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Omni-channel retailing-

towards factors which affect a shopping journey

Master's thesis

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Executive Summary

The aim of this project is to investigate and find an answer to the proposed research question of ***What factors influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and contribute to the creation of the consumer loyalty?*** In order to accomplish such an understanding, this thesis explores the subject in research from two diverse methods, namely theoretical and analytical. These aspects were brought into the project by using the systematic literature review approach, for the purpose of creating transparency within the literature which forms the basis for this thesis. Furthermore, this are used to understand what factors affect an Omni-channel shopping experience.

Through the literature review which consists of 18 articles, it could be revealed that within Omni-channel retailing, channels that are attributed the biggest importance in a retail mix are represented by the offline, online and mobile channels. Furthermore, within the theoretical analyses, it could be detected that there are certain aspects which influence a consumer shopping experience. These factors are rutted in the consumer variety-seeking behaviour where hedonic, utilitarian and social motivations have been detected to be prevalent. Additionally, for an in-depth analysis of these factors and their contribution to the creation of a consumer loyalty, 10 out of the total number of articles have been selected for further investigation. Also, it is discussed whether there is an interrelation within these factors and if these contribute to the value of a Global Omni-channel retailing. Additionally, other aspect such as the perception of seamlessness when moving from one place to another and the perception of consistency in the retail mix between touch points have been identified to also influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and contribute to a consumer loyalty. Therefore, these aspects have also been taken into consideration. The discussion chapter represents four propositions formulated in order to deductively conclude on factors which affect a consumer Omni-channel shopping experience and show the resulting of the retail channels interaction with the behaviour motivations.

The thesis concludes that, on a general tendency, all hedonic, utilitarian and social values affect Omni-channel retailing as much as they affect multichannel retailing. However, it could be argued that hedonic values affect Omni-channel retailing to a greater extent than other values since it could be observed that the hedonic behaviour is prevalent among all the retail channels-online, offline and mobile. The results are illustrated in a conceptual framework.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at investigating the phenomena of Omni-channel retailing. Recent literature has been argued at this becoming the new trend in doing business (Kwon and Jain 2014). The topic on Omni-channel retailing has been in discussion among the scholars only recently. Therefore, Wojciech Piotrowicz (2014) in the Journal of Electronic Commerce puts forward that the introduction of mobile devices has impacted the way retail business occurs these days. In his article, the author states that *"The changes are driven by new technologies, such as smart mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) and related software (apps, mobile payments, e valets, e-coupons, digital flyers, location-based services)."* Dennis Herhausen (2015) further argues that *"The world of retailing has changed dramatically in the past decade. The advent of the online channel and new additional digital channels such as mobile channels and social media have changed retail business models, the execution of the retail mix, and shopper behaviour."*

As the market topology changes due to shifts in the consumer tastes and preferences, the methods of delivering goods and services are slowly transforming as well. Current marketers are facing the challenge of resource allocation since they state, *"marketers face the challenge of resource allocation across the range of touchpoints"* (Shane Baxendale, 2015). For businesses to fully adopt an Omni-channel system, they have to be informed with detailed information that regards supportive elements on Omni-channel marketing. Therefore, an in-depth investigation on the aspects which could affect an Omni-channel retail shopping experience could help marketers and retailers at gaining sufficient knowledge on how to attract and retain its consumer and coordinate efficiently on a global scale. However, so far only little research has been done on the study of factors which might affect the Omni-channel shopping experience. Thus, it can be noticed the importance on investigating these issues and specifically factors which might affect the Omni-channel experience and can contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty, since it can be argued that, by all means, the Omni-channel retailing is becoming the next organized global market trend.

This master thesis searches the nuanced Omni-channel retail business that is slowly taking over the business arena. The underlying comprehension of the novel system has its roots in the systematic (literature) review. This thesis will investigate factors that affect Omni-channel shopping experience using the systematic review methods. Also, the method leads to understanding the relationships between identified elements. After thoroughly investigating the articles which form the basis for further analyses and discussion on the topic of research, a

conceptual framework will be developed. The conceptual framework comprises and discusses the elements identified as factors which affect an Omni-channel shopping experience which could also contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty through the development of a Global Omni-channel brand value.

Finally, after answering the research problem, the author will shed light on the topic of research and present the thesis limitations and propose future research directions.

1.2 Research Motivation and Problem Formulation

The present process of digitalition is intensely changing the retail sector (Hagberg et al. 2014). As Reynolds and Sundström (2014) has argued in their paper "*Digitalisation, retail transformation and change: what will European consumers want from their future shopping centre experience?*" the retail digitalization represents a key concept towards embracing the complete integration of digital technologies into the consumer's experience. On-line commerce is advancing; mobile devices are playing a major role; still, physical retail stores persist as key spaces. The interactions between offline, online, and mobile touch-points are complex and difficult to manage. Concerning the expanding range of touchpoints, retailers are concerned about the free-riding and showrooming behaviours (van Baal and Dach, 2005; Herhausen et al., 2015). Though, this could also lead to opportunities. Retail digitalization directs towards new enhanced shopping experiences in the case where, retailers succeed at delivering a consistent shopping journey built on fully integrated channels through a so-called Omni-channel experience (Antéblian et al. 2013). The retail digitalization is becoming ever more significant as it affects consumers' engagement and maintain brand loyalty. In order to exploit this opportunity, the retailer's target is to deliver superior consumer experience within their brand ecosystem while supporting consumer loyalty and lock-in effects (Baxendale et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015).

In order to achieve such targets, there is a need for retailers to assess, measure and monitor the Omni-channel experience. Nevertheless, the Omni-channel experience is yet on its early developments and how to capture and optimise the value of an Omni-channel experience is still to be determined and confirmed (Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015).

The formulation of the objectives on this topic come from the motivation of the research on this master thesis. As such, it has been found that the current literature has not been yet covered the phenomenon of the factors influencing the value of an Omni-channel shopping experience

which could contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty. Therefore, the objectives of this master thesis are to explore the current literature on the subject of Omni-channel shopping experience and the factors which influences it. Hence, the problem formulation of this thesis is:

What factors influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty?

The following sub-question will guide the research process:

Is there an interrelation between factors which affect the Omni-channel shopping experience?

The research objectives of this master thesis are:

1. To formulate a holistic understanding on the phenomenon of Omni-channel retailing;
2. To investigate if the Omni-channel shopping experience is affected by certain factors that could lead to the creation of a consumer loyalty;
3. To analyse the resulting impact of these factors on consumer loyalty;
4. To construct a conceptual framework that could explain and answer the proposed research question;

In order to fulfil the aim of this thesis, a systematic (literature) review on the existent empirical and conceptual papers on the topic of Omni-channel retailing will be conducted.

CHAPTER 2. Inception of E-commerce from B2B and B2C

The beginning of E-commerce has brought about tremendous changes in the way firms conduct business. In the article by Loebbecke (2002) E-commerce was the opening of new platforms to do business. In the definition of E-commerce, he puts forward, *"E-commerce is business occurring over open, non-proprietary networks such as the Internet."* The internet has been the catalyst of doing business using the electronic devices available including computers, phones, tablets etc. The business transactions take place as either from business to business or business to consumer. The traditional definition of consumers has remained as the final user of a good or service.

In a different article by Vinod Kumar (2012), B2B is defined as *"those companies who want to market their goods or services exclusively to other businesses and not to consumers."* Such

a bias is explained by the fact that it is easier to conduct operations on an electronic media with other firms than carry out business transactions with individuals. The authors further define B2C as *"those companies that want to market their goods or services to consumers."* The enterprises that adopt the B2B and B2C models are in a position to attract potential consumers through their websites. Also, the authors applied the term E-commerce to signify a new way of catalogue development on the internet.

The development of E-commerce made way for multichannel retailing and now, the Omni-channel retailing. In the article by Blandine Antéblian (2013) the inception of the automated way of transacting brought about substantial changes in business as they state, *"The development of e-commerce also contributes to the evolution of the role of the outlet in the purchase process…"* The process of e-commerce has evolved into information age that makes available data regarding products at different levels.

2.1 Multichannel Retailing Development

The multichannel retailing could be considered to have developed as soon as the electronic technology was advanced which allowed the ability to shop online and reach consumers through multiple distribution and marketing channels. The idea of Omni-channel marketing took the multichannel approach even further by realizing that all of the channels in the marketing stream had an effect on consumers' perception of a brand. In the multichannel approach, online and offline strategies are not considered as a unit. Instead, Omni-channel approach focuses on how each channel affects the whole. Research on multichannel retailing is more abundant than that on Omni-channel retailing, as it is older. Therefore, it is important to examine this research, as it lays at the foundation of the Omni-channel retailing.

In the article by Zhang *et.al.,* (2010) multichannel retailing is seen as the overall activities within a supply chain that a consumer can utilize since they have stated that, *"Multichannel retailing is the set of activities involved in selling merchandise or services to consumers through more than one channel. Multichannel retailers dominate today's retail landscape."* Therefore, today's business scene provides the user with a range of platforms on which to buy products and services. The rationale behind multichannel retailing is supported by the ever changing levels of business and consumer interactions.

The multichannel retailing has been made possible by use of technology along with retail channels. The system is more complex among the retailers because they have to deal with a

large number of inventories from different manufacturers, keep modifying the retail mix for profit maximization and make decisions regarding the various end users. However, the use of phones and tablets has managed to bring all the available channels on one platform, thus escalating the shopping experience. (Zhang et.al., 2010)

The preference of the consumer is the priority for a retailer. The consumers prefer to be served by the retailer who makes it easier for them to locate them and find out what they are searching for. In the article by Blandine Antéblian (2013) the management of the consumer behaviour relies primarily on the ability of a firm to look into the propensity of consumption as the authors state, *"Understanding experience and the role of the consumer in its management remains a priority in the consumer behaviour…"* Consumer preferences have shaped multichannel retail such that the business owners ensure that their needs are adequately met.

Multichannel retail is a diverse platform for retailers, however, years of research has shown that it is limited in more ways than the traditional mortar and brick business. The idea was to make the consumers' work easier in the process of looking for a product to purchase. The aim has been unfruitful since the consumers have been forced to rebuild the market study regarding the commodity they want whenever they move from one channel to another (Estela Fernández Sabiote, 2014).

2.3 Omni-channel Retailing Development

Omni-channel retailing has developed as an extension of the multi-channel retailing and represents a concept of complete channel integration. Defined by Rigby (2011) Omni-channel retailing is an "*integrated sales experience that melds the advantages of the physical stores with the information-rich experience of online shopping"* whereas Verhoef *et al.,* (2015) will argue that Omni-channel retailing consists of "*synergistic management of the numerous available channels and consumer touch points, in such a way that the consumer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimised".* As previously discussed in the literature, the goal of employing an Omni-channel retailing strategy is to combine the benefits of both digital and non-digital retailing in order to give consumers a seamless retail experience. There are numerous advantages related to online sales, such as price transparency, availability of reviews and limitless variety and selection of products while there are also benefits related to offline retailing, including for example, face-to-face interaction, instant gratification and hands-on product experience, among others (Grewal et al., 2004; Agatz et al., 2008; Rigby, 2011). Therefore, an online channel can in many ways complement an offline

channel and the other way around, which has resulted in several authors arguing that the increased integration of retail channels generates different types of synergies (Agatz *et, al.*, 2008; Herhausen *et al.*, 2015;) Hence, a successfully executed Omni-channel strategy with total integration is likely to greatly affect and enhance a consumer shopping experience, since this is something that consumer emphasise and place great value on (Herhausen *et al.*, 2015).

As earlier mentioned, the Omni-channel retailing has emerged as a result of the multi-channel retailing development. Consequently, several factors have been identified as influencing this development, but some of these have been identified to hold the most significant impact. Therefore, these factors will be explained in the following section.

2.3.1 Technological development

Omni-channel retailing is closely linked and driven by technology as the development of advanced technology has allowed for better integration of the retail channels. As a result of a change in the use of technology together with increased availability of e-commerce, have influenced consumers change within their shopping patterns (Kumar *et al.*, 2012). The development of smartphones and tablets are fundamental to the new shopping method, therefore when designing new strategies, retailers have had to take these technologies into consideration (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013; Frazer & Stiehler, 2014).

2.3.2 Changes within consumer shopping patterns

Nowadays, consumers have the ability to constantly have access and be connected to the global marketplace, which permits easy comparison of different products and prices. Therefore, consumers are becoming ever more demanding, while expecting at having a wide range of product selection available at all times (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). As a result, this has affected the way they use to search for necessary information and in doing so, having a great impact on the purchasing process. As Oh, *et al.*, (2012) have argued *"consumers are combining various channels and approaches, searching online to buy offline, searching offline to buy online— and everything in between"* and by this, they are looking to constantly get both customization and convenience within their shopping experience.

The use of multiple shopping channels through a single purchasing process is an example of such a shopping experience, which is today becoming more and more common (Kalyanam & Tsay, 2013).

A concept that has evolved within this is the one of "webrooming" (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). This concept refers to consumers that first search for the products online before visiting the store for purchasing it. Researchers explain that in many cases a physical store is able to increase its store traffic by making available the information about store location and in-store inventory on their website. This type of information provided to the consumers can, in some cases, be proven to be a successful strategy for increasing the store traffic (Bell *et al.*, 2014). The enhanced accuracy of the online information allows the consumer to carefully research the product from home and then visit the physical store to assess the non-digital components of the product and, if satisfied, purchase the product in-store (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013).

2.3.3 Consumer centricity

As argued by Galbraith, (2005) *"Today, nobody owns the consumer. The consumer owns you"* this statement proves the reality of the majority of retails nowadays. Since consumers are becoming increasingly influential on companies' activities, these are continuously becoming more and more consumer-centric (Agatz *et al.*, 2008). As previously mentioned, retailers choose to implement an Omni-channel strategy in order to provide a seamless integrated shopping experience to the consumer therefore, consumer centricity is a strong driver of the Omni-channel efforts. Consumer centricity is about creating and delivering value to a consumer rather than how to sell the products which is the case in a product-centric organization where all organizational activities are planned around the product of the company (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin & Day, 2006). The firm must, therefore *"literally organize around the consumer"* and, in order to build up a relationship with its consumer, have the capability to conduct business according to the preferences and demands of the consumers. This requires a close communication and interaction with the consumers across all contact points in order to use the results of this integrative activities in reaching reliability in the consumers' eyes (Galbraith, 2005). As later Shah *et al.*, (2006) has stressed this further and argued that *"the ultimate consumer-centric company integrates and aligns all its functional activities to deliver the best value to the consumer".*

In today's challenging economy and fast shift in consumers' trends and demands, companies face difficult times to survive, hence these have to move towards the direction of consumer centricity, since it represents the key at achieving sustainability and long-term growth, profitability and consumer loyalty Gummesson, *et al.*, (2008). Additionally, companies should

be willing to invest in business models that are value-adding for consumers, since generally, these are challenging for competitors to imitate (Teece, 2010).

2.4 Differences between Multichannel and Omni-channel Retailing

The focus of this thesis is on Omni-channel retailing and this term has often been confused with the multichannel retailing. However, one of the differences between these two terms occurs in the consumer engagement strategy. Both multichannel and Omni-channels consumer approach are dependent on reaching consumers through a number of devices. The Omni-channel approach differentiates itself from being more focused on delivering a seamless consumer message and experience across various channels. Contrary to this, multi-channel approach is not as focused on making certain that the consumer receives a consistent message across the different channels.

In the article by Verhoef *et al.,* (2015) the usage of the Omni-channel retail emerged from the fact that multichannel retail illuminated weaknesses in the manner of doing business. The authors argue, *"…new channels will break down old barriers such as geography and consumer ignorance. Hence, it will become critical for retailers and their supply-chain partners in other industries to rethink their competitive strategies."* The retailers had to investigate a method that could ease the burden of cross-channelling. Consumers have been experiencing difficulties in the research of the commodities that they want to purchase due to the multiplicity of the channel which brought complexity.

The authors continue to argue that the Omni-channel retail system can break down the barriers of geography and limited knowledge amongst the consumers. Therefore, the difference between the Omni-channel and the multichannel retail is based on the strategic effort of the Omni-channel retail system as opposed to the tactical methods of the multichannel retail system. The strategic approach trickles from the ability to provide seamless shopping experience. (Verhoef *et al.,* 2015) The table below summarises the differences between multichannel and Omni-channel retailing:

Multichannel retailing	Omni-channel retailing
Reaches consumers through multiple touch-points without creating consistency;	Reaches consumers through multiple touch-points by creating consistency;
Requires multiple touch points that are, however, not interconnected;	Sends the same message across all the touch points at the same time creating a seamless experience;
Capitalizes the strength of each type of channel, thus creating channel centrality;	Capitalizes on consumers through their centrality, thus increasing consumer experience;

Table 1 *Differences between multichannel and Omni-channel retailing (Source: Own illustration)*

The next chapter will present the research methodology part employed in this master thesis. Moreover, the reasons for adopting a systematic literature review and the systematic review executed in this thesis will be also discussed.

CHAPTER 3. Research Methodology

As argued by Arbnor & Bjerke (2009), methodological views represent the means by which a researcher perceives reality. Therefore, the literature on methodology suggests that before proceeding to data collection methods and further analyses, it is important to explain the way, in which we, as knowledge creators, perceive reality. This would, later on, represent the last presumptions.

According to Arbnor & Bjerke (2009) and Kuada (2012) the association between last presumptions and the methodological views constitute the *paradigms*.

The concept of paradigm has been attributed to Kuhn (1970) who has argued that each research area can be attributed to a general set of understanding as of what kind of phenomenon is being studied, what sort of questions are practical to ask how researchers should build their own approach in order to answered their proposed research question and how should the final results be interpreted (Kuada, 2012).

Classifications of Paradigms in Social Science

As suggested by Kuada (2012), *the subjective-objective* discussion within social science has resulted in a number of typologies of paradigms. The author further argues that two distinct reasons have influence this selection, such as the commonality of using the three classifications

within the social science methodology textbooks in Scandinavian colleges and universities and these classifications having robust origins in classical sociological studies. (Kuada, 2012). These classifications are:

- The FISI classification (comprising functionalism, interpretivism, structuralism, and interactionism);
- The RRIF classification (comprising radical humanism, radical structuralism, interpretivism, and functionalism);
- Arbnor and Bjerke classification of six paradigms and three research approaches;

For the purpose of this thesis methodological approach, the selection of Arbnor and Bjerke classification of paradigms and three research approaches will be further considered. These will be presented in the following section.

As previously mentioned, Arbnor & Bjerke (2009), identify six paradigms:

1. Reality as a concrete phenomenon that is conformable to law and independent of the observer;

2. Reality as a concrete determining process;

3. Reality as mutually dependent fields of information;

4. Reality as a world of symbolic discourse;

5. Reality as a social construction;

6. Reality as a manifestation of human intentionality.

From a practical view point, these are the basic philosophical assumptions important for this research.

The author of this thesis' own approach of reality understanding is attributed to both subjective and objective perspectives; thus the author cannot understand nor explain the full picture without seeing both perspectives as complementary. Taking this into account, the author does not consider these as mutually exclusive and leans towards adopting a pragmatic approach to her research by implementing a methodological approach that is best suitable for this thesis.

The way in which the author of this thesis has identified the research problem is not influenced only by her paradigmatic choices but also by various methods and techniques used for solving them.

As mentioned by Arbnor & Bjerke (2009) the use of a paradigm concept consists of a *concept of reality* (vision of the world), *a conception of science*, *a scientific ideal* and *ethical/aesthetical aspects.*

The conception of reality refers to the philosophical ideas of the researcher about the construct of reality.

The conception of science refers to knowledge, concepts and beliefs attained through education about objects and subjects under investigation.

Scientific ideal relates to the researcher as a person and how he/she wants to be perceived through the given area of study i.e., as an exponent of science as something objective or a believer of subjectivity and interaction between actors.

Ethical and aesthetical aspects refer to what, in the researcher view of morality, is claimed at being suitable or unsuitable. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, pp. 15-16)

Based on their six formulated paradigms mentioned above, authors provide three methodological approaches to knowledge creation. These are represented by:

- *The Analytical view*
- *The Systems view*
- *The Actor's view*

The chosen view to be adopted cannot be eventually claimed as being right or wrong, since there is no empirical or logical way in determining the best view. Moreover, they have argued that within a paradigm, there could be more than one methodological view.

The paragraph below analyses the three methodological approaches in order to identify which one suits the enquiry of this thesis the best, by also taking in consideration the paradigmatic choice and the proposed research scope of this thesis.

The Analytical view

Within Analytical view it is argued that the reality is objective and independent from the observer. Its main objective is to explain reality which contains both subjective and objective facts that give a summative character. In order to provide researcher with an integrated picture, this reality should be decomposed and its parts solely analysed.

Taking the epistemological perspective, the knowledge created over an analytical approach is based on facts and is independent from subjective experience of individuals. This represents the ultimate presumption underlying analytical view.

The analytical view's prerequisite is the "exiting theory and a number of techniques given in advance that make rendering the verification of falsification of hypothesis possible" (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009, pp. 57). The researcher can additionally build on existing theory for the problem investigated. Therefore, everything starts and ends with facts, in this way illustrating the cyclical nature that the analytical view has.

As argued by the authors, the analytical view task is to discover the environmental elements that are insensible to its change. Therefore, logic and mathematics from an analytical view perspective are indisputable, universal and valid. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, pp. 82) Hence, the models formed within an analytical view approach would usually be quantitative based and reflect the phenomenon under investigation.

The eventual presumptions of the analytical view will be further presented.

The concept of **reality** through the lens of the analytical approach is that its objective and independent from us as researchers.

Correspondingly, the theories used within this view, must be based on facts and specific terms that should be synthetically and semantically precise and all the terms should be logically and mathematically based (Arbnor & Bbjerke, 2009).

Within the **conception of science** in the analytical view it would refer to a number of concepts that, to some extent it might formulate unclear points and, to some degree, confusion, resulting in many diverging opinions of the meaning of its central concepts. Arbnor &Bjerke, 2009, pp. 36)

From the **scientific ideal** perspective within the analytical view it would refer at researchers being able at identifying a common in regards to what the subject in research should stand for, what the most important question are and how should these questions be answered scientifically.

Since the researchers are the knowledge creators, the **ethical and aesthetical** aspects of the analytical view would refer to researchers as being able to give advice to different decision

makers at the same time emphasising on “beautiful graphs and nicely presented statistical arrangements.” (Arbnor &Bjerke, 2009, pp. 37)

The Systems view

The System View theory is built on the idea that phenomena are understood systems, involving interrelated parts which are in a continuous interaction and form a synergistic result. The components of the system within the systems view cannot be examined separately but placed in context. All systems have mutual patterns, behaviour and proprieties that can be described and/or understood, hence the purpose of this approach is descriptive and has an investigative or understanding purpose. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009)

As previously mentioned by Kuada, (2012, pp. 86) the central focus in the systems view approach is placed on the objective or “objectively accessible” reality.

The main difference between the analytical approach and systems approach is that the analytical view considers phenomena as stable constructions thus making them highly expectable, while the systems view emphasises on the dynamic process within the environment or the system.

In the systems view, the **reality** is understood as systems composed by both subjective and objective facts.

The **conception of science** in the systems view “implies studying the entrepreneurship reality as different wholes and patterns, where the entrepreneur is not looked as an isolated individual.” (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, pp. 39)

The scientific ideal is to determine the different wholes and patterns to be able at building an improved picture of the system. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, pp. 39)

The ethical and aesthetical aspects refer to the use of knowledge and results which is overlooked in the systems view. From an aesthetical perspective it is of importance that the content, figures, graphs and the language are not overlooked. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, pp. 39)

The Actors view

By applying the actors approach to the knowledge generation, researchers have to consider two important concepts which are involved, such as improvisation and creativity. The primarily focus is on actors, that represent the individuals. These actors are independent from the external factors and don’t answer to external incentives of the environment they are in. Therefore, the

disordered context they are positioned in comprises other individuals "with their own finite provinces of meaning". (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 138)

Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, pp. 144) have argued that in the actors view the attention is rather drawn towards actions than behaviours as "action gives a person the role of an active creator of understanding, whereas behaviour gives a person a passive role as a receiver of stimuli and a generator of responses". As mentioned by Kuada (2012, pp.88) the actors approach emphasises on three concepts such as subjectivity, individual and, interaction.

In the actors' approach, one important tool is the dialog between the observer and the individuals being observed or examined. Thus, for a researcher, the dialog would represent a methodological tool which would enable the observer to become a participant.

Within a methodological perspective, researchers adopting the actors approach find their research purpose in illustrating the "inner quality" and after reconstruct it within themselves in order to be able to better understand certain phenomena.

The ultimate presumption in the actors' approach assumes that **reality** is a social construction where the central role is attributed to the individuals and the knowledge creators represent an essential part of it.

The **conception of science** in the actors' view is to some extent ambiguous, since researchers do not take theories for granted and "must become objects of reflection"

The scientific ideal within actors' view are deeply rooted in the ultimate presumptions concerning the conception of reality and refer to "active interaction" that would result in a permanent creation of knowledge that ultimately drives change.

Concerning the **ethical and aesthetical aspects** researchers tend to be creative and provide interpretations "which are close to being artistic". (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009, pp.41)

3.1 Own Methodological View

After evaluating the three methodological views, the following step would be at deciding which one of them matches the author's scope and can help at best answering the proposed research question.

The author of this thesis has rejected from the start the Analytical view, because adopting this approach would mean that the reality is objective, based on facts and independent from the observer. Since the author of this thesis did not apply any statistical models, mathematical

calculations or formulated hypothesis with already tested techniques, this methodological view does not match the objectives proposed for this thesis.

The author has also excluded the *Actors view* since the focus of this research was not on individuals which should represent the central focus of the research. Rather, the emphasise of this thesis research was placed on phenomenon of Omni-channel retailing and factors which affect this.

The purpose of this thesis is to find the answer to the proposed research question as of *What factors influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and could contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty?* supported by the sub-question *Is there an interrelation between factors which affect the Omni-channel shopping experience?* As far as the methodological view is concerned, the decisive presumption about the authors' own reality stems for both objective and subjective realities. The reality is understood as a system, representing a dynamic process that can change. Therefore, the author has adopted a *Systematic View* methodology which implies "objectively accessible" reality, meaning that for the proposed objectives, the author has done a thorough examination on previous studies written on the subject of Omni-channel retailing by using a systematic (literature) review (see *Research Methodology* chapter) because of the transparency the data achieves and to formulate a more complete picture of the phenomena. Moreover, the findings on the previous studies are argued to be objective since these have been carefully investigated in the methodology each of these employed (see *Methodology* chapter). The systematic review of each of the articles has created ground for the author by formulating an exhaustive analyses and discussion on the factors which have been detected as having an influence on the Omni-channel shopping experience (see *Analyses* and *Discussion* chapter). Within the *Discussion* chapter, the author has elaborated four propositions based on the findings from the systematic review. As such, it can be argued that the method employed has a deductive reasoning, since "*the creator of knowledge goes from theory to facts"* (Arbnor and Bjerke 2009 pp. 90-91). Therefore, the deductive approach on the method of reasoning goes from a generalised to a more specific subject, and will help the author to create knowledge "*whereby, the creator of knowledge infers single cases from general laws"* (Arbnor and Bjerke 2009 pp. 90-91). The author has also proposed as an objective to formulate a conceptual framework that could illustrate and answer more structurally the research question. It can be argued that this part of the project is based on the author's own understanding and interpretation of reality, therefore it has a subjective approach to the knowledge creation. At the same time, it can be argued that by combining both objective (systematic review) approach

and subjective (own understanding) approach would give an even richer understanding of the phenomenon. The formulation of such an objective comes from the author's purpose at formulating plausible conclusion to the findings, and implicitly, suggestions for future research (see *Conclusion* and *Limitation and Future research directions* chapter).

In the next sub-chapters, the methods and techniques, reasons for adopting a systematic review process and own systematic review approach will be further discussed.

3.2 Methods and Techniques

Since the aim of the project is to find *generalizable explanations* to the subject of Omni-channel shopping experience, a valuable source of information would be the previous results from the research made on this issue. To be able to create a complete and clear picture of the phenomenon being investigated, there is the need for searching on previous finding on the topic.

After positioning ourselves at the intersection between two research areas of international marketing and Omni-channel retail, the review of these areas was directed towards linking the value of a shopping experience and consumer loyalty towards Omni-channel retail.

Even though the concept of multichannel retail and cross-channel retail has received scholarly attention in multiple studies, there has been little to no effort in systematically decoding major findings underlying this concept into a comprehensive review of current knowledge (Pittaway *et al.,* 2004; Chandra *et al.,* 2009; Ardichvili *et al.,* 2003).

In order to analyse all the factors and aspects underlying Omni-channel shopping experience, there is a need to gather all the relevant evidence since the phenomenon of investigation is complex in nature and is affected by a multitude of factors which also influence this process.

The first step in proceeding on the examination of the topic was to conduct a pilot search by using Scopus database which represents one of the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature i.e., scientific journals, books and conference proceedings (Burnham, 2006). The reasons behind executing a pilot search were to reveal the development stages on the research of this master thesis topic as well as measure the informational volume and data available on this topic. The preliminary keyword searched in the Scopus database were with the following search strings: "Omni-channel consumer behaviour" and "Omni-channel shopping experience" with the scope "Article Title, Abstract, Keywords" and data range "all

years to present" yielded only 6 hits. The shortage of the research papers leads to the conclusion that the research at this intersection is only at its early stage. Therefore, a need of approaching other research streams that focuses on the concept of Omni-channel shopping experience is extremely important in order to inform the international business scholars and direct future research efforts. (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006)

Due to the scarcity found within the literature positioned at the intersection of the aforementioned fields of studies, the review herein emphasises on the evidences found concerning the concept of Omni-channel shopping experience. Due to limited resources and the scope of this research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), this review will be restricted only to empirical and conceptual papers including case studies, while other sources such as conference papers and/or book chapters were excluded.

The selected papers are English-written publications, since these are easier to be accessed as well as these papers are cross-sectional in nature.

The scarcity on the evidence of the Omni-channel shopping experience led us to the conclusion that there should be conducted a systematic review on the available studies to further direct the research efforts.

3.3 Reasons for Adopting a Systematic Review Process

The systematic review methodology is the most suitable tactic when seeking at best answering the research question proposed for guiding this master thesis. Regarding the research question, it requires a deep understanding of the phenomenon in focus-which represents Omni-channel retailing. Although the research topic is new, there is relatively an adequate amount of available studies, which is increasing in the amount of the research information and varies in terms of quality and relevance. In this way, it could make it difficult to integrate the available evidence of information into practice. Therefore, the systematic review approach provides a key source of evidence-based information and it helps to better analyse, support and develop practical knowledge as well as provide professional development- for example, by contributing in identifying gaps in knowledge in the existing literature and new and emerging developments Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, a systematic review methodology has been employed. (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Systematic (literature) reviews are very supportive when it is necessary to direct future research efforts on an overall picture of the evidence. Therefore, in order to find an answer to a given question or a set of questions, systematic reviews strive to identify, review and synthesise all

the relevant studies and literature on the given topic of research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). In other words, systematic reviews can identify gaps and direct future research efforts. According to Petticrew & Roberts, (2006) a systematic review is necessary "*when there is uncertainty about what the evidence on a particular topic shows*" and an explanation of a certain concept is required by synthesizing the relevant evidence in order to "*suggest directions for future research*" and "i*dentify trends*" in the fields of international marketing and international business.

Generally speaking, an important step in designing and implementing new evaluations or new interventions is by implementing a systematic review. By doing so, it helps in distinguishing where the need of improvements in evaluation methods are required and direct to where changes in the intervention may be needed to improve effectiveness.

In order to explore the Omni-channel shopping experience phenomenon and attempt to accomplish a knowledge gap in the studies on this topic domain, there are certain procedures that apply principles of a systematic review methodology. It is considered that this type of methodology is more valuable rather than the literature review, since it represents only the basic tool in managing different knowledge and information on a certain topic (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

Instead, the systematic literature review develops a comprehensive method of the research process which tries to reduce the bias which often represents a drawback in the traditional literature review. "*A systematic review maintains a precise audit of the procedures, decisions and conclusions made in papers under scrutiny*" (Cook, Greengold, Ellrodt, & Weingarten, 1997).

The systematic reviews provide researches and practitioners with reliable basis in formulating strategies and formulating future tactics which increases the legitimacy and authority of the resulting evidences (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

3.4 Own Systematic Review Approach

The systematic review approach adopted in the writing of this master thesis followed the steps provided by Petticrew & Roberts (2006) and Turcan, Marinova & Rana (2012) in their journal article. The writers suggest that there are three steps which should be followed in the process of a systematic review approach, this process being fully transparent which should allow the undertaken steps to be traceable and replicable.

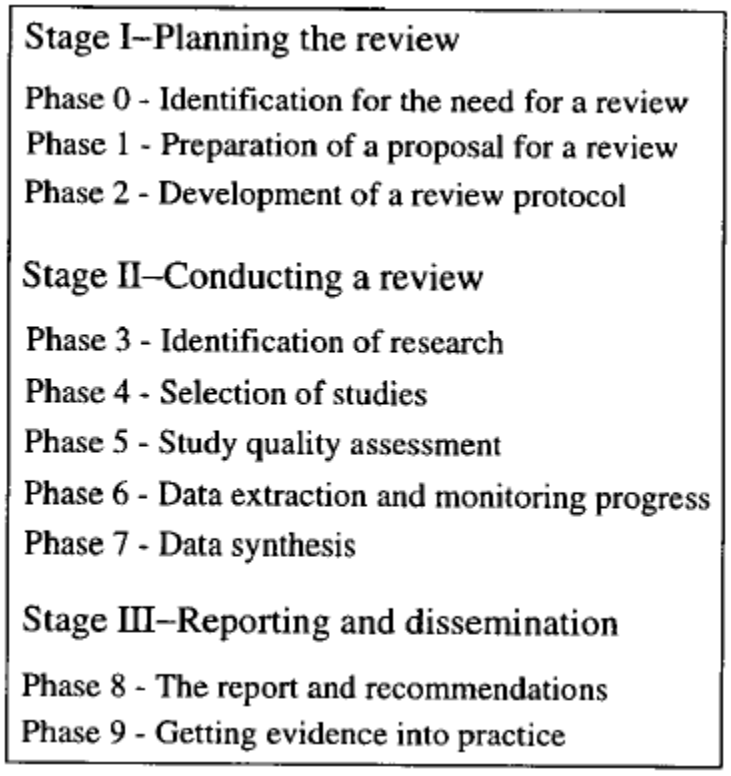

Figure 1: *Stages of systematic review (Source: Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003)*

In the first stage of *planning the review* which is a constant process of *definition, clarification and refinement* (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) the keywords within the review protocol are identified (Turcan, Marinova, & Rana, 2012). The research strings which are subsequently used in the Scopus database are based on the following keywords: (i) experience, knowledge, loyalty, capture, optimise as applied to shopping; and (ii) brick-and-mortar, multichannel, cross-channel, Omni channel, retailing. An example of the search string would be: (multichannel) AND (Omni-channel) AND (article titles, abstract, keywords) AND (all document type) AND (data range-all years) and (subject Areas-Social Sciences & Humanities).

The techniques adopted to search for relevant papers combined Scopus database and manual search. The manual search involved scanning through bibliographical sources, references, and citations of major relevant journals and articles containing "Omni-channel retail/consumers' shopping experience/consumer loyalty/ optimise/ capture" within their titles, abstract or keywords specified in each of these. This method helped to increase the initial number of articles that were generated through pilot search (Zou & Stan, 1998).

After the review protocol in which it was specified the search criteria, the next step involves conducting the review. As Tranfield *et al.*, (2003) suggest, at this stage the relevant articles are selected followed by data extraction and data synthesis.

The search strings generated a result of 75 articles, of which 32 were selected based on the title, abstract and content. These articles were retrieved for a detailed evaluation (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Also, these were manually scanned to identify the ones that contain relevant evidence and if these were relatively associated with the concept of Omni-channel shopping experience.

The result based on the specified criteria provided a total number of 18 relevant papers multichannel and Omni-channel consumer behaviour and shopping experience. A summary of the reviewed articles sorted by year, authors, themes/concept, research question, findings and context are presented in the Table 2: *Summary of articles reviewed*.

The next step, after conducting the review, extracting the data and summarising the finding of the research, is to support the results and findings followed by the analyses and discussion of the findings, conclusion and formulation of recommendation for future research.

One of the purposes of this review was to get insights into the theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and methods, findings, analyses, and contributions within the subject in research. Therefore, this thesis has been combining interpretative and deductive methods in order to analyse the data collected by using the authors' expertise and knowledge, executing an analyses and discussion, build a conclusion and discuss the scope this research has for international marketing.

As such, through the means of a systematic review, the author proposed at gathering the existent evidence on the topic of research in order to determine the importance of specific factors and their influence on consumer shopping experience within an Omni-channel environment. Also, if these factors could contribute at the enhancement of a consumer loyalty. Therefore, given the complexity of the phenomenon, a systematic review approach on the last evidence would benefit at identifying the current status of the research in the proposed area of examination and find future research directions.

No.	Year	Author(s)	Themes/concepts	Research purpose	Findings	Context
1	2009	Know & Jain	Hedonic motivations, multichannel shopping, retail formats, utilitarian motivations, variety-seeking behaviour	A study on the effect of shoppers' hedonic and utilitarian motives on multichannel retails.	Both hedonic and utilitarian factors play a significant role in the multichannel retail.	Retail industry
2	2010	Keller	Branding, multichannel, multimedia, retailing, brand equity	Exploring brand management challenges in a multichannel, multimedia retail marketing environment.	Within a multichannel retail, marketers should create and implement an integrated channel and communicate strategies that maximize short-run sales and long-run brand equity	Retail industry
3	2010	Ofek, Katona & Sarvary	Channels of distribution, retailing, internet marketing, product returns, reverse logistics, competition	A study of the impact of product returns on the strategies of the multi-channel retailers.	Having an online channel can increase the investment in store assistance level when differentiation among competing retailers is not high.	Retail industry
4	2010	Zhang, et al.	Retail strategy, cross-channel synergy, retail mix decision, channel format; consumer behaviour, internet retailing	A study on the multichannel retailing strategies and the key issues concerning multichannel retailing.	A synthesis on the current knowledge from the academic literature.	Retail industry
5	2013	Bell, Gallino & Moreno	Product information effect, consumer	An investigation of the effect of additional product information on the	The effect of showrooms and	Online and offline retails, USA

			satisfaction, Omni-channel retail	offline market and its effect on consumer behaviour in Omni-channel retail settings.	informational role of channels leads in achieving an efficient match between consumers and consumers touch points.	
6	2013	Anteblian & Filser	Buying behaviour, consumption experience, e-shopping experience, retailing, shopping experience	Explores the development of a model used for capturing consumers' virtual and physical shopping experience.	Further work by using these methods could help enrich the understanding of the consumers' symbolic interactions with the retailers' offerings in regards to the day-to-day shopping.	Retail industry
7	2014	Belu & Marinoiu	New distribution strategies, consumer behaviour	A research on different forms of distribution channels focusing on the Omni-channel strategy in the Romanian retail markets.	Future focus on multiple distribution models which leads towards a transition to a relationship management model.	Retail, Romania
8	2014	Yrjölä	Business model, value creation, retail, multichannel retailing	An empirical investigation on value creation challenges in a multichannel retail business model.	The adoption of a multichannel retail business model calls for critical rethinking of the basic building blocks of value creation.	Finland
9	2014	Tetteh & Xu	Distribution channels, Omni-channel, single-channel, dual or multi-channel	A paper review on the supply chain distribution network channels; it's challenges, product growth and profitability.	Supply chain distribution network channel expansion increases product growth and	Supply chain, retail

					profitability but requires immense effort to maintain its smooth running.	
10	2014	Cao	Cross-channel strategy, retail business model, Chinese retail	An examination on different aspects of the business model changes after the launch of its cross-channel strategy.	Retailer shifting toward the cross-channel strategy will follow the stage-of-adoption model which may be in five stages; and physical store as a hub linking different channels becomes the source of value creation	Retail, China
11	2014	Carvalho & Campomar	Multichannel, logistics, marketing, retail, Omni-channel	A study on the challenges that the multiplication of distribution channels-multichannel- imposes on marketing and logistics.	It shows the integration between marketing activities and logistics as a tool for reaching the entrepreneurial goals.	Retail industry
12	2015	Verhoef, Kannanb & Inman	Omni-channel, retail mix, retail performance.	A paper which discusses special issues on multichannel retailing and the new Omni-channel movement.	Finding reveal that the movement towards an Omni-channel retail will affect the retailers' operations.	Retail industry
13	2015	Sabiote & Roman	Employees' consumer facilitation behaviours, E-psychological	Understanding the connection between multichannel strategy and the development and establishment of consumers' relationships.	Consumers' use of multichannel services influence satisfaction and trust in the service provider	Service retailing

			benefits, satisfaction, trust, multichannel			
14	2015	Lazaris, et al.	Store atmosphere, Omni-channel retailing, consumer behaviour, retail technologies.	An investigation on the importance of consumers attach to a series of online practices in a store and consumers' preferences towards the use of both online and offline store atmosphere and Omni-channel criteria that affect their purchasing intentions.	Both in-store Internet users and non-users attach more or less the same importance to some specific online practices offered within the physical store.	Retail industry, Greece
15	2015	Herhausen, Binder & Schoegel	Multi-channel management, Omni-channel retailing, channel integration, channel synergies, channel cannibalization, willingness to pay	A research on the impact of offline-online channel integration and consumers' reaction towards retailers and across different channels.	The result provides sufficient evidence at proving Omni-channel integration lead to building a competitive advantage and channel synergies rather than channel cannibalization.	Retail industry
16	2015	Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson	Retailing, advertising, integrated marketing communications, in-store communications, Word-of-mouth (WOM)	Presents an approach towards understanding the impact of multiple touchpoints.	Evidence the impact on retailers, social effects and third party endorsement in addition to brand advertising.	Retail industry
17	2015	Picot-Coupey, Huré & Piveteau	Retail strategy, multi-channel, channel management, Omni-channel,	A research on the type of challenges faced when synchronizing clicks with bricks into an Omni-channel perspective.	There are multiple challenges faced by shifting from multi- to Omni-channels and it cannot occur	Retail Industry

			channel design, e-tailer		without any transition.	
18	2016	Hübner, Kuhn & Wollenburg	Omni-channel retailing, grocery logistics, order fulfilment, last mile operations, distribution strategies	Discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different design concepts and develops a planning framework for "last mile" order fulfilment.	Omni-channel logistic planning can be structured into few areas. Furthermore, the "last mile" fulfilment options identified can be applied for further optimise of Omni-channel integration.	Retail industry

Table 2 *Summary of the articles reviewed (Source: Own illustration)*

CHAPTER 4. Theories and Theoretical Frameworks

In the present academic world, there are numerous valuable theories and theoretical frameworks that discuss a consumer shopping experience and buying behaviour. Therefore, this chapter will present the theories which have been argued to be the most reliable for the discussion of this thesis based on the understanding and discussion of the articles. However, other sources are also mentioned for the purpose of generating a holistic understanding of the theories which examine the subject of consumer shopping experience. These theories and theoretical frameworks will be subsequently presented and discussed.

4.1 Variety-seeking Behaviour Theory

Previous literature has conceptualized consumer multichannel shopping behaviour as a type of variety-seeking behaviour where variety-seeking behaviour has been defined as the act of choosing alternative behaviour to experience products and/or brand diversity (Kwon and Jain, 2009). Scholars have argued that consumers engage in variety-seeking in order to satisfy a desired stimulation level, specifically when shoppers' psychological arousal level is lower than their desired level. Therefore, brand-switching behaviour is a way to increase arousal level and consequently it can be argued that store-switching is one type of variety seeking behaviour.

Consumer literature has identified motivation as crucial in the analyses of variety-seeking behaviour. The motivation for variety-seeking behaviour could be the result of hedonic motivations or utilitarian motivations in dependence of the value derived which could be intrinsic (hedonic) or extrinsic (utilitarian) (Staw, 1976). Furthermore, scholars have argued that hedonic or intrinsically motivated behaviours appear as a result of variety-seeking behaviours themselves as being enjoyable i.e., a shopper gains pleasure from the act itself, and intrinsically motivated behaviours may be self-sustained, without any external inducement. Contrary to this, extrinsically motivated behaviours offer satisfaction which is rather derived from the achievement of a goal that is external to the behaviour itself. An example of intrinsic motivated behaviour would be purchasing a new brand out of boredom, whereas extrinsic motivated behaviour could be brand switching to take advantage on promotion offers. The social motivations have been also argued to form part of the motivation for variety-seeking behaviour which are related to the consumers' construction of the personal values

Furthermore, the section below gives a more detailed explanation of the hedonic, utilitarian and social motivations and its implication in the consumer behaviour.

4.1.1 Hedonic, Utilitarian and Social motivations

Consumer value represents a key concept in retail strategy and differentiation since it addresses "*what consumers want and believe they get from buying and using a seller' product"* (Woodruff, 1997) Therefore, generating and delivering consumer value is a prerequisite for retailers to survive in today's competitive marketplace. Nowadays, shoppers are looking for more than fair prices and convenience within their shopping journey, therefore retailers who understand the variety of motives for shopping have the greatest possibilities to create value for their consumers. As such, previous literature has investigated the importance of hedonic, utilitarian and social shopping values (Rintamaki *et al.*, 2006). Previous studies have identified utilitarian shoppers as being those who are shopping to meet their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and other items that are considered necessities in modern society. Contrary to this, hedonic shoppers are those that are driven by entertainment and have the need to fulfil an emotional need. Hedonic shoppers are driven by a different set of human motivations than the utilitarian shoppers and have different behaviours when it comes to when, where, and how they shop. Consumers are shopping to fulfil a set of psychological needs and for them, the shopping experience makes them feel good.

Marketing theorists have tried to understand the motivations of shoppers in both the utilitarian and hedonic associations with a certain product. When shoppers are shopping for utilitarian products, they are in a "work" mind-set. When they are shopping for hedonic products, they are in a "play" mind set (Babin, Darden, and Griffin, 1994). A scale has been developed to help capture the mind-set of consumers in terms of how they perceive the shopping experience in terms of hedonism and utilitarianism. The authors found that when they are in a utilitarian mind set, they tend to be more value-minded than when they are on the hedonic mind set (Babin, Darden, and Griffin, 1994). Kwon and Jain (2009) found that both hedonic and utilitarian aspects played role in the multichannel retail experience. It is possible for hedonic factors to play a role in what would typically be a utilitarian purchase. As such, retailers often leverage the hedonic aspects of a product on utilitarian products. For instance, they emphasize the way a hand soap will make you feel, rather than the fact that it will clean things.

Within social motivations, shopping would represent a social act where symbolic meaning, social codes, relationships and the consumer's identity may be generated (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993). In other words, as consumers are able to express their personal values through the consumption experience, for them, the act of shopping can provide a symbolic benefit. The

literature discusses that status enrichment represents a part of the social motivations which represents a benefit achieved by using symbolic features in communicating signs of position to others. Previous scholars have argued that status seeking has its origins in materialism and is related to conspicuous consumption (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Therefore, people that engage in status enhancement are considered as highly self-monitored, mainly concerned with what kind of impression they give to others. On the other side, scholars argued that self-esteem enhancement is an advantage experienced when symbolic features resulting from the company, store, products etc., are attached to self in order to express and maintain one's impression of self.

4.2 Definition of the Shopping Experience

One of the difficulties with research into the retail experience is defining what is meant by the shopping experience. Throughout the literature review, it was found that the main differences in definition remained in when the shopping experience begins and ends. Some studies took an all-encompassing approach to the shopping experience and considered it to have begun at the marketing touchpoint, which Picot-Coupey, Huré and Piveteau, (2015) consider a soloed approach. The authors have considered shopping experience started when a consumer decides to buy the product and begins the physical process. Likewise, there were differences in when the shopping experience was considered to end. For instance, some considered it to end as soon as the shopper made the final payment (Picot-Coupey, Huré and Piveteau, 2015). But authors have argued that consumer experience with the product does not represent the final end of a shopping experience.

Literature discusses that choosing a beginning and end point are the main challenges facing the research community. For this study, the definition of the shopping experience focuses on the consumer's value creation and examine the retail experience from the standpoint of both value creation and consumer loyalty. Therefore, achieving this goal will require a broader definition of the retail shopping experience. The definition of the shopping experience within this study will refer to when the consumer at the first consumer contact with the product, regardless of the marketing channel used. In keeping with the work of Picot-Coupey, Huré and Piveteau (2015), it will end when the consumer decides that they have a positive or negative experience with the product and ultimately decide whether to keep or return the product.

4.2.1 Consumer Buying Behaviour

Earlier studies have discussed the concept of consumer buying behaviour as a decision process which consists of a number of discrete but interlinked stages. Therefore, former studies by

Engel *et al.*, 1991 represents the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model in which the decision-making process is divided within five stages: (1) problem recognition; (2) information search; (3) evaluation of alternatives; (4) purchase decision; and (5) post-purchase behaviour.

Present literature discusses that Omni-channel marketing leads to the development of a total consumer relationship model. Therefore, the Omni-channel approach overlaps with consumer relationship marketing (Belu and Marinuoiu, 2014).

Consumer buying behaviour is influenced by retailer touchpoints, rather this occurs online or in a brick and mortar store. Touchpoint frequency and positivity were found to have an impact on consumer experience with the brand (Baxendale, Macdonald and Wilson, 2015). The researchers found that positivity had a greater influence on changing brand perception than frequency alone. This supports the theoretical development for this thesis by examining the influence of the quality of the message. It demonstrates that it is not all about how many times the consumer views the message that is important, but how they perceive the message that builds consumer perceptions.

4.2.2 Consumer Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction has been variously defined in the literature, but the conceptualization that appears to have gained the biggest support is the assessment that satisfaction is a post-choice evaluative judgement concerning a specific purchase selection (Day, 1984). Satisfaction has been argued to be a key causal agent which is responsible for experience-based attitude change (Holbrook, (1994). Earlier literature discuses that the evaluative aspect of the satisfaction judgement is assumed to vary along a hedonic continuum, from unfavourable (i.e., dissatisfied) to favourable (i.e., satisfied). In regards to this, consumer satisfaction is generally assumed to be a unidimensional concept.

The literature on multichannel and Omni-channel marketing discusses that retailers aim is not to make a sale; instead, they should focus on creating a loyal consumer that will keep coming back. In order to build this type of relationship, the consumer must be satisfied. It is worth mentioning that consumer satisfaction does not only include happiness with the merchandise or product, it means happiness with the entire consumer experience. This would mean, from an initial touchpoint satisfaction to the experience after the sale. Hamemrschid, Weijters, and Falk (2015) examined the challenges of the multichannel approach on maintaining consumer satisfaction throughout the entire system. They found that structural alignment was the key to

overcoming these challenges. The complexity of the multichannel system means more points along the system that need to be maintained in order to create consumer satisfaction. The complexity of multichannel systems adds to the challenges that are inherent in this system.

4.2.3 Consumer Loyalty

One of the areas that lack on research into Omni-channel and multichannel marketing was consumer loyalty. Consumer satisfaction is inextricably linked to consumer loyalty. However, consumer loyalty can be more difficult to maintain in a highly competitive environment. Maintaining consumer satisfaction along the entire value chain and across all marketing channels, as well as developing strong consumer relationships, are all important to consumer loyalty.

Earlier literature on consumer loyalty discusses that it represents a critical strategic trust for retailers who strive to gain competitive advantage in the oversaturated market environment. In the internet environment, where the cost of switching between e-tailers is extremely low, earning and maintaining consumer loyalty may be even more challenging, thus an e-tailer often faces constant competition. Therefore, former studies have argued that loyal consumers are more likely to repurchase the same service or brand, provide a positive word of mouth (WOM) and willing to pay a premium price (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Holbrook, (1994), in his research paper has argued that depending on the level of commitment a consumer develops towards a product or service, consumer loyalty may consist of four stages. According to him, these include: (1) cognitive loyalty in which consumers act upon their favourable evaluations of costs and benefits associated with the product/service; (2) affective loyalty, which represents consumers' feelings of the link to the product/service provider developed through cumulatively satisfying usage occasions; (3) conative loyalty in which consumers form behavioural intentions on the basis of repeated episodes of positive affect; and (4) action loyalty in which consumers demonstrate a habitor routine of repurchase and positive word-of-mouth behaviour based on the prior three stages of loyalty. A more loyal and committed consumer to a retailer has been observed to show a later stage of loyalty along with all the earlier stages of loyalty towards the retailer.

4.3 Consequences of the Shopping Experience

The consumer has numerous consequences associated with the shopping experience. This applies to both the physical brick and mortar shopping experience and the online retailing shopping experience. Anteblian and Filser (2013) explored the development of a model that could be used to capture the shopping experience of consumers. This model was determined to be one of the methods for enriching and understanding the symbolic interactions of the consumers with offerings of the retailers in the day-to-day shopping experiences. The study found that there are several antecedents of the in-store shopping experience. For instance, shoppers are seeking (1) economic performance, (2) conversation, (3) hedonic gratification, and (4) social interaction. They cannot satisfy all of these needs in the online shopping atmosphere. Therefore, Anteblian and Filser (2013) argues that the shopping experience in a brick and mortar store has a social element that the online experience lacks. These experiences, as part of the dimensions of the shopping experience, are an important part of the theory on how to capture the shopping experience in a meaningful way. This theory also suggested that this experience could be used by retailers to "script" the shopper's experience through product positioning and other experiential elements.

For a shopper, they will have an effect from the shopping experience. They might gain some social factor from the experience and might also have a positive or negative reaction to the touchpoints with a product that they experienced. The emotions associated with this experience will have one of the greatest impacts on whether shoppers decide to purchase the product again in the future. In the end, all shoppers are seeking a hedonic experience with every product that they encounter, even those that are supposedly utilitarian in nature. The consumer will still have an emotional reaction with the product that will affect their purchasing decision. Scholars have argued that this is why the multichannel retailing approach needs to move towards the Omni-channel retailing approach which focuses on creating an integrated experience for the consumer (Anteblian and Filser, 2013).

4.4 Methodology of the Reviewed Articles

An important aspect which needs to be taken into account when conducting the literature review is the paradigmatic assumption of the articles that were used in this thesis. Within the selected papers it can be concluded that the most predominant paradigm is represented by functionalistic paradigm. According to Kuada, (2014), the functionalistic paradigm is a type of

research that is attributed to positive and objective perspectives. In real life, the functionalism would refer to businesses which strive for effectiveness while making their changes according to the environmental changes. In turn, environmental changes would generate a reaction to the particular companies which respond accordingly to those changes.

The studies reviewed in this thesis have applied quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods methodologies in their research. Therefore, the section below will present an inspection of these papers which has been divided accordingly. The tables which show the studies and their methodology have been organised by the year of publication starting with the oldest ones. Also, for each set of studies the authors are presented followed by the themes/key concepts of the papers and the type of methodology used in their study.

4.2.1 Quantitative papers

This subchapter will present the articles that used the quantitative methodology in their research methods and will provide a deeper understanding of the way in which these have used the quantitative methodology. The Table 3 below shows the papers on which its authors have applied the quantitative methodology.

No	Year	Author(s)	Themes/Concepts	Methodology
1	2009	Kwon & Jain	Hedonic motivations, utilitarian motivations, multichannel shopping, variety-seeking behaviour.	Quantitative
2	2010	Ofek, Katona & Sarvary	Channels of distribution, retailing, internet marketing, product returns, reverse logistics.	Quantitative
3	2013	Bell, Gallino & Moreno	Product information effect, consumer satisfaction, Omni-channel retail, USA.	Quantitative
4	2015	Lazaris, et al.	Store atmosphere, Omni-channel retailing, consumer behaviour, retail technologies. Greece.	Quantitative
5	2015	Herhausen, Binder & Schoegel	Multi-channel management, Omni-channel retailing, channel integration, channel synergies, channel cannibalization, willingness to pay,	Quantitative

6	2015	Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson	Retailing; advertising, integrated marketing communications, in-store communications, Word-of-mouth (WOM), retail industries.	Quantitative
7	2015	Picot-Coupey, Huré & Piveteau	Retail strategy, multi-channel, channel management, Omni-channel, channel design, e-tailer, retail industries.	Qualitative

Table 3: *Quantitative methodology papers (Source: Own illustration)*

In the social science the quantitative methodology represents the research that wants to investigate certain issues by the use of numerical measurements of specific factors for a given phenomenon (Kuada, 2010). The data collected have numerical values and the hypothesis that have been made in the purpose of investigation are tested through statistical analyses (Kuada, 2010). The present classification examines the papers that used the quantitative methodology approach, which gives reasons for different ways of data collection. The papers mentioned above have applied in their research different surveys, questioners and empirical studies.

The empirical paper by Kwon & Jain (2009) discuss the motivations for shoppers in multichannel retails through non-traditional retail formats by studying the effect of shoppers' hedonic and utilitarian motives. The study also develops six hypotheses the answer to which was given by using a large-scale survey for U.S. consumers from the DDB Needham 2003 Life Style Study conducted by DDB, an international marketing communication firm. The results have suggested that both hedonic and utilitarian motivations are important predictors for multichannel shoppers. Writer also propose various topics for future research such as *how multichannel shopping is influenced in a variety-seeking behaviour context?* In their empirical paper, Ofek, Katona & Sarvary (2010) statistically investigate competing retailers that can operate dual channels such as Brick and Click and how pricing strategies and physical store assistance level change as a result of the additional internet outlet. Therefore, after the summarise of the relevant literature, they describe and analyse the Basic Model Setup, a statistical model which could explain if adopting Brick and Click, multichannel format could affect the strategic behaviour and profits of competing retailers. Another empirical study by Bell, Gallino & Moreno (2013) discusses the implications of online and offline channels for consumers' demands and operational issues such as product return. Based on their assumption that consumers have a need for visceral product information, i.e., the need to touch, feel, and sample physical products before purchasing, they have developed a simple model of sample matching through specific research settings, econometric modelling approach and quasi-

experimental design. They also suggest future research topics as *the development of an Omni-channel retail strategy and the role of physical channels in delivering information and fulfilment within this.* The study of Lazaris, *et al.*, (2015) employed an exploratory quantitative empirical research design that took place in Greece in order to investigate consumers' importance attached to a series of online practices offered in the physical retail stores and their combined use of online and offline store atmosphere. Therefore, they have formulated few hypotheses to be tested and confirmed or rejected through their study by adopting in this way a functionalistic paradigm. Authors also discuss future research directions such as *the investigation of the causal relationship between retailers' Omni-channel retail practices and consumer behavioural patterns and evaluations.* One more empirical paper by Herhausen, Binder & Schoegel (2015) has examined the impact on online-offline channel integration, more specifically its effects on consumer reaction towards retailers and across different channels. Their study has therefore proposed three questions the answer to which was carried out by conducting three empirical studies supported by technology adoption research and diffusion theory. Writers propose that future research should investigate *whether the addition of offline-online channel integration will affect the results of our findings.* Picot-Coupey, Huré & Piveteau (2015) are discussing in their empirical papers the challenges faced by e-retail companies when going Omni-channel and their decisions in addressing these challenges. Therefore, a single case-study with an ethnographic approach was undertaken in order to build an understanding of the phenomenon from an internal point of view. The data collection method was made through participant observations, structured and non-structured interviews, primary internal data and secondary data. They have also proposed future research topics; such as *are the challenges faced when shifting from multi-channel to Omni-channel similar to those faced when shifting from cross-channel to Omni-channel?* Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson (2015) have used an online survey and collected data from Northern America and Europe to investigate the relative impact on multiple touchpoints. The overall reason for using online surveys is to analyse the distribution of the answers obtained to generalize the set of answers to the population of the sample.

4.2.2 Qualitative papers

The following subchapter will examine the studies that used quantitative methodology and will provide a better understanding of the methods in which the different articles used the

quantitative methodology. The table below illustrates the articles of which the authors have applied the qualitative method.

No.	Year	Author(s)	Themes/Concepts	Methodology
1	2010	Keller	Branding, multichannel, multimedia, retailing, brand equity.	Qualitative
2	2010	Zhang, et al.	Retail strategy, cross-channel synergy, retail mix decision, channel format; consumer behaviour, internet retailing.	Qualitative
3	2013	Anteblian & Filser	Buying behaviour, consumption experience, e-shopping experience, shopping experience, retail industries.	Qualitative
4	2014	Tetteh & Xu	Distribution channels, Omni-single- dual- or multi-channel, retail industries.	Qualitative
5	2014	Belu & Marinoiu	New distribution strategies, consumer behaviour, retail industries, Romania.	Qualitative
6	2014	Carvalho & Campomar	Multichannel, logistics, marketing, Omni-channel.	Qualitative
7	2014	Yrjölä	Business model, value creation, retail, multichannel retailing, Finland.	Qualitative
8	2014	Cao	Cross-channel strategy, retail business model, Chinese retail.	Qualitative
9	2015	Verhoefa, Kannanb & Inman	Omni-channel, retail mix, retail performance.	Qualitative
10	2016	Hübner, Kuhn & Wollenburg	Omni-channel retailing, grocery logistics, order fulfilment, grocery industry.	Qualitative

Table 4: *Qualitative methodology papers (Source: Own illustration)*

As suggested by Kuada (2010) qualitative methodology represents a type of research that do not have findings built on statistics or other means of quantification. These type of research is generally based on interviews or observations in natural settings in order to give an examination of the social-historic context in which the participants are in (Kuada, 2010).

From the total number of the studies reviewed that are using the qualitative methodology, three of them could be observed as analysing specific theoretical frameworks. The study of Keller (2010) explores the concepts of brand equity, retail images, optimal channel integration, multichannel retail and discusses a framework which addresses the challenges faced by marketers when designing and choosing their channels and communication options. In their

article, Carvalho & Campomar (2014) present a concept of multichannel retailing and its evaluative concept towards Omni-channel retailing were challenges faced by these are also addressed. Another study by Hübner, Kuhn & Wollenburg (2016) develops a planning framework for last mile order fulfilment within Omni-channel grocery retailing and debates the advantages and disadvantages of different design concepts. Therefore, the paper formulates three research questions the answers to which was based on a meta-analytical approach by conducting eight semi-structured interviews with retailers and experts from the grocery industry. The research finding and the planning framework contribute to identifying necessary steps for further optimizing Omni-channel integration.

Also, from the papers using qualitative methods, one of them uses case study as qualitative methodology. One of them is the paper of Cao (2014) which investigates the phenomena on how cross-channel strategy affects different aspects of retail business model. The case study was built on a consumer appliances retailer based in China within 14 formal and informal interviews with different managers of the company and its major competitors. His future research proposal is based on *investigating the effect over time of a shift to an integrated cross channel business model which could bring retailers incremental changes and require heavy investments.*

A study by Zhang, *et al.,* (2010) examines the benefits and challenges of operating in a multichannel retailing strategy. This paper contains a literature review on the topic of multichannel retail strategies and discuss the opportunities for creating synergies across channels. The article examines the previous empirical evidence on the topic and provides a research agenda for additional investigation on the topic. The researchers also propose topics for future research where questions like *do consumers of these companies have a more coherent experience as they migrate across channels? In turn, does this make them more loyal to the company?* could be answered and validated. One more study by Tetteh & Xu (2014) aim at study different types of supply chain distribution networks channels and addresses a number of challenges faced by these. The investigation of the previous research done in this field calls for future research, where topics such as *Omni-channel better than single- or dual-channel?* or *Omni-channel and dual or multi distribution channel which coordinate products better? s*hould be further investigated. The article by Belu and Marinoiu, (2014) also represent a literature review done on earlier studies which discusses different forms of distribution channels with the focus on the Omni-channel distribution channel, predominately on the Romanian market and current challenges faced by retailers in implementing an Omni-channel retail strategy.

Another study done by Verhoefa, Kannanb & Inman (2015) conceptually discuss special issues concerning multichannel retailing and the movement towards Omni-channel retail. Within previous literature review, they have identified special issues in which shoppers are influenced and move through channels in their search and buying process and future research directions of the topic are also addressed. They have also identified future research topics from the domain of investigation they have focused in their paper, therefore *What is driving the simultaneous consumers' choice for touch-points and channels?* and *What are the inter-relationships between a consumers' touchpoint choice and a consumers' retail channel choice?* could be an additional extension of their investigation.

The study of Yrjölä (2014) has identified and analysed the challenges of value creation in multichannel retail business model. To meet the purpose of the research, the author has carried out qualitative interviews with the top executives from different retailing environments. The author has outlined that the adoption of a multichannel retail business model requires critical rethinking of the basic building blocks of value creation. Future research could therefore concentrate on *investigating value creation drivers and challenges in a broader scope that encompasses more stakeholders.*

4.3.3 Mixed methodology

The paragraph below will present and describe the paper which have used a mixed methodology, and the two ways in which the studies have used the mixed methodology will be presented. The following table presents the papers using mixed methodology.

No	Year	Author(s)	Themes/Concepts	Methodology
1	2015	Sabiote & Roman	Employees' consumer facilitation behaviours, E-psychological benefits, satisfaction, trust, multichannel, service retailing.	Mixed

Table 5: Mixed methodology papers (Source: Own illustration)

In social science, the mixed methodology approach is a combination of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, which is called triangulation. The reason behind adopting a mixed methodology is that researchers can get a better understanding of the studied phenomenon and when applying different methods for data gathering, they could improve their conclusion. The methods of triangulation can be grouped into four categories: 1) theoretical triangulation, 2) data triangulation, 3) investigator triangulation, and 4) methodological triangulation (Kuada, 2010).

In their study Sabiote & Roman (2015) applied the mixed methodology approach in order to investigate the relationship between how multichannel strategy helps in establishing and developing relationships with consumers. The authors use survey for data collection which was administered to a sample randomly selected from all regions of Spain. The use of surveys implies that data collected from them is quantitative data. The authors also conducted interviews with four multichannel consumers of financial services and a pre-test with a convenience sample of 45 financial services consumers for an in-depth understanding of the research variables. As a result, the paper combines a mixed methodology by combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Furthermore, by doing so, the authors found a relationship between the various hypotheses presented by them. Additional research could examine *the role of different levels of experience with the channels.*

CHAPTER 5. Findings

5.1 Omni-channel Retailing

As previously mentioned, Omni-channel retailing encompasses both digital and non-digital retailing in order to give a consumer a seamless retail experience. As such, it can be argued that the retail channels that are attributed the biggest importance in a retail mix are represented by the offline, online and mobile channels. Therefore, the next sub-chapters present an in-depth exploration on the finding of the articles in relation to each of these touch points as well as other important aspects in relation to Omni-channel shopping experience.

5.1.1 Offline channel

From the reviewed articles and as mentioned in the previous chapter offline retailing is often referred to as “brick and mortar” retailing. In the most common context of offline retailing, it is usually assumed that retailers are situated in a permanent, fixed location. However, offline retailing can also include temporary venues, such as festivals or weekend markets. For the purposes of this study, offline retailing will only refer to stores with are static, fixed location from which they conduct business.

The offline retailers have many more tools at their disposal than the online retailers. For instance, they can incorporate the elements of lighting, touch, smell, and taste into the consumer experience, whereas the online retailers do not have this opportunity. Bell, Gallino, and Moreno, (2013) in their article investigated these components of the offline consumer experience for their effects on future perceptions of the product and shopping experience. The

study found that the showrooming played an important informational role in conveying product information to the consumer. This information was responsible for the formation of a match between the consumer and the retail experience in terms of touchpoints. In some cases, shoppers that would restrict themselves to an online purchase might visit a showroom to test out the product (Bell, Gallino and Moreno, 2013).

This research adds to the theory that the brick and mortar stores enhance something to the consumer experience which cannot be replicated in the online environment. This supports the development of a multi-channel strategy. It also dispels the widely held myth that online shopping displaces the offline experience or that the online retailer will eventually make the brick and mortar store obsolete. Consumers still get something from the offline shopping experience that they cannot get in the online environment.

5.1.2 Online channel

Within the existing literature, online retailing refers to shopping where the entire experience occurs online. It can be combined with brick and mortar retailing, but in the development of a comprehensive theory on Omni-channel retailing, it is essential to understand how the online retailing experience differs from the brick and mortar experience. This section of the literature discussion will take in consideration the shoppers' experiences that only involve the online retail experience.

Literature review discusses that the online only retailers would appear to have fewer resources to work with than the brick and mortar retailers. Also, the brick and mortar retailers have the ability to provide a multi-sensory experience for the consumer, where the online retailers are limited in the sensory input that they can influence. In the article by Lazaris *et al.,* (2015) it was discussed that consumers attach a set of online practices to their experience in the online world. These practices affect their perceived experiences in the online setting and many of these practices paralleled those that are used in the brick and mortar store. This study supports the theory that a certain set of practices are important to both the online and offline world. It reminds the research and professional community that regardless of the selling venue, the consumer is the same. The consumer experience is the key to building brand, just as it is in the offline world.

5.1.3 Mobile channel

The development of new digital and more specifically, mobile channel has caused another change in the retail environment. As discussed in the article by Tetteh & Xu, (2014), similar to

what the online channel development has caused, researchers have also investigated the effect of the use of the mobile channels and specifically mobile apps on performance. Therefore, from the reviewed articles it was discussed that mobile channel usage is indeed affecting shopping behaviour across channels and that mobile is still most relevant in the initial research phase. Shoppers now frequently search for information in the store and at the same time search on their mobile device to get more information about offers and other attractive prices. As a result, the opposite of showrooming (where the consumer visits a physical store to check a product but then purchases the product online from home) also occurs, which researches now referred to as webrooming, where consumers seek the information in relation to a product online and then buy it offline. Verhoef *et al.,* (2015) in their article have argued that, before this was found to be a dominant form of research shopping, (for example within Apple stores), where by having mobile devises, consumers can seek information about their products and order them. As an alternative, through in-store Wi-Fi networks, companies can communicate with their consumers over their mobile devices and also track their behaviour. Within the article of Verhoef *et al.,* (2015) the authors also have argued that within the context of mobile channel, in addition to the above mentioned channels, a branded app is considered as a channel as well. Therefore, consumer switching across channels and devices such as desktop, laptop and mobile devices are all part of the consumers' Omni-channel experience and companies needs to take these issues into consideration in order to provide a seamless experience for their consumers. Precisely, the different channels and touchpoints should be constantly and concurrently used by both consumers and companies in order to enable the consumers' retail experience.

5.2 Multichannel Retailing

Maximizing the shopping experience has traditionally been thought of as more pertinent to the offline retail arena, but previous studies have revealed that integrating distribution channels can have a positive impact on the shopping experience of the consumers. The studies by Picot-Coupey, Huré and Piveteau, (2015) discussed that switching from a strictly offline product distribution approach was difficult in the beginning, but after the initial period, the multichannel approach enhanced the shopper's experiences. This study was important for understanding the challenges that retailers face as they have started to move more intensely towards a multichannel distribution model.

The studies by Tetteh and Xu, (2014) found that while expanding distribution channels can help to increase product growth and profitability, these are also more labour intensive to maintain. There is also a downside to the multichannel retailing approach. When companies started going online, they found that they needed to expand their IT departments and they needed to hire people to man and monitor the online media presence. There are additional costs to all of these activities. Their study also denotes that it is possible for the benefits to outweigh the costs and for the products to benefit substantially enough to offset these additional costs.

The study by Keller (2010) supports that of Tetteh and Xu, (2014) by finding that companies that engage in multichannel marketing maximize both short-run sales and increase brand equity. This demonstrates that the strategy can benefit long term strategic planning, as well as short term increases. When one considers the arguments by Tetteh and Xu, (2014), the ability to build a sustainable advantage is an essential factor in the approach. If only short term gains were realized, then the approach would not be sustainable in the future and could cost more in the end. Keller's study reminds the researcher that both the short and long term costs and benefits must be examined in the multichannel strategy.

Ofek, Katona, and Sarvary, (2010) examined the effects of product returns on multichannel retailers. This study found that adding an online retail operation to an existing offline strategy would mean adding additional staff to process returns. This is especially the case when product differentiation is not high. Product returns can create an increases investment and expense due to processing a higher numbers of returns. The authors did not explore the reason for this, therefore it is still uncertain if it is due to a higher volume, or there are certain factors in the online environment that contribute to higher returns. For instance, the consumer cannot experience the item in a visceral manner that they can in the retail store through an interaction with the physical products (Zhang et al, 2010). This is one of the major challenges faced by online retailers. One way to study this in the future would be to examine the rate of returns against the volume increase due to the addition of online sales. This difference would provide clues into the phenomenon.

Yrjölä, (2014) in the study on "Value creation challenges in Multichannel Retail Business Models" examined that a multichannel strategy called for a recreation of the ideas surrounding value creation for the consumer. The study stressed the need to place consumer preferences first. Therefore, it was suggested that the multichannel retail approach depends on the ability to be responsive to consumers, just as much as online or brick and mortar retailing.

One of the main issues in the multichannel approach is whether this strategy leads to greater competitive advantage, or whether it leads to channel cannibalization. In other words, would consumers use one channel at the expense of other channels. The main question surrounding this issue is whether online stores will lead to a drop in brick and mortar sales. Herhausen, Binder, and Shcoegel, (2015) in response to previous studies found that cannibalisation did not occur and that the multichannel approach increased consumer value and competitive advantage.

5.3 Cross-channel Retailing

From the reviewed literature, it was suggested that cross channel retailing is another strategy that has become important in the retail industry. Cross channel retailing refers at using multiple channels to complete one purchase transaction. For example, a cross channel retailing would be if a person who sees a product online and then decides to drive to the store to purchase it rather than purchasing it online. Another example of this is buying something from a catalogue over the phone. The paper by Cao, (2014) studies that using a brick and mortar store as a linking hub was one way to increase consumer value because it represents the traditional and more familiar retail experience for consumers. As mentioned in the article by Caravillino and Campomar, (2014) cross channel retailing requires greater integration of marketing and logistics operations in order to continue to increase consumer value. Therefore, a movement towards a multichannel or cross channel approach has a significant effect and adds many levels of complexity on the retailer's operations (Verhoef, Kannanb, and Inman, 2015).

5.4 Global Omni-channel Brand Value and Consumer Loyalty

Keller, (2010) discusses that the increase in global retail channels intensifies the distribution motive and increases the profit margins. The increase in profitability depends on the effects of more retail channels to consumers. The available retails channels determine the perceptions of the consumer. Kwon and Jane, (2009) state that the retail channels and the consumer perceptions are directly proportional. Therefore, a company's retail channels must provide consumers with an integration of the shopping experience. Due to consumers' desire for diverse products and services, an increase in the retail channels leads to an increase in consumer knowledge. Conversely, brands that desist in increasing retail channels are likely to lose clients. According to Anteblian, Filser, and Roederer, (2013) brands do not provide enough experience

to the clients that match the real shopping list and the competition in the market. Researchers show that the companies that increase retails channels are consumer responsive and forward thinking. Therefore, the increase in retail channels creates consumer loyalty. Consequently, consumer loyalty increases profitability (Fernández-Sabiote and Román, 2015).

Many retail channels ensure profitability through increases in sales. The retails channels enable the potential consumers to engage in diverse points that guide purchases. Moreover, the retail channels increase the easiness and the convenience of sales to potential clients.

Because of the better data assembly tactics from consumers, an increase in retail channels results in profits increase. The data collections in more retail channels imply the increase in raw data that leads to effective study of the market. Also, the increase in retail channels ensures that the retailer improves the target marketing. Consequently, the target marketing specializes in consumers with similar attributes and increases profit.

Bell, Gallino, and Moreno sustain that the addition of retail channels enhances the worker productivity. The retail channels offer the workers more information about the clients. Furthermore, more information results in efficiency. Therefore, the workers benefit from new techniques in retail and in turn offer quality services to the potential clients. Consequently, the increase in efficiency causes an upsurge in the profits.

5.5 Omni-channel Impacts on Consumer Shopping Experiences in the Information Age

Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson, (2015) state that the experience from Omni-channel shopping is notable and revolutionary. Therefore, the experience exceeds the minute evolution in current shopping experience. The primary benefits of Omni-shopping are the continuity of true shopping experience. A consumer experience during shopping encompasses more than one brand's products. Therefore, a consumer is omniscient in that he or she perceives and understands all the available and futuristic products from diverse brands (Carvalho and Compomar, 2014). Due to the Omni-channel attribute of consumer experience and data freedom, the consumer is omniscient.

Fernández-Sabiote and Román, (2015) argue that Omni-channel experience facilitates the existence of social business. The experience creates the benefits of future research, selection of products, and easy payments. Therefore, a company becomes efficient as a result of the consumer's Omni-channel shopping involvement. However, the efficiency of a company

depends on the ability of a company to interpret the data from the Omni-channels. A company must understand the consumer to enjoy profit maximization from the involvement of Omni-channel shopping.

Herhausen *et al.,* (2015) argue that the experience of an Omni-channel provides a brand with a universal outlook of the market. A company sells to a large population from different nations in the world. Furthermore, the universal consumers provide the firm with universal data. The data is diverse and does not reflect the inadequate data from a single brand's universe. However, researchers show that consumers give data to a particular brand about other brands in exchange for local data about products. (Herhausen et al., 2015)

Kwon and Jane, (2009), state that an Omni-channel experience during shopping allows consumers to identify themselves. Subsequently, a brand attains the opportunity to learn the consumer preferences in the current market. While brands benefit from concise projection of preferences, the consumers benefit from identity.

5.6 Omni-channel Marketing and Impacts on different Product Touch Points

Organizations face challenges as they expand to accommodate the Omni-channel marketing. The primary challenge is the alignment of the Omni-channel demands with the available inventory. Bell, Gallino and Moreno, (2013) explains that the Omni-channel marketing increases the requirements of an organization's inventory that must match with the value chain of retail. Moreover, the Omni-channel marketing requires that a firm accepts the future development of business practices. Therefore, the company must keep with the industry's business velocity.

Organizations in Omni-channel marketing face the challenge of the comparable imports and the branded channels. Firms experience pressure to create efficient delivery choices for consumers and offer competitive prices. According to Carvalho and Compomar, (2014) firms face the need to reevaluate and redefine the supply chain. The competitive nature of the Omni channel marketing prospects implies that the company with a competitive price which is able to deliver a product to clients in extreme fast pace, wins the largest market share.

Companies in the Omni-channel marketing find it difficult to provide advice and data to clients. The firms find difficulty to provide serious reasons for potential consumers to physically appear in stores and purchase products. Therefore, the Omni-channel marketing limits the

engagements between organizations and clients. Thus, it can be argued that the staff of an organization is knowledgeable enough to induce the consumer preferences.

Anteblian, Filser, and Roederer, (2013) argue that organizations experience problems in the availability of real time data during Omni-channel marketing. The absence of real time data implies that a firm does not interact with the clients and the level of confidence reduces the operational information. Unless a company builds an analytical infrastructure, it is unable to benefit from the unstructured market signals within a time interval which is realistic. Cao, (2014) states that the lack of individual views of consumers and consumer behavior across the Omni-channels creates problems for the successful implementation of the Omni-channel marketing.

5.7 Consumer Perceptions about Omni-channel Shopping Experience

Consumers raise concerns about the relevance of the information that is available in the Omni-channels. Therefore, the consumers do not find exhaustive information that addresses their demands. However, relevant information may be available but may not match the local information. Consequently, potential consumers face challenges to find store locations and the business hours. Moreover, Kwon and Jane, (2009) have mentioned that consumers are uncertain of the inventory or the directions to a store. Thus, consumers do not visit a store due to irrelevance of data and ambiguity in the available local store information.

Also, consumer concerns entail the limits in geographical locations. The geographical disparity between a firm and the consumer determines the time of delivery and the accessibility of a product. If the geographical accessibility of products is a concern, Anteblian, Filser, and Roederer, (2013) argue that the universal outlook of Omni-channel experience is an issue to consumer benefits. For example, a firm in Britain that cannot make product deliveries to a client in Asia implies that the consumer is unable to benefit from the prior Omni-channel shopping experience.

Tetteh and Xu (2015), show that consumers express dissatisfaction in the transformation of businesses to address the dynamics of personal needs. The Omni-channel shopping involvement requires timely updates. Moreover, the updates must suit the current needs of the clients. Due to the absence of advice to clients by the firms in the market in the Omni-channel shopping, consumers find difficulty to make a selection of qualitative products. In fact, researchers establish that consumers are unable to physically assess a product before a purchase

through Omni-channel. Therefore, most consumers who participate in Omni-channel shopping do not have information about the products from a physical interaction. Additionally, Keller, (2010) states that few clients purchase products through Omni-channels as a result of the absence of the product in the physical stores. Therefore, consumers express concerns that the Omni-channels shopping experiences promises benefits, some of which they are unable to experience.

Because of the challenges of the Omni-channel marketing and shopping experience, firms must use strategies that address the needs of the consumers and could also result in profit maximization (Tetteh and Xu,). A company must be consistent in all the messages that reaches a consumer across the channels. Moreover, the consistency must have an equal feel and appearance in a manner that allows the consumer to know the exact brand that he or she interacts during shopping. Additionally, Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson, (2015) sustain that the firms that establish Omni-channel marketing must ensure that the strategy adds value to the consumer. Thus, every involvement provides helpful information to a potential client. Furthermore, the consumer must be able to access the Omni-channel shopping experience regardless of his or her current location. Firms must ensure that the Omni-channels are not intrusive but informative. Therefore, the Omni-channels must not defy the security issues for the consumers to be offered personal information. The consumers must understand the method of data collection, the use of the data, and the value that they receive after the offer. A firm's transparency is critical in the success of the Omni-channel marketing and shopping experience. (Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson, 2015)

Moreover, authors such as Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson (2015), Cao (2014), Zhang *et al.*, (2010) Fernández Sabiote, and Román (2015) have also mentioned in their research papers the importance of taking into consideration other two relevant aspects that could affect the consumer's perception of a shopping experience. These are represented by the perception of seamlessness when moving from one point to another and the perception of consistency in the retail mix between touch points. Therefore, the suggestions and findings on both of these aspects will be presented in the following section.

5.7.1 The perception of seamlessness when moving from one place to another

Within the social values it can be argued that the utilitarian and hedonic aspects interconnect, therefore a seamless intersection exists within the Omni-channel shopping involvement. Consequently, retailers find it hard to move within the various retail channels. However, the

retailers find new ways to converge with the consumers at different marketing points. On the other hand, the retailer engagement is being reduced as the online communication takes over the touch point interactions. Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson (2015) state that the seamless intersection takes place in a retail industry. Therefore, the authors suggest that there is an importance for retailers at considering the perception of seamless when moving from one place to another. As argued by them, such a seamless perception will enable the consumer at using a channel of their choice for each step along their shopping journey, including a product research, product evaluation and comparison, buying and paying. Also, the retailers would enable at providing consumers with access to all available promotions, discounts and loyalty points gained regardless the channel used. Another aspect at providing a seamless consumer experience is by knowing the consumer and understanding consumers' expectations. By spotting these, retailers would be able at providing a very personalized "individual" buying and service experience. Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson (2015)

5.7.2 The perception of consistency in the retail mix between touch points

The retailer must exploit the available marketing channels to maximize profits. Therefore, the retailer's use of the Omni-channel approach can be reasoned at creating more profit. Cao (2014) explains that the Omni-channel marketing entails more capacity to minimize costs and increase the returns. If a retailer builds a seamless channel system, he creates the conditions necessary for efficiency in marketing and enough value that can be translated into profit. However, Fernández Sabiote, and Román, (2015) sustain that the consistency in the marketing channels is difficult to be acquired in a small firm. As argued by Zhang *et al.,* (2010) one of the issues associated to the channel integration is due to the level of consistency in the retail mix between touch points which is not high enough. Such an issue, in many situations, is not easy to be solved due to the aforementioned difference between the channels. As argued by them, retailers which should decide which areas need to have a level of uniformity is between others pricing and promotions, delivery and return policies and assortments. Therefore, by charging diverse prices in different channels would, as a result, go in contradiction with the solid argument regarding providing the consumers with a seamless experience since, as mentioned before, many scholars have agreed that it is crucial that the consumers do not practice disturbing inconsistency between the different channels. However, Zhang *et al.,* (2010) also mentioned that retailers could use special promotions by the means of directing consumers into a specific channel.

5.8 Ways of Improving Omni-channel Shopping Experiences

As previously discussed in the article of Keller, (2010) and Ofek *et al.*, (2011) one of the ways in which the services can be improved for the stakeholders is by ensuring that *they are able to get the best output at all times*. The use of Omni-channel opens up new possibilities for the marketers. One of the factor which is especially important to consider is that the Omni-channels can be used to bring in new services for the consumers, and making it much easier for the consumers to access these services.

The use of mobile based services for examples allows the various stakeholders to access the marketing as and when they need. The customizable nature of the marketing efforts can also allow the consumers to ensure that they can deliver and understand the new options which are available to them. This not only ensures that the consumers are able to get the services which are needed in various locations but also to get what they are looking for (Keller, 2010, Ofek *et al.*, 2011). Another way in which Omni-channel shopping experiences can be improved is by changing the nature of support and products that the consumers get from a company. This is especially needed in order to ensure that new services are easily used by consumers, and therefore can allow them to get access as and when they require. Another way for improving the shopping experience of consumers is to integrate the different channels, and therefore make it more covenant for the end consumer to access new services (Zhang *et al.*, 2010).

The innovation which can be enabled in the Omni-channel environment is that through a clear understanding of the problem areas, companies can be often established, which needs to be based on the continuous expansion of options (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). The integration of the marketing channels is also important as companies can improve the user experience, and increase the loyalty of the consumers. This level of confidence in the different retail environments need to be improved, which can lead to the development of the various options. These options need to be established in order to make sure that the services can be delivered in order to ensure long term support for the new services (Keller, 2010, Ofek *et al.*, 2011). In this regard, companies must develop policies which can allow them to understand the potential of the new services, which improves the services, as well as increasing the interaction between the brand and the end user. This increase in integration through use of new mediums such as social media can be one of the ways forward for companies to integrate the services, and improve the output which they seek to improve (Kwon and Jain, 2009).

5.9 Future Strategies for Integrating Various for Increasing Value of Omni-channel Marketing

As discussed by Fernández-Sabiote and Román, (2015) one of the strategy which has been advocated in the literature is to take a proactive approach to learning from mistakes, and use the various initiatives to ensure long term support. One of the future strategy for companies in order to improve Omni-channel marketing experience is to ensure that it can change its management structures which can deal with these new innovations. The research is clear on this aspect, as there is a need to ensure that a multichannel area is put into place, which can lead to continuous improvement in the way companies engage with consumers (Rippé *et al.,* 2015).

Kwon and Jain, (2009) have discussed that increasing the value of Omni-channel marketing is also dependent on the ability to integrate the various marketing channels in a seamless manner. This increases the value of the brand, while also ensuring that the different options that are provided to the consumer in the most robust manner. The use of the various options is also important to take into account, as companies must put into place a system which can enable them to provide better services. The ability to deliver new innovations in the marketing channel environment is also an important factor, as it not only increases the trust level of the consumer, but also allows them to improve their ability to relate to the new challenges. Companies must adopt new strategies which ensures that the consumers are able to get the products as and when they require. The relationship between the brand and the consumer also needs to be managed by increasing the trust in the marketing initiative, as well as ensuring that the consumer gets a better deal than before Picot-Coupey, Huré & Piveteau, (2015).

The future strategies must be developed to ensure that the global consumer needs are addressed. In the past, companies have been working continuously to make sure that they can customize the problem, and Omni-channel marketing is undertaken to ensure that the services can be enabled at all times (Keller, 2010, Ofek *et al.,* 2011). One of the factor which is important to take into account is that the consumer needs have to be addressed, which can lead to improvement in the ability of different companies' initiatives (Zhang *et al.,* 2010). This is also important to take into account, as organizations need to ensure that they have a proper system, which can relate to the use of new and innovative marketing. Companies must also ensure that they have a proper system for dealing with changing consumer needs, which can be addressed by reducing the costs for the company, and therefore passing it on to the consumer in the form of lower prices (Zhang *et al.,* 2010).

5.10 Sum-up and Factors Inferred from the Systematic Review

Within the systematic literature review chapter, certain theories and theoretical frameworks on the factors which influence a consumer shopping experience in a multichannel and Omni-channel retailing have been discussed. Furthermore, other relevant aspects on certain issues of Omni-channel retailing which previous literature has discussed are also taken in consideration in order to form a comprehensive understanding on the factors which could affect the consumers' shopping experience and contribute to the creation of consumer loyalty in an Omni-channel retail industry.

Within the findings of the literature, it can be argued that there are certain factors which influence and contribute to the formation of a consumer shopping experience. These factors are represented in the Table 6 below.

Omni-channel retailing channels	**Variety-seeking motivations**
Online retailing channel	Hedonic value
Offline retailing channel	Utilitarian value
Mobile retailing channel	Social value

Table 6: Factors which influence consumer shopping experience (Own illustration)

Additionally, within the systematic review, it could be observed that factors such as *consumer perception about Omni-channel shopping experience* including aspects such as *the perception of seamlessness when moving from one place to another* and *perception of consistency in the retail mix between touch points* are also of significant importance in the discussion of a consumer acquires of an Omni-channel shopping experience. Therefore, this factors should be also taken into consideration for the formation of a consistent analyses of the factors influencing an Omni-channel shopping experience.

Within the discussion of the next Analyses and Discussion chapters, the way in which these factors interchange and could add to the creation of a global Omni-channel brand value and contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty will be discussed.

CHAPTER 6. Analyses

6.1 Factors which Influence Omni-channel Shopping Experience

From the total number of the articles which form the systematic literature review ground for this thesis, ten of them have been found to explore more in-depth the issues which could relate to the factors influencing the Omni-channel shopping experience therefore, this articles have been selected for further foundation of the findings and analyses part of this thesis. The reason behind selecting these specific papers are various. Hence, one of the reasons is due to the contexts in which this articles study the effect of multichannel and Omni-channel in consumers' shopping behaviour. Other reason lays in the consideration of the themes/concepts in which each of the articles has built up the ground for their investigation. Also, the author has taken in consideration the topics proposed for future research discussed in each of the specific articles (see *Methodology of the articles* sub-chapter) from which it was concluded that there is currently a limited understanding of the phenomenon in discussion. However, the author acknowledges that the articles used have an individual approach to their own subject of examination therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, the writer has approach her own understanding on the subject of Omni-channel retailing and consumer shopping experience and treated the findings of this articles in a subjective way.

Table 7 below illustrates the articles and the letter of reference used in the Analysis and Discussion part.

Nr.	Year	Author (s)	Article name	Themes/Concepts	Future research topics proposed	Letter of reference
1	2009	Kwon and Jane	Multichannel Shopping Through Nontraditional Retail Formats: Variety-Seeking Behavior with Hedonic and Utilitarian Motivations	Hedonic motivations, utilitarian motivations, multichannel shopping, variety-seeking behaviour.	*How is multichannel shopping influenced in a variety-seeking behaviour context?*	**A**
2	2010	Keller	Brand Equity Management in a Multichannel, Multimedia Retail Environment	Branding, multichannel, multimedia, retailing, brand equity	*How does consumer brand knowledge change as the result of an exposure to a communication and how does that changed knowledge, in turn, affect how consumers respond to the brand itself and how it is marketed?*	**B**
3	2013	Bell, Gallino & Moreno	Inventory Showrooms and Consumer Migration in Omni-channel Retail: The Effect of Product Information	Product information effect, consumer satisfaction, Omni-channel retail	*The development of a Omni-channel retail strategy and the role of physical channels in delivering information and fulfilment within this.*	**C**
4	2013	Anteblian & Filser	Consumption experience in retail environments: A literature review	Buying behaviour, consumption experience, e-shopping experience, shopping experience, retail industries.	*In the field of the consumer's experience, research has traditionally distinguished experience in physical stores from virtual online experience. Yet the development of new techniques is leading to an ever greater convergence between these two practices. The shopper uses their smartphone at the point-of-sale to obtain information, while drive channels directly link a virtual navigation stage with a real logistics stage. Understanding these mixed experiences is a considerable challenge for researchers.*	**D**
5	2014	Tetteh & Xu	Supply Chain Distribution Networks: Single-, Dual-, & Omni-channel	Distribution channels, Omni-channel, single-channel, dual or multi-channel	*Omni-channel better than single- or dual-channel? or Omni-channel and dual or multi distribution channel which coordinate products better?*	**E**
6	2014	Cao	Business Model Transformation in Moving to a Cross-Channel Retail Strategy: A Case Study	Cross-channel strategy, retail business model, Chinese retail	*Investigating the effect over time of a shift to an integrated cross channel business model which*	**F**

					could bring retailers incremental changes and require heavy investments.	
7	2014	Carvalho & Compomar	MULTICHANNEL AT RETAIL AND OMNI-CHANNEL: Challenges for Marketing and Logistics	Multichannel, logistics, marketing, retail, Omni-channel	*Which are the shoppers' characteristics that use multichannel and what is its influence on the company´s performance? What is the strategic role of the multichannel? How do the eventual inconsistencies of information at the several channels used affect the satisfaction and the faithfulness of the client?*	**G**
8	2015	Sabiote & Roman	The multichannel consumer's service experience: building satisfaction and trust	Employees' consumer facilitation behaviours, E-psychological benefits, satisfaction, trust, multichannel	*Future research could replicate our results in another setting, using similar channels, or further develop our insights by including other channels (e.g., mobile).*	**H**
9	2015	Herhausen, Binder & Schoegel	Integrating Bricks with Clicks: Retailer-Level and Channel-Level Outcomes of Online–Offline Channel Integration	Multi-channel management, Omni-channel retailing, channel integration, channel synergies, channel cannibalization, willingness to pay	*Whether the addition of offline-online channel integration will affect the results of our findings.*	**L**
10	2015	Baxendale *et al.*	The Impact of Different Touchpoints on Brand Consideration	Retailing; advertising, integrated marketing communications, in-store communications, Word-of-mouth (WOM), retail industries.	*We suggest listening to consumers in real time to understand how they construe their consumer journey. The range of touchpoints they encounter in this journey is undoubtedly broad therefore this require future focus.*	**M**

Table 7: *Articles used for forming the Analyses and Discussion part (Source: Own illustration)*

From the revision of the previous literature it could be observed that the Omni-channel shopping experience can be acquired through online, the offline and the mobile channel. However, the factors that affect the three kinds of consumers within each specified channel have psychological settings. The factors that were investigated include hedonic value, utilitarian value and the social value. The three factors affect the consumers to different extents. Therefore, the literature was reviewed in order to study the impact of these factors on the Omni-channel shopping experiences that could also contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty.

6.1.1 Hedonic Value

From the study of the article **A** it could be observed that the hedonic shopping behavior is prevalent among online shoppers since the authors suggest that "*different channels based on mobile technologies make it possible for companies to cater to their consumers."* Most of the applications installed in a phone are internet based. Therefore, the hedonic consumers have the chance to exhibit the play mentality while shopping online

In the article **B**, it has been argued that the case for offline shoppers suggesting that hedonic shopping behavior is based on trust. The authors argue that"… *the concern of the consumer is that most companies lack the clarity across technological devices…"* Further, article **A** (2009) implore that"…*consumers are threatened by introduction and use of new technologies…"* The argument brought forward in the two articles from the conclusion that offline usage of marketing tools is appealing to the hedonic shoppers. The aspect that hedonic shoppers have a playful mentality during shopping is not equivalent to the lack of value for money. Buyers prefer face to interaction when they purchase priced products.

The interaction between the hedonic shopping behavior and the mobile touch points are discussed in the article **C**, where the authors express the suggestion saying: "*Retailers concern themselves with showroom and free riding behavior to attract consumers"* Therefore, the hedonic shopping behavior inclines towards visiting showrooms and enjoying free samples.

6.1.2 Utilitarian Value

In the article **A**, functional shopping behavior can be seen among the online shoppers. However, the relationship is negative since it was argued that "*Retailers capitalize on the hedonic values of a utilitarian product…"* Therefore, the adverts viewed online fail to appeal to the utilitarian aspect of the products. The shopper who is interested in knowing how the good will practically fit into his daily lifestyle finds it hard to believe in online messages about products.

Given the argument put forward in the article **B**, the utilitarian behavior in shopping primarily depends on the trustworthiness of the retailer to provide accurate information regarding the product. Therefore, it was suggested that "… *offline marketing remains useful… consumers seek human interaction"* To understand the use of a commodity, consumers rely on the face to face interaction with the marketer.

Article **L**, further suggests that the advent of technological devices has rendered mobile touch points relatively inefficient since "*retail digitalization has enhanced the shopping experience… delivering fully integrated channels that are cost effective"* Retailers would rather depend on the use of technological devices to reach consumers as opposed to the costliest methods of retailing. As such, the skeptical tendencies of the utilitarian shopper opt to look up the usage of a product using different search engines. However, the behavior is not equal to the one of online shopping.

6.1.3 Social Value

Article **B** states the following "*shoppers seek conversation, hedonic gratification, and economic satisfaction."* This claim provides the idea that the relationship between the social behavior among the online shoppers is limited. In another article **H** it was observed that "*brick and mortar retail has a social element that online shoppers lack."* In essence, it can be argued that the social value is decreased among online shoppers but is prevalent among the offline and mobile consumers. It is hard to measure the value of a commodity to the society if the transaction is done online.

6.1.4 The perception of seamlessness when moving from one place to another

Article **A,** suggested that the interrelationship between the hedonic, utilitarian and the social values among the three channels within the Omni-channel shopping experience in the retail industry seemed to create a seamless intersection among the channels. The authors state that "*omnichannel marketing is dependent on the seamless integration of various marketing channels…"* Another article **C** concur that the movement of retailers moving from one point to another is rather hard for retailers as they say, "*… sometimes shoppers who engage in online shopping visit the showroom for testing."* Touch points are relevant to both retailers and all kinds of consumers exhibiting the three shopping behavior- hedonic, utilitarian and social. The retailers find ways to meet with the consumers. However, the interactions have reduced significantly with the use of online communication. Therefore, the retailer subscribing to the

Omni-channel marketing ideology is unrestricted to meet the consumers because as it was argued in article **H**, "…*consumer experience increases with touch point frequency and positivity…".* The retailer maintains a seamless interrelationship among the available channels at all costs because that is his prime marketing factor.

6.1.5 Perception of consistency in the retail mix between touch points

Article **B**, further suggests that for the retailer to maximize profits, he must be willing to apply all the marketing channels available to him since he argues that *"… to create long term value instead of short-run sales…"* This statement indicates what is put in the context of the multichannel levels since the authors explains that the fundamental reason for the practice of multichannel ideas is to maximize profits. It is, therefore, logical to state that Omni-channel system has a greater capacity to maximize profits and minimize the costs. The build-up of a seamless channel creates a threshold of efficiency that is just enough to create value for the retailer as well as maintain consumer satisfaction.

In a different article **F**, it argues that *" A physical store increases consumer traffic by making available information about the store location and in-store inventory on their website".* Therefore, it makes sense for the retailer to accept the retailing mix offered by the Omni-channel model. Working out all the channels for the overall benefit is a challenging task. However, once the retailer has mastered the value of mixing strategies, the benefits are numerous.

6.1.6 Global Omni-channel Brand Value

From the article **E**, it can be concluded that the global Omni-channel brand value is necessary for current marketing since they suggest that, *"…manufacturer's profit suffers if retailers offer their store brand. The manufacturer can reduce such negative impact by promoting appropriate national brand strategy, lowering their wholesale price and increasing their national brand quality."* Bringing the quality of the brand to a national level avails the ability of a company to maximize profits. Deductively, a company can further maximize profits in bringing the brand to an international scale.

Elsewhere in the article **E**, a straightforward statement was made suggesting that, *"retailers must stay focused on the total consumer experience across all selling environment by first designing the brand experience across all channel…….determining the role of digital in the total experience and aligning the organization to the brand."* In that case, the retailers align

the business to the brand as opposed to the channel. However, for the retailer to be successful, they must consider all the channels of selling.

To address the contemporary marketplace, the retailer seeks effective methods to reach clients on an international scale. Article **G**, argues that the *"consumers are turning out to be more demanding… require that they can access a broad range of products…"* The Omni-channel marketing strategies provide the opportunity to band commodities aiming the global market. Traditionally, the companies used to have a target market restricted by location. Within the new business application methods, the consumer has access to multiple brands from different manufacturing firms. The retailer needs to align themselves to appeal to international consumers to obtain survival tactics in the novel market trends.

6.1.7 Interrelation between Omni-channel touch pints and Variety-seeking Behaviors

The interrelationship between the global Omni-channel retail system and the variables described herein is a complex one. However, describing such a relationship was done through the deductive method. In the article **A** it was discussed that the hedonic and utilitarian shopping behavior both have an effect on the Omni-channel retail system since they argue that *"… digital consumers, like consumers in physical stores, demonstrate both utilitarian and hedonic shopping values."* Therefore, the hedonic and the functional shoppers are prevalent in a global Omni-channel retail system due to digitalization of shopping experiences.

Therefore, to create consumer loyalty among the hedonic and utilitarian shoppers in a global scale within the Omni-channel retail system is relatively easy since article **G** suggests that the retailers need to devise a system of consumer follow up. He suggests that, *"Marketing planning is benefited, as there is global follow-up of the client's behavior…."*

However, social shoppers require the human interaction which the Omni-channel retail system cannot focus in order to provide primarily that the global Omni-channel marketing trends are novel. Therefore, the relationship being sought is negative as article **H** suggests *"… social interaction in a physical store has a positive effect on consumer behavior."* To understand the importance of social interaction within the Omni-channel system, retailers have to bring together the users into a physical store all the time. The efforts limit the sense in Omni-channel ideology at the first place. Therefore, it can be argued that creating consumer loyalty among shoppers with a social shopping behavior on a global scale is nearly impossible due to the inherent geographical limitations of social interactions. The interactions are shown in Figure 2 below.

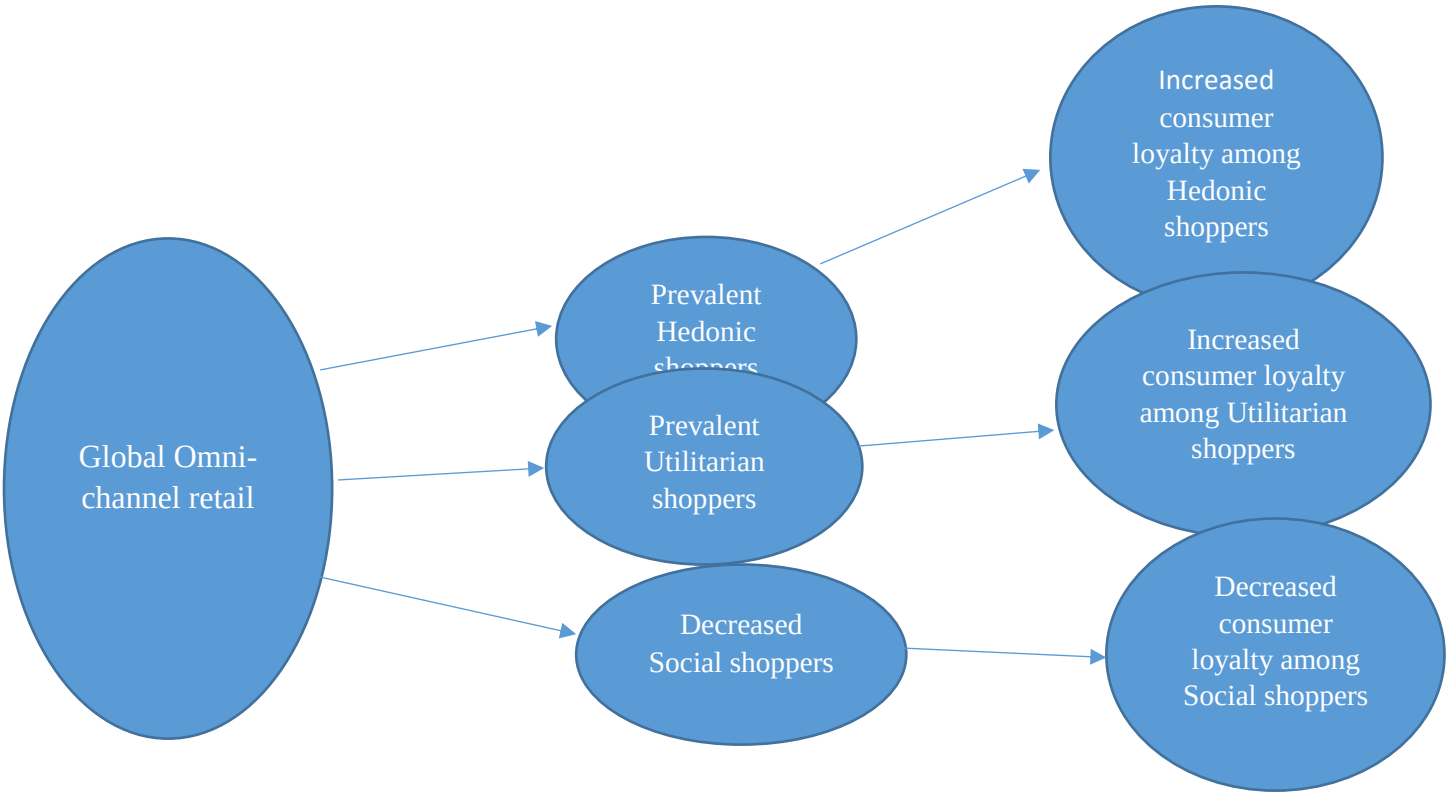

Figure 2: *The interaction between Hedonic, Utilitarian and Social shoppers and its effect on consumer loyalty (Source: Own illustration)*

The figure above summarizes that the introduction of global Omni-channel retail brings about increased number of consumers hedonic and utilitarian shoppers. The increased numbers of online and offline shoppers due to enhanced Omni-channel systems indicates increased consumer loyalty. However, decreased consumer loyalty among the social consumers due to inherent geographical limitations of the Omni-channel retail system leads to reduced number of social shoppers. The arrow direction shows that the introduction of the global Omni-channel retail system has a corresponding effect on the number of shoppers in each type of shoppers.

CHAPTER 7. Discussion

The analysis of the findings seems to identify the hedonic, utilitarian and the social values as inter-related factors that determine the behavior of the shoppers in general and contribute to the formation of a consumer loyalty. However, the benefits have been deemed secondary to the most primary factors that include the identification of unique factors affecting the rationale of

shoppers. The logical explanation is that shoppers have deeper senses that need to be cached out and satisfied. From the point the buyer is entering the chain store, the consumer service should be aimed at identifying his needs and fulfilling these. However, the basic needs are difficult to isolated (Sabiote & Roman, 2014). Therefore, the secondary values discussed in the findings section play a significant role at understanding the needs of a consumer. The importance associated with such a comprehension is an attempt to analyze how a multichannel retailer can evoke consumer loyalty.

There are, therefore, four propositions which one can argue from, such as:

Proposition 1 a: *hedonic values affect Omni-channel retailing to a greater extent than other values*;

Proposition 1 b: *utilitarian values influence the Omni-channel shopping to a greater extent than other values;*

Proposition 1 c: *social values influence the Omni-channel shopping experience to a greater extent than other values;*

Proposition 2: *all hedonic, utilitarian and social values affect Omni-channel retailing as much as they affect multichannel retailing*;

The hedonic, utilitarian and social benefits have significant effects on the multichannel retailing. The literature, however, has little reliable information to lead to a similar claim in regards to the Omni-channel retailing as previously mentioned by Herhausen *et al.*,(2015). The propositions flow from the fact that Omni-channel retailing is an outgrowth of the multichannel retailing. Also, the findings reveal that the experience of retailers puts them in a position where they can train their employees how to identify the needs of consumers efficiently. The skills are, therefore, dependent on non-verbal communication channels.

The Table 8 bellow illustrates the interrelation between the types of shopping behavior among the different types of consumers within the Omni-channel shopping experience. For example, hedonic behavior increases among the online shoppers, offline shoppers and the mobile shoppers such that the shoppers show more hedonic tendencies as Omni-channel retail system formalizes. This phenomenon occurs due to the fact that the Omni-channel retail system provides a platform for hedonic tendencies to increase.

Omni-channel shopping experience	Online shoppers	Offline shoppers	Mobile shoppers
Hedonic behavior	Increase	Increase	Increase
Utilitarian behavior	Decrease	Increase	Increase
Social behavior	Decrease	Increase	Increase

Table 8: *The interrelation between Variety-seeking behaviours and Omni-channel retail channels (Source: Own illustration)*

Deductively, it is significantly possible to conclude that the hedonic, utilitarian and social values have an equal effect on the Omni-channel retailing as the multi-channel retailing. Therefore, **Proposition 2** can be argued to form a valid answer to the proposed research question: *What factors influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and contribute to the creation of the consumer loyalty?* In this case, **Proposition 1 a, Proposition 1 b and Proposition 1 c** form inapplicable conclusion from the discussion thereof. The first **Proposition 1a**, however, could be argued to forms a logical conclusion that relates to the literature and the deduction method herein. From Table 8 above, the hedonic behavior is prevalent among all the types of shoppers- online, offline and mobile.

A study on the effect of the shoppers shows that hedonic factors have a significant role on multi-chain retailing (Picot-Coupe *et al.,* 2015). In another study by Anteblian *et al.*, (2013) it was discussed that the utilitarian factors play an equally significant role in the multichannel retail as the hedonic factor. The study also concluded that the majority of practical shoppers are men.

The grounds of the discussion, however, have a wrap up that affects the nature of allocating resources. The Omni-channel retailing is diversified and improved to enhance the multi-channel retailing. While Omni-channel focuses on the effects of each of the channel in a multi-channel retailing, it is undisputable that retail marketing has changed drastically with the introduction of novel technology (Keller, 2010). Now the retailer has the chance to advertise and communicate with consumers all the time. However, some of the retailers have relied too much on the online channel of marketing forgetting the invaluable benefits that are attached to the multi-channel retailing system. The model, therefore, suggests that a retailer needs to take the favor that a consumer accrues from all the levels multichannel proposes. At the same time, the retailer needs to identify the strongest channel and offer more attention to it. The more

important channel is the platform that allows the retailer to interact and determine the genuine requirements of the consumer. Such a channel would help maintain more consumers. However, the retailer should deter from ignoring all other channels entirely (Picot-Coupe *et al.*, 2015)

7.1 Conceptual Framework

The interrelationship between the global Omni-channel retail system and the variables described herein is a complex one. However, describing such a relationship was done through the deductive method. In article A the hedonic and utilitarian shopping behaviour were discussed to both have an effect on the Omni-channel retail system since they argue that *"... digital consumers, like consumers in physical stores, demonstrate both utilitarian and hedonic shopping values."* Therefore, the hedonic and the utilitarian shoppers are prevalent in a global omnichannel retail system due to digitalization of shopping experiences.

Therefore, it can be argued that in order to create consumer loyalty among the hedonic and utilitarian shoppers in a global scale within the Omni-channel retail system is relatively easy since in article G there is a suggestion that the retailers need to devise a system of consumer follow up. The authors suggest that, *"Marketing planning is benefited, as there is global follow-up of the client's behaviour…."*

However, social shoppers require the human interaction which the Omni-channel retail system would face difficulties to provide primarily because global Omni-channel marketing trends are novel. Therefore, the relationship being sought is negative as it is phrased in article M *"... social interaction in a physical store has a positive effect on consumer behaviour."* To understand the importance of social interaction within the Omni-channel system retailers have to bring together the users into a physical store all the time. The efforts limit the sense in Omni-channel ideology in the first place. Therefore, creating consumer loyalty among shoppers with a social shopping behaviour on a global scale is nearly impossible due to the inherent geographical limitations of social interactions. The conceptual framework below illustrates the factors which affect an Omni-channel shopping experience which add to the global Omni-channel brand value and contribute to the creation of consumer loyalty.

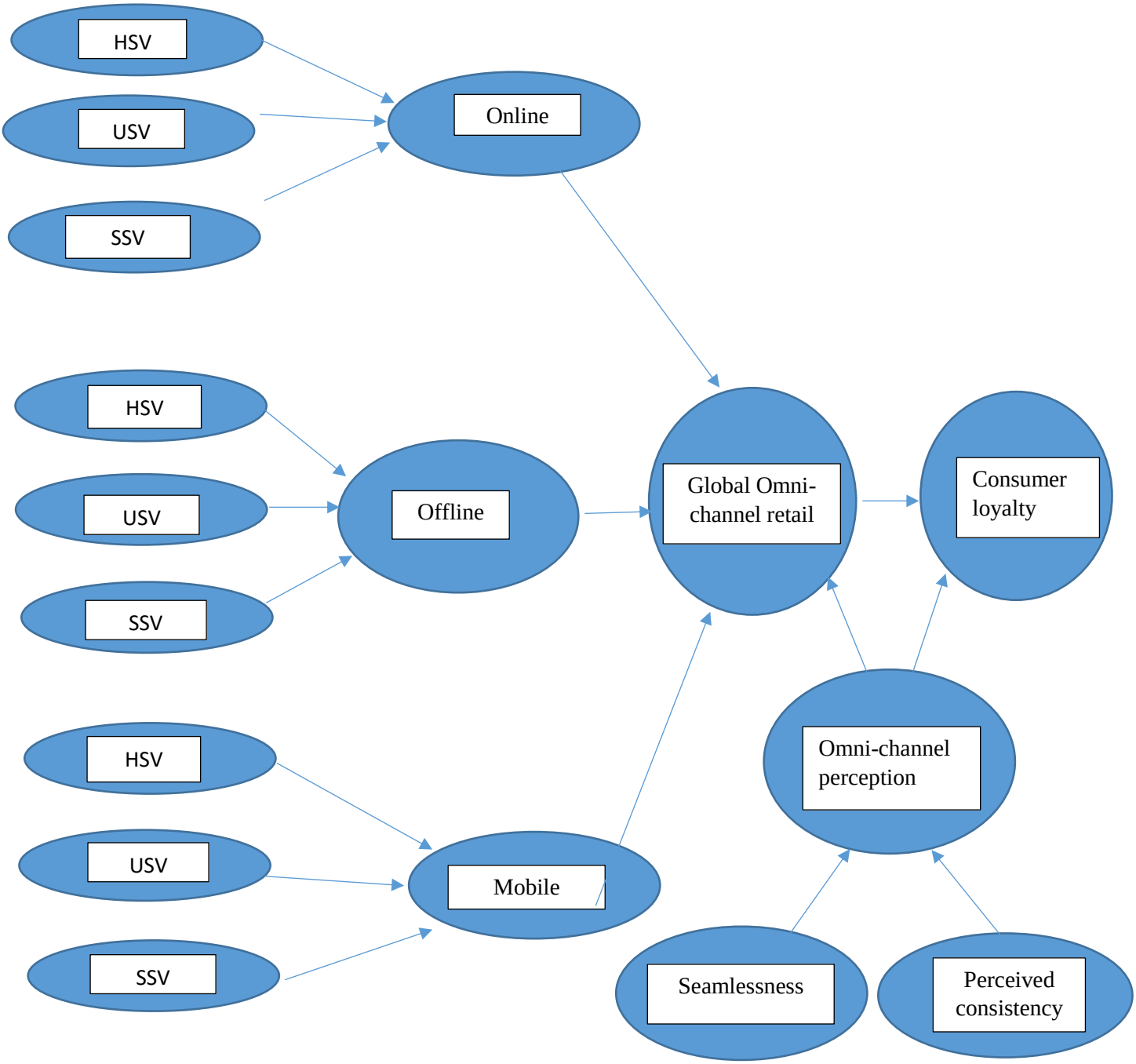

Figure 3: *Conceptual Framework (Source: Own Illustration)*

**Key: HSV-hedonic shopping value; USV-utilitarian shopping value; SSV-social shopping value.*

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this master thesis was to find out the factors that could affect an Omni-channel shopping experience and cover the current knowledge gap revealed in the literature. Hence, the problem which could address this issue was formulated as follows:

What factors influence an Omni-channel shopping experience and could contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty?

Furthermore, the sub-question *Is there an interrelation between factors which affect the Omni-channel shopping experience?* was formulated in order to guide the proposed research question and help at finding a more comprehensive answer to it.

As the objectives were at performing a holistic understanding, the systematic review methodology was argued to be the most suitable tactic when seeking an answer to the proposed research question which guided this master thesis (see *Reasons for adopting a systematic review process* sub-chapter). Thus, Systematic (literature) reviews are very supportive when it is necessary to direct future research efforts on an overall picture of the evidence.

After conducting a pilot search by using Scopus database, subsequently 18 articles have been compiled and thoroughly investigated in order to examine the phenomena. After forming the systematic (literature) review ground for this thesis, the author could come to the conclusion that currently, Omni-channel retailing emphasise on three touch points, mainly physical store, the digital store and the mobile application. Also, it could be observed that when acquiring a shopping experience, consumers/shoppers are driven by three value dimensions, specifically hedonic value, utilitarian value, and social value. Moreover, after the systematic review, the author could detect that these are not the only factors attributed to the acquisition of an Omni-channel experience, and two other influential factors such as *the perception of seamlessness when moving from one touch point to another* and *the perception of consistency of the retailing mix between touchpoints* have also been taken into discussion. These have been argued to form a consumer perception about Omni-channel shopping experience and thus, contribute to the formation of a consumer loyalty.

Additionally, 10 out of 18 articles included in the review, have been detected at investigating these factors in a more exhaustive way. Therefore, these articles have been further selected for the support of the analyses part which have also indicated the interrelation between the global Omni-channel retail system and the variables described, further argued in the *Discussion chapter*. In order to investigate the interrelation between the three touchpoints (online, offline,

mobile) and variety-seeking dimensions (hedonic, utilitarian and social), and their effect on consumer loyalty the author has developed four propositions based on the findings that were further studied. However, describing such a relationship was done through the deductive method and the author has been guided by her own understanding and perception of the phenomena examined, hence from a subjective approach. The interactions were presented in a conceptual framework diagram (see *Conceptual Framework* sub-chapter). It was concluded that the interrelations further affect global Omni-channel shopping experience that consequently affect consumer loyalty. It was, therefore concluded that all the hedonic, utilitarian and social motivation affect an Omni-channel shopping experience and these should be considered by retailer when performing an Omni-channel seamless shopping experience.

It can also be argued that besides answering to the proposed research question, the contribution of this thesis is that it builds the foundation for detailed analysis of factors influencing the Omni-channel shopping experience and gives reasons for further investigation on the topic.

CHAPTER 9. Limitation and Future Research Directions

All research studies have their own limitations, whether the study was completed by a student or an academic. Generally speaking, the study limitations are represented by such characteristics of design or methodology that influenced and/or restricted the interpretation of the research finding. For the purpose of making this thesis more explicit and to be able to describe it in a more comprehensive way, this section will present the limitations of the study.

After the initial research done, it could be observed that the papers which examined the literature on the proposed topic were discussing the subject of Omni-channel retailing from different aspects.

Due to the objectives of this thesis and the proposed problem formulation, it was necessary to limit the study in order to focus only on identifying the factors which could affect the Omni-channel shopping experience. Therefore, it was important to examine only papers which touch on the subject of Omni-channel shopping experience, mainly major factors affecting it which could also contribute to the creation of a consumer loyalty.

Lastly, the papers focusing on the subject of Omni-channel shopping experience were selected for a further in-depth investigation and explanation of the proposed research question in order to find relevant answers to the settled objectives of this thesis.

An important limitation that should be mentioned is that the articles which form the systematic literature review for this thesis have been searched in the Scopus database. By using alternative databases, might have led to find other papers which could in turn provide this thesis with other significant information and knowledge on the subject examined. Therefore, the author acknowledges that using other sources for information acquisition might have resulted in a different evidence generation and implicitly, impact the final result. Moreover, the answer to the proposed problem formulation might have been different, and in dependence on the findings of other relevant papers, the final outcome might have resulted in different aspects which affect an Omni-channel shopping experience.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the selected papers in the systematic literature review are not all part of high ranked journals. One of the reasons could be the fact that the subject of Omni-channel retailing is relatively new and scholars have not yet been comprehensively investigating this phenomenon. Hence, the high ranked journals would be limited in providing academic papers which would specifically study this topic.

Another limitation is based on the extensiveness of the review, i.e., did the review enclosed all the related studies? Taking into consideration the lack of reviewing team and the restricted time by which the thesis was supposed to be completed, which represents only one semester, this study is influenced by the sources constraints, so it is limited to a particular number of sources. Although, the systematic literature review did not comprise all the studies on the subject, it can be argued that the presented articles give a complete image on the phenomena studied thus, it is considered that these articles are being representative.

This master thesis represents a theoretical approach on the subject on Omni-channel shopping experience, therefore from a theoretical and methodological approach, this thesis should not employ primary data collection methods, such as companies' surveys, interviews, direct observations, etc. Contrary to this, the data collection method employed in this thesis is secondary, which, in most situations is easily available and inexpensive to collect. Nevertheless, the use of primary data sources would have been of much more support since, the in-depth investigation of the subject and its implications on the resulting impact could have been grounded and argued from a fully objective "measurable" perspective.

Future research directions

Since this thesis presents a theoretical approach to the study of Omni-channel shopping experience, future research is required in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of this

phenomenon, thus other perspectives and approaches could be employed at investigating it. Therefore, a potential future research direction would be at looking for a more in-depth causal effect between the factors which affect the Omni-channel shopping experience. In such a way, retailers would be able to allocate resources to the channel on which consumers emphasise the most in their shopping journey and generate certain marketing strategies that could meet and predict consumers' specific variety-seeking behaviours.

Furthermore, in order to test if the factors which influence a consumer shopping experience are the ones found and presented within this thesis, it is of a major importance to empirically test and validate the conceptual framework.

This thesis is largely founding a first step towards understanding the Omni-channel shopping experience which also comprises its retail channels designed to enrich consumers' shopping journey. Thus, future research on the topic of brick and click, i.e., the way in which to synchronising brick with click in an Omni-channel strategy would be of a major importance for the retail business.

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