



OMNI-CHANNEL TRENDS IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

Beginning with the realization of an exigency and finishing with a post-journey review, a customer's experience is divided into many stages. This experience is largely defined by consumers shifting between platforms (e.g., store, retailer website, price comparison app) across and inside platforms in today's omni-channel context. It is even typical for them to utilize many platforms at the same time (e.g., checking online prices inside a real-world store). The evolving characteristics of the consumer experience has become a prominent theme in marketing research. Especially, the COVID-19 pandemic has escalated to changes from retailer's sides. During this period, retailers went for changes to provide the best services for the customers to survive. The aim of this article to find out the latest omni-channel trends to how retailers adopting themselves in this new era.

Keywords:

Omni-channel, E-commerce, Covid-19

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the existence of individuals worldwide. Lockdowns and social distancing standards have had a significant impact over the manner in which individuals shop. Buyers are searching for an advantageous and more secure spot to do their shopping. The footfalls at the shopping centers have likewise decreased post-lockdown and this can be because of the aversion among the buyers to shop in these areas. Thus, online shopping is acquiring further importance in the time of pandemic (Dinesh & MuniRaju, 2021).

Perhaps the main lesson for retailers from the Covid-19 pandemic is that advancements in technologies, services, and science are all the more direly needed to separate and without a doubt, to survive. Customers' increasing demands for more digital, contactless, individual, helpful, and more secure shopping encounters are compelling heavier investments in empowering technologies. The tipping point that has been arrived at is that the present time requires more proficient solutions for 'digital transformation' to the shopping survival experience (e-commerce, mobile applications, cashier-less) as well as concerning store operations (efficiencies, labor savings, robotics, wellbeing) (Ciancio, 2021).

Simultaneously, an increasing amount of operations management researchers are analyzing product flow across the entire supply chain to the final client (Marchet, Melacini, Perotti, Rasini, & Tappia, 2018). The omni-channel environment has become a major driver for changes in procurement and inventory policy as well as innovativeness in distribution and returns management. Hence, numerous product flow phases have become more integrated and resulted in a highly valued, cost-effective and flexible service (Bijmolt, ve diğerleri, 2021).

An omni-channel environment has become the norm in most markets. Omni-channel retailing has been defined as a business model in which different channels are fully integrated to provide a seamless experience throughout a customer's journey (Brynjolfsson, Hu, & Rahman, 2013). The term "omni-channel retailing" refers to a business concept in which several platforms are completely integrated to provide consistency to consumers throughout their experience (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). Optimizing performance in one platform is usually inefficient as individuals prefer their own mix of platforms, want to shift between them and desire persistent, flawless and dependable service throughout their experience (Sousa, Amorim, Pinto, & Magalhães, 2016). Customers also consider the variety of products, ordering, shipping, and refund policies while conducting searches and placing orders. So, synchronization between platforms, various customer journeys and product flow stages is critical to provide a completely integrated experience. In today's omni-channel markets, success demands an integrated

marketing–operations approach to address the main decisions that lead to interdependencies between customer journey and product flow (Roederkerk & Kök, , 2019). Regardless of this, researchers have typically studied the elements of integrated product flow management, channel management and customer journey management based on their own area of expertise (Nguyen, Leeuw, & Dullaer, 2018). The objective of this study is to understand the successful journey of popular omni-channel strategies in the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Literature Review

2.1 COVID-19 and The Impacts On Online Retailers

Novel Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is turning into a pandemic on the planet as expressed by World Health Organization (WHO) since March 2020. Interestingly, the virus was discovered in China and it is turning into an episode in various countries within a brief timeframe. Subsequently, this pandemic is affecting the human existence, including the business exercises and worldwide monetary circumstance (Craven, Liu, & Wilson, 2020).

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic all through 2020 has affected purchasing behavior. Social separation during the COVID-19 pandemic constrained numerous individuals to go to digital media. In general, customers will utilize advanced data to discover product information prior to purchasing. Alluding to online retail sales information in several countries in the world, including the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada and Latin America, shows that online retail sales are exceptionally small when contrasted with offline retail sales. Worldwide online retail sales are less than 30% of total retail sales. As such, retail sales in actual stores are enormous, which is over 70% of total retail sales. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting online retail sales; however, it is minuscule. The expansion in worldwide online retail sales was under 10% of total retail sales or 10% to 15% of online retail sales prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most noteworthy expansion in online retail sales during the pandemic happened in the second quarter of 2020 and diminished again in the third quarter of 2020. The pinnacle of online retail sales during the pandemic is more than 35% of the total retail sales. The expansion in online retail sales in the second quarter of 2020 was brought about by surprising purchasing behavior as customers dreaded market interruptions due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic (Sayyida, 2021).

2.2 E-commerce and COVID-19

The improvement of the business world today cannot be isolated from the advancement of information and communication technology. How companies and firms are run from all parts of the world just with the sophistication of technology, the creation and advancement of communication means and methods make information exceptionally simple to acquire; we can easily get all the information about whatever occurs in various parts of the world. The development of E-Business models cannot be halted, different E-Commerce resemble mushrooms in the stormy season. Enormous companies appear virtually, the improvement of artificial intelligence makes various businesses so efficient that companies can undoubtedly move with Office Automation due to the help of the web and cloud networks. Different market place applications have jumped up working together online and offline sales models. Advertising strategies started to be created on a digital basis. This development occurred so rapidly; how the Single Channel strategy was changed into an Omni-channel which is well known in retail business today. A few studies have shown that businesses can build their yearly sales by launching an omni-channel procedure. This is affected by customer purchasing interest, a decent product combined with the role of technology causes the product to have more value that can attract more buyers to purchase (Maisyura & Ameliany, 2020).

The current technology is a pivotal factor in acquiring upper hand and achievement in this aggressive period of globalization. It helps in quicker production and decision making. Therefore, businesses are looking for imaginative solutions to upgrade their business performances, to acquire relative benefits, to slice costs, as well as to improve the nature of their services and products by embracing cutting technological developments. During this COVID-19 outbreak, businesses may profit by the worldwide conditions that urge the purchasers to embrace their online business channels. To inspire purchasers to utilize e-commerce, it is important to comprehend the key factors that impact the selection of e-commerce by consumers (Salem & Nor, 2020).

Web based retailing has developed monstrously over the years and there is sufficient headroom for additional development. COVID-19 has caused the online business market to penetrate further, as a result of customer delay to shop from offline stores. Anxieties with respect to shopping from actual stores and limitations on movement have constrained customers to purchase online during the pandemic. For customers, online retail offers access to a huge

collection of products and for vendors it offers a chance to arrive at an enormous geographical region with limited resources. The sales of e-commerce platforms have essentially developed similarly to the pre-lockdown order volumes. The outcomes show that more customers are purchasing kitchen essentials, personal care products and groceries online. The demand for essentials and hygiene products is expanding and the online platforms need to guarantee that the customer request is met successfully so that satisfied customers are retained. The finding that customers are progressively moving their purchases online underlines that online platforms need to focus on improving customer experience. This is because increasing sales is not sufficient to guarantee growth over the long haul. The online retailers in India should invest more in infrastructure and search for productive tie-ups with nearby retail stores. The significant players in the online business market in the country might actually accomplish this all without any difficulty. However, more modest ones would need to concentrate their energy and endeavors in fulfilling the expanding shopper need. Offline retail stores also would need to rehash themselves to drive customers in the 'new normal' scenario. In countries like India, it is impossible that online stores could totally supplant offline stores. Accordingly, the offline retailers should get more brilliant with the adoption of smart technologies. Online retailers also would require steady advancements and coming up with programs to build customer commitment. Furthermore, the platforms need to guarantee the wellbeing and security of individual and financial details of customers shopping on their websites by adopting appropriate monitoring measures. This would support the certainty of both existing customers as well as first time customers to make purchases on the web and thus would improve customer trust (Dinesh & MuniRaju, 2021).

2.2.1 Examples From The Coffee Sector

Consumers stuck at home drinking coffee powered Nestle SA to its best quarterly sales growth in almost a decade. The world's biggest packaged-food company reported a 7.7% rise in first-quarter organic sales in 2021, which strip out currency fluctuations, acquisitions and divestitures, driven by strong demand for Nespresso pods, Nescafé instant coffee and Starbucks-branded products. That performance handily beat analyst expectations of 3.3% sales growth. Nestle said coffee was the largest contributor to growth, with gains in North America and Europe. Nespresso products were particularly popular, with sales rising 17.1%, fueled by market-share gains in North America and demand for its Vertuo coffee machines (Kostov, 2021).

When the pandemic hit last year, consumers bought whatever coffee they could find as offices closed around the world and they faced shortages at supermarkets. But after months of restrictions, coffee drinkers have invested in espresso machines, French presses and pour-over brewers as they look to upgrade their coffee experience and replicate what they were getting in cafes at home. E-commerce was another bright spot, with sales, fueled by Nespresso products, rising 40% to reach one-sixth of group sales. Nestle also flagged signs of recovery in its out-of-home business, selling to places like restaurants and hotels, as pandemic restrictions ease in some parts of the world. China was its best selling region in the quarter. The company's first-quarter sales were also boosted by higher selling prices, up 1.2%, to cover rising commodity costs. Other consumer products companies have also flagged price rises, including Procter & Gamble Co (Kostov, 2021).

Not only giant companies as like Nestle but also some SMA companies in the coffee sector have increased their profit during lock downtimes in Turkey. To give an example; Horeka ltd. is an espresso coffee machine manufacturing and coffee and tea filter paper producing company in Turkey. Especially, in the filter paper product line, the company with their' brand of Caffeo coffee filter paper, has a leading power in the market. According to their sales, they reached to more households through grocery stores and online shopping. The company increased 247% of the unit online sales the brand of Caffeo in 2020.

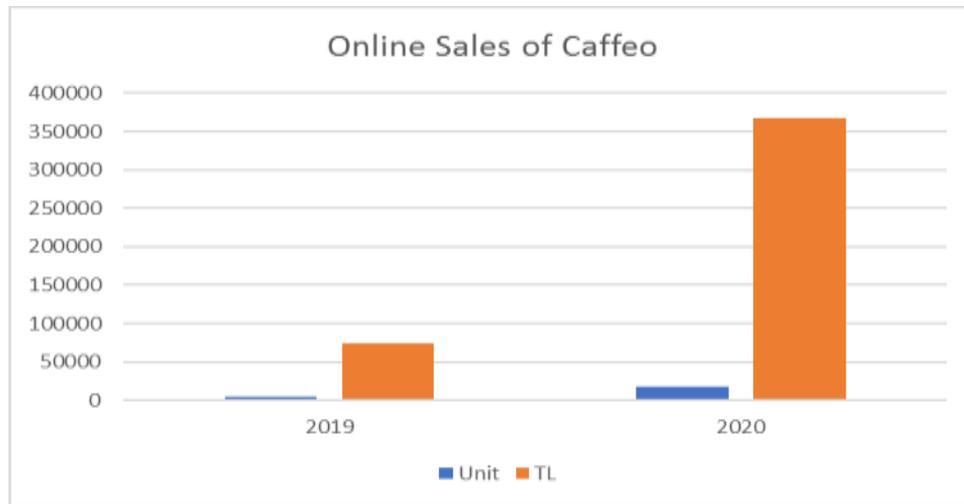


Figure 1. Annual Growth Rate of Online Sales of Caffeo

2.3 Omni-channel Solutions For The Retailers

Omni-channel strategy assumes a critical part during COVID-19 time, which lessens long lines in fundamental goods shops; subsequently, it has helped control the pandemic's spread. The strategy guaranteed that customers noticed social distancing protocol during the order and delivery time of the products. The companies and retailers should use suitable omni-channel capabilities, for example, order management system, inventory management system, enterprise data interface, and warehouse management system as the key supply chain strategies. The failure of utilizing a multichannel system has prompted the change of the key supply chain to an omni-channel strategy, which is the most proficient and resilient. The vital gateway to proficient omni-channel strategy is a strong IMS (inventory management system) and OMS (Order Management Software), making stock areas effectively open in offline and online customers and figuring out which stock areas where an order ought to be fulfilled. Nonetheless, retailers have not been completely successful in onboarding new clients effectively because of a lacking realization of the IMS and OMS prerequisites; consequently, they have executed EDI and WMS (warehouse management systems) as the omni-channel strategies to improve the supply chain serving clients. An omni-channel supply chain strategy pursues to furnish the customers with a consistent shopping experience for the individuals who are buying their items available or on the web. The omni-channel strategy has been completely coordinated and empowered with fully integrated and enabled with advanced technology and the most efficient microservice architecture framework. The retailers for in store-based, brick and mortar, and online supplies are incorporated. Thus, the great development in the omni-channel retail strategy, which is joined with an alarming effort to mitigate delivery times, has prompted a basic uplift in demand for customers' products. At last, OMS, EDI, and WMS have developed colossally because of the fast progression in technology and rise in the Internet. In this manner, consolidating these system capabilities frameworks into a solitary durable system has profound advantages across the disturbing adoption of omni-channel supply chain strategy. The flexible system abilities are significant in managing and establishing omni-channel supply chains since the customer demands an omni-channel arrangement with consolidated supply chain that will warrants an integrated system. Subsequently, supply chain systems should share information to build up a consistent customer experience and loyalty. They should have the ability to deal with potential issues that may emerge during the order fulfillment process (Venkatasubramanian, 2021).

2.4 Major Omni-channel Trends in 2021

2.4.1 Accelerated Digital Transformations

The Covid-19 pandemic focused on digital transformation across ventures, including retail. Businesses have distinguished and put resources into apparatuses and systems to react to sky-rising online business action with new products, services, and shopping encounters. Digital payment choices incorporate technologies like mobile wallets

(think Apple's Wallet app), P2P payment platforms (think Venmo), time payments, and even cryptocurrencies (Holmes, 2021).

The worldwide digital payments industry has seen numerous advancements recently, including mobile wallets, P2P mobile payments, real-time payments and cryptocurrencies. This new, easy to-utilize, cashless payment techniques have attracted many customers. Large players like Amazon, PayPal, Apple, and Facebook are constantly investing large amounts of cash into on the web and mobile payment solutions. The progressing improvement from independent online shops towards coordinated internet shopping environments has made space for new business models for and opportunities for digital payment techniques (Kranjec , 2021).

In 2017, the whole digital payments sector was worth more than \$3trn, as the Statista study showed. Before the end of 2019, this figure bounced by 55% to more than \$4.7trn and kept developing. Statistics show the global digital payments industry hit \$5.4trn value in 2020, just about a 16% increment year-on-year. The whole sector is relied upon to proceed with its great development in 2021, with transaction value jumping by 22% to more than \$6.6trn. In the following four years, the digital payments market is set to reach a value of \$10.5trn. With a worldwide transaction value of about \$4.2trn in 2021, the digital commerce sector is set to make up by a wide margin the greatest portion of the whole digital payments market. The high transaction value in digital commerce is driven by an enormous number of products and services bought on the web. It incorporates all e-Commerce, e-Services, and digital media transactions or bookings in e-travel. The whole sector is conjecture to develop by practically 40% and hit a \$5.8trn by 2025. There are expectations that Mobile POS payments will contribute 37% or nearly \$2.5trn to the the digital payments value in 2021, but the next years will witness great development in the the mobile payments segment, with transaction value increasing by 90% to \$4.6trn by 2025 (Kranjec , 2021).

2.4.2 Shoppable Social Media

Social media accounts and influencers can get your items before shoppers historically. Be that as it may, in the event that you need to divert this commitment from simply interest into genuine deals, you need to simplify it to get from the post to a finished request. With shoppable media, customers can navigate a post to your site or even place an order without leaving the application, just like Facebook Shops. Adding an incentive (like a discount code or offer free of charge shipping) further urges customers to act (Holmes, 2021).

If social distancing implies retail brands will not have the live interaction with their customers they previously relied upon, shoppable video may be the most suitable advanced substitution (Moore, 2020). In the event that there's one thing that is plentiful in 2020, it's video content. The streaming wars are seething, with services producing sufficient programming for a lifetime. Meanwhile, social media platforms continue growing and commanding a greater number of individuals' finite attention. Yet, while consumers have no deficiency of content, what's missing is an encounter that catches their eye by offering something other than just viewing (Tsou, 2020).

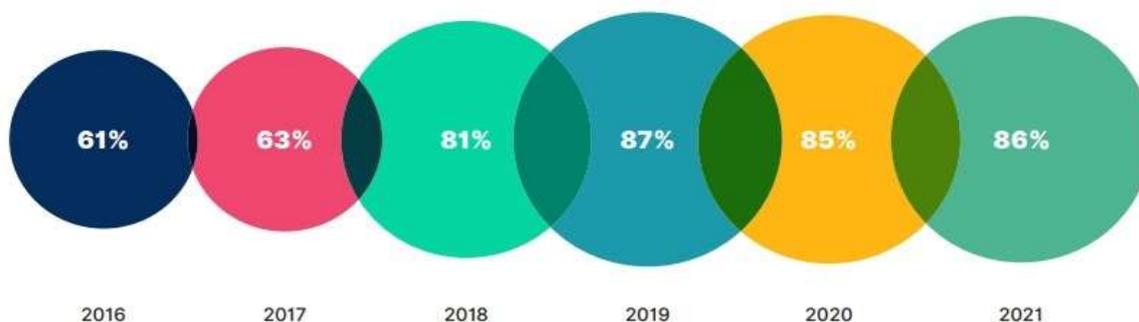


Figure 2. Percentage of Businesses That Use Video As A Marketing Tool

Source: (wyzowl, 2021)

The future of trade has a place with brands and makers who bring commerce and content closer together in a consistent, drawing in, and intuitive viewing environment. These shoppable video encounters meet the watchers

where they are, can possibly open important customer information, and enable brands to associate with customers through more significant collaborations. Retailers worldwide are joining shopping and entertainment to attract younger generations who are anticipating additional engaging experiences. While this "shoppertainment" pattern at first rose as a reaction to online shopping, the e-commerce world can likewise observe and apply some of these techniques to the digital scene. Major media organizations are as of now driving the charge by utilizing interactive video, especially inside the ad space. For instance, Walmart's real time feature Vudu has been investing in shoppable ads to up level their platform's e-commerce abilities. This sort of interactive content permits viewers to buy an ad's highlighted products in a split second through a spring up window instead of leaving the video to go through the transaction (Tsou, 2020).

These new abilities are something beyond gleaming fancy odds and ends. They embody "shoppertainment" at their center, giving engaging experiences that are incorporated into entertainment, yet modernized and prepared for the online customer. The emergence of mobile additionally assumes a part in this new flood of retail- entertainment. Shopping was fastest-growing mobile segment in 2017 (up 54% year-over-year), trailed by entertainment (43%), making cell phones an ideal tool for keeping buyers engaged and putting the interactive ecommerce in their grasp. Numerous brands are perceiving this potential and putting a particular spotlight on mobile. NBCUniversal, for instance, is bringing "shoppertainment" to cell phones through shoppable adds fueled by mobile-friendly QR codes that permit clients to make purchases easily. These new capacities are something other than glossy fancy odds and ends. They embody "shoppertainment" at its center, giving engaging experiences that are incorporated into amusement, however modernized and prepared for the online customer (Tsou, 2020).

2.4.3 Merging Online and Offline Experiences In Stores

Both digital and physical experiences have one-of-a-kind benefits. Shopping on the web allows customers to explore alternatives, read reviews, and make comparisons on their own timetable. Shopping in stores allows customers to see and feel merchandise prior to purchasing, and they can get back their buys right away. Businesses that effectively connect the two can improve client retention and deals completion (Holmes, 2021).

Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are assisting with filling the gaps among on the web and in-person shopping by giving a scope of expanded experiences. For instance, Zennia optical permits customers to "try on" glasses virtually, and with IKEA Place application customers can try 3D models of furniture and accessories in their own rooms. Supermarkets are making 360° vivid experiences that allow customers to shop by browsing shelves. Keeping in mind that these digital shopping alternatives are energizing, marketers should remember that they should be consistent with and associate with different sales channels, so they are really essential for a consistent brand experience (Holmes, 2021).

2.4.4 Driving Traffic Into Stores With “On-The-Go” Promotions Via Mobile Devices

Mobile devices are as of now a significant piece of the in-store shopping experience. Customers research things prior to making purchases, examination shop in the store, and use applications to manage coupons and receive the advantages of rewards programs. Studies show digital interactions influence 56 cents of every dolar spent in physical stores (Skrovan, 2017). By utilizing browsing history and location data, brands can customize promoting, which has demonstrated to be massively compelling.

Makeup retailer Sephora recently their application to take into account this way of shopping. Presently clients can check reviews and information in the store, see what's available, and even virtually try on products. By following how customers handle their purchases, Sephora can adjust promotions accordingly. They understood their clients consistently search for products online prior to visiting stores, so they started vigorously promoting in-store sales on their mobile website. This straightforward strategy has brought about a transformation rate that is three times higher than regular digital ads (Holmes, 2021).

3. Conclusion

The competitive landscape and society are anticipated to be profoundly transformed by digital technology innovations and business methods. How digital technologies are redefining the routine of marketing, which is in turn redefining the nature of markets internationally, is at the heart of changing business procedures. Currently, the essence of digital media such as more reliable statistics paired with interaction has created entirely new marketing

options. Anticipating the changing consumer preferences and demands is a major challenge for marketers, technology suppliers, investors and those who develop policies in government. The risks are really high. Companies that were unsuccessful in adapting to the changes in desires, conditions caused by new technologies and business formats taint the landscape. The acceptance of digitization will be hastened by the quick transformation of marketing with digital instruments, products and tactics. It will affect the workforce markets, well-being of consumers, businesses and competitiveness of the nation. Consumers, corporations, and governments are predicted to reap varying gains and expenses as a result of the digitization of marketing. In a world revolutionized by digital markets, traditional marketing strategies for understanding consumer attitudes have proved to be less effective. Consumer shopping and purchasing behaviors are fast changing, with rising inclinations for shared consumption over possession. The usage of mobile technology, consumer co-creation of value, internet shopping and a desire for experiences above material goods are among the many alterations in priorities (Narayanpura & Kothanur , 2021). Notwithstanding the quantity of platforms accessible to consumers, omni-channel retailing actually depends vigorously on good quality personal interaction. The attitudes and behaviors of service providers directly affect customers satisfaction and loyalty. With the additional utilization of technological channels while interacting with consumers, certain aspects emerge with farthest significance in terms of virtual service quality, including efficiency, aesthetic design, privacy/security, and personalization of the virtual channel (Civelek & Avşar, 2021). At last, on-ichannel retailers should be and keep mindful of the strong allure of physical store environments. Notwithstanding the expanding utilization of online channels, this base idea still holds as the essential of all buying experiences and accordingly should give customized experience and cutting-edge applications and applications with regards to omni-channel retailing (Civelek & Avşar, 2021).

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