



Review

From a Multichannel to an Optichannel Strategy in Retail

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Abstract: This paper presents the first systematic literature review (SLR) that includes the concept of an optichannel strategy, examining the main principles, key characteristics, and implications for retailers when switching from a multichannel to an optichannel approach. The SLR was made using Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar to find literature on the optichannel model in retail. The results show a paradigm shift in retailing from a multichannel, passing through omnichannel and phygital, to an optichannel strategy. This shift means marketers are now adopting a more customer-centric approach to brand management and consumer behaviour. This article has practical and managerial implications for researchers and practitioners. For researchers, the study explains how retailers evolved from multi- to cross-, omni-, phygital, and optichannel strategies. For practitioners, this paper indicates future ways to allow retailers to manage their customers' needs, ensuring a positive impact on customer experience and the company's commercial and financial performance.

Keywords: multichannel; crosschannel; phygital; omnichannel; optichannel; retail; literature review



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1. Introduction

Technology has transformed retail interactions between retailers and consumers in the last two decades by providing extensive and diverse consumer information, e.g., [1–7].

The internet has changed customers' shopping [6,8–10]. Consumers nowadays are very demanding, regardless of the type of product or service to be purchased; they want brands to expand beyond a single channel, i.e., blurring the lines between online and physical points of sale [11,12]. Consumers increasingly purchase through direct and indirect sales channels according to their utility and convenience [7,13–15]. Empowered consumers want to connect with brands and have a seamless and optimised experience across all touchpoints, e.g., [5,16,17]. These authors argue that changes in customer experience, people's lifestyles, values, and even social changes modify how managers understand consumer behaviour. Moreover, brands now face very demanding and well-informed customers, who are attracted to various technologies that allow them to stay in touch and keep up with fashion and novelties [18–20]. Digitalisation will enable retailers to expand their operations and gain revenue from new channels, e.g., [10]. Digital transformation is also increasing the ease and tendency to quickly change brands and products, leading to a Research Online Purchase Offline (ROPO), or vis-à-vis, approach and blended consumer profiles, as clients constantly coordinate action online and offline [13,21,22]. In other words, it promotes the interconnection of commerce and the dissemination of information through different channels and touching contact points; it combines online and offline sales as an accepted norm [23,24]. As such, retailers are expected to invest more in new technologies

like automation, machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics because customers prefer distribution channels with those features, e.g., [18,20]. Nevertheless, beyond e-commerce, individuals also want physical stores because they provide entertainment, social interaction, and the capacity to touch and feel the products [25,26]. Traditional approaches to multichannel, crosschannel, phygital, and omnichannel retailing have evolved into a new paradigm known as optichannel [27,28].

A multichannel strategy, deeply rooted in the customer's journey, is about being present at all the touchpoints that customers use to interact with the brand. Its primary purpose is to offer convenience to customers by enhancing the performance of each channel [10,29,30].

An omnichannel retailing strategy adopts a broader perspective on channels and how individuals move through them in their search and buying process, e.g., [13,31,32]. It aims to integrate different touching points in the customer journey and provide a seamless, balanced, and integrated experience across all channels, e.g., [5,33].

Both multi- and omnichannel postures pretend to give consumers more flexibility when making purchase decisions [34,35].

Due to high technological development and its acceptance by individuals, the idea of going beyond an omnichannel strategy began to be considered. A phygital approach started to be accepted as the next step, incorporating immersive technologies—such as augmented and virtual reality, apps, and the metaverse, among others—to connect better physical and digital customer experiences [19,20,36–38]. It was the driving force behind the optichannel concept, generally accepted as an evolution and/or refinement of the omnichannel approach [27]. In other words, rather than simply ensuring consistency across channels, merging physical with digital, marketers now focus on tailoring the experience of each channel to best suit its unique characteristics and strengths [37]. The main idea behind the optichannel approach is to recognise that different channels serve different purposes and cater to different customer preferences [39]. Companies must direct the consumers to the channel with the best and most personalised experience. Therefore, each channel should be optimised and redesigned to maximise effectiveness and deliver value to each customer through hyper-personalised and relevant experiences, e.g., [40]. It is about using the optimum channel for each point in the customer journey [41]. This approach has become crucial to increasing business outcomes.

As such, we present the following research question: how do retailers move from a multichannel to an optichannel approach to contribute to consumer experience and retailers' performance?

2. Materials and Methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) was selected as the research method for this study because we wanted to comprehensively understand the existing research and categorise and analyse key findings from the available studies in the area, e.g., [42]. To perform the SLR, we selected Web of Science and Scopus, because these databases are considered the most reputed in the scientific domain, being the most widely used in management, marketing, and retail research. We also explored Google Scholar for other types of literature, focusing on 'optichannel at retail' to seek different and novel contributions that could not be published in indexed journals. Given that optichannel is a very recent concept for explaining what is happening in the retail sector, we decided to limit our period of literature research from 2020 until now, e.g., [43].

To guide our review of the set of studies published and identified as approaching the evolution from a multichannel to an optichannel approach, we began our structured review with an intensive search of the literature in two main stages, as recommended by Paul

and Rosado-Serrano [44]. In the first stage, we explored the Web of Science and Scopus databases using the Boolean sentence presented in Figure 1.

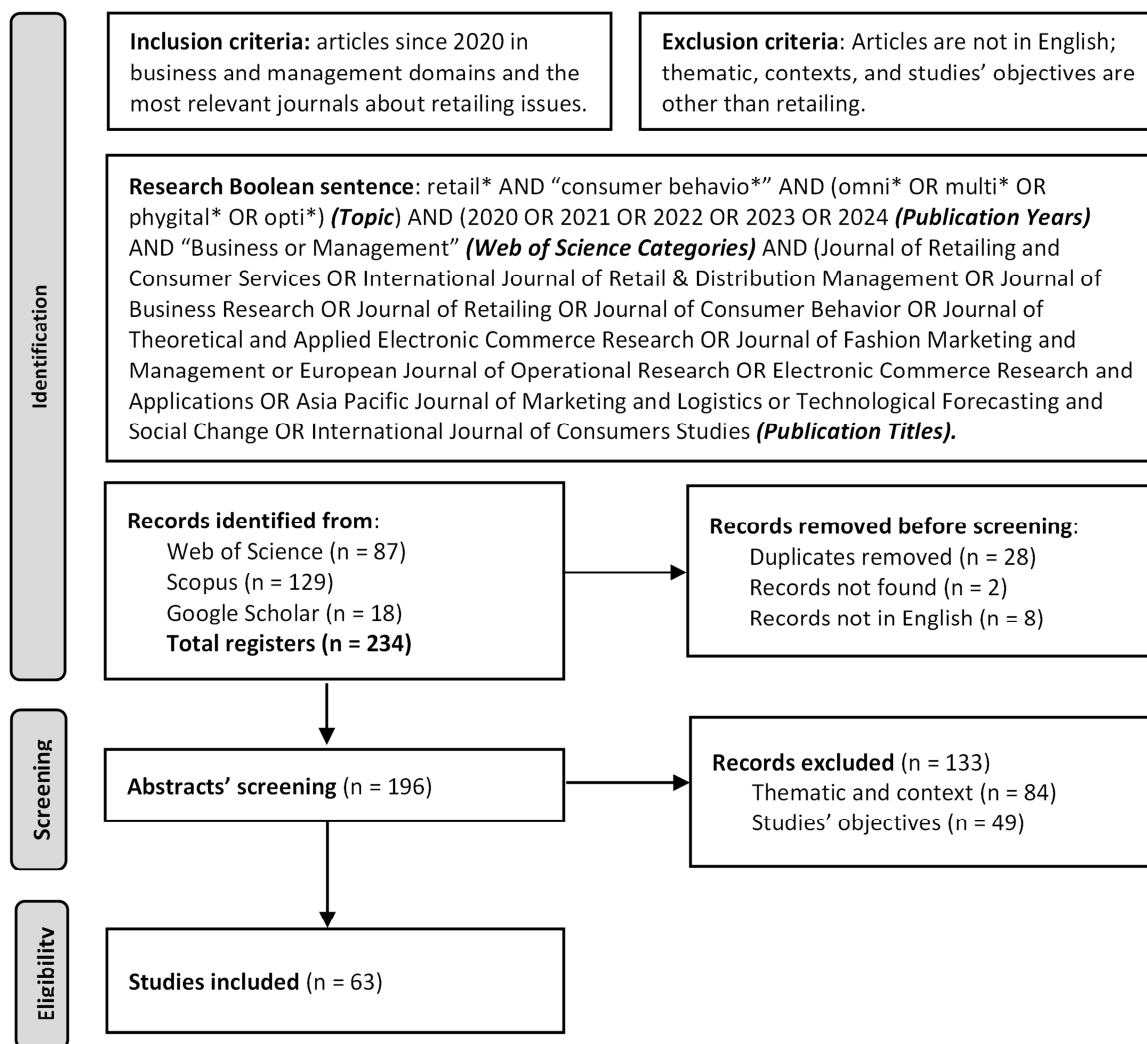


Figure 1. Flow diagram of systematic literature review.

Our search was confined to business and management domains and the most relevant journals about retailing issues. This procedure was repeated on the Scopus database. Complementarily, we decided to use Google Scholar, limiting our research to “optichannel at retail” without a time limitation. As a result of this procedure, 87 documents were found on Web of Science, 129 on Scopus, and 18 on Google Scholar. Twenty-eight articles were duplicated (Scopus and WOS). After reading the abstracts and main conclusions of the 196 sources screened, 133 were removed because they did not present themes, contexts, or objectives aligned with our research questions. As such, 63 studies were included in this literature review, in addition to the older articles used for introducing and discussing this topic.

3. Results

Table 1 presents a summary of the 63 eligible articles. These studies were conducted worldwide, with 42.6% being of European origin, 33.8% from Asia, 14.7% from America, 5.9% from Oceania, and 2.9% from Africa. The types of methodologies used were mainly quantitative (49.2%), qualitative (23.8%), and literature review (27%).

Table 1. Summary of eligible articles.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[45]. Spain	To identify the variables predicting channel preference and multichannel behaviours in retailing.	An online questionnaire with 858 Spanish consumers using R-linear and non-linear regression models, classification trees, and a rule-based model.	Companies should receive actionable insights into how they should manage their multichannel offering to increase sales.
[46]. Spain	To analyse how consumers accept the use of combined mobile and in-store technology, and the possible moderating effect of gender on this acceptance.	Telephone interviews with 805 consumers in Logroño, Spain.	The physical retail sector needs to be revived, and gender differences must be considered.
[47]. Turkey	To assess how AR features trigger consumer hedonic shopping motivations; analyse differential impacts of AR features on consumer purchase intention; and examine the mediating role of hedonic shopping motivations.	297 consumers in Turkey.	The more appropriate adjustment of AR features facilitates positive consumer behaviours.
[1]. Ethiopia	To summarise the key drivers that made retailers shift from a multichannel to an omnichannel approach.	A systematic literature review (total of 48 articles).	The study provides a holistic view of omnichannel retail research and literature-based evidence on the drivers and outcomes of omnichannel retail strategies from the perspectives of retailers and customers.
[2]. China and Denmark	To provide analytical solutions for optimal pricing and inventory decisions that lead to customer satisfaction.	A comparative analysis of scenarios based on stochastic consumer valuation and strategic consumer behaviour.	Sales performance depends on the way consumers interpret value. Communication via traditional and social media impacts product demand.
[36]. Italy	To identify the phygital customers' needs and expectations that are satisfied through in-store technologies.	A multiple-case study with semi-structured interviews with sporting goods store managers.	The phygital customer experiential journey can be created through new technologies and improved with specific reference to sporting goods stores.
[48]. Brazil	To assess how perceived risks and benefits relate to the omnichannel strategy and influence consumer behaviour.	A systematic review was conducted on 111 articles using content analysis.	The study proves that well-planned omnichannel strategies can help to reduce customer risk.
[49]. Romania	To understand omnichannel and multichannel retailing strategies and how to design an online retailing landscape.	A text mining approach exploring the content of documents.	The study shows the future digital transformation of retailing: multi- and omnichannel approaches.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[19]. India and Qatar	To conduct extensive research on metaverse retail purchasing behaviours.	A longitudinal analysis across 508 and 474 respondents at two time frames using structural equation modelling.	A holistic understanding of consumer behaviour in metaverse-based shopping experiences and the adoption and continuance of such technologies.
[50]. Malaysia, China and Australia	To investigate consumer behaviour in omnichannel retailing and the effect of privacy concerns.	Questionnaires were given to 736 consumers and analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling.	The paper underscores the need to synergise channel integration, retailer–consumer relationship empowerment, and effectively mitigate privacy concerns in omnichannel retailing.
[51]. UK	To understand the impact of augmented reality in retail.	A thematic analysis of a sample of 76 papers.	The paper highlights the functional and experiential elements needed for an effective consumer AR experience that retailers could implement.
[11]. France	To understand how to provide seamless shopping journeys so customers will be engaged, avoid switching to another retailer, and increase their basket size.	A survey of 344 consumers in the UK.	Retailer omnichannel integration strategies directly affect customers' seamless shopping journey perceptions and engagement.
[37]. Italy	To analyse the current debate about the role of the phygital environment and identify how digital technologies are transforming the physical world.	A critical literature review.	Different phygital environments provide customers with a positive, novel, and immersive experience in strategic retail, tourism, and education industries.
[8]. Czechia	To understand the trends and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer buying behaviour and identify how consumers from the Baby Boomer, X, and Y generations changed their shopping behaviour.	A questionnaire survey using online panel data and multiple regression analysis.	COVID-19 impacted individuals' behaviour regarding work, study, free time activities, and consumption, with the higher use of new technologies. Retailers need to act accordingly.
[39]. Portugal	To analyse the contribution of digital marketing metrics to the performance of an e-commerce business and its capacity to attract new customers.	A qualitative, non-experimental descriptive study.	Data have allowed us to see through which digital channels clients arrive at online stores and the impact of digital marketing actions on the organisation's results, proving the need for an omnichannel posture.
[52]. India	To assess how COVID-19 disrupted the lives of consumers across the globe, and its impact on the retail sector.	A bibliometric and content analysis.	The pandemic accelerated online shopping and led to an increase in the number of omnichannel consumers.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[53]. France	To consider how and why the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted retail and accelerated e-commerce.	The study used data from a French online retailer.	Companies must offer multiple ways for consumers to look at and buy products.
[38]. Italy	To assess how phygital interactive in-store technologies are perceived in the context of luxury retail.	A web-based survey of 1427 Italian consumers.	Technology's distinct features attract consumers at physical stores; phygital approaches must be considered to enhance the retail experience.
[54]. Vietnam and Australia	To investigate the evolution and trends in channel shopping behaviours.	A bibliometric review of 500 papers.	Data showed the importance of new concepts, like the multichannel approach, channel choice, customer experience, and social commerce.
[3]. Austria	To analyse the literature on the influences of personality traits on purchasing channel decisions.	A literature review with 24 papers.	There is a need for more research considering augmented reality, virtual reality, and in-store shopping, as well as studies considering multiple channels to suit customer demands better.
[55]. Spain	To evaluate the impact of perceived usefulness, perceived ease-of-use, and individuals' predisposition on intentions to develop webrooming or showrooming behaviour and buying decisions.	A questionnaire with 847 apparel shoppers (TAM model).	An omnichannel posture must be considered to address customer needs correctly.
[56]. UK	To explore consumer behaviour and preferences for e-commerce in the grocery retail industry.	A survey of 19,033 respondents from YouGov in Great Britain.	There is a general acceptance to buy online. Retailers need to develop costly localised infrastructure to support e-commerce.
[57]. USA	To understand the reasons for and implications of using phygital marketing at retail commerce.	An extensive literature review.	Phygital consumer experiences allow marketers to combine and leverage the benefits of in-person shopping with digital payment.
[13]. Switzerland and South Korea	To identify the drivers of BOPS (Buy Online and Pick up in Store) usage intention for omnichannel consumers in the automotive retail sector.	Using a factorial survey method, the study surveyed 436 customers in South Korea with short story vignettes.	Retailers must understand which factors impact consumers' preferences for using BOPS and act accordingly.
[58]. Monaco	To propose an alternative perspective on consumer behaviour in a multichannel luxury retail context.	A survey with 200 UK-based luxury retail customers.	Retail atmospherics are important in light of digital transformation and the aim for a seamless omnichannel experience.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[20]. Germany	To understand retailers' perspective on integrating smart technologies into their offline retail environment.	A semi-systematic review of 75 studies in retail environments.	The study provides recommendations for selecting and combining sensor technologies in stores and smart shelving or shopping carts (phygital).
[4]. Japan	To assess how customers utilise multiple channels in a recent retail environment.	An analysis of 15,938 Japanese single-source panellists' data on low-involvement, frequently purchased categories with customers' demographics.	The study indicates how retailers must act on their product portfolio to proceed with an omnichannel strategy, considering segmentation for the overall products and individual products.
[5]. China and Singapore	To verify the influence of omnichannel retailing and consumer showrooming behaviour when adopting livestreaming demonstrations.	Game theory modelling.	Livestreaming demonstrations enhance consumers' product valuation, but the manufacturer cannot consistently achieve higher profits. The time-limited promotion measures of the livestreaming mode are not always beneficial to the manufacturer.
[31]. UK	To examine the customer decision-making journey of high-involvement female fashion consumers in omnichannel fashion retailing.	Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, online diaries, and follow-up interviews, with grounded theory applied to analyse the data.	A framework which outlines the stages of the omnichannel customer decision-making journey for young, high-involvement, female fashion consumers; an omnichannel decision-making journey makes clients feel less risk.
[59]. France	To focus on how the digital channel can create expectations for the physical channel.	24 semi-directive interviews with consumers with thematic and lexicographic analysis.	Direct online experience on a website will create beliefs about the physical stores of the same brand and impact consumer attitudes towards the store.
[12]. South Korea	To synthesise the empirical evidence surrounding omnichannel consumer research and its management.	A systematic literature review with 130 articles.	The study offers the first comprehensive and systematic overview of "Chinese omnichannel consumers".
[16]. India and France	To provide a comprehensive and concise literature review on omnichannel retailing.	A review of 131 studies.	The study offers a holistic picture of omnichannel retailing research and evidence about relevant consumer behavioural dimensions.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[22]. Brazil	To understand if consumers from developing countries want to use pick-up point structures and the viability of implementing a pick-up point network in an urban distribution network.	A survey with 396 consumers in São Paulo, Brazil, using structural equation modelling.	The paper identified the three factors that most affect consumer intention to adopt the pick-up point: trialability, compatibility, and relative advantage.
[17]. Vietnam	To synthesise the current understanding and developments in omnichannel marketing.	A structured literature review of 174 papers.	The study outlines the pillars of recent developments in omnichannel marketing.
[28]. Belgium	To analyse the evolution of e-commerce, retailers' reaction to IT challenges and opportunities, and identify and discuss the main components of an optichannel strategy.	A practical case analysis of brands embracing an optichannel strategy using data regarding e-commerce usage and acceptance worldwide.	There is a need for a paradigm change; companies need to move towards an optichannel strategy.
[33]. Vietnam	To research the complex dynamics of consumer behaviour in Vietnamese banking omnichannel environments.	A questionnaire using a sample of 422 Vietnamese bank customers.	The study provides valuable insights for retailers and marketers seeking to optimise consumer experiences and cultivate loyalty in omnichannel environments.
[60]. South Korea	To assess how the omnichannel approach's perceived service convenience can impact customer equity from a customer perspective.	The SERVCON framework.	Selected omnichannel constructs such as post-benefit convenience are important, and temporal personality has a differential effect on consumers' preference.
[29]. Hungary and UK	To identify drivers for service quality from the perspective of multichannel fashion customers.	Information cases, viewing service quality through the eyes of experienced German multichannel customers, as well as 18 in-depth interviews and two focus groups.	The study conceptualises integration quality as a catalyst, which supports reinforcing the physical and electronic service quality reactions to provide an optimised service quality experience.
[61]. Brazil and Peru	To investigate impulse buying as a consumer behaviour outcome in omnichannel retail through the stimulus–organism–response theory.	An online survey was conducted with 229 customers of a Brazilian retailer, and the analysis used partial least squares structural equation modelling.	Channel integration and convenience positively influenced consumer empowerment, which, in turn, influenced customer satisfaction and trust.
[62]. USA	To review AI's effects in customer-interfacing retail applications based on an ecosystem value co-creation framework.	A bibliometric and conceptual mapping analysis.	The study indicates both the positive and negative effects of AI and allows for its implementation in a way that is helpful to organisations, employees, consumers, and society.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[9]. Czechia and Romania	To explore the direct and indirect impact of mobile apps' utilitarian, hedonic, and social attributes on consumers' attitudes and purchase intention.	An online survey, analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling.	The paper shows the direct and indirect impact of utilitarian, hedonic, and social attributes on consumers' attitudes and purchase intention towards fast fashion apps.
[63]. Quinones et al. (2023). Spain	To classify emerging technologies based on their potential for sustaining retailers' competitive strategies.	A qualitative study based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 20 retail managers and survey data from a sample of 168 retail and technology professionals.	The study provides valuable insight into how retail companies can capitalise on technology to create or reinforce their competitive positioning.
[6]. USA	To understand the interaction between e-commerce and offline retailing.	A literature review.	The research highlights empirical findings and presents general recommendations.
[64]. China	To analyse how personalised pricing affects customers' showrooming behaviour in the duopoly competition with horizontal product differentiation between traditional and online retailers.	A viewpoint article.	The study explains why an increasing number of on- and offline retailers have implemented personalised pricing based on technical means and consumer purchase records + a novel theoretical basis for dealing with crosschannel shopping in multichannel retail competition.
[40]. Russia	To analyse new interpretations of customer segmentation technology based on predictive analytics.	The study collected research data using the consulting company Gartner.	The data indicate that an optichannel approach offers customers a channel they recognise as most suitable, as expected from the brand.
[7]. Netherlands and Spain	To ascertain the effects of omnichannel retailing on the promotional strategy of retail organisations, to better understand how to alter promotional strategies following the ever-changing needs of customers and their preference for a seamless experience.	A critical systematic literature review.	Customers are becoming more empowered, and omnichannel retailing is a phenomenon that almost every company nowadays must deal with. The study also provides a general guideline for researchers and practitioners concerning promotional strategies that can be adopted in omnichannel retailing.
[65]. India	To examine the impact of a seamless experience across all touching points on the behavioural outcomes of customers in India.	A partial least squares two-stage approach.	Retailers should encourage customers' engagement in omnichannel purchasing by designing a pleasurable and smooth shopping experience.
[66]. Germany	To analyse whether reciprocal effects exist between the images of major purchase channels and how they affect consumers' loyalty.	Study 1—a longitudinal design. Study 2—a cross-sectional design.	The results indicate that a positive offline channel image enhances the online channel image and vice versa.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[14]. Chile	To provide valuable insights into consumer preferences for delivery services in Chile's online shopping industry.	Questionnaires were given to a non-probabilistic sample of 424 individuals selected from 346,261 Chilean panellists and analysed using Multinomial Logit Models.	Customers are willing to buy online and receive products at home, in-store, or any specific location, therefore wanting an omnichannel posture.
[15]. Indonesia	To provide insights to retailers about the dynamics of consumer behaviour before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Seven studies selected from five databases that met their inclusion criteria.	Both offline and online stores can be integrated in an omnichannel approach rather than substituted for each other.
[10]. Australia	To better understand research and practices in the move toward omnichannel retailing.	A summary of all the articles included in a special issue.	Despite the barriers that firms may face, channel integration is the way to go.
[23]. Canada	To understand what "new retail" is and its implications for companies, with a focus on grocery shopping.	A literature review.	There is a general willingness to adopt new lifestyles incorporating advanced technologies. However, regarding virtual grocery shopping, a hybrid posture is the more favourable option (on and off).
[67]. Canada	To investigate consumers' attitudes towards virtual grocery shopping, focusing on their technological readiness and the impact of optimising consumer learning.	A cluster analysis of 1034 consumers using structural equation modelling.	Some consumers accept VGS and provide retailers with insights into consumer behaviour that will allow them to target specific segments with shopping modalities.
[30]. Germany	To increase the understanding of online retailing across electronic channels and e-channel touchpoints from a consumer perspective.	An online survey ($N = 502$) and an experimental study ($N = 126$).	Retailers can enhance consumers' shopping experiences by providing alternative e-channel touchpoints.
[68]. China	To investigate the interaction between online and offline retailers' product information-disclosure decisions and the behaviours of showrooming or webrooming.	A literature overview and a multi-stage game process that used backward induction to find the equilibrium solution.	The optimal choice for online retailers is to allow webrooming behaviour and not invest in information disclosure.
[69]. China	To identify the operational issues related to an omnichannel strategy in the fashion luxury industry.	Several case studies on different types of luxuries.	With the firm's different channel strategies—store-only and omnichannel strategies—consumers' valuation and channel selection behaviours are varied. Furthermore, the luxury firm may not benefit from it.
[70]. China and France	To evaluate the importance of strategic planning alternatives for consumers to buy online and pick-up in specific locations.	An analysis of a real-world dataset provided by the Ali IJCAI.	The authors built a data-driven method to optimise collection and delivery point locations and increase customer satisfaction.

Table 1. Cont.

References/ Country	Objectives	Population, Sample, Methods, and Analysis	Main Conclusions
[34]. China	To understand the importance of fast fashion retailers moving from multi- to omnichannel approaches.	A case study with a retailer.	Retailers must offer consumers the alternative to engage online and with them, deciding where to look for information and buy and receive products.
[71]. Egypt	To predict the following order review based on historical data, to find the most important things that affect customer satisfaction in e-commerce, and to make a model to predict whether a customer will be happy.	A comparative machine learning modelling approach using a large dataset of over 100 k online orders from a major retailer.	Online shopping allows retailers to make predictions based on a historical dataset from the retail company and align proper strategies to give customers prompt and customised answers, increasing their satisfaction.
[24]. China	To investigate how off- and online switching behaviour impacts price policies and buying decisions.	The study used game theory and consumer utility theory. A retailer-driven pricing model was developed using data simulation to study the optimal pricing problem.	An optimal combination of pre-announcement discounts and a strategic consumer ratio can generate the most significant profit for retailers and the supply chain (on- and offline).
[35]. China	To analyse online channels' positive and negative effects and their impact on price policies and the final decision on where to buy.	A game model that involved an offline and online retailer.	Consumers keep a showrooming preference, proving that offering them multiple touching points is the best option for retailers.
[32]. China	To assess how to design high-quality touchpoint combinations.	PLS-SEM and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis methods were used to analyse data from a total of 1112 respondents and to confirm the consequences.	The study discusses the impact of Customer Journey Design in establishing a stable relationship between retailers and customers.
[72]. France	To understand the metaverse's retailing potential, empirically studying its effects on consumer behaviour.	The study gathered scenario-based data from 262 consumers and used a multimethod quantitative approach to examine the integrative behavioural model and partial least squares structural equation modelling.	The metaverse needs to be explored more; however, many consumers accept the use of this new technology. Therefore, a phygital approach is something that brands need to bear in mind.

Note: Most of the text included in this table is taken almost verbatim from the original articles of the referenced authors.

4. Analysis and Findings

The analysis was divided into four parts. The first part presents the key factors that led retailers to move from a multichannel to a crosschannel strategy. The second part presents the omnichannel posture as the way to integrate channels from both retailers' and customers' perspectives, e.g., [16]. The third part points to an intermediate strategy approach. It results from the current evolution of marketing at a business level, the continuous development of digital technology, and the focus on AI, which point to the need for companies to invest in a phygital strategy, operationalising immersive marketing [38]. The fourth part reflects the need for retailers to take omnichannel approaches to another level. It is about adopting

a posture that benefits customers but also contributes to companies' profitability and stability: this is the optichannel approach. Table 2 summarises the four parts of the analysis of our findings.

Table 2. The evolution of retail channel approaches.

From multichannel to crosschannel strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving customer experience through crosschannel coordination; • Allowing customers to switch channels at every stage of the buying process; • Making it possible to buy online and receive the product at home.
Omnichannel strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailers try to ensure the maximum availability, transparency, visibility, and consistency of information across different channels; • Allow customers to interchange and seemingly use the functionalities of all channels; • Focus on and for the customers based on their buying behaviour and contextual constraints.
Phygital customer experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore integrating digital elements in physical stores to enhance the customer experience and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market; • Allow customers to have physical stores as an option; • Try to engage customers using innovative technologies to provide unique and interactive user experiences.
Optichannel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prioritise the most popular channels based on customer preferences and not implement all possible channels simultaneously; • To be aware of the unique advantages and limitations of each channel; • To achieve a healthy balance between what the customer wants and the company needs regarding competitive advantages and financial results.

4.1. From Multichannel to Crosschannel Strategies

There is broad agreement that providing good customer experiences is crucial for achieving a strong brand image, loyalty, positive word of mouth, differentiation, and competitive advantages in mature markets, e.g., [29,71]. From the retailer's perspective, the internet significantly impacted how to conduct business, e.g., [4,45,49]. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to some societal changes, leading people to adopt a lifestyle partially lived online, e.g., [52,53]. As internet use has increased substantially, along with substantial developments in digital technologies, platforms, and social media, individuals have become aware of the convenience associated with being online [14,15,35,45,70]. Being online has become part of their daily lives and, gradually, they have started to accept looking for information and buying products on different channels [70].

Before the massive information and communication technology revolution, individuals visited several physical stores to decide what to buy, e.g., [39]. They wanted to reduce any perceived risk associated with their final decision. The internet has created an open window with no physical and time limits, e.g., [73]. Consumers gradually started to adopt a crosschannel search and shopping behaviour and buying using different and multiple channels rapidly became a growing phenomenon, e.g., [35]. Companies continually added new channels [73].

In a faster-growing e-commerce era, individuals started to require more online channel services, and a new business model emerged; consumers look to make maximum use of online and offline channels for looking for information on products and services and shopping, e.g., [35]. Many retailers have chosen to start operating online and offline despite inherent risks [6,48] and knowing that offline and online channel images have a positive and reciprocal relationship, e.g., [59,66]. Offering different and independent channels to interact with customers became a widely accepted and used strategy—a multichannel approach, e.g., [6,30,35]. Platforms such as Amazon started to bet online and offline. Customers

started to use various devices anywhere and at any time; this gradual growth of the internet and the rapidly shifting world of e-commerce and information technology led retailers to adopt multichannel strategies, e.g., [29,35].

Multichannel retailing offers convenience to customers. This approach allowed individuals multiple channels to browse or buy goods and services, including online and offline stores, e.g., [23,28,58]. The central assumption was that everyone prioritises one channel to interact with a brand, so brands must let them establish this priority and decide where to buy, e.g., [28,39]. However, a multichannel approach means channels are compartmentalised, without integration, and managed individually [48]. Studies concluded that this apparent lack of communication and channel integration did not allow for a similar buying experience [28]. At the same time, it was preventing brands from having a holistic view of consumer needs and behaviours. So, to enhance the consumer multichannel experience, retailers have tried to make products, services, and information consistent across all channels, e.g., [28].

Consumers are becoming increasingly sophisticated and concerned about receiving product and service information before purchasing [39]. Brands wanted to simplify the information-gathering and decision-making processes for the consumer; slowly, they started to adopt a crosschannel strategy [28]. Compared to a multichannel posture, crosschannel approaches have multiple integrated channels promoting product, money, and information movement, e.g., [39]. The purpose of this is to allow customers to switch channels at every stage of the buying process. The client is in control, from gathering information about products and services, to confirming product availability, to the purchase itself, delivery place, and returns [39,70].

In practice, a customer can use a mobile application to search for information about products and services and then place an order online and pick them up in-store; alternatively, one can search online, buy in-store, and have the goods delivered at home [70]. For some authors, e.g., [40], there are two approaches to crosschannel retailing: in one, some or all channels are partially integrated, and in the other, at least two channels, but not all, are fully integrated [39]. Although a crosschannel stance has revealed considerable improvements, it depends on the consumer's ability to act as an information integrator. Furthermore, in a crosschannel system, the supply chain itself did not benefit from a centralised knowledge base about the product to synchronise all contact points; in other words, more was needed to achieve this level of maturity [28]. Efficiency still required additional effort. That is when the concept of omnichannel started to become a new approach in retail. Retailers began to consider ways to ensure the maximum availability, transparency, visibility, and consistency of information across different channels [39].

4.2. Omnichannel Strategy

The first time this concept was mentioned in the academic literature, defining omnichannel as an integrated sales experience, was in 2011; it is considered an evolution of the multichannel perspective, e.g., [16,31–33]. Multichannel strategies proved not to allow the best results for retailers, as they revealed flaws in their interactions with consumers and in managing their data and purchasing moments, e.g., [35].

The internet, mobile phones, and digitalisation empowered the omnichannel strategy [12,35]; global consumers use multiple channels throughout their shopping journey, and they now expect channels to be connected in order to allow them to switch seamlessly from one channel to another [7,11,32]. Retailers promised an integrated view of online and offline services and products [34,50]. The purpose of this was to allow customers to interchange and seamlessly use the functionalities of all the channels to enhance their shopping experience during various stages of the buying process, including research, buy-

ing, receiving, and post-purchase services, e.g., [7,11,58]. It also allowed individuals to develop transactional activities across multiple channels, having various options while staying current with trends and news [11]. It was the result of mobile technology's constant advances that allowed retailers also to offer convenience, e.g., [7]. Some authors state that the concept resulted from the two previous phases: multi- and crosschannel; customers have become more capable of quickly obtaining information about goods, services, prices, promotions, and other relevant information inherent to the buying process, e.g., [39].

Omnichannel retailing is about providing a fully integrated multiple-channel experience because of the considerable advancements in telecommunications, the superior broader internet coverage in many countries, the consequent decrease in related costs, and the quick adoption of smartphones [7]. The focus is on integrating and coordinating detached channels to serve customers' needs better and providing seamless channel transitions and convenience through optimised strategies, e.g., [7,11,50]. This approach contributes to a positive brand image, higher customer satisfaction, personal engagement with brands, and personalised customer experiences, e.g., [48]. Adopting an omnichannel posture is crucial to any company's success, e.g., [11,74]. Customers have a centric perspective, evolving from their role as spectator consumers to that of co-creators of value at each stage of their decision-making process, e.g., [11]. The omnichannel approach, therefore, surpasses the traditional offline and online point-of-sale dichotomy. It aims to arrange an integrated strategy that encourages and allows customers to move across all the available touchpoints, having the same transaction process, e.g., [39], and deciding where to buy the product [13]. It represents a true paradigm shift in retail: a retailing model focused on and for the customers based on their buying behaviour and contextual constraints [28]. It is like an upgrade, leading to customer engagement [11].

These approaches move from a lack of integration across the different retail channels (multichannel) to a continuous and seamless interaction between individuals and brands [7,39]. Individuals strategically make channel choices, e.g., [28]. The uniformity between different channels ends up creating a showroom without walls. While a multichannel strategy keeps channels separate, omnichannel retailing allows a better approach and understanding of customer purchasing behaviours; this posture, in turn, enables companies to plan and deliver superior and customised customer experiences [7]. Companies need to act entirely on the customer and their purchasing journey to avoid a considerable probability of spending their various resources in the wrong places, e.g., [39]. This approach can distance them from their competitors.

Customers expect flexibility on when and where to shop, receive, and even return products; they also want product availability and real-time brand information [74]. The challenge is to ensure the seamless integration of online and physical stores to allow customers a more accessible and friendly shopping experience, e.g., [11,60]. Consumers are now blended, and they undertake showrooming and webrooming to improve their buying experience, e.g., [5,13,22,32,35,39,54,55,68]; they also decide to buy online and pick-up in physical stores (BOPIS), e.g., [22,34,56,75], or even reserve online and pick-up and pay in-store (ROPS), e.g., [13]. This means that customers use one channel for information searching, another channel for buying or reserving the product or service, and another one to buy the chosen products [13]; in other words, visiting offline stores before purchasing online and/or using the mobile channel while visiting physical stores, e.g., [5]. Studies prove that this showrooming behaviour can benefit all stakeholders if a proper posture is adopted, e.g., [7].

The omnichannel system aims to ensure maximum information availability, visibility, and consistency across multiple channels, and a seamless experience across all the touchpoints [39,65]. Despite the challenges, it has become a familiar and widely accepted

phenomenon in the retail sector; companies that adopted omnichannel retailing could have access to a larger target, develop customer-oriented business routines, better understand customer behaviour, and efficiently use diverse resources to offer personalised products and services, e.g., [33]. It also leads to customer satisfaction and engagement by promoting the perception of fluency and flow in the shopping experience and price transparency, e.g., [11]. A well-structured omnichannel supply chain seems to create a boost in consumers' perception of brand authenticity due to inventory management competencies, which is also related to an increase in customer empowerment, sales, brand loyalty, and the company's profitability [7,11,33,60,61,65].

4.3. *Phygital Customer Experience*

Recent studies indicate many challenges for brands in the 21st century. The following challenges stand out: (1) being able to develop assertive responses from a generational perspective, (2) appropriately using AI, and (3) ensuring a relevant consumer experience, e.g., [41]. Retailers have begun adopting phygital strategies over the past decade, gaining significant attention towards this approach in the mid-2010s [36,38,57]. The rise of digital technologies and the increasing prevalence of online shopping prompted retailers to explore integrating digital elements into their physical stores to enhance customer experience and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market, e.g., [28,37,41,46,67]. The phygital concept has been developed to describe how retailers try to engage customers using smart technologies to provide unique and interactive user experiences, e.g., [20,37,38]. These aims also reinforce their competitive advantages, e.g., [63].

Some examples of phygital strategies adopted by retailers over time are the introduction in their stores of digital technologies, such as interactive displays, sensors, AI, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), metaverse-based virtual stores, and mobile apps [19,28,46,47,51,62,67,72]. These aimed to enhance the shopping experience and allow consumers to have physical stores as an option, e.g., [37]. In the 2010s, creating a seamless and integrated experience across all touchpoints became a priority. Then, adopting an omnichannel strategy became necessary; it was the way to ensure a good and customised customer experience, e.g., [39]. In the early 2020s, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated retailers' adoption of phygital strategies. Virtual try-on tools, virtual visits to properties, livestream shopping, and easy-paying methods, among others, became applicable to allow consumers to purchase products and services despite restrictions. Retailers needed to offer clients seamless, positive, and, from that day on, integrated experiences, e.g., [39,46,57].

4.4. *Optichannel*

According to many studies, an omnichannel sales strategy integrates all the available channels to serve consumers better. It has outstanding advantages compared to traditional single-channel and multichannel approaches, e.g., [40]. Adopting an omnichannel posture allows retailers to gather more information about their clients than ever [28]. This fact, in turn, leads to a customised posture, e.g., [39]. Managers started to consider implementing the possibility of buying online and picking up in-store BOPIS systems, e.g., [22,75]. Moreover, customers can buy online and return offline, e.g., [28,40]. Companies must coordinate activities across channels and customer journey stages, ensuring product flow, e.g., [39]. As customer experience is considered a source of competitive advantage, retailers strive to guarantee it, e.g., [40]. An interesting consequence has been observed: Postmodern consumers tend to attribute anything they interact with, including places, as a representation of themselves, e.g., [41]. Consequently, nowadays, the new source of value is no longer just the product, service, or brand, but the experience as a whole that the customer can have. So, brands must move from an omnichannel and even phygital perspective to an optichannel one [28].

Although both phygital and optichannel strategies involve integrating physical and digital elements, phygital focuses more on improving physical points of sale by blending physical and digital elements to create a seamless and integrated experience, e.g., [28,36,38]. The optichannel approach allows customers to choose channels for interacting with brands. It is about optimising each channel (e.g., physical stores, online platforms, social media, apps) and offering a consistent brand experience [28,40]. To be aware of each channel's unique advantages and limitations, understanding that everyone has different preferences, identifying them, and providing appropriate stimuli and/or answers is about allowing them to choose the channel that best suits their needs at any given time [39]. However, it is also about achieving a healthy balance between what the customer wants and the company needs regarding competitive advantages and financial results [28,40,41]. Strictly, the optichannel approach is a successful strategy that aims to balance customer-focused, keeping an eye on competitors, and ensuring profitability [28,41]. Observing brands that have moved to an omnichannel strategy, most have embraced a dogmatic approach to customer satisfaction, allowing them to make decisions in all situations. However, this leads to countless customer journeys, resulting in a complex and difficult-to-manage scenario [28,39,41].

An optichannel strategy guides the customer through the best possible journey based on the customer's profile and the knowledge that the retailer has gathered. In other words, it is about prioritising the most popular channels based on customer preferences and not implementing all possible channels simultaneously [40]. This approach allows retailers to focus their resources more effectively [28]. It is a dynamic model: to be successful in the long term, retailers need to keep the focus on customers, competitors, companies' financial position, and the market's economic situation [39]. Markets are constantly evolving. Companies face different needs; they must keep up with these changes and achieve proper financial results. Therefore, only optichannel strategies can optimise each channel (e.g., physical stores, online platforms, social media, and apps) to offer a consistent brand experience [28] and make possible a moment of individual or social entertainment [64]. This approach should be implemented moderately: the customer must be directed to the ideal journey but must have options, e.g., [41]. We emphasise the importance of offering customers a choice of channels (physical and digital); give them the option to purchase online for home delivery, buy online, and pick in-store, e.g., [39]. Customers should be able to visit a physical store for assistance and product testing or go online to receive information and decide where to buy. At the same time, companies guide them according to the brand's needs, since optichannel is a balanced, win-win relationship [28].

What started to be debated among managers and marketers was the high costs of adopting a multichannel and/or omnichannel approach, e.g., [41]. Then, the concept of an optichannel strategy emerged precisely to understand the reason for giving the consumer a unique experience, how to achieve this, and how to ensure the brand's profitability [28]. For instance, this approach could be better for luxury businesses [69]. So, an optichannel strategy can be perceived as an evolution or refinement of an omnichannel and phygital approach, allowing the demonstration of marketing's value both to customers and to the company itself [41]. Based on the analysis of companies that have already taken a step towards an optichannel stance, it seems to be the way forward; managers need to meet customer expectations [28,40,41]. Failing to meet expectations can lead to customer dissatisfaction and the consequent erosion of brand image, e.g., [39]. On the other hand, there is a need to keep up with the competition [28].

To summarise, the literature shows the emergence of a new need: the capacity to have constant control over omnichannel performance through developing metrics that measure each channel's contribution to success and competitive advantages, considering

internal and external costs [28,40]. Therefore, omnichannel and optichannel approaches put the customer at the centre [39,41]; however, since companies do not have unlimited resources—financial, human, technological, or time—they need to understand the consumer's decision journey and optimise it [39]. While monitoring all the available channels, managers can assess economic viability and revise their operational procedures. To better suit clients, companies also need to ensure net results, compromising in the short and medium term between customers' needs, competitive advantages, and the need for financing and/or profit [28]. Therefore, phygital to optichannel transition is about moving from merging physical and digital experiences for the seamless interaction through all channels to privileging and optimising the best individual channels for customers' satisfaction and companies' performance [28,40,41].

5. Knowledge Gaps and Trajectories for Future Research

For retailers to stay competitive and keep customers' attention over time, they needed to follow the evolution of technology and the gradual change in individuals as they became increasingly informed, demanding, and receptive to unique and personalised shopping experiences. Sequential steps were taken in this direction, showing an evolution in the way companies communicate and interact with consumers. They moved from a fragmented approach to an integrated, customer-centric experience. Each step built on the previous one, reflecting consumers' increasing complexity and expectations in today's digital environment. According to the literature, multichannel strategies, the first approach, made retailers use several communication and sales channels independently (physical stores, e-commerce platforms, and social networks). The purpose of this was to increase sales and offer more alternatives for the customers to get to know their products and services. The evolution towards crosschannel strategies allowed customers to move between channels fluidly and find synchronised information. The omnichannel approach takes integration a step further, focusing on the customer experience as a whole: all channels are interconnected and offer a cohesive and seamless experience; the customer can start interacting on one channel and continue on another without losing continuity and with information being shared in real-time. The phygital strategy combines physical and digital by recognising that customers often interact with both worlds; the purpose is to create experiences that emerge from technologies on- and offline and enhance customer experience. Finally, the optichannel strategy focuses on personalisation and consumer choice: retailers offer multiple channels and allow customers to choose how and where they want to interact, based on their individual preferences. By doing this, retailers communicate and manage their offers to meet each customer's specific needs, providing an even more personalised experience.

Thus, this literature review identifies an emergent interest in optichannel topics. According to the existing literature, multichannel and crosschannel strategies resulted from the considerable increase in internet use with the continuous developments in digital technologies, platforms, and the use of social media. More advanced technologies, mobile device capacity, and AI created new opportunities for retailers and customers in physical stores. Mobile applications, technology, the growing acceptance by individuals, and the companies' commitment to user-friendly systems and websites contributed to a new paradigm: a seamless customer and shopping experience across all touchpoints became crucial.

Omnichannel retailing combines the advantages of digital and physical retail; it is about integrating multiple channels to help customers make decisions and purchases. Studies reveal that it increases consumers' satisfaction and engagement, positively impacting their buying intention. However, some studies indicate that omnichannel retailing may not be enough. At the same time, some retailers are already successfully implementing strategies that are in line with optichannel principles. This strategy allows them to make sig-

nificant profits and increase brand awareness. For example, Wayfair is an online retailer of furniture and housewares that has begun to use a strong optichannel and forward-thinking strategy. With the slogan “More than just furniture,” this brand implemented an innovative buying experience for their clients and won the 2019 BRAND United Optichannel Award: https://digitaleditions.napco.com/publication/?m=1960andi=639362andview=articleBrowserandarticle_id=3550504andver=html5 (accessed on 11 September 2024)

This brand has bet on augmented reality, developed a specific app for buyers, uses QR codes, interacts through their social media platforms to engage customers, shares décor suggestions, and informs customers about a 10% discount for a first order. H&M is another brand that claims to be focused on optimising sales channels. This brand’s optichannel strategy involves taking advantage of each element of its portfolio of stores, on- and offline, to respond to customer needs genuinely. The company considers that consumers enjoy personal interactions and the possibility of using the brand’s digital channels and social media (<https://www.colliers.com/en/news/foot-traffic-indicators-towards-global-fast-fashion-expansion>) (accessed on 11 September 2024). These two retailers are proving that an optichannel approach seems to be the way to increase profits. It also allows value delivery to customers by integrating online and offline channels to offer a convenient, customised, and engaging shopping experience. Therefore, other retailers are rethinking their omnichannel model.

Brands accept that all customers want to save time. Shopping could be a moment of entertainment, so the social component must be addressed. Moreover, the customer experience must always be positive, and ideally memorable. That is why Amazon decided to open its Amazon Go store in Seattle and, in 2022, the Amazon Style store in Los Angeles.

Gradually, brands are adopting an optichannel stance. Briefly, according to the results of this review, optichannel distribution can be accepted from two perspectives: (1) from the retailers’ perspective, as a way to guarantee complete integration between channels and achieve a positive balance between what customers want and the company needs in financial results and competitive advantages, and (2) from the customers’ point of view, it is an approach attitude that reveals retailers’ transparency, convenience and, therefore, increases individuals’ satisfaction and engagement.

In conclusion, the literature indicates that it is crucial to have constant technological development, social media improvements, and increased internet use. It also shows that retailers need to obtain as much information about their clients as ever to answer them correctly and succeed in market competition.

Future research should focus on observing current retailers that have already adopted an optichannel stance in their business model. Then, researchers can assess what has been achieved in terms of competitive advantages recognised by customers and compare it with companies that have just adopted and implemented an omnichannel strategy.

The main limitation of this work, which simultaneously reveals its relevance, was the lack of studies on the importance of an optichannel posture. While multichannel, crosschannel, and omnichannel strategies have already been the subject of several studies, there is little research into this qualitative leap that needs to be taken by retailers: adopting optichannel retailing as a way of better integrating the customer into the business and exponentially improving their buying experience.

This article has practical and managerial implications for researchers and practitioners. For researchers, the study explains how retailers evolved from multi- to cross-, omni-, phygital, and optichannel strategies. For practitioners, this research (1) indicates future ways to allow retailers to be able to manage their customers’ needs, ensuring a seamless experience; (2) enables them to make up-to-date decisions to ensure their solvency (i.e., it is possible to achieve a balanced and win–win relationship between customers’ needs

and companies' profitability); and (3) gives awareness about the need to use AI and new technologies, in both on- and offline channels, as a way to enhance the consumer experience. Finally, this study emphasises the importance of an approach centred on the consumer buying experience, planned to suit them so that perceived value is associated with convenience, engagement, transparency, and no risk. This approach will lead to a win-win relationship between retailers and customers.

6. Conclusions

The increase in the number of individuals using the internet, their growing acceptance of social networks, and the evolution of technology have prompted changes in consumer behaviour. Customers began to interact with brands through an increasing number of digital and interchangeable devices. They stopped just turning to physical stores to see products, receive information, and buy. They are currently called blended customers, i.e., people who search online to buy offline and vis-a-vis. As people who are very and quickly informed, receptive, and agile in using a series of new technologies, they have become demanding customers who want everything immediately. This situation has fostered the transition from multichannel to crosschannel and omnichannel strategies.

However, adopting an omnichannel stance has brought constant challenges, particularly regarding companies' ability to achieve a fluid approach that reaches all stakeholders, not just customers. Meanwhile, physical and online channels have begun to coexist, forming an integral and complementary part of many individuals' shopping journeys and experiences. Managers realise they need to move from omnipresence to channel optimisation based on customer preferences. The aim is to simplify their purchasing process by merging physical and online experiences, giving clients an immersive marketing experience (phygital) and determining the optimum touchpoint or combination according to each individual preference. This evolution, in turn, will increase customer satisfaction and engagement while positively impacting the company's profitability by effectively focusing its resources.

Rather than just using all possible channels for a specific situation or buying experience, AI, big data, the blockchain, and some other new technologies allow managers to direct the consumer to the channel that will provide the best and most customised experience; this, in return, seems to have a positive impact both on customers' experience and on companies' commercial and financial performance.

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