

# **Managing Customer Experiences in an Omnichannel World**

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# **Managing Customer Experiences in an Omnichannel World: Melody of Online and Offline Environments in the Customer Journey**

EDITED BY

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## Chapter 1

# The Melody of Omnichannel Customer Experience Management (OCCEM)

*Taşkın Dirsehan and Meltem Çelik Dirsehan*

### Abstract

In recent years, with the development of technology, the number of contact points between companies and their customers has multiplied. From the company point of view, companies may reach their customers through multiple marketing channels. Moreover, business intelligence necessitates increasing data sources, strengthening the power of analysis tools, and developing knowledge to be used as a competitive advantage. On the other hand, today's mostly digitized customers expect more than just commoditized products or services. Customer activation creates experiences that make them feel strong as agents perpetrating the structure (brand strategies) by taking an active role instead of being passive. In other terms, customers are in the main decision position to plan the structure. Thus, companies should design unique and memorable customer experiences through different channels in an integrated way, which is called omnichannel. Omnichannel customer experience management is possible by determining and coordinating customer touch points. In other terms, a melody should exist at these interaction points. This book aims to contribute to this advancement by first providing general reviews of the literature, then covering the pillars to design omnichannel customer experiences, and lastly providing technology-enhanced applications from several industries. This book aims also to provide fresh conceptual insights and thinking about the ways to design and develop omnichannel customer experiences.

*Keywords:* Omnichannel marketing; customer experiences; technology management; customer journey; customer touch points; marketing strategy

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## Introduction

As we are at the intersection of increasing globalization, rapid technology changes, and newer lifestyles, new strategic opportunities are emerging in our lives (Bowonder, Dambal, Kumar, & Shirodkar, 2010).

The last period of marketing history, which emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century, was characterized by sustainability (Kurtz & Boone, 2010). It can be defined as development that meets current needs without ignoring the needs of future generations (Brundtland, 1987). Organizations' sustainability strategies include natural environment, society, and economic performance (Elkington, 1994, 2004). Therefore, in the context of sustainable strategies, companies should balance their economic progress by considering the continuity of lives in nature and welfare in society.

Companies' financial performance development is based on the development of customer loyalty, which necessitates customer strategies (Cravens & Guilding, 1999). Perhaps the most famous one is customer relationship management (CRM), which involves customer acquisition, satisfaction, and retention, as well as enhancing relationships with customers (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). CRM is not only a technology but also a business process management strategy intended to maximize relationships (Goldenberg, 2000). Relationship management requires managing customer knowledge (Gebert, Geib, Kolbe, & Brenner, 2003). The principles behind CRM are not unfamiliar; companies have already been practicing these principles for a long time, even if they did not call it CRM. What is new is that whereas companies implemented one-to-one relationships with few customers in the past, today they can do so with many more customers (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). The evolution of technology continues at a great pace, and the next step is said to be the Internet of Things. This approach has been discussed in terms of its ability to change the way we manage customer relationships (Merrifield, 2015). Therefore, in economic terms, sustained competitive advantage can be achieved with no doubt by using information system resources (Dao, Langella, & Carbo, 2011).

In marketing management, individuals in any society are traditionally segmented regarding their social and cultural stratifications, which mostly determine their purchasing habits. In today's highly digitized world, it is easier than in the past to design customer management using digital methods and the skills of commanding big data, which provide simple ways to signify and categorize people in segments based on their purchasing habits as well as consuming practices and preferences. Nowadays, the size of data is huge (referring to the volume), data are produced quickly (velocity), and data take different forms from various sources (variety; Chen & Zhang, 2014). These three Vs (volume, velocity, and variety) characterize "Big Data" (Laney, 2001). The Big Data approach seeks to reveal intelligence from data and transform it into business advantage (McAfee, Brynjolfsson, Davenport, Patil, & Barton, 2012). In other terms, business intelligence refers to extending the data sources, using tools to analyze them, and producing knowledge (Laudon & Laudon, 2018). Therefore, in the customer context, companies may find new ways to capture customer data, store them in data

warehouses, and analyze them with strong analytical tools in order to strengthen the relationship with customers and ensure competitive advantages. Thus, companies should be able to pursue customer steps and determine and act on different touchpoints through alternative communications and distribution channels (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016).

Shorter life cycles of products and services have made them commoditized. Therefore, brand differentiation and customer preference have shifted from the offerings themselves to the institutions that create experiences associated with their acquisition, use, and maintenance (Dirsehan, 2019). Thus, revenue does not only depend on sales of existing goods and services, but also on creating experiences for which customers are willing to pay (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). Experiences can be conceptualized as “events that engage individuals in a personal way” (Pine, Pine, & Gilmore, 1999, p. 12) or as “enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events” (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007, p. 120). Therefore, creating strong customer experiences is a leading objective for management (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) to create competitive advantage (Edelman & Singer, 2015). Innovation is an effective way to provide experiences that excite the customer (Bowonder et al., 2010). As customers interact with companies through a countless number of channels, an integration of multiple businesses functions including information technologies is needed in creating and delivering positive customer experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For this purpose, customer journeys should be analyzed to depict the touchpoints where customers may interact with the companies (Rosenbaum, Otalora, & Ramírez, 2017). Throughout the journeys, as data sources, customer data may take the form of messages, updates, images posted on social media, readings from sensors, and GPS signals from cell phones (McAfee et al., 2012). Then, these data may be analyzed through analytical platforms such as online analytical processing and data mining. Then, possible extraction of information from data mining may include associations, sequences, classifications, and forecasts (Laudon & Laudon, 2018). Based on these analyses, new technologies can be developed and offered to develop customer experiences from various integrated channels as an omnichannel strategy. This strategy aims to provide consumers with a “holistic” shopping experience (Payne, Peltier, & Barger, 2017).

To take a holistic experience approach, analysis of the transformation of societies is crucial. Sociocultural changes mostly involve different generations’ strategies of adapting to the new rhythm of new technological advancements. New lifestyles engaged with smart facilities require a deep sociocultural analysis, which can give many cues to brands’ marketing strategies, especially with respect to customer experience management.

It is important to note that omnichannel strategies involve a mediator position between customer and brand. They suggest many good effects in the whole process of customer experience, which calls for equilibrium of the control all along the purchasing and consuming process through omnichannel strategies. Having a mediator between customer and brand also results in a positive improvement in the marketing and customer management. However, even in multichannel marketing strategies, brand centering makes customers passive in the customer journey

because the channels are determined by the brands. This is the main issue that has been subject to highly powerful critiques on consumer society in sociological thought. Critical theory has a deep tradition in consumer society, which has its bases in Marxist critiques on the capitalist mode of production and the relations of production. Consumption, which is in the focus of marketing, is considered the cyclic complement of the capitalist mode of production in capitalist society. It is also considered the main motor of the resolution for the crisis of capitalism, and marketing has been a building block to find solutions for sustaining consumption. In this frame, the main interests of marketing, the customers and consumers, have been critically defined as consumer society in critical sociological theory (Baudrillard, 1998). Therefore, marketing and customer management have been targeted by critics as manipulating customers/consumers by markets and brands. The consumption process is evaluated as it includes creation of needs, which is commanded first by the natural propensity to happiness, deeply based on naive anthropological discourses (Ritzer, 1992). These critiques include the abuse of people's basic feelings and leading them to consume massively; thus, this massive consumption is depicted as the absolute support for massive production, and therefore for capitalist society. These critiques were followed by McDonaldization theory, which evaluated that the high rationalization and manipulation were supported by the standardization of all dimensions of production and consumption phases. Highly standardized productions and marketing strategies have been criticized as erasing the identities of individuals, defining all of them in the same segments, and blinding the customers' special needs, feelings, and expectations. Brands have been seen simply to cover all basic needs of customers with standardized products, manipulating all the dimensions of the customer journey. This standardization puts the brand in the center and makes the customers passive receivers in the purchasing phases. The weakest aspect of marketing, according to criticisms, is putting the customer in a passive position during purchase and consumption.

Network society discourse has germinated many other critiques about the transformations of the new global world in motion. The main critiques that have been developed refer to digitization of all aspects of daily life and social order in the new technological and information age (Ritzer, 2018). However, the turning point of marketing and customer experience management is related to the transformations of society by all these new technological advancements. Individuals in a fast-moving world need more power and command in the process of consumption. Also, they no longer have passion for brands that behave as the commander to the customers; instead of the experience of being manipulated by brands and feeling their emphases, individuals need to individualize the brands in their own ways without being standardized. As the main commanders of their life with the help of smart technology, they need to have the satisfaction of the feeling of taking the harness in their hands and have more interaction with not only brands but also their own social milieu through social media.

In this network society, people who are mostly categorized and admitted as part of the mainstream culture need an experience that makes them feel unique and active in all phases of the customer journey. Omnichannel strategies suggest

grabbing the rhythm of the motions in the world's sociocultural aura. Through omnichannel strategies, it is easy to come to the end of a tradition of determining strategies to put customers in the same or different bowls and manipulate them by the limited channels in marketing. Omnichannel strategies can lead us to develop a new style of customer experience management and enable brands to improve the purchasing process on behalf of customers. This frees customers from both psychological and physical burdens in the purchasing process. For instance, it clears the fault of making customers lose time to pay; it also eliminates the condition of being limited and forced to use the access channel determined by brand-centered marketing strategies.

Technological transformations cover all dimensions of people's daily life practices, from the moment of waking up in the morning to closing their eyes in bed at night; even during sleep, people can choose to use smart technologies for their individual needs. It could be openly argued that people living in today's web society satisfy most of their needs by engaging new technological applications and tools that help them to easily tackle daily problems individually and give them the feeling of being in command, comfortable, and free. In today's digitized world, there is no more room for being manipulated by limited channels wholly controlled by brands when there are many others suggesting that the harness is in the customer's hands. Omnichannel strategies precisely suggest a good answer to the critiques previously discussed on consideration of consumers in a passive position in main critical thoughts on consumer society. The shining aspect of omnichannel strategies in customer experience management is putting the customer at the heart of the marketing strategy. Putting the customer at the center of the marketing strategy and leaving the decision about the form of the interaction between the brand and the customer in the marketing phases in the hands of the customer resolves many flaws in the purchasing and consumption process.

In omnichannel strategies, the customer can first choose the channel individually, control the process from another channel he or she wants, make choices about the method that comes to him or her without being restricted by the brand, and experience the same ease during payment. All these phases can be resolved through the channel that the customer assumes easily. Also, thanks to firmly integrated systems in omnichannel strategies, the purchase decision will be accelerated and facilitated because both the time loss and the efforts required from the customer are eliminated. Both the time loss and all other burdens on the customer are conceived as negatively affecting the customer's purchasing decision, and those are reduced in an omnichannel world. Therefore, admittedly, it can be cited that omnichannel strategies with the approach of centering the customer create an important experience in terms of giving the customer the freedom to control the process as he or she wishes, eliminating the loss of time, and creating the feeling of being a determiner of the brand, because it makes the customer more free and active. This also offers the happiness of feeling like the commander in the journey; therefore, this experience reinforces customer loyalty to the brand.

In addition, our fast-moving world is getting faster and closer with the support of technological advancements in globally networked societies and interactions

between structures and agencies (Castells, 2010). Customer activation creates experiences that make them feel strong as agents perpetrating the structure (brand strategies) by taking an active role instead of being passive. In other terms, customers are in the main decision position to plan the structure.

This introductory chapter on the melodies of omnichannel strategies with an additional vision of a little window opening to some sociological aspects has the aim of grabbing the sociological rhythm of the fast-moving world transforming through new technological developments. In the following chapters, deeper visions can also evolve in terms of sociological and sociocultural analysis on transformation in the network society to well define the omnichannel world for marketing strategies and customer experience management. However, here, the aim is to create a visionary discourse on the changing rhythm of customers in this fast-moving world enchanted by new technological advancements and to try to create a chance to hear the melody of marketing strategies first by grabbing the rhythm. This can be achieved by catching the main shining notes of new technological advancements with the help of omnichannel strategies and platforms.

The omnichannel environment necessitates that customers move freely among channels within a single transaction process (Melero, Sese, & Verhoef, 2016). Therefore, an integration of channels is needed in an omnichannel service to deliver customers an integrated, unique, and consistent shopping experience (Shen, Li, Sun, & Wang, 2018). For this purpose, customer touchpoints should be managed in harmony. In other terms, a melody should exist while managing omnichannel customer experiences.

## Contents

This book aims to contribute to omnichannel customer experience management (OCCEM) and to provide fresh, up-to-date conceptual insights, thinking, and examples. To ensure the quality of the book, all chapters have been through a blind peer-review process.

After this first introductory chapter, the book handles OCCEM from three aspects, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The first section consists of “General Frames defining OCCEM.” This section aims to present literature reviews and fundamental definitions within the topic. The second chapter by Tibor, János Karlovitz points out the milestones in history that transformed individuals. Technology devices, from the introduction of computers to the development of social media, have changed individuals’ environments, and marketing channels have been developed accordingly. Especially with the spread of social media use, people now have access to information from everywhere, and they can work online, even under pandemic restrictions, thanks to the technology.

The following chapter by Özge Adan Gök first distinguishes marketing channels—single, multi, and omni. Then, the potential effects of omnichannel usage on consumer behavior are revised in terms of brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, perceived brand value, and buying behavior together with changing consumer characteristics, with several examples.

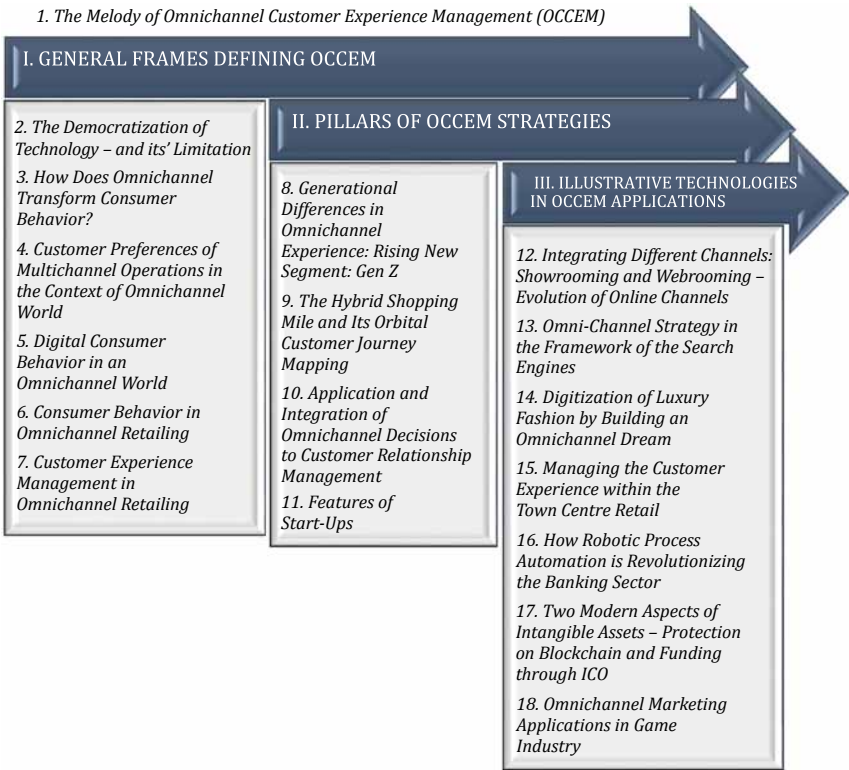


Fig. 1. Structure of the Book “Managing Customer Experiences in an Omnichannel World”. *Source:* Created by the Authors.

In Chapter 4, Yaman Öztekin and Özgür Çengel discuss main terms and terminologies, along with common practices, on how customer preferences of multichannel operations have evolved throughout the years of competition and globalization.

In the chapter “Digital Consumer Behavior in an Omnichannel World,” Pınar Yürük Kayapınar revises the historical process of the marketing concept and explains how we arrived at the Marketing 4.0 era and how the consumer buying process has evolved in addition to consumers’ characteristics. Even though digital consumers’ buying behavior is similar to traditional behavior, the buying environments and tools are different.

In the sixth chapter, Raife Meltem Yetkin Özbük, Duygu Aydın Ünal, and Büşra Oktay examine previous literature on omnichannel retailing approaches by providing several industrial applications. Even though there is an increasing interest in the retailing literature to analyze the omnichannel approach, there are still gaps in analyzing all the steps of the customer to understand the overall customer experience.

In the following chapter, K. Ilgin Çakıroğlu and Özgür Çengel consider the role of customer experience management in establishing sustainable omnichannel retailing strategies. In this context, some ideas from previous research are summarized.

The second section of this book includes “Pillars of OCCEM Strategies.” The main purpose of this section is to cover the topics necessary to understand in developing OCCEM strategies. In the first chapter in this section, Bilge Baykal emphasizes the importance of the rising new segment, Generation Z. This generation was born into today’s digitalized world and has never known shopping without using digital tools. They are brand agnostic and act with deliberation on brand promises.

In the following chapter, Zeynep Bilgin-Wührer and Gerhard A. Wührer introduce a holistic perspective on today’s omnichannel customer experience journey. Marketers need to understand the customer hybrid omnichannel journey including the customer touchpoints to adapt to technological developments that lead to changes in the competitive forces, wants, and desires, in order to develop customer experiences.

In Chapter 10, Ozan Karacali and Gulberk Gultekin Salman underline the importance of the integration between customer experience management and CRM. In-depth interviews conducted with three companies in the sportswear industry reveal that even though these companies apply strategies to create relationships with their customers, the omnichannel implementation in Turkey is still in the introduction phase.

The next chapter by Judit Kárpáti-Daróczi and Tibor János Karlovitz aims to describe start-ups and to distinguish businesses with moderate growth and extra fast-growing businesses. It is not only big and global companies that create omnichannel customer experiences. Start-ups should also be considered as experience providers with their high growth potential based on technology ideas that make life easier for consumers.

The third section of the book is designed to provide “Illustrative Technologies in OCCEM Applications.” The purpose of this is to show how companies can design and use omnichannel customer experiences in different industries. In the first chapter of this section, Elif Türk details the applications of showrooming and webrooming as the first attempts to integrate the channels.

The following chapter by Beyza Gultekin and Sabri Erdem is focused on the role of search engines in developing omnichannel customer experiences. In today’s competitive environment, search engine optimization is not enough anymore; new features such as personalization and location-based searches should be implemented to meet the needs and wants of customers and provide appropriate information regardless of the device they use.

In Chapter 14, Gizem Merve Karadag and Irem Eren Erdogmus attempt to apply the omnichannel retailing approach in the luxury industry. Four profiles are identified from conducting in-depth interviews with 16 women in Istanbul: luxury beginners (the new middle-class consumers), nouveaux riches, conservative luxury consumers (consisting of both nouveaux riches and established consumers), and established luxury consumers. Then, their omnichannel luxury purchase journeys are blueprinted and compared.