communication channels and determining how these channels can be effective.

They analyzed the application of different technological interfaces for generating different social networks and web-based channels by manifesting consumer behavioral characteristics. While generating these radical and new channel opportunities to establish relational shop marketing, the authors of this group primarily focused on three issues: 1) consumer behavior for different social networks and consumer retirements from these interactive channels compatible to new generation customers, 2) special advantages of these channels to distribute and, particularly, to communicate with mass consumers at a time with personalization and location-based customized content, and 3) ensuring security and authenticity of communication so that consumers can trust web-based channels.

The researchers Amrahi et al. (2014) conducted a research study to identify consumer perceptions of an online channel dedicated to hotel marketing. They recommended that any appropriate offer through an online channel can be a driving force for the success of an Internet-based channel. The research conducted by Forsythe et al. (2006) investigated consumer intentions to purchase from online channels through the perceived benefits and risks. The authors have developed a model to establish the trade-off between these two constructs for creating consumer purchase intentions from online shopping channels. This study (Forsythe et al., 2006) identified that shopping convenience, product assortment, ease of buying, enjoyment, and different types of risks related to online virtual buying – such as financial, product, and transactional – are the prevalent controlling factors for consumer use of online shopping channels. Constantinides (2004) conducted research to identify factors affecting consumer behavior for an online purchase focusing on web experience.

The paper by Zheng and Ma (2013) investigated marketing strategy for online-based garment retailer considering consumer behavior for online shopping. The paper written by Constantinides (2004) also revealed the same phenomena that for online buying, consumer web experience measured by the factors mentioned in the study of Forsythe et al. (2006) are the driving factors. This paper also emphasized that trust and ability to customize are building blocks for an online purchase intention. The study done by Sayadi

and Makui (2014) investigated communication through online channels and their performance. The authors Amrahi et al. (2014) addressed a similar research question, i.e., the effectiveness of online channels for hotel marketing (Schimmenti et al., 2013, conducted similar study for nurseries and gardening in Italy). The authors Sayadi and Makui (2014) identified that if the product type is compatible with online channel communication, an online channel can be an effective tool for advertising. As per the findings of Schimmenti et al. (2013; supported by Granados et al., 2011), it can also be effective for an online channel sale firms to continue to communicate with consumers through email, phone, SMS, etc. Based on a meta analysis, the authors Taylor and Strutton (2011) identified that if the online channel is easy to use and can provide some benefits to prospective customers, they will adopt this channel. The authors Zheng and Ma (2013) identified that product design, consumer psychology, and sales promotion are important attributes for the success of an online product distribution channel.

Several authors (Ivanov, 2013; Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2011; Schimmenti et al., 2013) investigated the widespread impact of different social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter for business communication. The paper by Ivanov (2013) revealed that social networking can be an effective channel for integrated marketing communications with consumers. The study conducted by Fiorini and Lipsky (2012) looked at different search engines for marketing and identified that social networking is effective as online marketing communication with consumers (this conclusion was supported by Barnes and Pressey, 2012). The paper written by Hsieh et al. (2012) also investigated the factors that are important for the effectiveness of online marketing. Hsieh et al. (2012) postulated that some factors like humor and the use of multimedia associated with channel design have positive effects on consumer attitudes. The research article conducted by Lee et al. (2012) worked on the optimization of search engines for the effectiveness of online marketing. Through a survey about the performance of search engine marketing for 98 companies, Lee et al. (2012) delineated that online website optimization, consistent with search engine design, can enhance the effectiveness of this marketing campaign. The research articles conducted by Mihai et al. (2012) and Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi (2012) explored the effectiveness of different online social networking sites as a marketing channel to communicate with consumers in Romania. The authors Mihai et al. (2012) identified that for marketing communication through social networking, channel quality for communication is very important for its effectiveness (supported by Huang, 2012). Huang (2012) investigated different strategies to be taken to make the Taiwan Travel Agency blogs effective as a marketing channel. The paper by Michaelidou et al. (2011) addressed some detailed effects of social networking as a marketing channel on business-to-business (B2B) SMEs in the UK. Michaelidou et al. (2011) revealed that while customization is a great benefit, nonsystematic usage of social networking can create a barrier to the effectiveness of marketing through online. Particularly for SMEs, if the marketing channel does not consider the relevance of the media with the product, it might have a negative impact on the success of marketing strategy. Li and Du (2011) explored the effectiveness of online social blogs by focusing on the special effect of opinion leaders for consumer communication. Li and Du (2011) identified that an opinion leader, like a reference

group, can have a potential impact on the success of an online social blog marketing channel.

The studies of this group did not comprehensively consider the effects of different channels on consumer interactions and purchase intentions. Michaelidou et al. (2011) considered detailed attributes as the driving and inhibiting factors for social networking on the marketing channel. Nevertheless, this study did not deliberate over comparing conventional (offline) and online channel effectiveness. It also did not consider detailed SOD. Although the paper by Constantinides (2004) focused lightly on how the factors of a conventional channel can influence online channel intentions, the authors Forsythe et al. (2006) did not integrate this effect with online channel selection criteria. However, the papers of this group did not consider the presence of dual channels, where the first channel is a conventional channel, and how it may have an impact on a second channel, i.e., an online channel.

Category 6a: Effective consumer communication: Online or mobile advertising

This is an advancement and extension of the studies conducted in category six by providing a special focus on online or mobile advertisement. The researchers were engaged in identifying how online advertisement can be made effective based on consumer perceptions and requirements. These researchers are more interested in revealing consumer cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes, and, based on a behavioral model, they developed a theoretical framework of effective online communication as a channel for commercial information flow.

The authors Thomaidou et al. (2012) and Xu et al. (2013) addressed the effectiveness of mobile advertising as a marketing tool to communicate with consumers. The researchers identified that mobile advertising can be an effective marketing channel for communicating with consumers. The research article of the author Trkulja (2012) investigated consumer perceptions, particularly students, about Internet-based marketing such as advertising. This paper identified that the Internet can be an effective channel as a marketing communication channel if it maintains a reputation for reliability among consumers (students). The authors Breuer and Brettel (2012) explored the effect of different online advertising, such as search engine marketing (SEM), banner advertising, price comparison advertising (PCA), and coupon/loyalty advertising on new and existing customers. Breuer and Brettel (2012) identified that for online advertising, SEM has the best effect on consumers as a communication tool. Based on samples from Austria and Japan, the paper of the authors Liu et al. (2012) empirically examined the factors which govern the effectiveness of mobile advertising on consumer behavior. Their study (Liu et al., 2012) encapsulated that credibility has a potential impact on online advertisement regarding consumer behavioral intentions. Several scholarly articles (Breuer et al., 2011; Sorato and Viscolani, 2011) addressed the time effect of different types of online advertisements for communication effectiveness through an extensive empirical study among consumers. Breuer et al. (2011) and several other authors (Anbu and Mavuso,

2012; Gold et al., 2011; Ho et al., 2010) identified that different kinds of online/mobile advertising channels – such as email, banner, short messaging service (SMS), and PCA – have different sustained (time dependent) effects on consumers.

The researchers in this category were focused on a particular issue of channel structure, i.e., an online channel as an outlet for information flow. They tried to investigate consumer behavior for online advertising and depicted psycho-social behavior for the effectiveness of online advertising. However, these papers, while addressing consumer communication through the mobile channel, did not consider its impact on consumer purchasing behavior. They also did not consider the balance of SOD and SOS while theorizing consumer behaviors based on their psycho-social traits to identify the relationship with the effectiveness of online advertisements.

Table 1 Channel Design from Supply and Demand Side: A Summary from the Review of Existing Research

Primary Division	Reviewed Articles Under each Category	Major Research Area	Conceptual Development	Key Observation
Supply Side Stakeholder	Category 1: Bendoly et al., 2005; Burke, 2002; Dholakia et al., 2010; Inman et al., 2004; Jiang and Rosenbloom, 2004; Konus et al., 2008; Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005; Kushwaha and Shankar, 2007; Neslin et al., 2006; Neslin and Shankar, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2004; Van Birgelen et al., 2006; Venkatesan et al., 2007	Segmenting market for different channels where multichannel is viable based on consumer attitudes	This category of studies suggested that consumer attitudes, perception, and exposure varies widely, which is compatible with different channel structures. In addition, consumer preferences differ significantly for different products. Customer preferences for multichannel to purchase any products or services or communicate with sellers or getting product information also vary based on their attitude to those channels. Since the attitude of consumers is potentially influenced by their different psychological, economic, and socio-demographic factors, such as price, innovativeness, social norms, retailer loyalty, and time pressure associated with different product/service search and purchase, market segmentation can be feasible considering consumer attitudes toward multichannel.	While addressing consumer attitudes for multichannel selection preferences, the scholarly articles hardly attempted to recognize and analyze how and why consumer attitudes differ for different online and offline channels. These studies also did not explain theoretical paradigms for attitudinal differences for multichannel and failed to extend their studies with the cultural effect.
	Category 2: Balabanis et al., 2007; Bugge, 2011; Cao et al., 2011; Chen and Tan, 2011; Jamieson, 2012; McDonald and Dahlberg, 2010; Yazdanifard and Islam, 2011 Category 2a: Animesh et al., 2010; Broder et al., 2007; Danaher, 2007; Gilbody et al., 2005; Gopal et al., 2011; Korgaonkar et al.,	Designing industry/culture-specific online marketing channel for both product/service distribution and customer relationship marketing for advertisement and communication Keyword-based advertising and direct marketing; Strategies for specific online marketing	This group of studies fundamentally investigated and developed how industry- or culture-specific online marketing channel can be developed effectively and efficiently. The heuristic analysis sequentially recommended that for effectiveness and efficiency, manufacturers should not offer any generalized channel irrespective of customer requirements. Any channel for product/service distribution and communication with consumers should generically reflect cultural attributes and industry-specific behavior of consumers. The category 2a addressed and	While the efficiency of channels were investigated based on channel members profit effectiveness of channels is substantially tailored to consumer behavior. However, the researchers of this group only focused on product type channel preference reflecting country-specific phenomena as the cultural traits. They also did not contrast traditional channel benefits over online-based channels. An equally important issue in distribution channel design is market segmentation for different groups of customers while considering consumer channel selection criteria reflecting service output demand and the capability to ensure and balance service output supplied (SOS) which is also ignored in theoretical model.

Primary Division	Reviewed Articles Under each Category	Major Research Area	Conceptual Development	Key Observation
	2000; Liao, 2011; Weber and Zheng, 2007		conceptualized the design of channels for some specific industries where product customization has a unique value. They identified that an online channel can be best suited for keyword-based advertisement or direct marketing because this type of marketing strategy can get complementary support from the opportunity to personalize.	
	Category 3: Arya and Sappington, 2007; Banyte et al., 2011; Bernstein et al., 2008; Biyalogorsky and Naik, 2003; Cai, 2010; Chen and Om Narasimhan, 2008; Chun, 2014; Coelho et al., 2003; Wiesel et al., 2011	Multichannel development and channel switch strategy	These studies addressed the burning issue of channel selection from the supplier perspective. They explored different organizational capabilities and related factors associated with profit, efficiency, effectiveness, distinctive competencies, and competitive advantage, and intertwined these factors with the development of multichannel and a switch from one channel to another. So while category 2 addressed a multichannel development strategy tailored to industry/cultural traits, this category attempted a similar issue considering company gains.	There is an obvious weakness of this study which necessitates the inclusion of the studies demonstrated in category 2. Although both categories (category 2 and 3) explored the channel design and multichannel development strategy from the supplier perspective, they both ignored the required checkpoint of SOD and SOS balance. In addition, this category also did not incorporate consumer preferences while introducing a multichannel strategy, which may have a long-lasting mediating effect on channel switch strategy.
	Category 4: Drossos et al., 2007; Goldfarb and Tucker, 2011a; Goldfarb and Tucker, 2011b; Tomaskova, 2010; Yan et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2008; Zhang and Zhuo, 2011	Consumer communication; Developing an online advertisement strategy	This group explicitly focused on effective communication with online consumers through online advertising. The studies advocated the essential benefits of online interaction and relationship marketing and revealed that recent consumers behavior is highly influenced by online advertisements.	The studies focused on only one fragmented aspect of channel design for consumer communication through Internet-based advertisements. However, although they encapsulated certain behavioral aspects of consumers and product quality while identifying the effectiveness of online advertising, these studies did not integrate consumer heterogeneous characteristics for channel selection. Overall, the studies of category 2, 3, and 4 of supply side stakeholder channel strategy development did not comprehensively investigate the balance of the generic channel development strategy criterion, such the balance between SOD and SOS.
Demand Side Stakeholder/ Consumer	Category 5: Danaher et al., 2003; Danaher and Rossiter, 2011; Danaher and Dagger, 2013; Laroche et al., 2013; Qureshi et al., 2012; Tse and Yim, 2001; van de Wijngaert, 2011; Verhagen and Dolen, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2007	Comparison between online and offline channels; Consumer preference and selection criteria	These studies investigated channel selection criteria based on consumer preferences focusing their attitude through, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics. The researchers also revealed and developed theoretical framework for a comparison between traditional and online channels and their different possible benefits. Some studies also explored socio-psychological factors and SOD from different channels and attempted to interrelate how these SODs can be best suited to different conventional and online channels which ultimately influence consumer preferences for channel selection.	This group of scholarly articles explored a complete set of issues related to consumer preference for comparison between offline and online channels. The researchers also investigated socio-psychological factors and SOD, which contribute in identifying selection criteria for different channels. However, the popular claim from category 2) that cultural attributes and product type have continuous impacts on deriving consumer dynamic preferences is not understood in the theoretical framework of consumer comparative preference between online and offline channels. Consequently, whether consumer comparative selection criteria revealed in these studies can be justified as generalized theory is not acknowledged.

Primary Division	Reviewed Articles Under each Category	Major Research Area	Conceptual Development	Key Observation
	<p>Category 6: Amrahi et al., 2014; Barnes and Pressey, 2012; Constantinides, 2004; Fiorini and Lipsky, 2012; Forsythe et al., 2006; Granados et al., 2011; Hsieh et al., 2012; Huang, 2012; Ivanov, 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Li and Du, 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Mihai et al., 2012; Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2011; Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012; Sayadi and Makui, 2014; Schimmenti et al., 2013; Taylor and Strutton, 2011; Zheng and Ma, 2013</p> <p>Category 6a: Anbu and Mavuso, 2012; Breuer et al., 2011; Breuer and Brettel, 2012; Gold et al., 2011; Ho et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2012; Sorato and Viscolani, 2011; Thomaidou et al., 2012; Trkulja, 2012; Xu et al., 2013</p>	<p>Marketing and communication channel; Consumer preferences for different web search tools and social networks.</p> <p>Effective consumer communication; Online or mobile advertising</p>	<p>This group of studies addressed different online and social network channels as effective marketing and communication outlets. These studies investigated the effectiveness of different newly invented web-based social networks to market the products and communicate with consumers as per consumer preferences and requirements. They also focused the scope of personalization of web-based channel.</p> <p>Group 6a addressed and analyzed consumer communication through online or mobile advertising. They explored the effectiveness of this channel for information flow to communicate with consumers. In this regard, these researchers explored consumer behavioral aspects.</p>	<p>This group of studies is fundamentally engaged in a heuristic analysis of online based channels such as E-commerce, Internet, mobile phones, and social networks like Twitter, Facebook, etc. Shedding light on consumer preferences, the researchers delineated how to make these new, non-pragmatic channels effective to consistently flourish in mobile and dynamic marketing. While doing this, the studies considered the human aspects of channel selection based on different attributes of these channels and their capability to offer and meet consumer selection criteria; however, they did not consider comprehensively the conventional requirements of product distribution and communication channels like the gaps between SOD and SOS. Apparently, generic SOD of consumers from any channel is pragmatically underestimated in these studies. Primarily, the research effort these studies rest on the widely established design criteria of SOD. For channel design, this group is supplementary to generic SOD of any channel structure.</p> <p>Similar to group 6, group 6a also undermined conventional SOD requirements while identifying consumer preferences for the effectiveness of online/mobile advertising. They basically revealed consumer psychological and social behavior, not the true marketing aspects of channel design.</p>

Discussion and Development of Theoretical Progression

The studies conducting research on channel structure design and strategy development considered continuously changeable consumer preferences and their attitudinal changes due to the introduction of online channels and social networks as the product distribution and consumer communication have focused their primary attention on two perspectives.

The first group of studies is entirely focused on supplier decisions and strategy development to earn a competitive advantage in this highly competitive market. The second group of studies are attempting to identify the epistemological and ontological paradigms of consumer behavior for selecting and preferring any channel for communication or purchasing.

The first category of studies is dealing with the provision of new channel structures, particularly the renovation of old traditional channels by the inclusion of an online-based selling and advertising channel through capturing the perspective of supply-side stakeholders. This category is very relaxed about consumer psychological, economic, and socio-demographic attributes. Basically, a group of researchers were aligned to speculate on channel development strategies through gaining deep insight into customer requirements. This idea has provided a new avenue to the researchers to contrast channel strategies with consumer characteristics. These researchers considered that an effective channel can be rooted on the assumption of targeting the right group of customers. For the sake of this assumption, they segmented the market based on consumer requirements, which are adjusted with the different psychological, economic, and socio-demographic factors of consumers, such as price, innovativeness, social norms, retailer loyalty, and time pressure. This identification clearly indicates that this group of researchers, while advocating for strategies for proposing any specific channel where multichannel exists, did not consider an integrative view of channel effectiveness, like the ability to supply service output in a specific channel and meet the SOD of the customers. Consequently, any attempt of market segmentation and tailoring a channel based on that segmentation might not be compatible with traditional channel design criteria where the balance of SOD and SOS is considered. Consumer behavioral and affective attitudes are a significant contributor in designing channels; nevertheless the cognitive attitude must not be undermined (Shareef et al., forthcoming).

The second category of research, in the true sense, is a sequential advancement of the first category that is attempting to deliver a pragmatic view in proposing a strategic outlook to design an effective channel for both distribution and communication. This group, from a true marketing concept, advocated for multichannel in the light of product type. They argued that for different products, consumer behavior is significantly varied, thus consumer requirements from channels can be different for different products. As a result, multichannel can be designed considering consumer behavior tailored to the type of product. This argument is well established for channel structure design; however, the researchers contributed to the existing knowledge by providing evidences that online and offline channels can act as supplementary to each other. Another remarkable contribution of this group of researchers is that they revealed that cultural traits are also potential derivatives in pursuing multichannel design. In the simple sense, cultural traits can be compatible to the distinct characteristics of any specific channel. This judgment and conceptual progression is, however, partially supported by a doctrine that conflicts with the findings of the first category which is theorizing that consumer segmentation is feasible for channel design considering consumer behavioral characteristics. Considering unique cultural traits of any nation for channel design indicates an assumption of similar

purchasing preference of consumers from any marketing channel, while tailoring consumer psycho-social traits in distinct channel design and proposing market segmentation based on this assertion might oppose the uniqueness of argument for any overall cultural integrity.

As the research gap, the first and second group can advance the research arena by looking into certain other issues such as the possibility of other market segmentation based on cultural traits, SOD, and product quality and attributes. Effective strategies can be rooted considering buying preferences with the conjoint effect of consumer overall online behavior.

The extension of the second group was focused on a specific area of channel design for consumer communication and product selling. This is keyword-based advertisement and direct marketing through online. They recognized the proof of both the first and second category that consumer behavioral characteristics can be suited to some online channels for keyword-based advertisement and direct online marketing; this behavior can be assimilated with product specifications. This group also investigated consumer behavior and product category and linked these two attributes in developing strategies for a specific form of online marketing, i.e., direct marketing and keyword-based advertisement. However, as the research gap, this group can connect different social networks and different forms of online/mobile advertisement for the possibility of better selection of any channel media and its appropriateness with distinct facilities of online direct marketing.

A comprehensive contribution of the third research group is solely engaged in designing strategies from the perspective of product/service suppliers. They analyzed different possibilities of offering multichannel and were keenly engaged in proposing cognitive attitudes in switching from one channel to another. They also revealed that when multichannel is offered, online and offline channels can supplement each other. While the efficiency of a channel can be largely dependent on the supplier capability in serving consumers, the effectiveness of the channel is significantly influenced by consumer preferences in meeting their SOD and achieving the zero-based channel (Bucklin, 1966). However, the authors of this group did not comprehensively address the issues which have a substantial effect on developing any criteria for channel selection and channel switch from supplier stakeholder perspectives. Only focusing on channel switch criteria from an apparent profit outlook, where multichannel is feasible, might be subversive to the long-term competitive advantage and distinctive competencies. Research related to channel switch criteria should be extended in the future by considering how to achieve long-term competitive advantage and distinctive competencies, not only short-term profit or efficiency.

The fourth research group is theorizing a specific and discursive discourse which is aligned with the first and second group research findings. The research question of this

group can get a potential advantage from the findings and delivered concept of the extended second group, which researched keyword-based advertisement. The fourth group is developing a strategy for online communication with consumers such as online advertising. While meeting this research agenda, they identified that effective online advertising is largely dependent on understanding consumer psycho-social characteristics and, to some extent, preference in product quality. They also recognized that well thought out online advertisement can be an effective channel for information flow to consumers for better communication. However, in this regard, marketers must have good knowledge about consumer behavioral traits. This knowledge implies that the efficiency of online advertising is intertwined with consumer behavioral attributes and unique preferences. However, although attributes of advertising are not included in grounded theory of this group, they asserted that structure and organization of online advertising should focus on product quality (although a limited analysis was conducted to perceive product attributes) and reflect consumer behavioral attitudes. They did not consider detailed product attributes in tailoring an online advertising strategy or channel capability in meeting the gaps between SOD and SOS. Future research can focus on online advertisement based on consumer cognitive attitudes and detailed product attributes.

The researchers who were solely engaged in revealing consumer behavior for channel selection from the demand side perspective are fundamentally providing support and issues for research advancement for the first category, i.e., the supplier perspective in designing channel strategy. The findings of this second category are the data of analysis for the first category to develop a theoretical framework for developing efficient and effective channel structure when multichannel behavior is to be analyzed.

The fifth group of combined marketing channel researchers and the first group who are investigating this issue from entirely demand side stakeholders' perspectives are recommending guiding principles for channel design on the basis of consumer preferences and selection criteria. This group of researchers advocated for appropriate online and offline channel design that reflects consumer comparative preferences and channel selection criteria. They attempted to conceptualize why and in what circumstances consumers may prefer an online channel in lieu of a conventional channel. They also revealed a comparative analysis of the merits and demerits of conventional and online channels as well as consumer preferences for each one. In accomplishing this objective, the researchers also developed a grounded theory for consumer selection criteria of channels. Like the second group, they identified that online and offline channels can have their complementary effect. The findings of this group are fundamentally the baseline of group three who have developed the strategy for multichannel and suppliers switching criteria from an offline channel to an online channel. This group is also potentially streamlining the conceptual development through a literature review of the first and second groups. This group provided deep insight into consumer behavior for both online and offline and analyzed a set of comprehensive issues related to consumer attitudes, perceptions, and exposure. However, they did not consider evidence of product variations, cultural differences, and the conflicting nature of

different intermediaries in theorizing about comparative consumer preferences for online or offline channels.

The sixth group is supplementing the research of group two and is actually an extension of this group. This demand side group (sixth group) is analyzing the feasibility of different web-based online channels and social networks as effective marketing channels both for distribution and communication reflecting and synchronizing consumer psychosocial characteristics. They discovered that shopping convenience, product assortment, ease of buying, enjoyment, and different types of risks related to online virtual buying – such as financial risk, product risk, and transactional risk – should be thoroughly considered to offer different web-based channels and social networks for effective communication with consumers. While defining an effective web-based channel, the authors of this group considered different aspects of consumers such as attitudes, lifestyle compatibility, the effect of the reference group, time- and place-related communication, the scope for personalization and customization, etc. So this group of studies can provide theoretical bases for the researchers who are designing strategy for a culture- and product-based online channel and online-based direct marketing embedded in group two and further extending group two. Based on the fundamental weakness or limitation of this group, i.e., lack of insight in considering the channel capability to offer SOD from the true marketing sense and meet the gaps between SOD and SOS, future research can be moved forward.

This extended sixth group is dealing with the issues of effective consumer communication through online/mobile advertising from a consumer perspective. This finding can provide a clear theoretical base for the fourth group which is designing online advertisement from consumer behavior. The authors of the fourth group admitted that a clear idea about consumers is the key success factor for effective derivation of strategies in this context. Consequently, the extended sixth group, while investigating the effectiveness of online/mobile communication with consumers through detecting consumer behavior, can provide consumer behavioral parameters for designing online channel strategies. This group analyzed consumer perception toward online advertising and consumer requirements such as scope of personalization and time-dependent advertisement. However, they did not consider how these can be connected with product types and other service output demand, as stated in Bucklin's SOD (Bucklin, 1966). As a new trend, this group of studies articulated potential ideas. Nevertheless, future research can be advanced considering detailed SOD requirements of consumers from different online-based communicating channels.

Conclusion and Future Research Guidelines

This research based on literature syntheses accumulated and reviewed a total of 83 relevant articles for understanding existing pragmatic research on the different scopes of effective offline and online channel design for both product/service distribution and the informational flow for communication and advertisement. Since recent phenomenon of

marketing channels explicitly focused on developing an effective online-based channel like the Internet, mobile phone, and social networks, this study also gained from the literature review a comparative analysis between offline and online channels. In the first effort, this study divided the scholarly articles into two broad categories: supply side stakeholder issues and demand side stakeholder issues. Then, for further classification, the research articles of the first category, which dealt with strategy formation from the supply side perspective were divided into four groups with one sub-group (in group two) that addressed a sequential research concept connected in some aspects. The second category engaged in synchronizing overall consumer behavioral changes and attitudes for the new trend of channel design, which is also further divided into two groups with one sub-group attached with group six.

The first group explained market segmentation based on consumer behavioral attitudes toward different marketing channels. The second group recommended that any attempt to develop suitable channels should be grounded on consumer cultural traits and product attributes. The extension of the second group suggested design criteria for a keyword-based communication channel and direct marketing. The third group is devoted to a strategy by manufacturers or product/service providers for offering multichannel and criteria for switching from one channel to another. The fourth group is studying effective online communication strategy through showing consumer behavior. The fifth group is identifying consumer comparative preferences for online and offline channels and recommending channel selection criteria. The sixth group acknowledged that different web-based and social network channels can be effective if they appropriately reflect consumer channel selection criteria. The extended sixth group identified effective consumer communication for mobile or any online advertisements. They analyzed consumer psychological and behavioral attitudes in this context.

From the analysis and sequential progression, it is obvious that the research articles in this area are engaged in analyzing different fragmented issues of channel design, channel strategy, multichannel design criteria, channel structure change, consumer channel selection criteria, consumer preferences for selecting marketing channels, consumer attitudes toward online advertisement, market segmentation based on consumer psychosocial traits of preferring any channel, and comparative analysis between conventional and online channels. Other issues this group is analyzing are a new scope of different social networks as the communication channel, cost efficiency of different channels, the scope of multichannel, channel switch, differentiation between product purchase channel and communication channels, etc. However, although the research articles articulated significant issues of channel design and multichannel offerings and achieved potential progress in this area of marketing research, there are still certain theoretical gaps in this research area. Although the specific research gaps that can be reduced through further research were explained under each group of studies, in this conclusions section, overall research limitations are pointed out and successive research directions are provided.

The obvious theoretical derivatives which should be understood in this ongoing and changing research area are:

1. The traditional SOD of channels, which are largely underestimated, should be considered when considering consumer behavioral characteristics.
2. The capability of different online and offline channels should be thoroughly verified based on their SOS; this is not normally investigated while deriving the unique attributes of different channels associated with channel structure.
3. While identifying the correlation between channel development strategy for effectiveness and consumer preferences, a thorough investigation is warranted for zero-based channels, i.e., an appropriate balance between SOD and SOS.
4. Market segmentation is a major aspect of launching different channels; however, the proper attributes of market segmentation should be considered, including consumer behavioral characteristics, cognitive and affective attitudes, the SOD of the channels, product types and scope of personalization, customization, and time- and location-based communication and their compatibility with customer psychosocial characteristics.
5. The functions of intermediaries should be resolved and considered while designing effective channels. This aspect is entirely overlooked in this research context.
6. While identifying consumer behavioral differences and the effect of cultural traits in designing appropriate channels, the concept must be very definite and explicit. It must not mislead about conflict between consumer cultural traits and consumer fragmented internal behavioral differences.

Future research in these areas and just mentioned field can provide a comprehensive idea of channel design reflecting consumer overall requirements and preferences, and comparative suggestions. Future research among members with different cultural traits can provide further insight whether for newly invented channel design or whether the scope of generalizability is feasible or not.

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