

The domain of omnichannel in marketing: approaches and scopes of research

The emergence of omnichannel is regarded as a direct consequence of digitalization. The first studies of omnichannel occurred in the retail sector, but today there is an increasing interest in omnichannel in other services, such as tourism, the hospitality industry, healthcare, and banking. At the same time, omnichannel has been influenced by digitization and the Internet, which are undergoing rapid changes, so the phenomenon of omnichannel itself is rapidly transforming. The paper determines the main approaches to the omnichannel phenomenon, its characteristic features, and research scopes based on current research. The main approaches to the definition of omnichannel have been systematized and analyzed. Thus, the main definitions of omnichannel in the scientific literature have been given in the aspects of retailing, marketing, management, strategy, and business. Therefore, terminological ambiguity can be observed, which actualizes the relevance of further research on theoretical developments in omnichannel.

The creation of seamless and consistent customer experience (CX) through the integration of online and offline channels (digital and physical) at all stages of the consumer journey has been pointed out as a common characteristic of omnichannel. The important scopes inherent in omnichannel, i.e. Channel Integration and Customer Perception, have been distinguished. The main issues within the scope of Channel Integration have been defined as the followings: omnichannel strategies; the dimensions of omnichannel integration from customer and company viewpoints; the Integration Quality of Channels; the dimensions of omnichannel integration from both customer and company viewpoints. The main issues within the scope of Customer Perception have been defined as the followings: the determinants / factors influencing seamless CX and consumers' behavior; the factors influenced by a seamless CX and channel integration; the omnichannel-capable measurement of CX; the dimensions of a seamless CX.

Keywords: omnichannel; retailing; marketing; management; strategy; business.

The relevance. Rapid changes in the external environment and the need to develop adequate ways of doing business facilitate the emergence of new business models that are significantly different from the previous ones and pose new challenges to companies. In particular, digitization today affects the nature of interaction between companies and consumers in both social and economic aspects. The product is no longer the companies' focus, but Customer Experience (CX), which covers much more than the quality and price of the product. The process of making a purchase (customer journey). The process of purchase-making and the interaction of the brand / company with consumers were taken into consideration. A direct consequence of digitalization for companies is omnichannel, the distinctive feature of which is the creation of a seamless CX in the process of using simultaneous physical and digital environments. Obviously, this poses new challenges to both the practice and the theory of marketing. In particular, the question arises about the key aspects of ensuring a seamless CX in omnichannel, the peculiarities of management in such an environment, etc. However, despite increasing interest in this domain over the last decade, research in the omnichannel domain in many of its aspects is still in its infancy.

Analysis of previous studies. Since omnichannel first appeared in retail, a significant amount of work is devoted to omnichannel in this business segment. In particular, M.Hänninen et al. studied the evolution of retail from the earliest period of the 90s to the late 2010s, where they determined its evolution from the physical store to platform and O2O (online-to-offline) business models, indicating the factors that influenced these processes, namely digitalization, and the increasing application of information technology [1]. Numerous studies are devoted to defining the main areas / streams in omnichannel retailing based on bibliometric analysis [2–4]. Iglesias-Pradas S. and Acquila-Natale E. argued that integration is the central idea underlying omnichannel retailing, and integrative perspectives in future research should consider this central concept [2, p. 664].

An endeavor to generalize modern approaches to omnichannel as a new phenomenon in business is presented in the work by C.Lehrer and M.Trenz. It is grounded in its unique characteristics involving technology, organizational, and market perspectives and clearly distinguishes omnichannel from other terms, such as multi-channel or cross-channel [5].

A number of studies are devoted to the peculiarities of omnichannel in various spheres of activity. A significant number of works are devoted to the field of B2C [2, 6–8]. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in omnichannel issues in B2B [9]. Also, in recent years, scientists have shown interest in omnichannel in other service industries, such as Tourism and Hospitality Industry [10], Healthcare [11], and Banking [12]. The phenomenon of omnichannel originally emerged from retailing (or e-commerce), so this industry is of the greatest scientific interest, but the omnichannel approach is growing in relevance in other services. However, as

noted by C.Lehrer and M.Trenz [5, p. 690], there is currently no certainty regarding the basic concepts and scope of omnichannel, which requires the development of its theoretical framework. In addition, omnichannel arose under the influence of digitization and the Internet, which are undergoing rapid changes, so the phenomenon of omnichannel itself is rapidly transforming.

The purpose of the paper is to determine the main approaches to the omnichannel phenomenon and its characteristic features based on current research on the specified topic.

Results. As aforementioned, the issue of omnichannel is highlighted mainly through retailing. However, there are currently endeavors to define this phenomenon in various aspects, which can be characterized as related to certain functional areas of activity (e.g., marketing and management), certain elements of management or marketing (e.g., strategy), etc. (Tab. 1).

Table 1

The main approaches to omnichannel in the marketing literature

Authors	Definitions
1	2
<i>Omnichannel Retail (Retailing)</i>	
Brynjolfsson E. et al. [13]	As the retailing industry evolves toward a seamless “omni-channel retailing” experience, the distinctions between physical and online will vanish, turning the world into a showroom without walls
Picot-Coupey K. et al. [14]	Omni-channel retailing exhibits four key differences in channel organization: first, it involves more channels; second, it implies a broader perspective as it includes not only channels but also customer touch points; third, it induces the disappearance of borders between channels; and, most importantly, fourth, the focal differentiator of omni-channel retailing, customer brand experience, is highly specific. ... the emphasis of omni-channel retailing is on the interplay between channels and brands. As such, shifting to an omni-channel strategy commits a brand to a process of optimizing CX and redesigning channels and touch points from this perspective
Iglesias-Pradas S. et al. [6]	Omnichannel retailing can be seen as a holistic bundling of channel mix and operational resources, which requires integration of the activities performed in the different channels. While some resources may be apparent to consumers – such as digital interfaces and physical and virtual stores – other operational resources, such as the reconfiguration of supply chain and back-office information technologies and systems, are not visible but are required to effectively ensure performance of each channel
Szozda N. [7]	... omnichannel retail should ensure the integration of all available channels and a homogeneous CX
Itani O.S. et al. [15]	Omnichannel retailing is described as a joint consumer–brand relationship with frequent interactions through traditional and new channels that affect consumers’ experience and engagement. It includes a process of conjoined operations, supply chain, info sharing, and supply through channels to support a merging of actions through online and offline channels
Massi M. et al. [16]	Omnichannel represents a customer-oriented distribution paradigm through which retailers can deliver a seamless CX and create an authentic brand narrative that is communicated to customers across diverse touchpoints. Omnichannel established signal congruency – all the channels are aligned and convey a consistent message to customers
<i>Omnichannel Marketing</i>	
Kotler Ph. et al. [17]	... omnichannel marketing – the practice of integrating multiple channels to create a seamless and consistent CX. It requires organizations to break channel silos and unify their goals and strategies. This will ensure a concerted effort across multiple online and offline channels to drive customers into making the commitment to purchase
Dirsehan T. et al. [18]	Omnichannel marketing requires harmonizing products or services across old channels so that a customer can fully initiate general interaction and control the overall channel integration. Omnichannel enterprises can trigger channel interaction with the customer and sell products or services through all the widely used channels. Omnichannel marketing simultaneously manages these channels and customer touchpoints to improve CX and business performance
Yegin T. and Ikram M. [19]	... Omnichannel Marketing as a new marketing strategy for brands. ... Omnichannel service has emerged since consumers turn to brands that offer this service and desire to store across many channels simultaneously. Omnichannel Marketing studies are therefore based on consumers (consumer behavior, customer loyalty, purchasing behavior, etc.)
Jena S.K. and Meena P. [20]	Omnichannel marketing, which offers the advantage of offering brands products to their customers through many channels, differs from multichannel marketing in that all channels are evaluated as a whole, allows customers to like a product through the brand’s online channels and receive it from the physical store, or to discover the product in the physical store and buy it online

1	2
<i>Omnichannel Management</i>	
Verhoef P.C. et al. [21]	the synergetic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in such a way that the customer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimized
Rodríguez-Torrico P. et al. [22]	The seamlessness of the customer experience, such that they can interact with the brand by navigating between channels with continuity and ease, is key in omnichannel management
Alonso-Garcia J. et al. [9]	Omnichannel management seeks to maximize the company's profit, but it does so by improving the customer experience and/or increasing customer loyalty, in such a way that both variables generate a greater volume and recurrence of purchases
<i>Omnichannel Strategy</i>	
Alonso-Garcia J. et al. [9]	This synergistic management is what differentiates an omnichannel strategy from multichannel management. The omnichannel strategy has been boosted by the latest technological advances that provide precise information, at each moment and for each channel, of each client's context
Szozda N. [7]	An omnichannel strategy integrates all customer touchpoints into a homogeneous and holistic experience, where the customer decides where and how to purchase and receive the product. It can be defined as an extension of multichannel retail, where all available online and offline channels have become completely integrated in order to offer the customer a seamless shopping experience
Pellicelli A.C. and Garrone C.R. [23]	An omnichannel strategy aims to optimize the management of every single touchpoint, not only by focusing on the customer but also by creating an integrated system with all the touchpoints. Omnichannel strategy is thus a marketing strategy whose main goal is to satisfy consumers by guaranteeing a return on investment for businesses
<i>Omnichannel Business</i>	
Lehrer Ch. and Trenz M. [5]	We define an omnichannel business as a firm that can exploit integrated processes and information systems for realizing a seamless and consistent consumer experience across a plenitude of digital and physical channels. ... we define the term omnichannel strategy as a firm's pursuit of becoming an omnichannel business. Our definition of omnichannel business involves three major perspectives: The first refers to the technology that enables integrated processes and interactions. ... The second refers to the organization that must be able to exploit those strategies, pertaining to questions such as business models, capabilities, and culture. The last one refers to the market, that is, how a seamless and consistent consumer experience should look like

The given definitions confirm a rather significant dispersion of approaches to the domain of omnichannel. Thus, a significant part of scientists consider omnichannel in terms of retailing and focus mainly on the integration of all available channels (online and offline, physical and digital, traditional and new ones), as well as the integration of the activities performed in the different channels as apparent to the consumer, and the one that requires operational efforts from the organization. Current approaches to omnichannel retailing define it as a joint consumer–brand relationship and customers' experience and engagement as indicators that are influenced by omnichannel. It is also worth noting that there is also an approach to defining O2O commerce as a specific form of omnichannel retailing, wherein consumers search and purchase online and then consume offline [24]. Moreover, there exists an approach to omnichannel as a paradigm in retail that establishes signal congruency – all the channels are aligned and convey a consistent message to customers.

The next approach to omnichannel is outlined as omnichannel marketing, where the importance of creating a seamless and consistent CX across all channels comes first, and it requires integration of those channels. Omnichannel marketing is also defined as a marketing strategy for brands, but it is worth noting that the focus is on promoting either products and services or the brand.

Omnichannel also refers to management as the activity of managing the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in which seamless CX is achieved through the optimization of customer interaction over the channels and the company's profit is maximized. At the same time, a distinctive feature of omnichannel management is the achievement of synergy.

The goal of omnichannel strategy as a certain approach in determining omnichannel is to create an integrated system with all the touchpoints and achieve homogeneous and holistic CX. An omnichannel strategy is also recognized as a marketing strategy.

Today, one can observe endeavors to provide a comprehensive definition of omnichannel, in particular, in terms of omnichannel business that comprises three elements, such as technology, organization, and market.

Despite the various approaches in the omnichannel domain, the results of the analysis of the given definitions make it possible to highlight the main characteristic features inherent in omnichannel, i.e. Channel Integration and Customer Perception.

1. Channel Integration. The emergence and proliferation of an online environment, where companies got the opportunity to promote goods and services and subsequently significantly expanded their presence and types of

activities, is recognized as a prerequisite for omnichannel, which made it necessary to integrate activities in both online and offline channels. Therefore, quite a significant amount of research is devoted to the problems of channel integration.

The most typical approaches to channel integration are «showrooming» and «webrooming». Showrooming refers to consumers researching products offline but buying them online, while webrooming is the opposite [18, 24].

Neslin A.S. provided a framework for the omnichannel continuum as integrating online and offline channels along the customer journey that comprises search, purchase, and aftersales. Based on the extensiveness of the integration of the aforementioned factors, four omnichannel strategies were generated, namely «Unconnected» on one extreme and «Complete» on the other, in between, «Vertical» strategies integrate channels over the customer journey, while «Horizontal» strategies integrate across channels at a given stage in the customer journey. Also, the article highlighted eight dimensions through which customers perceive channel integration: (1) channel breadth; (2) channel transparency; (3) consistent content; (4) process; (5) marketing; (6) customer freedom in choosing channels; (7) the extent that channels are synchronized; and (8) the extent the channels work together [25, p. 114]. The dimensions of omnichannel integration from the customer viewpoint were also carried out by M.Zhang et al. [26] and S.Iglesias-Pradas et al. [6]. S.Iglesias-Pradas et al. showed that the degree of implementation of omnichannel elements might vary largely depending on the distinctive features of each industry, and nowadays most retailers seemingly did not take integral and holistic approaches to implement omnichannel operation [6].

Yegin T. and Ikram M. considered the Integration Quality (INQ) of channels in an omnichannel environment in terms of the performance of a brand or retailer in coordinating all customer touchpoints (websites, physical stores, kiosks, smartphones, etc.) owned by the retailer to provide consumers with a sustainable and seamless experience. Consequently, INQ involves three sub-dimensions, i.e. Channel performance in terms of the same quality and consistency across all channels; Consistency of information going and coming through the brand's different channels; Consistency of consumer elements (sense of service, wait time, image, level of employee appreciation) across channels; Security provided to consumers across all channels [19].

Omni-channel integration is in line with the three levels of physical, application, and business integrations, introduced by X.Chen et al.: at the physical level, stock-keeping points and flows in different channels should be linked and coordinated; at the application level, information flows and databases should communicate properly; and at the business level, various channel processes and business models should be coordinated [27].

Mirzabeiki V. and Saghiri S. identified how companies can enhance their omnichannel activities through improved data management and integration. Amongst the challenges identified as the key themes in the study, automating and standardizing, data capturing and sharing methods, and centralizing data storage among companies and channels were pointed out as important ones [28].

Alonzo-Garsia J. et al. studied the factors that influenced the omnichannel management of an organization in a business-to-business (B2B) context. The following directions were chosen as variables: (1) Strategy (brand strategy, innovation strategy, corporate culture); (2) Management (IT Management, leadership in management); (3) Channels (Digital channels, Integration, distribution network); (4) Sales and Marketing (Sales management, marketing management); (5) Omnichannel management (the customer-centric proposition, the 360-degree view of the client, the portfolio of services and products to each client); (6) Customer performance (Customer loyalty, Customer experience). Sales and Marketing were confirmed to be the main predictor of B2B omnichannel management, even above Channels [9].

Lehrer Ch. and Trenz M. considered omnichannel interaction from both customer and firm viewpoints. The consumer viewpoint embraced Channel Transition and CX. The firm viewpoint embraced Information Systems, Channel Management, Incentive Schemes, and Logistics [5].

Taking into consideration the proliferation of the Metaverse and its influence on brands / companies' activity, Z.Ramadan examined channel-based marketing strategy approaches and showed the importance of integrating them in the presence of such a new virtual world. The research showed that there would be four key stages for companies to be aware of when developing their strategic marketing approach, i.e. (1) Multiverse-Multichannel, (2) Multiverse-Omnichannel, (3) Omniverse-Multichannel, and (4) Omniverse-Omnichannel [29]. Also, the study discussed the potential scenarios for brands, i.e. (1) the ideal path, (2) the recovery path, (3) the laggard path, and (4) the deflection path within the development context of the metaverse into a stand-alone world [29].

2. Customer Perception. The main task of the omnichannel approach is to create seamless CX as a key determinant of consumer behavior in the omnichannel context. Notably, that customer's preferences, demands and behavior are varying between different channels [30]. Accordingly, various aspects of customer perception of omnichannel are the focus of researchers' scientific interest. Researchers identify one of the main features of the omnichannel customer-oriented approach, when the customer decides where and how to purchase.

Zhang M. et al. confirmed that channel integration promoted consumer empowerment, resulting in increased trust and satisfaction and improved consumer intention to purchase, as well as consumers' positive responses to channel integration [26].

Rodríguez-Torrico P. et al. argued that seamlessness is determined by three main factors: (1) marketing mix consistency (i.e., the product, price, and promotion are the same for each channel); (2) freedom (i.e., customers

can freely choose among parallel channels); and (3) synchronization (i.e., customers can smoothly switch between channels, such as search product information online and make the purchase in-store) [22].

Massi M. et al. showed that a seamless CX has a significant main effect on purchase intention and that participants in the seamless CX condition perceive the brand as more authentic than those in the non-seamless multichannel CX condition [16].

Gahler M. et al. proposed an omnichannel-capable measurement of CX that applies to different customer interactions in the omnichannel environment. The authors detailed how the proposed CX scale can monitor and compare CX for different interactions in customer journeys (i.e., pain-point analysis), as well as improve CX features and their marketing outcomes (i.e., CX profiling). Researchers developed a CX scale according to three main scopes, including (1) the customer’s point of view to assess the valence of the CX (CX subjectivity); (2) the possibility of using it in the omnichannel environment for different experience partners, touchpoint types, and customer journey stages (CX directedness); and (3) the measurement of the six key dimensions of CX (CX multidimensionality) [31].

Yegin T. and Ikram M. argued that the efforts of the brand to realize the integration of all services offered in the omnichannel environment have an effect on all information, awareness, and associations in the mind of the consumer. They confirmed that the quality of integration (INQ) in omnichannel environments has an effect on brand equity and its dimensions (brand loyalty, brand association and brand awareness, and perceived quality) [19].

Yao P. et al. pointed out eight groups of factors influencing consumers’ behavior in O2O retailing as a specific form of omnichannel marketing: (1) technical and utilitarian, (2) social, (3) emotional and hedonic factors, (4) price and cost, (5) habit, (6) product, and service quality, (7) online content, and (8) trust and risk. Based on a proposed model, the authors found that performance expectancy, offline facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, habit, perceived risk, and confirmation significantly affected consumers’ continued intention to use O2O services, while the result for social influence was not significant [24].

Szozda N. investigated the interrelationships among technologies in retail (in-store and out-store), webrooming and showrooming purchase intentions, and CX. It was concluded that out-store technologies are positively associated with omnichannel purchase intentions as well as CX [7].

Itani O.S. et al. found that brand channels’ integrated interactions (process and content consistency) increased consumer brand engagement [15].

The results of the analysis of current omnichannel research in terms of its characteristic features make it possible to highlight the issues that are currently being considered in this domain (Tab. 2).

Table 2

The main issues in research of the omnichannel domain

Channel Integration	Customer Perception
Omnichannel strategies as the ways of integrating online and offline channels along the customer journey [25], as well as in the presence of the Metaverse [29]	The determinants / factors influencing seamless CX [7, 22] and consumers’ behavior [24] in omnichannel
The dimensions of omnichannel integration from customer viewpoints [6, 25, 26]	The factors influenced by a seamless CX [16] and channel integration [15, 19, 26]
The dimensions / levels of omnichannel integration from company viewpoints [27, 28]	Omnichannel-capable measurement of CX [31]
The Integration Quality of Channels [19]	
The dimensions of omnichannel integration from both customer and company viewpoints [5, 9]	Dimensions of a seamless CX in omnichannel [31]

Conclusions. Omnichannel is explored in several aspects. Since in practice, omnichannel arose in retailing, a significant amount of research has been conducted in this field. Today, omnichannel is also defined in terms of marketing, marketing strategy, management, business, etc.

Based on characteristics of omnichannel, which are cited in most studies, the common approach to omnichannel involves the creation of seamless and consistent CX through the integration of online and offline channels (digital and physical ones) at all touchpoints of the consumer journey. Some studies emphasize the importance of interaction between brands and consumers in an omnichannel environment.

Judging by numerous approaches to the definition of omnichannel that are nonetheless very similar in terms of the main characteristics, one can argue about the existence of terminological ambiguity in the omnichannel domain, that confirmed in previous studies [5, p. 690]. It facilitates the further development of terminology in the omnichannel domain.

The results of the analysis of current studies devoted to omnichannel allow one to distinguish the main characteristic features inherent in omnichannel as their important scopes, i.e. Channel Integration and Customer Perception. The main issues that are raised within the scope of Channel Integration have been defined as the followings: omnichannel strategies; the dimensions of omnichannel integration from customer viewpoints and

company viewpoints; the Integration Quality of Channels; the dimensions of omnichannel integration from both customer and company viewpoints. The main issues that are raised within the scope of Customer Perception have been defined as the followings: the determinants / factors influencing seamless CX and consumers' behavior; the factors influenced by a seamless CX and channel integration; Omnichannel-capable measurement of CX; Dimensions of a seamless CX.

Further research can be considered both in the aspect of further development of the theoretical frameworks of omnichannel marketing in order to overcome theoretical ambiguity in this domain, and in the aspect of the development of specific issues in terms of main scopes of omnichannel, the rapid changes of which are affected by the proliferation of digital technologies and the Internet.

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Сфера омніканальності в маркетингу: підходи та діапазон досліджень

Поява омніканальності розглядається як прямий наслідок цифровізації. Перші дослідження омніканальності проводилися в роздрібній торгівлі, проте у теперішній час зростає інтерес до омніканальності в інших сферах послуг, таких як туризм, індустрія гостинності, охорона здоров'я та банківська справа. У той же час на омніканальність впливає цифровізація та Інтернет, які зазнають швидких змін, тому явище омніканальності швидко трансформується. У статті визначено основні підходи до омніканальності, його характерні ознаки та межі дослідження на основі сучасних досліджень. Систематизовано та проаналізовано основні підходи до визначення омніканальності, які наведено в аспектах роздрібною торгівлі, маркетингу, менеджменту, стратегії та бізнесу. Спостерігається термінологічна неоднозначність, що актуалізує актуальність подальших досліджень теоретичних розробок в омніканальності.

Створення бездоганного та узгодженого клієнтського досвіду шляхом інтеграції онлайн- і офлайн-каналів (цифрових і фізичних) на всіх етапах шляху споживача було зазначено як загальну характеристику омніканальності. Виділено важливі сфери, притаманні омніканальності, а саме: «Інтеграція каналів» і «Сприйняття з боку споживачів». Основні питання в рамках інтеграції каналів були визначені як: омніканальні стратегії; розміри омніканальної інтеграції з точки зору клієнта та компанії; якість інтеграції каналів; аспекти омніканальної інтеграції одночасно з точки зору клієнта та компанії. Основні питання в рамках «Сприйняття з боку споживачів» були визначені як: детермінанти / фактори, що впливають на бездоганний клієнтський досвід і поведінку споживачів; фактори, на які впливає бездоганна інтеграція клієнтського досвіду і каналів; багатоканальне вимірювання та виміри бездоганного клієнтського досвіду.

Ключові слова: омніканальність; роздрібна торгівля; маркетинг; менеджмент; стратегія; бізнес.

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