



The Impact Mechanism of Consumers' Online Channel Transfer Intention in Omni-channel Retail

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Abstract. As a new and cheaper market tool, online channels allow brands to connect more deeply with consumers, breaking the constraints of time and space. Nowadays, the proportion of revenue from online channels is increasing, and brands are willing to invest more and more in online channels. Besides, entrepreneurs find that online channels can reduce cost and manual problems. Therefore, increasing numbers of brands find out the importance of the online channels, such as establishing platforms and logistics network. As a result, promoting consumers to transfer from offline channels to online channels has become a key issue. Through previous research and interviews, this paper aims at studying the influencing factors of consumers' online channel transfer intention in omni-channel retail. Data were obtained from 239 users having transfer behavior and analyzed by structural equation modeling. The results show that through the "stimuli - body - response" (S-O-R) model, two aspects of body perceptions (perceived value and immersive experience) have positive effects on the response (online channel transfer intention). Furthermore, the results show that customer loyalty and customer care as the external stimuli also have positive effects on online channel transfer intention both directly and through perceived value and immersive experience.

Keywords: Online Channel Transfer Intention · SOR Model · Customer Loyalty · Customer Care · Perceived Value · Immersive Experience

1 Introduction

The wide application of the Internet promotes the development of e-commerce, more and more people have used online channels to purchase what they wanted. According to Statista (2021) [33], the retail e-commerce sales worldwide had reached 4938 billion dollars in 2021, double what they were five years ago, and the e-commerce accounts for 17.8% in total retail sales worldwide in 2020. The number of digital buyers was 1.66 billion (2017), and the number is likely to soar with time passing. Because of the impact of Covid-19, many governments suggest people stay at home to reduce the spread of

the virus. These policies and measurements impose a large burden on offline retailers, but this background is a fast-growing opportunity for online stores. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [27] claimed the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the dynamism of the global e-commerce landscape. In Korea where retail is influenced highly of tourism, the money of e-commerce activities grew by 15.8% over one year from in middle of 2020, and many offline retailers who were almost facing the breakdown of their stores are recently regarding e-commerce as a vital and accessible selling solution [27]. To match the growth in demand, Amazon's supermarket business Whole Foods Markets raised its online order capacity by more than 60% by April 12, 2020 [27].

However, it can be seen that consumers' purchasing activities are more complex in an environment where the businesses have multiple channels. The intention of using different channels may be influenced by external factors and internal factors, which consists of the response chain. In other words, under the stimulation of specific external environmental variables, those stimuli will have an impact on consumers' inner psychological consciousness, and then affect their consumption decisions [7]. Individuals would frequently visit a website if it offered high quality service at a low cost, delivered things quickly, and improved their job performance. What's more, if the experience is enjoyable and consumers will feel satisfied [2]. That means businesses' efforts can win and increase customers' likes. Besides, loyal consumers also have many positive effects on the brands, so this kind of loyalty encourages brands to sell their goods and services to other consumers [13].

Compared with the offline channel, online channel would reduce operator's operational cost, transaction costs and promotion costs (Barroso et al. 2019), then provides more discount space for customers [9]. The online channel is also more flexible and not limited by space and time and has more convenience (Barroso et al. 2019). As for companies, they could use online channels to reduce the loss of offline income due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pookulangara and Natesan [29] refer that customers' positive attitude to the retailer will add the possibility to purchase in online channel of the same retailer. According to Bruce [8] customer loyalty is important to achieving strategic goals for all managers. If the perceived value from online channel is high, such as getting the benefit from online reaching, it is an important driver for customers to switch purchasing channel [5, 12]. Many management experts have emphasized the importance of customer and when the customers feel that the company takes some measures to show the care about them, their satisfaction will go up then increase the likelihood of further purchases [15, 18]. In the virtual shopping experience, consumers are more prone to attain happiness when they are adapting themselves in the shopping process [35].

The research based on the stimuli-organism-reaction model, the model has four variables: perceived value, immersive experience, customer loyalty and customer care, the perceived value and immersive experience will directly influence customers online channel transfer intention. This paper aims at researching the impact mechanism of consumers' online channel transfer intention to help companies deeply understand the psychological needs and objective conditions of consumers in the channel transfer intention and then implement effective management strategies.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Proposal

2.1 SOR Model

From external stimuli to individual reactions, there should be a process of personal information processing, so the theory is proposed as the “stimuli - body - response (S-O-R)” model [26]. The model after the introduction of body variables believes that the individual’s response after being stimulated by the outside world is not mechanical and passive and people have subjective initiative [26]. The individuals have the ability to effectively process information under stimulation and then to make rational behavior decisions [26]. The impact of objective stimuli of media on consumers’ behavior intention was verified by SOR model in the context of online trade: the interactive trait of media has an impact on the consumer sentiment, and further affects the adoption decision [19]. Therefore, it is speculated that the user’s online behavior in E-commerce is likely to be affected by the objective environment after a series of paths to affect the reaction. Some studies have indeed manifested this. For example, escapism, virtual experience in this study, generally acts directly on the user’s senses, reducing the distance from the user to a very small extent. These close experiences greatly deepen the perception and pleasure of customers, enhance the interactivity and realism of electronic channels, thus increasing the willingness of users to choose online channels [24].

Therefore, this paper chooses SOR model to study the consumers’ response (online channel transfer intention), and uses the retailer’s effort (customer relationship management) and the consumer’s objective preference (customer loyalty) as external stimuli (S), the consumer’s internal feeling (perceived value and immersive impression) as internal cognition (O) to explore the impact mechanism.

2.2 Response

2.2.1 Online Channel Transfer Intention (OCTI)

In the past research, it was generally aimed at the adoption of products or services in a single channel, and they generally ignored the selection behavior of the same product and service in different channels. At the first time, the paper focused on the phenomenon as “usage transfer” and defined as: customers transfer a new channel to buy products and services from the original channel [32]. With the increasing boost of digital technique, the online channel is considered as a new way to connect with customers and provide goods and services. In the external environmental factors, there are some motivating and negative factors to influence users’ intention to transfer intention from the offline to the online channel [25]. Especially in the case of online banking or the financial services industry, the shift in these online e-banking channels is very obvious [31]. However, the retail industry’s channel transfer intention lack enough research to guide companies, so we focus on the online business of retail to study the online channel transfer intention.

2.3 Organism

2.3.1 Perceived Value (PV)

Customers' perceived value is a subjective comment of using one product or having service after weighing the benefits obtained from this product or service and the cost paid by the consumer [37].

The study of perceived value is generally discussed from the perspective of cognition, and the expenditure and return in experiencing a certain thing are the main determinants of perceived value [11]. In the implementation of marketing practices for enterprises, improving perceived value is an effective way to increase customer satisfaction, providing a great attraction for customers to purchase their products and services. This emotional factor, perceived by the individual as a result, is often used as a positive factor to attract consumers to change the current situation, thus positively producing behavioral responses. According to the above inferences, we propose the hypothesis as below:

H1: Customers' perceived value has a positive impact on online channel transfer intention.

2.3.2 Immersive Experience (IE)

Immersive experience refers to a state of complete immersion in an activity that brings pleasure, which means the consumer completely immerses in one behavior or activity and ignores other things [30]. Wu, J., & Holsapple, C. [34] proposed that the process of immersive experiences inspires personal attraction, enhances the perception of the experience, and directs them to focus on their current activities. These perceptions can lead to a favorable perception of the experience. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Immersive experience positively affects online channel transfer intention.

H3: Immersive experience positively affects perceived value.

2.4 Stimuli

2.4.1 Customer Loyalty (CL)

Alan S. Dick [3] said that when customers are in favor of one brand, their attitudes strengthen the association between an individual's relative preference and repeat patronage. Customer loyalty is usually regarded as the attachment or admiration from customers towards the brand's products as well as services, which is mainly shown as the consumer's loyalty from behavior and emotion. Among them, emotional loyalty is manifested there is high consistence between the recognition and satisfaction from consumers and the brand's conception, rules and appearance. If customers are loyal to a brand, then the goodwill of the brand will increase, and the corresponding perceived return will be more, and they will feel that the effort is worth it. In addition, consumers will also be more immersed in the marketing environment created by the brand. These are likely to increase consumers' willingness to experience new channels online. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

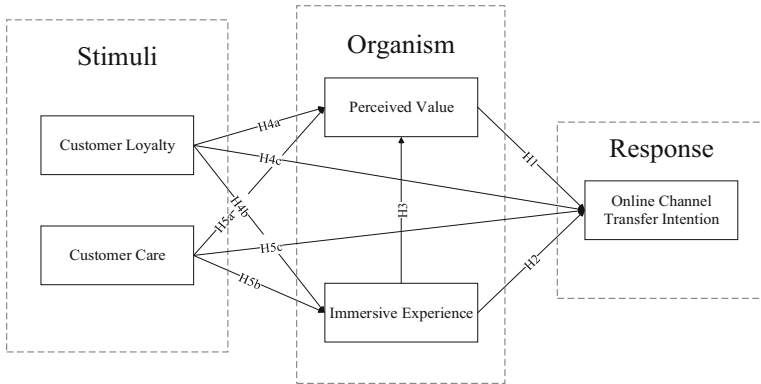


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

H4a: Customer Loyalty has a positive effect on customer perceived value.

H4b: Customer Loyalty has a positive effect on immersive experience.

H4c: Customer Loyalty has a positive effect on online channel transfer intention.

2.4.2 Customer Care (CC)

According to David Clutterbuck [15] customer care is not only teaching staffs basic service skills but the basic way to realize the service quality standards and includes every aspect of a brand's operations from the product or service's design to how it's packaged, delivered, and serviced. If one brand has professional methods of customer care, the customer will have a good shopping experience when they buy the product or service from the brand and the perceived value will be deepened. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5a: Customer Care has a positive effect on customer perceived value.

H5b: Customer Care has a positive effect on immersive experience.

H5c: Customer Care has a positive effect on online channel transfer intention (Fig. 1).

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Measures

This study used a survey questionnaire, which was distributed and collected online. All measurement variables were measured with several items by a 7-point Likert scale, in which 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree. We adopted the measurement questions all from the previous literature and examined by many scholars. Also, the questions are adapted to be suitable for the context of retailers, which have both online and offline channels. To ensure orderliness, logicity and contextual relevance, we carried out 50 questionnaires as a pre-test, and modified the questionnaire items to ensure better usefulness (Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire.

Variable	Measurements	Loading	Reference source
Online Channel Transfer Intention (OCTI)	1. Given the chance, I predict that I would consider buying goods of the brand from offline to online in the future.	0.855	A. Bhattacharjee [1], Davis [14]
	2. It is likely that I will actually buy goods of the brand from offline to online in the near future.	0.887	
	3. Given the opportunity, I intend to buy the goods of the brand online.	0.821	
Perceived Value (PV)	4. Considering the money I pay for buying goods of the brand at offline, online shopping here is a good deal.	0.892	Kim, Xu and Gupta [22]
	5. Considering the effort I make in buying goods of the brands offline, online buying goods of the brand is worthwhile.	0.913	
	6. Considering the risk involved in buying goods of the brand offline, online buying for goods of the brand is of value.	0.888	
	7. Online buying for goods of a brand delivers me good value.	0.885	
Immersive Experience (IE)	8. When I participated in interaction in online channel, I felt that time passed quickly.	0.872	Wu, J., & Holsapple, C. [34]
	9. I really enjoy the process of buying products or getting services online.	0.886	
	10. The online channel has a strong attraction for me.	0.892	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Variable	Measurements	Loading	Reference source
Customer Loyalty (CL)	11. I will say positive things about the brand to other people.	0.872	Zeitham, Berry and Parasuraman [36]
	12. I will recommend online channel to someone who asks for my advice.	0.886	
	13. I would consider online channel as my first choice to buy the goods.	0.892	
Customer Care (CC)	14. The price of goods sold online is competitive.	0.892	Paul and David [28]
	15. Delivery of goods purchased through online channels is very timely	0.878	
	16. Goods got from online channel is high-quality.	0.868	

3.2 Sample and Design

In this survey process, to guarantee the authenticity of the collected data, the respondents must be equipped with usage experience of transfer behavior from offline to online shopping scenario. Besides, the respondents were required to fill in the questionnaire connected with his or her true perception. The questionnaires were released and collected in China through many online platforms.

239 valid responses were collected, and 239 were qualified after deleting duplicates. We even set up a contradiction item to check whether the respondents answered carefully. Table 2 given below, there is some specific information about the data from complete and valid samples. In these 239 samples, most respondents are female (56.90%), and the majority of the ages (70.29%) were between 18–25 years old. Among the respondents, 91.61% had at least college or higher education experience.

3.3 Data Results and Analysis

3.3.1 Measurement Model Analysis

This paper got the structural and measurement model by using AMOS 26.0. We adopted the confirmatory elements to analyze, and Chi-square (χ^2) value was tested and got 586.265 with 239 degrees of freedom (df), the χ^2/df ratio is 2.001 (lower than the reference value 5) [4]. Besides, we got the ideal results: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.066, comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.977, the goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.923, the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) is 0.903, and normed fit index (NFI) is 0.921 [17].

Table 2. Statistic of questionnaires.

Demographic		Frequency	Proportion
Gender	Female	136	56.90%
	Male	103	43.10%
Age	<18	3	1.25%
	18–25	168	70.29%
	26–30	43	17.99%
	31–35	18	7.53%
	36–40	2	0.84%
	41–45	5	2.10%
	46–50	0	0
	>51	0	0
Education	Education High school or below	20	8.39%
	Undergraduate	212	88.70%
	Master	4	1.67%
	Doctor	3	1.24%
Income ¥	<2000	25	10.47%
	2001–5000	169	70.72%
	5001–8000	37	15.48%
	8001–12000	4	1.67%
	12001–15000	3	1.25%
	>15000	1	0.41%

This study also figured out reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted (AVE). The data are given in Table 3, from which Cronbach's alpha > 0.86, all CR statistics > 0.65, and all AVE values > 0.8, showing the satisfied validity towards the data. What's more, the internal construct correlations witness good validity in Table 4. Lastly, we cannot ignore methodological biases in the survey design, so we accumulated VIF to avoid multicollinearity. It can be seen from the data that all VIFs < 3.3 [16], which shows that there is no common method deviation in this study. Thus, this study did not have common method deviation.

3.3.2 Structural Model Analysis

Analyzing the results, the χ^2/df rate is 1.646. The structural model demonstrates the data: CFI = 0.910, GFI = 0.915, RMSEA = 0.07, NFI = 0.915 and AGFI = 0.935. All the indices are adaptable [20], illustrating the rationality of the structural model. Via AMOS 21.0, this study also examines the R^2 scores and structural paths.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the constructs.

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	VIF
Online Channel Transfer Intention (OCTI)	0.866	0.767	0.784	1.167
Perceived Value (PV)	0.882	0.673	0.788	1.139
Immersive Experience (IE)	0.833	0.725	0.722	1.156
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.863	0.720	0.766	1.108
Customer Care (CC)	0.861	0.717	0.764	1.040

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and correlations.

	OCTI	PV	IE	CL	CC
OCTI	0.728				
PV	0.546	0.744			
IE	0.544	0.578	0.772		
CL	0.532	0.553	0.582	0.714	
CC	0.536	0.562	0.587	0.578	0.718

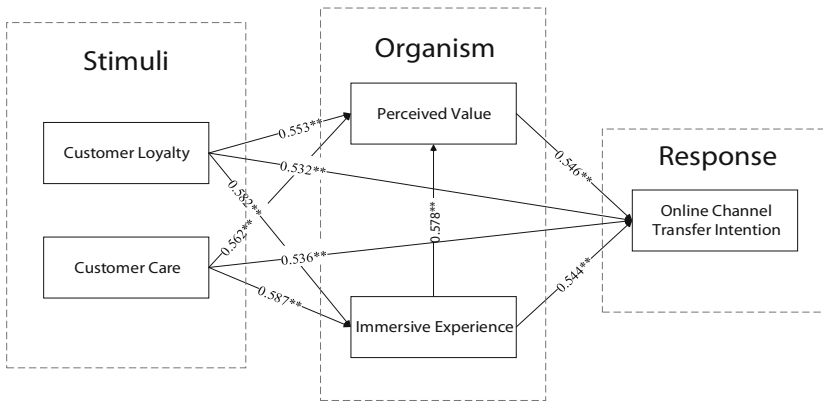


Fig. 2. Model test result. Note: ***, **, and * represent $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, and $p < 0.05$.

Figure 2 shows that: perceived value and immersive experience both positively influence online channel transfer intention, and immersive experience can positively affect perceived value, so supporting H1, H2 and H3. Customer loyalty influences immersive experience and perceived value, thus supporting H4a and H4b. Customer loyalty positively affects online channel transfer intention, so H4c can be verified. Customer care positively influences perceived value, immersive experience as well as online channel transfer intention, thus supporting H5a, H5b and H5c.

4 Conclusions

According to the structural equation analysis, this study uses many scientific models to examine how could external stimuli promote online channel transfer intention through perception. Several findings were found in this study.

Firstly, online channels make the interaction between customers and brands more closely, while online experiences emphasize the perceived value of products and services, bring consumers an immersive experience, and stimulate consumers to continue to use online e-commerce platforms to buy products wishes [10], thus making H1 more reasonable. The reliability and attractiveness conveyed by online channels play an important role in satisfying consumers' needs and desires, so we can easily support H2. At the level of personal perception, if users feel high value when using online channels, it will be more conducive for users to more engaged and be more immersed [23], so perceived value can promote immersive experience, and explain H3.

Secondly, when customers develop loyalty to one brand, they will usually give a higher comment to their perceptions, and they will engage more in the progress of purchase and having service. Therefore, customer loyalty can be regarded as a positive aspect to promote the transfer intention, thus supporting H4a, H4b and H4c. Besides the efforts of customers, the brand also plays the key point to change the behavior of customers. Brand care is a good and effective way to attract consumers to participate in the new commercial activities, so this study verifies that customer care increases the positive expression on perceive value, immersive experience and online channel transfer invention. In other words, H5a, H5b and H5c are valid and true.

Thirdly, according to the method of determining mediating variables from Baron [6], it can be seen that when the direct effect and the indirect effect co-exist, the mediating variable plays a partial mediating role. Therefore, immersive experience and perceived value play a partial mediating role between external stimuli (customer loyalty and customer care) and online channel transfer intention.

5 Discussions

5.1 Implication

The development of E-commerce is very quick. In particular, due to the impact of Covid-19, online channels are developing more rapidly. Many brands had started to sell products or services through the online channels. So attracting customers to shift shopping channels is significant for brands and it also has some enlightenment for the follow-up research. Here are some implications as follows:

1. Online channels are a great emerging market. It has few limitations and can be as a solution to reduce the economic impact from the offline channels. Many consumers are willing to experiment or use online channels regularly.
2. Enhancing brand self-worth. In the competitive industry, it is very important to highlight the uniqueness of the brand, increasing their own advantages can they win the love of consumers.

3. Standing on the consumer's side. Brands should ensure product quality, hold regular activities of sales promotion and listen to consumers' opinions to improve the quality of service. For example, optimizing the design of websites, improving the communication efficiency of customer service staffs, and then giving consumers a good shopping experience.

5.2 Limitations

Even though this study was strictly screened for data during the experiment. As in prior research, this research also has some limitations:

The sample is not big enough to eliminate the randomness of the results. From the collected data, the age groups covered are uneven, the proportion of 18–15 year-old interviewees is larger than other age groups, so the result may be more fit for brands that target a younger group.

There are many forms of online channels, in which some focus more on customer experience, some prefer sales. Some retail industries, such as vegetables, rely more on offline observation and selection. These may all be some other factors affecting the online channel transfer intention. Besides, it is easy to develop the habit of using one channel. These are real problems that need to be verified, so further researches are needed.

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