NOVA IMS Information Management School

MEGI

Mestrado em Estatística e Gestão de Informação
Master Program in Statistics and Information Management

CHANNEL INTEGRATION IMPACT ON CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION:

The mediating role of salespeople

Cláudia Sofia Peres Araújo

Dissertation presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Statistics and Information Management

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

CHANNEL INTEGRATION IMPACT ON CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION: The mediating role of salespeople

by

Cláudia Sofia Peres Araújo

Dissertation presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Statistics and Information Management, with a specialization in Marketing Research and CRM

Advisor: Professor Doutor Paulo Rita

Co Advisor*:* Prof. Doutor Frederico Cruz Jesus

May 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank to Professor Paulo Rita and Professor Frederico Cruz for the time invested. Throughout this process, they were always available, supportive, and challenging. Their knowledge and critical thinking were fundamental to finish this journey.

In second place, I would like to thank to my parents, sister, and boyfriend for their determinant support. They always knew how to give the necessary motivation to positively overcome all the obstacles.

I am also thankful to my team-leader for the patience and availability in the last months.

Finally, to all the people who were available to answer the online survey, I express my gratitude.

Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

Omnichannel retailing is increasingly essential. This study builds on the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model (S-O-R) to understand the direct effect of channel integration on customers' in-store purchase intention. Moreover, the mediated effect of salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust and the moderator role of showrooming are explored. We find that salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust, fully mediate the relationship between channel integration and customers' future purchase intention. Furthermore, trust fully mediates the relationship between salespeople interaction quality and customers' future buying intention. With a customer-centric perspective, this study extends channel integration literature. Suggestions for further research are provided.

KEYWORDS

Omnichannel Retailing; Channel integration; Salespeople; Trust; Showrooming

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Composite Reliability
DV	Dependent Variable
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
ICS	Integrated Customer Service
IIA	Integrated Information Access
INT	Channel Integration
INTQ	Salespeople Interaction Quality
IOF	Integrated Order Fulfilment
IP	Integrated Promotion
IPP	Integrated Product and Price Information Management
IT	Integrated Transaction Information Management
IV	Independent Variable
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
SHW	Showrooming Intention
S-O-R	Stimulus-Organism-Response Model
STBI	Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention
TR	Salespeople Trust
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

1. INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of the technology evolution and the ongoing digitalisation trend increased the diversity of available channels (Shen et al., 2018) and changed how consumers shop (Daunt & Harris, 2017). Retailing evolved significantly from a single channel to a multi and then omnichannel market characterised by a seamless and unified shopping experience that immediately meets customers' needs (Truong, 2020). Nowadays, it is common for customers to search for information offline and purchase online, called showrooming (Sit et al., 2018). In the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), 57% of consumer electronics were bought based on showrooming behaviour (Goraya et al., 2020), which is very common in this retail market segment (Schneider & Zielke, 2020), due to low purchase frequency, high financial value, products' complex specifications and varied prices (Sit et al., 2018). In this context, customers expect retailers to provide an integrated experience (Lee et al., 2019). Effective channel coordination improves customers' engagement and retention (Li et al., 2018) as well as their average spending (Heitz-Spahn, 2013).

The present study focuses on omnichannel retailing, more specifically on the consumer electronics segment. Being the dominant strategy, omnichannel retailing has been attracting researchers' attention. Many studies adopted a retailer perspective, investigating channel integration activities (Zhang et al., 2018). Others considered a customer perspective to investigate, for example, the mechanisms through which the omnichannel experience impacts customers' omnichannel shopping intention (Shi et al., 2020). From a customer perspective, this study applies the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to assess the direct impact of channel integration on customers' in-store future buying intention and the intervenient role of salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust. Even though some studies have previously tested the direct impact of channel integration on customers' trust in the retailer (e.g., Cheah et al., 2020; Schramm-Klein et al., 2011) and on customers' in-store purchasing intention (e.g., Goraya et al., 2020), no study was found considering the mediating effect of salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust. Thus, the evaluation of the full effect (direct and indirect effects) of channel integration on customers' in-store future buying intention, through salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust, is expected to fill a literature gap.

The primary research goal of our study was to explore the impact of channel integration in the physical store context. It aimed to answer the following research questions:

(RQ1) How does channel integration impact the relationship between salespeople and customers?

(RQ2) How does channel integration impact customers' intentions?

(RQ3) What are the determinants of customers' in-store buying intention?

This paper is organised into six sections. After this introduction, the research context, theoretical background, and hypotheses are developed. Then, there is a detailed description of the research methodology. The fourth section includes results, followed by their discussion. The last section systematises the research contributions and managerial implications and presents limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. STIMULUS-ORGANISM-RESPONSE MODEL FRAMEWORK

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical model has been used to demonstrate the effects of the physical environment on human behaviour (Loureiro et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2018). “Stimulus” refers to the market environment external factors, such as store atmospherics that significantly influence customers’ affective and cognitive states, which are referred to as “Organism” (Cheah et al., 2020). “Response” corresponds to the subsequent behaviour (Zhang et al., 2018). Following other studies (e.g., Gao et al., 2021; Cheah et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018), stimulus corresponds to channel integration in our research model. Moreover, organism corresponds to the quality of the interaction with salespeople and customers’ trust in salespeople. As in the study conducted by Zhang et al. (2018), response refers to customers' future in-store buying intention.

2.2. CHANNEL INTEGRATION

Channel Integration can be defined as the degree to which different channels interact with each other (Herhausen et al., 2015), “channel” being defined as a customer touchpoint, through which the company can interact with its customers (Neslin et al., 2006; Rita et al., 2020). Also, Herhausen et al. (2015) distinguished two different ways of channel integration: offline-online and online-offline channel integration. The first case provides access to and knowledge about the Internet store at physical stores. For example, assisted online platforms can integrate online features in physical stores to complement personal services. The second case provides access to and knowledge about physical stores in the online channel, for instance, through physical store locators.

Considering the retail environment, Beck and Rygl (2015) identified three concepts regarding channel integration: multichannel retailing, where there is a clear division between channels; cross-channel retailing, characterised by the partial integration of some channels; and finally omnichannel retailing, with the full integration of all widespread channels. Omnichannel retailing represents the set of integrated processes and decisions that support a unified view of a brand from a product purchase, return, and exchange standpoint, regardless of the channel (Goraya et al., 2020). Contrary to multichannel, this strategy aims to coordinate the fragmented service processes and technologies in various channels, to deliver a consistent and integrated customer experience (Shen et al., 2018). It is defined as the conceptualisation of the complete integration of channels (Simone & Sabbadin, 2017). Omnichannel retailing allows customers to simultaneously and interchangeably use channels and touchpoints to enjoy a seamless shopping experience. Across the whole customer journey, people can integrate the full range of products, ordering, and services (Truong, 2020).

Channel Integration can be defined according to six different dimensions that individually represent an element of omnichannel integration: integrated promotion, integrated transaction information management, integrated product and pricing information management, integrated information access, integrated order fulfilment, and integrated customer service (Oh et al., 2012). Integrated promotion enables customers to obtain advertisement information about a retailers' online store from its offline stores (Oh et al., 2012). By the same token, customers can also find offline store promotion-related information on its online store (Zhang et al., 2018). It implies that promotion information is consistent between channels, reducing customers' costs, resulting in monetary savings (Gao et al., 2021). In turn, integrated transaction information management is about customers being able to track all records in the various channels using the same account to know and understand each customer, regardless of the channels used. In other words, customers are treated as the same across all channels (Zhang et al., 2018). Integrated transaction information management allows customers to conveniently access their purchase records, reorder any of their previously shopped items and use as a reference for future purchasing (Gao et al., 2021). Besides, it allows firms to increase the richness of the information and the quality of services provided (Payne & Frow, 2004). By tracking customer's behaviour, previous purchases, and purchase patterns across channels, retailers reach a more comprehensive knowledge of customers, thus delivering a tailored shopping experience (Chen et al., 2018). Integrated product and pricing information management indicates that product and price information should be consistent across channels to avoid any customers' confusion and complaints about information inconsistency (Rangaswamy & Van Bruggen, 2005). When customers receive identical information about product categories, descriptions, and prices, they do not have to devote more time and effort to compare information across channels, improving shopping efficiency and convenience (Gao et al., 2021). Integrated information access means that customers should access information available in one channel from another channel (Oh et al., 2012). For instance, a firm's online store should allow customers to search for products' availability in the physical store (Bendoly et al., 2005). Integrated order fulfilment is related to the fact that customers should be able to conveniently complete their transactions using one or more channels. It includes, for example, the possibility to buy products online and pick them up in-store, as well as place orders in store for out-of-stock items using self-serve Internet kiosks. Integrated order fulfilment increases customers' empowerment, reducing transaction risks and increasing trust and satisfaction (Oh et al., 2012). Besides, it is also regarded as a high-customer-contact service stimulating customers to interact with salespeople and enjoy the shopping experience (Gao et al., 2021). Finally, integrated customer service refers to the provision of consistent services across all channels. For example, customers should be able to return online purchases in physical stores.

In this study, channel integration was defined according to Oh et al.'s (2012) definition, being a second-order construct, formative-formative type, composed of six previously identified dimensions. Thus, the following hypotheses were considered:

H1*: Channel Integration is composed of six dimensions whereby:*

H1a*: Integrated promotion is positively associated with channel integration;*

H1b*: Integrated transaction information management is positively associated with channel integration;*

H1c*: Integrated product and pricing information management is positively associated with channel integration;*

H1d*: Integrated information access is positively associated with channel integration;*

H1e*: Integrated order fulfilment is positively associated with channel integration;*

H1f*: Integrated customer service is positively associated with channel integration.*

Seamless channel integration is believed to be at the centre of the omnichannel experience (Hilken et al., 2018). Coherence of information, services, and experiences among various channels reduces customer concerns, such as price differences, and increases customer pleasure. Besides, service consistency and transparency can increase customers' satisfaction and loyalty (Quach et al., 2020). In turn, more satisfied customers are expected to repurchase and recommend the product to others (Kuo et al., 2009). Additionally, channel integration increases the retailers' knowledge about customers. Data integration allows retailers to know customers' behaviour, buying patterns, and trends, thus providing value-added services and customised solutions (Cao & Li, 2015). Moreover, by creating additional value for customers, omnichannel retailing increases customers' overall satisfaction, level of patronage intention, and perceived service quality, decreasing perceived risks and increasing willingness to pay (Zhang et al., 2018). Besides, well-integrated firms are expected to facilitate their customers' shopping process (Mosquera et al., 2018). For example, by allowing their customers to search for products' availability in the physical store, these well-integrated stores promote transparency and consistency of information, allowing for a seamless experience (Bendoly et al., 2005).

As it potentiates information and services consistency and transparency, improves firms' knowledge about the customers, and enriches shoppers' experience, channel integration is expected to increase customers' in-store future buying intention. Following Zhang et al. 's (2018) results showing that customers' perception of channel integration has an influence over shopping intention, the following hypothesis was considered:

H2*: Channel integration is positively associated with customers' future in-store buying intention.*

Despite the growth of the online channel sales, customers still want to see, feel, touch and/or try the desired product (Simone & Sabbadin, 2017). Accordingly, retailers face the challenge of empowering their physical stores and salespeople with online and mobile technologies to provide a personalised and interactive experience and attract customers, regardless of the preferable channel (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Since skilled IT personnel is crucial for omnichannel retailing (Cao & Li, 2018), salespeople should be involved as technology users. Tablets provision to support and assist the selling process could be considered. Also, investment in training should be intensified (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). This would empower salespeople with all the necessary tools to access customers' information as well as products and services' price information, to provide high-quality interaction with customers.

In the physical stores' context, channel integration is expected to positively impact customers' interaction with salespeople as they should be prepared to deliver a complete and interactive experience. Consequently, we hypothesised:

H3*: Channel integration positively impacts salespeople interaction quality.*

In this retail context, operational benevolence, which reflects the underlying motivation to place customers' interest ahead of self-interest and problem-solving orientation, is positively associated with trust in salespeople (Sun & Lin, 2010). Moreover, according to Guenzi et al. (2009), operational competence is the strongest predictor of customer trust towards salespeople. It is related to the ability to present alternatives and explaining and knowing product features. Well-integrated retailers give their salespeople the necessary tools to provide customers with accurate information, give suggestions, and make recommendations. Thus, by potentiating operational competence, it is possible to reduce consumers' uncertainty and feelings of vulnerability (Guenzi et al., 2009).

The scientific literature has already stated that retailers' channel integration can promote customers' trust in retailers (Cheah et al., 2020). In this store context, explicitly focused on the relationship between customers and salespeople, we also expected that channel integration positively impacts customers' trust in salespeople. The following hypothesis was defined accordingly:

H4*: Channel integration positively impacts customers' trust in salespeople.*

2.3. SALESPEOPLE INTERACTION QUALITY

Salespeople interaction quality is defined as the quality of the interpersonal interaction between parties (Fassnacht et al., 2019). According to Brady and Cronin (2001), salespeople's attitude,

behaviours, and/ or expertise define interaction quality and affect what customers evaluate as a satisfactory encounter.

The retail environment is highly competitive since companies offer identical products at comparable prices. Fostering salespeople-customer solid relationships is key to a successful differentiation strategy (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000) as employees represent the firm in the front-line (Vesel & Zabkar, 2010). Salespeople are often the most critical source of information (Fassnacht et al., 2019), and so they are expected to have a substantial impact on customers (Darian et al., 2001).

When salespeople build strong relationships with their customers, for example, through the personalisation of services, it is believed that it will impact perceived service quality and customers' satisfaction (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). Personalisation, which refers to the degree according to which customers can get personalised attention and tailored service, allows for uncertainty reduction and enhances retailer's trust (Shi et al., 2020). In accordance, salespeople's interaction quality is positively related to money spent and buying intentions (Fassnacht et al., 2019). Following past research, in this study context, salespeople interaction quality is expected to positively impact customers' in-store buying intention:

H5*: Salespeople interaction quality positively impacts customers' future in-store buying intention.*

Moreover, when salespeople provide high interaction quality, customers perceive that salespeople give a great deal to the relationship (Johnson et al., 2003). Researchers pointed out that interpersonal relationships between salespeople and customers can substantially impact trust (Guenzi et al., 2009). It implies that customers can rely on salespeople's integrity and behaviours and are confident in salespeople's performance (Crosby et al., 1990).

According to past research, it is reasonable to expect that when customers perceive a high-quality interaction with salespeople, they will trust them. Therefore, salespeople interaction quality was expected to exert a positive influence on customers trust in salespeople, such that:

H6*: Salespeople interaction quality positively impacts salespeople trust.*

2.4. TRUST

According to the Commitment-Trust Theory proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23), trust is defined as "means that one of the committed parties believes in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity", such that "trust is not taking risk per se, but rather it is a willingness to take risk" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712).

In consumer services markets, it is possible to distinguish individual-to-individual from individual-to-firm relationships. The first concept occurs between customers and other individuals, such as salespeople, while the second is about customers' familiarity with the organisation in general, brand, and products or services (Guenzi et al., 2009). Our study focuses on individual-to-individual relationships, more specifically on customers' trust in salespeople, that can be defined as "the confident belief that the salesperson can be relied upon to behave in such a manner that the long-term interest of the customer will be served" (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997, p. 129). Trust is based on salespeople's skills, expertise, and ability and comes from their motivation to protect customers' best interests (Swan et al., 1999). So, when customers trust salespeople, they see them as dependable, honest, competent, customer-oriented, and likeable (Liu & Leach, 2001). They are confident that salespeople will deliver on promises and fulfil long-term needs (Liu & Leach, 2001). In the business context, numerous advantages come from trust in retailers, such as the development of long-term relationships, reduction of perceived risks, and willingness to pay price premiums (Fortes et al., 2017; Midha, 2012; Oliveira et al., 2017). Trust also encourages consumers to spend more money (Zhang et al., 2018).

In this study context, trust in salespeople is expected to positively influence in-store future purchasing intention. This hypothesis was formulated based on past research. Previously, Bateman and Valentine (2015) had already concluded that trust in salespeople was positively related to customers' purchase intentions. Other studies stated that trust in salespeople fosters repurchase intentions and willingness to recommend the retailer to other potential customers (Guenzi et al., 2009; Kennedy et al., 2001). Hence,

H7*: Trust in salespeople positively impacts customers' future in-store buying intention.*

2.5. SHOWROOMING

As companies increase their level of channel integration, customers increasingly opt to shop through integrated channels (Goraya et al., 2020). In this context, the research shopper phenomenon emerged, corresponding to the propensity of consumers to research the product in one channel and then purchase it through another (Chiou et al., 2012). When customers visit physical stores to search for information before purchasing products online, it is called showrooming (Aw, 2020).

Showroomers seek to combine the advantages of online purchases with the advantages of brick-and-mortar stores. On the one hand, the online channel answers customers' need for convenience (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004). On the other hand, physical stores allow customers to interact, feel and touch the products, which can be more informative than viewing the same product online. This factor is

particularly relevant when a product's technological speed of change, perceived acquisition value, recommended retail price, and availability are higher (Daunt & Harris, 2017). In this case, consumers' uncertainty and perception of risk are higher, increasing the likelihood of showrooming (Van Baal & Dach, 2005). Besides, when customers' degree of involvement with the product is higher, they have a more substantial need to collect information, experiment, and gather advice from salespeople. In-store employees can answer customers' doubts about products' features and benefits, providing additional information and insights to customers that are unavailable online. Finally, customers can enjoy the social environment associated with visiting brick-and-mortar stores (Burns et al., 2018).

Although most studies focus on showrooming as a threat to brick-and-mortar stores, some research focuses on managing and converting those threats into opportunities. To do that, it has been stated that retailers should understand showroomers' decisions, activities and emotions, during the customer journey (Sit et al., 2018). During the first stage, when customers tend to be more curious and excited as they know more about the product, purchase uncertainty leads customers to collect information at retailers' physical stores to know more. Thus, Sit et al. (2018) proposed retailers to ensure interactive product experience and sessions with salespeople. Moreover, during the evaluation stage, when showroomers shortlist and appraise their desired choices, customers tend to experience negative emotions, such as disappointment, distrust, feel cheated, stress, and confusion, as they face a range of attractive choices. Consequently, the same researchers recommend that retailers display product information and offer consultation with sales assistants.

In this specific context, showrooming will be tested as a moderator variable. This type of variable is believed to affect the strength of two specific relationships between two latent variables: salespeople interaction quality and customers' future purchasing behaviour and customers' trust in salespeople and customers' future purchasing behaviour. According to previous literature, more specifically the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), people's intention is the most important predictor of their behaviour, such that the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour is, the more likely it is to be. Since intention indicates how hard people are willing to behave, in this specific context, it was expected that salespeople's interaction quality impact on future buying intention as well as salespeople's trust impact on buying intention would have a weaker effect on customers with stronger showrooming intention. These customers do not have the intention to buy in-store but to collect information to buy online afterwards. The following hypotheses were identified:

***H8**: Showrooming moderates salespeople interaction quality and customers' future in-store buying intention in such a way that the greater the showrooming intention is, the less its impact on this relation.*

***H9**: Showrooming moderates salespeople trust and customers' future in-store buying intention in such a way that the greater the showrooming intention is, the less its impact on this relation.*

In summary, the research model is depicted in Figure 1.

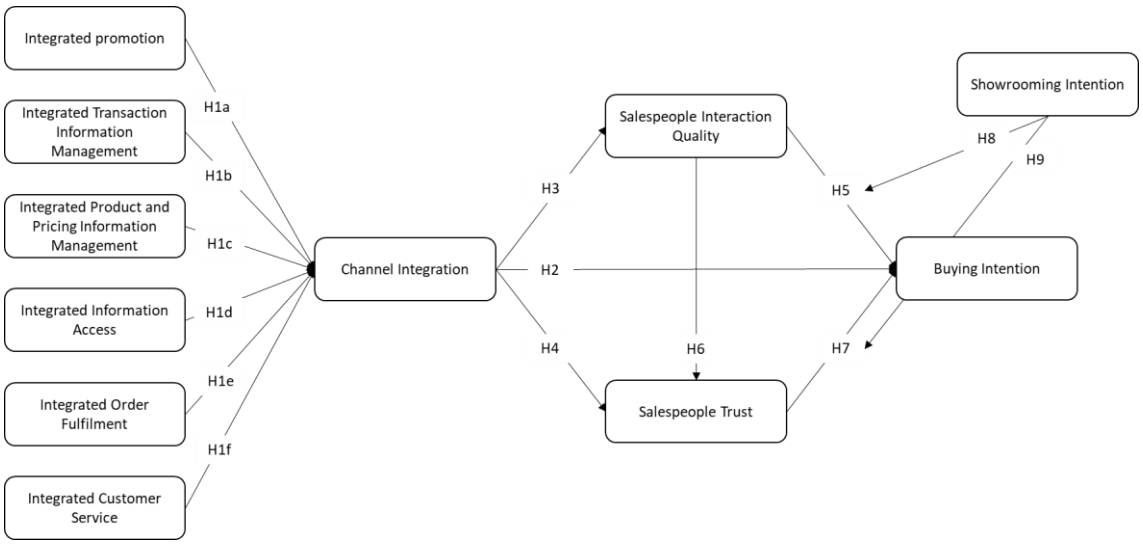

Figure 1 – Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

Data collection was conducted through an online survey questionnaire using Qualtrics Software. The link was shared on social networks. Since the questionnaire was applied to the Portuguese consumer electronics market, original questions had to be translated from English to Portuguese.

The survey was built to reflect our research model (Figure 1). Items were adapted from previous literature so that every question of the instrument had theoretical support, previously validated in the literature. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, anchored between "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7) (please see the Appendix for the complete list of items).

The instrument was firstly tested in a pilot study which registered 30 complete responses. This test sought to improve the questionnaire structure, question consistency and increase the questions' word understandability, always keeping in mind the need for clear and short questions that respected the original purpose of the considered references. The time to complete the questionnaire was adjusted, from an average duration of five to seven minutes, to manage respondents' expectations. Since the instrument was then adapted, the answers collected during the pilot study were not considered in the main study.

The final questionnaire took place between October 2020 and November 2020. It was sent to friends and family and shared on social networks. From a total of 506 responses, only 316 were complete and thus qualified for analysis. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first factor explained 25.65% of the covariance amongst all constructs. Since it was less than 50%, common method bias did not affect the study's data.

Concerning the respondents' sociodemographic characterisation, the average age was 37 years old, the youngest respondent being 18 years old and the oldest one 75. Of the 316 participants, 56% were women, and 44% were men. Moreover, most of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (43%). Also, most of the respondents (39%) reported a monthly income between 1,001€ and 2,000€. Table 1 indicates the demographic distribution of the sample.

Variable	Item	N	%
Gender	Male	140	44%
	Female	176	56%
	Other	0	0%
Age Range	18-24	76	24%
	25-34	74	23%
	35-44	70	22%
	45-54	69	22%
	≥55	27	9%
Education Level	Primary School	0	0%
	Basic School	7	2%
	High School	95	30%
	Bachelor's Degree	135	43%
	Master's Degree	76	24%
	Doctorate Degree	3	1%
Occupation	Employed	258	82%
	Student	41	13%
	Others	17	5%
Gross Individual Monthly income	≤ 1 000€	77	24%
	1 001€ - 2 000€	122	39%
	2 001€ - 4 000€	50	16%
	4 001€ - 5 000€	7	2%
	> 5 000€	9	3%
	No answer	51	16%

Table 1 – Demographic Distribution of the Sample (N= 316)

4. RESULTS

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the research model. This technique was considered appropriate. First, it is suitable for prediction-oriented research that explains endogenous constructs (Henseler et al., 2009). Second, it does not require large samples nor normal distributions. Finally, it is indicated for models that include formative indicators, which is the case of our model (Hair Jr et al., 2017). The minimum sample size in a PLS-SEM analysis should be equal to the larger of either ten times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure one construct or ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at a construct in the structural model (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Following the first criterion, there are six first-order formative constructs used to define channel integration. The remaining constructs were measured using reflective items. The construct with the largest number of formative indicators is integrated order fulfilment. Thus, the minimum sample size is sixty, which corresponds to ten times six indicators used to measure this construct. Two measures of distribution were examined: Skewness, which assesses the extent to which a variable's distribution is symmetrical, and Kurtosis, to examine whether the distribution is too peaked (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Some indicators presented a non-normal distribution. However, since PLS-SEM is a non-parametric statistical method, it does not require data to be normally distributed. A two-step process was followed: assessment of the measurement model and assessment of the structural model (Henseler et al., 2009).

4.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL

Four critical criteria were analysed to evaluate the measurement models for reflective constructs: internal consistency reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Internal consistency reliability was firstly evaluated using composite reliability (Henseler et al., 2009). Composite reliability values above 0.70 are satisfactory, which is the case (Henseler et al., 2009) – Table 2.

Construct	CR	AVE	INTQ	TR	STBI	SHW
INTQ	0.945	0.776	**0.881**			
TR	0.908	0.712	0.832	**0.844**		
STBI	0.903	0.699	0.523	0.605	**0.836**	
SHW	0.913	0.723	0.205	0.265	0.246	**0.850**

Table 2 – Internal Consistency Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Note: CR, Composite Reliability; AVE, Average Variance Extracted; INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust; STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention; SHW, Showrooming Intention.

The reliability of each indicator should also be assessed. Outer loadings should be higher than 0.70, and when the loading is below 0.40, researchers should consider eliminating it (Hair Jr et al., 2017). According to Henseler et al. (2009), only if the indicator's reliability is low and eliminating it goes along with a substantial increase of the composite reliability should it be removed. In this case, it was not necessary to drop any item, as they were all above 0.70 – Table 3.

	INTQ	TR	STBI	SHW
INTQ_1	**0.857**	0.696	0.449	0.201
INTQ_2	**0.880**	0.687	0.429	0.186
INTQ_3	**0.884**	0.768	0.508	0.153
INTQ_4	**0.931**	0.785	0.470	0.170
INTQ_5	**0.851**	0.724	0.445	0.199
TR_1	0.858	**0.862**	0.544	0.233
TR_2	0.716	**0.898**	0.532	0.217
TR_3	0.675	**0.886**	0.544	0.247
TR_4	0.511	**0.718**	0.406	0.196
STBI_1	0.466	0.535	**0.874**	0.188
STBI_2	0.382	0.481	**0.833**	0.224
STBI_3	0.434	0.523	**0.798**	0.185
STBI_4	0.464	0.481	**0.837**	0.230
SHW_1	0.199	0.265	0.211	**0.793**
SHW_2	0.106	0.174	0.198	**0.872**
SHW_3	0.169	0.198	0.165	**0.854**
SHW_4	0.213	0.252	0.248	**0.880**

Table 3 – Cross-Loadings

Note: INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust; STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention; SHW, Showrooming Intention.

To assess validity, two subtypes of validity are usually considered: convergent validity and discriminant validity. First, regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is a standard measure to evaluate it. It should be higher than 0.50 (Hair Jr et al., 2017). In this case, each construct's AVE was above 0.50 – Table 2. Thus, all reflective constructs have high levels of convergent validity. Second, discriminant validity was analysed using three measures: cross-loadings, Fornell-Lacker criterion, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Regarding cross-loadings, an indicator's outer loading on the associated construct should be greater than any of its cross-loadings in other constructs, which was the case – Table 3. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was verified. Table 2 shows that the square root of each construct's AVEs (diagonal elements) is higher than the highest correlation with any other construct (off-diagonal elements). Finally, since both the assessment of the cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion are insufficiently sensitive to detect discriminant validity problems (Henseler et al., 2015), the HTMT ratio was also analysed. Although the exact threshold level of HTMT is debatable, if the constructs are conceptually very similar, an HTMT value above 0.90 is required; if they

are more distinct, a threshold value of 0.85 is necessary (Henseler et al., 2015). In this case, one comparison (INTQ and TR) is above 0.85, as demonstrated in Table 4. The 90% normal bootstrap confidence interval of the HTMT criterion did not include the value one. Thus, according to the HTMT inference criterion, discriminant validity was assessed.

Construct	INTQ	TR	STBI	SHW
INTQ				
TR	0.914			
STBI	0.586	0.699		
SHW	0.225	0.301	0.280	

Table 4 – Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Note: INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust; STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention; SHW, Showrooming Intention.

Regarding the formative measurement model evaluation, channel integration was analysed. It corresponds to a formative-formative second-order construct. Since it does not correspond to a dependent component in the path model, the chosen approach was the extended repeated indicators. All indicators of the lower-order component were assigned to the high-order component (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Initially, the formative measurement models of the six low-order components were analysed, considering multicollinearity and the significance and sign of the weights (Hair Jr et al., 2017). All formative indicators registered a VIF value below five – Table 5. Second, outer weights' statistical significance was evaluated. Considering a significance level of .05, several items' weights were not statistically significant; however, they were not automatically excluded. The indicator's absolute contribution was also considered, which corresponds to the information an indicator provides, without considering any other indicator (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Outer loadings give the indicators' absolute contribution. As seen in Table 5, for the nonsignificant indicators' weights (IT_2, IT_3, IT_4, IPP_3, IPP_4, IIA_2, IIA_3, IIA_4, IOF_3, IOF_5, and ICS_3), the corresponding item loadings were above 0.5, except for IOF_5, whose outer loading was 0.432. This means that, except for IOF_5, these indicators are absolutely but not relatively important.

Regarding IOF_5, it was near 0.5 and above 0.4. Also, since formative indicators represent a relevant dimension of the latent variable, removing this indicator could omit a unique part of the formative measurement model, changing the meaning of the construct (Henseler et al., 2009), in this case, "Integrated Order Fulfilment". Therefore, all indicators were retained.

Constructs	Items	VIF	Outer-Weight	t-value	p-value	Outer-Loading
Integrated Promotion	IP_1	1.148	0.231	2.274	0.023	0.534
	IP_2	1.455	0.334	3.170	0.002	0.750
	IP_3	1.200	0.324	3.032	0.002	0.649
	IP_4	1.313	0.302	2.518	0.012	0.691
	IP_5	1.447	0.287	2.433	0.015	0.721
Integrated Transaction Information Management	IT_1	1.592	0.609	2.958	0.003	0.886
	IT_2	1.784	0.297	1.282	0.200	0.812
	IT_3	1.726	0.201	0.813	0.416	0.605
	IT_4	1.619	0.182	0.791	0.429	0.538
Integrated Product and Pricing Information Management	IPP_1	1.686	0.380	3.533	0.000	0.808
	IPP_2	1.577	0.359	3.022	0.003	0.770
	IPP_3	1.332	0.128	1.186	0.236	0.586
	IPP_4	1.579	0.094	0.709	0.478	0.592
	IPP_5	1.697	0.388	3.022	0.003	0.737
Integrated Information Access	IIA_1	1.665	0.477	3.520	0.000	0.792
	IIA_2	1.800	0.193	1.423	0.155	0.737
	IIA_3	1.683	0.229	1.543	0.123	0.671
	IIA_4	1.934	0.120	0.869	0.385	0.662
	IIA_5	1.691	0.339	2.757	0.006	0.729
Integrated Order Fulfilment	IOF_1	1.285	0.353	3.508	0.000	0.700
	IOF_2	1.364	0.355	3.240	0.001	0.740
	IOF_3	2.010	0.032	0.208	0.835	0.596
	IOF_4	1.969	0.298	2.231	0.026	0.662
	IOF_5	1.140	0.136	1.251	0.211	0.432
	IOF_6	1.230	0.326	3.100	0.002	0.660
Integrated Customer Service	ICS_1	1.251	0.620	5.388	0.000	0.866
	ICS_2	1.391	0.362	2.601	0.009	0.754
	ICS_3	1.258	0.295	1.860	0.063	0.643

Table 5 – VIF, Relevance and Significance of Measurement Model of Low-Order Constructs

Note: IP, Integrated Promotion; IT, Integrated Transaction Information Management; IPP, Integrated Product and Price Information Management; IIA, Integrated Information Access; IOF, Integrated Order Fulfilment; ICS, Integrated Customer Service.

Then, to evaluate the measurement model of the high-order construct, two steps were considered. First, the VIF ranged from 1.175 and 1.784, below five, indicating no collinearity issues. Second, bootstrapping, using 5,000 samples, was run to assess the significance and relevance of the relationships between the order components and the high-order component, represented as path coefficients in the PLS path model (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Excluding IPP and IOF, the remaining second-order formative constructs were not statistically significant – Table 6.

High-order formative construct	Second-order formative constructs	VIF	Outer Weight	t-value	p-value	Latent Correlations
Channel Integration	IP	1.718	0.140	1.303	0.193	0.702
	IT	1.175	0.086	0.876	0.381	0.414
	IPP	1.637	0.490	5.067	0.000	0.809
	IIA	1.650	-0.023	0.221	0.825	0.598
	IOF	1.784	0.432	3.777	0.000	0.814
	ICS	1.460	0.167	1.577	0.115	0.616

Table 6 – VIF, Relevance and Significance of Measurement Model of High-Order Construct

Note: IP, Integrated Promotion; IT, Integrated Transaction Information Management; IPP, Integrated Product and Price Information Management; IIA, Integrated Information Access; IOF, Integrated Order Fulfilment; ICS, Integrated Customer Service.

The absolute contribution of each first-order construct was also analysed, which is given by the correlation between the low-order construct and the high-order construct. The covariance between the high-order construct and low-order constructs was larger than 0.50, except for the covariance between integrated transaction information management and channel integration (0.414). From a theoretical point of view, it should not be excluded since it represents a dimension of the high-order construct. Removing a lower-order construct would mean omitting a unique part of the "Channel Integration" construct (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

In conclusion, both reflective and formative constructs were able to be used to test the structural model.

4.2. STRUCTURAL MODEL

After confirming that constructs' measures were reliable and valid, the structural model was evaluated. Explained variation criteria were considered through the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the significant degree of the path coefficients, assessed by the bootstrapping technique using 5,000 samples as suggested by Hair Jr et al. (2017). Also, all VIF values were below the recommended threshold of five, excluding multicollinearity issues (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Figure 2 displays the estimated structural model and its results.

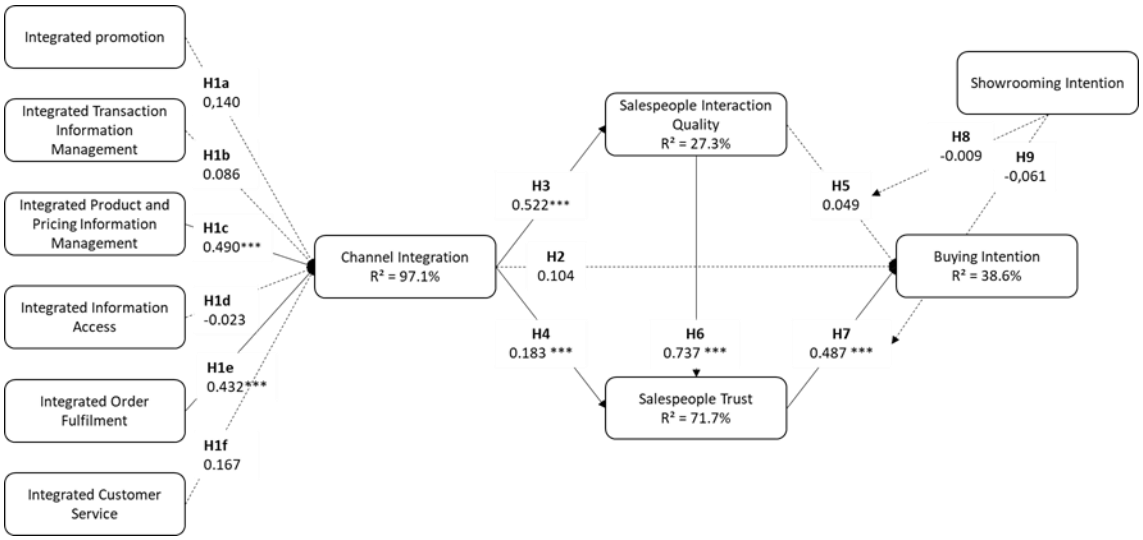

Figure 2 – Structural Model Results

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .010, *** p < .001

The model explained approximately 38.6% of customers' in-store future buying intention. Channel integration had a substantial R^2 value (0.971). It was already expected that channel integration's variance was fully explained by its lower-order components (Sarstedt et al., 2019) since all indicators of the lower-order components were repeated to identify the high order component. Channel integration explained about 27.3% of the variation of salespeople interaction quality. Further, the model explained approximately 71.7% of customers' trust in salespeople.

Only integrated product and price information management (H1c; β = 0.490, p < 0.001) and integrated order fulfilment (H1e; β = 0.432, p < 0.001) were statistically significant in explaining channel integration. The relationship between channel integration and buying intention, contrary to our expectations, was not supported (H2; β = 0.104, p > 0.100). The relationship between channel integration and quality of salespeople interaction quality was supported (H3; β = 0.522, p < 0.001) as well as the relationship between channel integration and salespeople trust (H4; β = 0.183, p < 0.001). Quality of the interaction between customers and salespeople was statistically significant in explaining customers' trust in salespeople (H6; β = 0.737, p < 0.001) but, contrary to our expectation, not statistically significant in explaining future buying intention (H5; β = 0.049, p > 0.100). As expected, customers' trust in salespeople was statistically significant in explaining customers' in-store future buying intention" (H7; β = 0.487, p < 0.001).

Later the moderating effect was tested. Showrooming was expected to moderate the relationship between salespeople interaction quality (IV) and future buying intention (DV) and between salespeople trust (IV) and future buying intention (DV). Moderating effects were not significant (H8, β = -0.009, p > 0.100; H9, β = -0.061, p > 0.100).

Finally, all endogenous variables of the model presented positive Q^2 values, providing clear support for the model's predictive relevance regarding the endogenous latent variables (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

4.3. MEDIATION EFFECTS

As proposed by Carrión et al. (2017), two steps were followed to test the mediation effect on PLS. First, using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples, the significance of the indirect effects and their magnitude were determined. Second, the effect type and/or mediation were determined. In this study, both salespeople interaction quality and trust work as mediators in the relationship between channel integration (IV) and customers' in-store future buying intention (DV). Also, trust in salespeople works as a mediator between salespeople interaction quality (IV) and customers' in-store future buying intention (DV).

Following Carrión et al. (2017), the mediator role of salespeople interaction quality and trust on the relationship between channel integration and future buying intention was tested. This evaluation involved estimating the significance of one direct effect (INT > STBI) and three indirect effects (INT > INTQ > STBI; INT > TR > STBI; INT > INTQ > TR > STBI). The direct effect was not found to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.104$, $p > 0.100$), while the total indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.302$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, there was full mediation. The total effect was significant ($\beta = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$) – Table 7.

Effect	Paths	Path coefficient	p-value	Results
Direct	INT > STBI	0.104	0.217	Not supported
Indirect	INT > INTQ > STBI	0.025	0.613	Not supported
	INT > TR > STBI	0.089	0.001	Supported
	INT > INTQ > TR > STBI	0.187	0.000	Supported
Total indirect effect		0.302	0.000	Supported
Total effect		0.406	0.000	Supported

Table 7 – Mediating Effect of INTQ and TR (IV: INT; DV: STBI)

Note: INT, Channel Integration; INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust, STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention

In what concerns the effect of trust as a mediator variable between salespeople interaction quality and buying intention, there was also full mediation as the indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.001$) but not the direct effect ($\beta = 0.049$, $p > 0.100$). The total effect was significant ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < 0.001$) – Table 8.

Effect	Paths	Path coefficient	p-value	Results
Direct	INTQ > STBI	0.049	0.580	Not supported
Indirect	INTQ > TR > STBI	0.359	0.000	Supported
Total effect		0.407	0.000	Supported

Table 8 – Mediating Effect of TR (IV: INTQ; DV: STBI)

Note: INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust, STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Only two constructs were statistically significant in explaining channel integration: integrated product and pricing information management (H1c) and integrated order fulfilment (H1e). In fact, "as the number of indicators determining a formatively measured construct increases, the more likely it is that there will be indicators with low or even nonsignificant weights" (Cenfetelli & Bassellier, 2009, p. 692). Integrated product and pricing information management considers integration between physical and online stores regarding product descriptions, category classification, stock availability information, prices, and discounts (Gao & Su, 2017). It explains most of the channel integration, as it ensures the transparent flow of information between processes and reduces confusion (Oh et al., 2012). This is particularly important in the consumer electronics market since these products have complex specifications and varied prices (Sit et al., 2018). Integrated order fulfilment considers, for example, pick-up in-store service for online purchases, allowing customers to access real-time information. Being one of the most-shopped categories online (Rejón-Guardia & Luna-Nevarez, 2017), this service is particularly relevant in the consumer electronics market (Zhang et al., 2019). In fact, Best-Buy, a United States consumer electronic retailer, announced that for approximately 40% of online purchases, customers choose to pick up in-store orders, showing how customers value this service (Kim et al., 2017). Moreover, following the "Amazon effect", according to which retailers are progressively transforming their online and offline stores to "be more like Amazon" (Vollero et al., 2020), it is crucial for retailers to invest in their pick-up in-store service. Besides increasing competitive advantage towards players like Amazon, which propose fast and agile home delivery and in some geographies in a few minutes, it may improve customer value (Jara et al., 2018).

Contrary to Zhang et al. (2018), who concluded that channel integration had a positive impact on customers' shopping intention, channel integration was not statistically significant in explaining in-store future purchasing intention (H2). Moreover, it impacted significantly and positively salespeople interaction quality (H3) as well as customers' trust in salespeople (H4), thus confirming Cheah et al.'s (2020) results. Answering the two first research questions, channel integration impacted directly and positively both salespeople's interaction quality and customers' trust in salespeople but had no significant direct impact on customers' purchasing intention.

Salespeople interaction quality did not significantly impact customers' future purchase intention (H5), contrary to what Fassnacht et al. (2019) concluded. However, it impacted significantly and positively customers' trust in salespeople (H6), supporting Guenzi et al. (2009). On the other hand, H7 was

supported, such that salespeople trust positively impacted purchasing intention, thus confirming Bateman and Valentine's (2015) conclusion. This implies that salespeople interaction quality only impacts customers' future purchasing intention when fully mediated by salespeople trust. Additionally, the relationship between channel integration and customers' future purchasing intention was sequentially, positively, and fully mediated by salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust. Answering the last research question about the determinants of customers' purchasing intention, although the direct effect of channel integration was not significant, when considering both salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust, the effect was significantly fully mediated, reinforcing the critical role of channel integration on salespeople interaction with customers as well as on promoting customers' trust in salespeople, while reducing their uncertainties.

Moreover, salespeople trust was the most significant construct in explaining customers' future purchasing intention. In fact, it was already stated as a key component in building strong relationships with customers and a key factor to improve sales (Midha, 2012; Zhang et al., 2018). More specifically, integrated strategies can reduce customers' insecurity, improve trust and increase customers' future intention to purchase (Cao & Li, 2015; Cheah et al., 2020).

Finally, showrooming was not found as a significant moderator. Contrary to what was expected based on Ajzen's (1991) planned behaviour theory, showrooming did not significantly moderate the relationship between both salespeople interaction quality and purchasing intention and salespeople trust and purchasing intention. Table 9 summarises the main results.

Hypotheses	Findings	Conclusions
H1a: IP > INT	Non-significant	Not supported
H1b: IT > INT	Non-significant	Not supported
H1c: IPP > INT	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.490, p < 0.001)	Supported
H1d: IIA > INT	Non-significant	Not supported
H1e: IOF > INT	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.432, p < 0.001)	Supported
H1f: ICS > INT	Non-significant	Not supported
H2: INT > STBI	Non-significant	Not supported
H3: INT > INTQ	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.522, p < 0.001)	Supported
H4: INT > TR	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.183, p < 0.001)	Supported
H5: INTQ > STBI	Non-significant	Not supported
H6: INTQ > TR	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.737, p < 0.001)	Supported
H7: TR > STBI	Positive and statistically significant (β = 0.487, p < 0.001)	Supported
H8: SHW Moderator INTQ > STBI	Non-significant	Not supported
H9: SHW Moderator TR > STBI	Non-significant	Not supported

Table 9 – Results and Hypothesis Conclusions

Note: IP, Integrated Promotion; IT, Integrated Transaction Information Management; IPP, Integrated Product and Price Information Management; IIA, Integrated Information Access; IOF, Integrated Order Fulfilment; ICS, Integrated Customer Service; INT: Channel Integration; INTQ, Salespeople Interaction Quality; TR, Salespeople Trust, STBI, Customers' In-Store Future Buying Intention; SHW: Showrooming Intention

5.2. Research Contributions

Our research offers several contributions to the omnichannel literature that has been attracting researchers' attention (Truong, 2020). They have shown the effects of channel integration on firms performance broadly (Oh et al., 2012) and have demonstrated that customers' perception of channel integration reduces uncertainty (Li et al., 2018) and increases customers' empowerment (Zhang et al., 2018). However, our research focuses on the specific impact of channel integration on the relationship between customers and salespeople and customers' purchasing intention. Our findings highlight the importance of salespeople in the physical stores' omnichannel context.

Second, only two constructs were found to be significant in explaining channel integration: integrated product and pricing information management (H1c) and integrated order fulfilment (H1e). This conclusion differs from what Zhang et al. (2018) had previously demonstrated. That study, which collected data from a Chinese omnichannel retailer, found that, for the same formative constructs, only two had non-significant weights: integrated promotion and integrated transaction information management. Our conclusions may differ since we considered different geographies and economic

and social-demographical contexts. Besides, our study focused only on the consumer electronics market, meaning that these two components of channel integration can be the most significant in this context. Moreover, while Zhang et al.'s (2018) concluded that integrated order fulfilment was the channel's integration dimension with the highest weight, in our study, integrated product and pricing information management explained the most.

Additionally, contrary to the Fassnacht et al. (2019) study, salespeople interaction quality was not found to significantly impact customers' purchasing intention. However, trust in salespeople fully mediated that same relationship. This aspect may be explained by the fact that this study focuses on the specific case of consumer electronic goods. Probably due to their high average selling price, it is not enough to provide a high-quality interaction but to create a trusty relationship to influence customers' purchasing intention. In fact, customers trust in salespeople was found to positively influence customers' purchasing intention, confirming Bateman and Valentine's (2015) conclusion. Finally, by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, we analysed the direct impact of channel integration on customers' future buying intention and the mediating role of salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust. Although some studies had tested the direct impact of channel integration on customers' trust in the retailer (e.g., Cheah et al., 2020; Schramm-Klein et al., 2011) and on customers' in-store future purchasing intention (Zhang et al., 2018), no study was found considering the mediating effect of both salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust on customers' in-store future buying intention. Since salespeople are typically ignored stakeholders in multichannel research (Rapp et al., 2015), that reinforces the relevance of this study. Contrary to what was expected, channel integration did not significantly impact customers' in-store future buying intention, but it significantly impacted salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust, supporting Cheah et al. (2020). Although channel integration did not directly impact customers' purchasing intention, it did when fully mediated by salespeople interaction quality and salespeople trust, highlighting the importance of salespeople's role when in a physical stores' context.

5.3. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Due to the e-commerce shift, it is expected that some customers do not come back to physical stores at the same frequency they used to. Therefore, being able to maximise the value of each trip is fundamental. We believe that our study offers several practical contributions for consumer electronics retailers.

Our study demonstrates that only integrated product and pricing information management and integrated order fulfilment significantly explained channel integration in this market segment. In fact,

besides having naturally more complex specifications (Sit et al., 2018), consumer electronic products' range is increasing, as firms are making their online and offline stores available to more sellers, expanding the marketplace. Thus, it is critical to invest in product and pricing information integration and transparency to ensure a seamless customer experience, regardless of the channels used. Moreover, being one of the most-shopped categories online (Rejón-Guardia & Luna-Nevarez, 2017), retailers should invest their resources in services such as in-store pick-up to ensure convenience and no barriers between channels.

Second, although e-commerce continues to grow, retailers should bear in mind that physical stores are still crucial when purchasing consumer electronic goods. Due to their higher average selling price, customers still want to interact, see, and feel products. They also expect retailers to provide attractive experiences (Mosquera et al., 2018). Therefore, and since we find that channel integration positively impacts salespeople interaction quality and trust, and its relationship with customers' purchasing intention is fully mediated by those same variables, retailers should be aware of their salespeople's critical role. Companies that integrate their channels provide salespeople access to all product's range, features, and price information. They will be able to answer confidently to all doubts, recommend new products and/ or services that better suit customers' needs, and even upsell and/ or cross-sell. By personalising their customers' shopping experience, salespeople are strengthening their relationship with customers and improving customers' trust. In the end, their purchasing intention increases, and so does the company overall performance. Besides, retailers should train their salespeople to focus on satisfying customer needs and building long-term and sustainable relationships with customers to enhance their willingness to purchase. More specifically, Bateman and Valentine (2015) suggested that communication training should be focused on improving verbal and non-verbal interaction, as well as on listening skills.

Finally, in our view, the positive impact on customers' purchasing intention will not only reinforce retailers' offline presence but also give them scale when approaching the online channel, thus increasing the online weight as well as overall market share, in a sustainable way.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be considered in future research. First, it focused on the consumer electronics market, and it was carried out in Portugal. Therefore, future studies could assess this theoretical framework concerning other market segments (e.g., fashion). Second, it was based on an online survey, in which respondents were asked about several dimensions of channel integration. Since people answered based on their memory about retailing experience, such data may contain

inaccuracy due to limited memory capacity. Thus, future studies could use other methods, such as interviews. Finally, this study did not analyse eventual differences across retailers. Although the respondents were asked about their favourite retailer to access possible significant differences across groups, only two groups respected the minimum sample size. Moreover, the two eligible groups were not similar in size, which is advisable to avoid introducing error. Therefore, it could be interesting to understand if the results vary depending on retailers. Additionally, it could be interesting to understand if there are any differences across generations since customers' expectations and demands may differ in an omnichannel setting.

5.5. CONCLUSION

This study analysed the impact of channel integration on customers' choices, more specifically customers' in-store future purchasing intention, and the importance of salespeople's role through the quality of customers' interaction with salespeople and customers' trust. Our research focused on the consumer electronics retail market context, typically affected by the research shopper phenomenon, especially showrooming (Schneider & Zielke, 2020). We concluded that channel integration impacted directly and positively on both salespeople's interaction quality and customers' trust in salespeople. Moreover, we also found that channel integration had no significant direct impact on customers' future in-store purchasing intention. However, salespeople's interaction quality and customers' trust in salespeople fully mediated that relationship. Finally, salespeople trust was the most significant construct in explaining customers' future purchasing intention.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Aw, E. C. X. (2020). Understanding consumers' paths to webrooming: A complexity approach. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101991

Bateman, C., & Valentine, S. (2015). The impact of salesperson customer orientation on the evaluation of a salesperson ' s ethical treatment , trust in the salesperson , and intentions to purchase. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *35*(2), 125–142.

Beck, N., & Rygl, D. (2015). Categorization of multiple channel retailing in Multi-, Cross-, and Omni-Channel Retailing for retailers and retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *27*, 170–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2015.08.001

Bendoly, E., Blocher, J. D., Bretthauer, K. M., Krishnan, S., & Venkataramanan, M. A. (2005). Online/in-store integration and customer retention. *Journal of Service Research*, *7*(4), 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670504273964

Brady, M. K., & Cronin, J. J. (2001). Some new thoughts on conceptualizing perceived service quality: A hierarchical approach. *Journal of Marketing*, *65*(3), 34–49. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.3.34.18334

Burns, D. J., Gupta, P. B., Bihn, H. C., & Hutchins, J. (2018). Showrooming: an Exploratory Empirical Investigation of Students' Attitudes and Behavior. *Information Systems Management*, *35*(4), 294–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/10580530.2018.1503802

Cao, L., & Li, L. (2015). The Impact of Cross-Channel Integration on Retailers' Sales Growth. *Journal of Retailing*, *91*(2), 198–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2014.12.005

Cao, L., & Li, L. (2018). Determinants of Retailers' Cross-channel Integration: An Innovation Diffusion Perspective on Omni-channel Retailing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *44*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2018.04.003

Carrión, G. C., Nitzl, C., & Roldán, J. L. (2017). Mediation analyses in partial least squares structural equation modeling: Guidelines and empirical examples. *Partial Least Squares Path Modeling: Basic Concepts, Methodological Issues and Applications*, *March 2020*, 173–195. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64069-3_8

Cenfetelli, R. T., & Bassellier, G. (2009). Interpretation of formative measurement in information systems research. *MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems*, *33*(4), 689–707. https://doi.org/10.2307/20650323

Cheah, J. H., Lim, X. J., Ting, H., Liu, Y., & Quach, S. (2020). Are privacy concerns still relevant? Revisiting consumer behaviour in omnichannel retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *January*, 102242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102242

Chen, Y., Cheung, C. M. K., & Tan, C. W. (2018). Omnichannel business research: Opportunities and challenges. *Decision Support Systems*, *109*(March), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2018.03.007

Chiou, J. S., Wu, L. Y., & Chou, S. Y. (2012). You do the service but they take the order. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(7), 883–889. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.06.035

Crosby, L. A., Evans, K. R., & Cowles, D. (1990). Relationship Quality in Services Selling: An Interpersonal Influence Perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, *54*(3), 68. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251817

Darian, J. C., Tucci, L. A., & Wiman, A. R. (2001). Perceived salesperson service attributes and retail patronage intentions. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, *29*(5), 205–213. https://doi.org/10.1108/09590550110390986

Daunt, K. L., & Harris, L. C. (2017). Consumer showrooming: Value co-destruction. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *38*, 166–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.05.013

Fassnacht, M., Beatty, S. E., & Szajna, M. (2019). Combating the negative effects of showrooming: Successful salesperson tactics for converting showroomers into buyers. *Journal of Business Research*, *102*(May), 131–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.05.020

Fortes, N., Pagani, M., & Rita, P. (2017). The effects of privacy concerns, perceived risk and trust on online purchasing behaviour. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, *11*(4), 307. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijima.2017.10007887

Gao, F., & Su, X. (2017). Omnichannel retail operations with buy-online-and-pick-up-in-store. *Management Science*, *63*(8), 2478–2492. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2473

Gao, W., Fan, H., Li, W., & Wang, H. (2021). Crafting the customer experience in omnichannel contexts: The role of channel integration. *Journal of Business Research*, *126*(December 2020), 12–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.12.056

Goraya, M. A. S., Zhu, J., Akram, M. S., Shareef, M. A., Malik, A., & Bhatti, Z. A. (2020). The impact of channel integration on consumers' channel preferences: Do showrooming and webrooming behaviors matter? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102130

Guenzi, P., Johnson, M. D., & Castaldo, S. (2009). A comprehensive model of customer trust in two retail stores. *Journal of Service Management*, *20*(3), 290–316. https://doi.org/10.1108/09564230910964408

Hair Jr, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). A Primer On Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In *SAGE Publications, Inc.*

Heitz-Spahn, S. (2013). Cross-channel free-riding consumer behavior in a multichannel environment: An investigation of shopping motives, sociodemographics and product categories. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *20*(6), 570–578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2013.07.006

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sinkovics, R. R. (2009). The use of partial least squares path modeling in international marketing. *Advances in International Marketing*, *20*(2009), 277–319. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1474-7979(2009)0000020014

Herhausen, D., Binder, J., Schoegel, M., & Herrmann, A. (2015). Integrating Bricks with Clicks: Retailer-Level and Channel-Level Outcomes of Online-Offline Channel Integration. *Journal of Retailing*, *91*(2), 309–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2014.12.009

Hilken, T., Heller, J., Chylinski, M., Keeling, D. I., Mahr, D., & de Ruyter, K. (2018). Making omnichannel an augmented reality: the current and future state of the art. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *12*(4), 509–523. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-01-2018-0023

Jara, M., Vyt, D., Mevel, O., Morvan, T., & Morvan, N. (2018). Measuring customers benefits of click and collect. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *32*(4), 430–442. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-05-2017-0158

Johnson, J. T., Barksdale, H. C., & Boles, J. S. (2003). Factors associated with customer willingness to

refer leads to salespeople. *Journal of Business Research*, *56*, 257–263.

Kennedy, M. S., Ferrell, L. K., & Leclair, D. T. (2001). Consumers' trust of salesperson and manufacturer: An empirical study. *Journal of Business Research*, *51*(1), 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00039-9

Kim, E., Park, M. C., & Lee, J. (2017). Determinants of the intention to use Buy-Online, Pickup In-Store (BOPS): The moderating effects of situational factors and product type. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(8), 1721–1735. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.08.006

Kuo, Y. F., Wu, C. M., & Deng, W. J. (2009). The relationships among service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and post-purchase intention in mobile value-added services. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *25*(4), 887–896. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.03.003

Lee, Z. W. Y., Chan, T. K. H., Chong, A. Y. L., & Thadani, D. R. (2019). Customer engagement through omnichannel retailing: The effects of channel integration quality. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *77*(October 2018), 90–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.12.004

Li, Y., Liu, H., Lim, E. T. K., Goh, J. M., Yang, F., & Lee, M. K. O. (2018). Customer's reaction to cross-channel integration in omnichannel retailing: The mediating roles of retailer uncertainty, identity attractiveness, and switching costs. *Decision Support Systems*, *109*, 50–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2017.12.010

Liu, A. H., & Leach, M. P. (2001). Developing loyal customers with a value-adding sales force: Examining customer satisfaction and the perceived credibility of consultative salespeople. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *21*(2), 147–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2001.10754265

Loureiro, S. M. C., Almeida, M., & Rita, P. (2013). The effect of atmospheric cues and involvement on pleasure and relaxation: The spa hotel context. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *35*, 35–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.04.011

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust Author (s): Roger C . Mayer , James H . Davis and F . David Schoorman Published by : Academy of Management Stable URL : http://www.jstor.com/stable/258792 REFERENCES Linked references are available on JSTOR f. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 709–734.

Midha, V. (2012). Impact of consumer empowerment on online trust: An examination across genders. *Decision Support Systems*, *54*(1), 198–205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.05.005

Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). *The Commitment-Trust Theory of*. *58*(July), 20–38.

Mosquera, A., Olarte-Pascual, C., Ayensa, E. J., & Murillo, Y. S. (2018). The role of technology in an omnichannel physical store Assessing the moderating effect of gender. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*, *22*(1), 63–82. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-03-2018-008

Neslin, S. A., Grewal, D., Leghorn, R., Shankar, V., Teerling, M. L., Thomas, J. S., & Verhoef, P. C. (2006). Challenges and opportunities in multichannel customer management. *Journal of Service Research*, *9*(2), 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670506293559

Oh, L. Bin, Teo, H. H., & Sambamurthy, V. (2012). The effects of retail channel integration through the use of information technologies on firm performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, *30*(5), 368–381. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2012.03.001

Oliveira, T., Alhinho, M., Rita, P., & Dhillon, G. (2017). Modelling and testing consumer trust dimensions in e-commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *71*, 153–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.050

Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2004). The role of multichannel integration in customer relationship management. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *33*(6), 527–538.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2004.02.002

Piotrowicz, W., & Cuthbertson, R. (2014). Introduction to the special issue information technology in retail: Toward omnichannel retailing. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *18*(4), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415180400

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

Quach, S., Barari, M., Moudrý, D. V., & Quach, K. (2020). Service integration in omnichannel retailing and its impact on customer experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *January*, 102267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102267

Ramsey, R. P., & Sohi, R. S. (1997). Listening to your customers: The impact of perceived salesperson listening behavior on relationship outcomes. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *25*(2), 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02894348

Rangaswamy, A., & Van Bruggen, G. H. (2005). Opportunities and challenges in multichannel marketing: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *19*(2), 5–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20037

Rapp, A., Baker, T. L., Bachrach, D. G., Ogilvie, J., & Beitelspacher, L. S. (2015). Perceived customer showrooming behavior and the effect on retail salesperson self-efficacy and performance. *Journal of Retailing*, *91*(2), 358–369. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2014.12.007

Rejón-Guardia, F., & Luna-Nevarez, C. (2017). "Showrooming" in Consumer Electronics Retailing: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, *16*(2), 174–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2017.1305812

Reynolds, K. E., & Arnold, M. J. (2000). Customer loyalty to the salesperson and the store: Examining relationship customers in an upscale retail context. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *20*(2), 89–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2000.10754228

Rita, P., Ramos, R. F., Moro, S., Mealha, M., & Radu, L. (2020). Online dating apps as a marketing channel: a generational approach. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, *30*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-10-2019-0192

Rohm, A. J., & Swaminathan, V. (2004). A typology of online shoppers based on shopping motivations. *Journal of Business Research*, *57*, 748–757. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(02)00351-X

Sarstedt, M., Hair, J. F., Cheah, J. H., Becker, J. M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). How to specify, estimate, and validate higher-order constructs in PLS-SEM. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *27*(3), 197–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2019.05.003

Schneider, P. J., & Zielke, S. (2020). Searching offline and buying online – An analysis of showrooming forms and segments. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *52*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101919

Schramm-Klein, H., Wagner, G., Steinmann, S., & Morschett, D. (2011). Cross-channel integration - is it valued by customers? *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, *21*(5), 501–511. https://doi.org/10.1080/09593969.2011.618886

Shen, X. L., Li, Y. J., Sun, Y., & Wang, N. (2018). Channel integration quality, perceived fluency and omnichannel service usage: The moderating roles of internal and external usage experience. *Decision Support Systems*, *109*, 61–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2018.01.006

Shi, S., Wang, Y., Chen, X., & Zhang, Q. (2020). Conceptualization of omnichannel customer experience and its impact on shopping intention: A mixed-method approach. *International*

Journal of Information Management, *50*, 325–336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.09.001

Simone, A., & Sabbadin, E. (2017). The New Paradigm of the Omnichannel Retailing: Key Drivers, New Challenges and Potential Outcomes Resulting from the Adoption of an Omnichannel Approach. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *13*(1), 85. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v13n1p85

Sit, J. K., Hoang, A., & Inversini, A. (2018). Showrooming and retail opportunities: A qualitative investigation via a consumer-experience lens. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *40*, 163–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.10.004

Sun, P. C., & Lin, C. M. (2010). Building customer trust and loyalty: An empirical study in a retailing context. *Service Industries Journal*, *30*(9), 1439–1455. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642060802621478

Swan, J. E., Bowers, M. R., & Richardson, L. D. (1999). Customer Trust in the Salesperson: An Integrative Review and Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Literature. *Journal of Business*, *44*, 93–107.

Truong, T. H. H. (2020). The drivers of omni-channel shopping intention: a case study for fashion retailing sector in Danang, Vietnam. *Journal of Asian Business and Economic Studies*, *ahead-of-p*(ahead-of-print). https://doi.org/10.1108/jabes-05-2020-0053

Van Baal, S., & Dach, C. (2005). Free riding and customer retention across retailers' channels. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *19*(2), 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20036

Vesel, P., & Zabkar, V. (2010). Relationship quality evaluation in retailers' relationships with consumers. In *European Journal of Marketing* (Vol. 44, Issue 9). https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561011062871

Vollero, A., Siano, A., & Sardanelli, D. (2020). *Amazon Effect? an Analysis of User-Generated Content on Consumer Electronics Retailers' Facebook Pages*. *Denning 2019*, 188–193. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47595-6_23

Zhang, M., Ren, C., Wang, G. A., & He, Z. (2018). The impact of channel integration on consumer responses in omni-channel retailing: The mediating effect of consumer empowerment. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *28*, 181–193. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2018.02.002

Zhang, P., He, Y., & Zhao, X. (2019). "Preorder-online, pickup-in-store" strategy for a dual-channel retailer. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, *122*(May 2018), 27–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2018.11.001

APPENDIX

Construct	Items	References
Integrated Promotion	**IP1.** The firm's brand name, slogan and logo are consistent both online and offline. **IP2.** The Website highlights in-store promotions that are taking place in the physical store. **IP3.** The Website advertises the physical store by providing the address and contact information of the physical store. **IP4.** The physical store advertises the Website through pamphlets, receipts, and carrying bags. **IP5.** The Website publishes advertisements appearing in newspapers or pamphlets.	Oh et al. (2012)
Integrated Transaction Information Management	**IT1.** The firm keeps an integrated purchase history of customers' online and offline purchases. **IT2.** The firm allows customers to access their prior integrated purchase history. **IT3.** The firm makes future purchase recommendations to customers based on past consolidated online and offline purchases. **IT4.** The Website customises Web pages for customers based on past consolidated online and offline purchases.	Oh et al. (2012)
Integrated Product and Pricing Information Management	**IPP1.** Product/service descriptions are consistent in both the physical store and Website. **IPP2.** Product/service category classifications are consistent in both the physical store and Website. **IPP3.** Information on stock availability is consistent in both the physical store and Website. **IPP4.** Product/service prices are consistent in both the physical store and Website. **IPP5.** Discounts are consistent in both the physical store and Website.	Oh et al. (2012)
Integrated Information Access	**IIA1.** The Website allows customers to search for products available in the physical store. **IIA2**. The firm allows checking of inventory status at the physical store through the Website. **IIA3.** The physical store provides Internet kiosks for customers to access the information and functionalities available on the Website. **IIA4.** The physical store provides Internet kiosks for customers to access store maps to quickly locate items in the store. **IIA5.** The physical store provides Internet kiosks for customers to find answers to frequently asked questions without making enquiries from in-store customer service assistants.	Oh et al. (2012)
Integrated Order Fulfilment	**IOF1.** The gift coupons or vouchers issued by the store can be redeemed either online or offline. **IOF2.** The Website allows ordering by a catalogue number. **IOF3.** The physical store allows customers to self-collect their online purchases. **IOF4.** The firm allows customers to choose any physical store from which to pick up their online purchases. **IOF5.** The firm allows customers to make payment in the physical store for their online purchases.	Oh et al. (2012)

	IOF6. The physical store provides Internet kiosks for customers to place orders for out-of-stock items.	
Integrated Customer Service	**ICS1.** The in-store customer service centre accepts the return, repair or exchange of products purchased online. **ICS2.** The Website provides post-purchase services such as support for the products purchased at physical stores. **ICS3.** The Website provides interactive access to the customer service assistant through a real-time chat program.	Oh et al. (2012)
Salespeople Interaction Quality	**INTQ1.** The salesperson was friendly. **INTQ2.** The salesperson was attentive to address my needs. **INTQ3.** It appeared that the salesperson knew his job very well. **INTQ4.** Overall, I would say that the quality of my interaction with the salesperson was excellent. **INTQ5.** I would say that the quality of my interaction with employees was high.	Fassnacht, Beatty, & Szajna (2019)
Salespeople Trust	**TR1.** This salesperson was friendly and approachable. **TR2.** This salesperson was sincere. **TR3.** This salesperson was honest. **TR4.** I felt very little risk was involved when dealing with this salesperson.	Ramsey & Sohi, (1997)
Customers' Future In-Store Buying Intention	**STBI1**: I will buy. **STBI2.** I would be likely to consider this brick-and-mortar store for future purchases. **STBI3.** The next time I need consumer electronics, I would intend to buy them at this store. **STBI4.** I would definitely consider this store for future purchases.	Fassnacht, Beatty, & Szajna (2019)
Showrooming Intention	**SHW1.** When I am in this retailer's physical store, I look at the products in-store while using my mobile devices. **SHW2.** When I am in this retailer's physical store, I often use mobile devices to investigate products in the store. **SHW3.** When I am in this retailer's physical store, I use technology-enabled devices to find better prices for products online. **SHW4.** When I am in this retailer's physical store, I use technology devices while still in the store.	Li et al. (2018)