

# Chapter 17

## Critical View of Multiple Channels Retailing

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this chapter is to better understand the gap that exists between the literature dealing with multiple channels shopping behavior and the actual shoppers' behavior. Adopting a critical analysis of a large literature of research articles dealing with consumer behavior and retailing in a multiple channel context, covering the period from 2002 to 2020, this chapter identifies an important gap in the literature: generally the authors define the different situations of multiple channels retailing (e.g., multichannel, crosschannel, and omni-channel) from the company point of view, and the main distribution channels presented in the literature review do not reproduce the richness of variety of channels available to the shoppers. Implications for future research related to multiple channel retailing and shopping behavior are discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

Advanced digitalized technologies have profoundly changed the shopping behavior as well as the retail industry (Alexander et al., 2020; Blom et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2020). The shoppers are currently able to buy services and goods using more than one channel making retailing evolving from multi-channel concept toward the concepts of cross-channel and omni-channel (Balasubramanian et al., 2005 ; Ansari et al., 2008 ; Avery et al., 2012 ; Beck and Rygl, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015).

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## **Critical View of Multiple Channels Retailing**

Furthermore, the worldwide situation marked by the different type of crisis: economic crisis, ecological crisis, social and the COVID 19 sanitary crises; in addition to the level of unemployment due to mass lay-offs have contributed to the development of new forms of shopping behaviors and to consumer empowerment characterized by the research of the best deal through the integration of new channels in the shopping journey. Consumers are increasingly using shopping channels non-controlled by conventional retailers. They could be new digital channels, as peer to peer online platforms (Jang et al., 2021), second-hand digital platforms (Luo et al. 2020; Zou & Jiang, 2020), or social media e-commerce (Kim & Kim, 2018); or old physical channels as flea markets (Sherry, 1990) or farmer markets (Brown, 2001).

Through a fast scrolling of the literature review related to multiple channels retailing, we can observe that generally the authors define the different situations of multiple channels retailing (e.g. multichannel, crosschannel and omni-channel) from the company point of view and the main distribution channels presented in the literature review do not reproduce the richness of channels variety available to the shoppers. Researches present mostly a model of shoppers switching amid the different channels of one retailer (Verhoef et al., 2007; Konus et al., 2008 ; Schröder and Zaharia, 2008 ; Dholakia et al., 2010 ; Cao and Li, 2015 ; Lee et al., 2019) and few researches discuss the free-riding shopper behavior who consist on a shopper using different channels from different retailers in a same shopping journey (Heitz-Spahn, 2013).

The aim of this paper is to better understand the gap that exists between the literature dealing with multiple channels shopping behavior and the actual shoppers' behavior. Adopting a critical analysis of a large literature of research articles dealing with consumer behavior and retailing in a multiple channel context, covering the period from 2002 to 2020, we identify important gap in the literature that future researches need to investigate.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

How to imagine nowadays a company with only one channel? Multichannel has now established itself as a distribution model. According to Frazier (1999), "the multi-channel strategy is becoming the rule rather than the exception".

Due to technological advances, competition, and new consumer expectations, companies believe it is imperative to sell their products through a multitude of distribution channels (Bilgicer, Jedidi, Lehmann & Neslin, 2015).

Consumers multiply the channels and means of communication to make their purchases (Dholakia et al., 2010). During their shopping journey, consumers traditionally bought in the physical store, but nowadays companies have multiplied the distribution channels including physical stores, online stores, catalogs, call-centers, mobile phones, social media... (Shen et al., 2018; Neslin and Shankar, 2009). These different distribution channels are common places through which consumers can interact with companies and make their purchases (Neslin et al., 2006).

In the literature related to the multiplicity of channels, three concepts are used to describe a multiple channel distribution system and a multiple channel shopping behavior: the multichannel, the cross-channel and the omnichannel, but the boundaries between these 3 concepts are sometimes blurred.

According to Beck and Rigl (2015), multichannel distribution consists of selling products or services through more than one channel without interaction between the different channels from the consumer's point of view and/or without integration between them from the retailer's point of view.

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