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## Omnichannel retailing: Exploring consumer perceptions and roadmap of selected brands

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### Abstract

Technological advancements in the retail industry have sparked a wave of innovations that are transforming what consumers expect and how businesses operate. One standout innovation is omnichannel retailing, a strategy aimed at providing customers with a smooth and integrated shopping experience. To keep up in today's technology driven market, many retail brands are weaving omnichannel approaches into their operations, striving to meet the changing preferences of shoppers. This paper aims to explore how aware consumers are of omni-channel retailing, while also gathering insights from store managers who are actively implementing these strategies. The results are drawn from primary data collected through structured questionnaires and interviews with executives from selected brands. The findings indicate a generally positive outlook on the adoption of omni-channel practices. However, a significant gap persists regarding consumer awareness. This underscores the importance for brands to effectively promote these services to their customers. The insights gained from this study can help retailers and store managers better understand consumer perceptions of omni-channel retailing, allowing them to tailor their strategies accordingly. It presents valuable information for researchers looking into how consumer behaviour is shifting in response to new technologies in the retail space and highlights potential areas for further research.

**Keywords:** Omni-channels, retailing, consumer awareness, technology

### 1. Introduction

Technological developments have played a pivotal role in revolutionizing numerous sectors. Retail sector is one of the notable areas which has undergone significant transformation. With the rise in digital innovation, retail has witnessed significant shifts in both consumer behaviour and business operations. With the advent of online platforms for shopping, the total market can be bifurcated between online and offline channels. 43% of the respondents expressed their intention to increase their engagement with online shopping. The digital shopping platforms have gained popularity for offering better prices, discounts and rewards, while the offline channels continue to attract customers through convenience, immediacy and sensory experience. Initially, the retail brands expanded to online marketplaces to respond to ever-evolving consumer demand. However, this expansion has not rendered the significance of the offline channels that have been in existence ever since retailing began. Increasingly, customers are seeking "phygital" experience the enhancement, facilitation, or mediation of the physical shopping experience through digital technologies<sup>[1]</sup>. In a bid to elevate customer satisfaction and interaction, retailers sought to integrate different channels, driving the shift toward the "omnichannel" model. This approach not only supports a seamless and satisfying customer experience but also attracts new customers.

Omnichannel retailing is the coordinated and integrated management of multiple available channels and customer interaction points, aimed at enhancing the overall customer experience while maximizing performance across all channels<sup>[2]</sup>. The authors have differentiated between multi-channel and omnichannel with omnichannel being broader in approach. Omnichannel retailing is the process of transacting across multiple channels in an integrated manner<sup>[3]</sup>. In the present fast-evolving environment, retailers must act promptly in embracing omnichannel as consumers are increasingly engaging with brands across various channels, enabled by rapidly evolving technology<sup>[4]</sup>. Retailers are creating various strategies to leverage the opportunities presented by omnichannel retailing, which is blurring the lines between online platforms and physical outlets<sup>[4]</sup>. Omnichannel Retailing has been described within a framework comprising physical store, e-commerce platforms, apps on devices and

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social media <sup>[4]</sup>. These omnichannel extend across various spheres of retail marketing such as sales, distribution, and logistics, among others.

**Table 1:** Types of Omnichannels

Distribution Services	Click and collect Buy online, return in store Curbside pickup
Sales tools	Endless aisle
Promoting cross-channel access	Retail outlet locator Inventory check Click and Try QR-enabled in-store product details

*Created by authors*

An omnichannel retailer, for instance, can enable consumers to complete their purchase online and collect their items in person at a retail store, a service often referred to as "click and mortars" <sup>[5]</sup>. They can also install 'in-store virtual aisles' which can be used by the customer to gain access to a larger inventory. This helps the retailers to reduce the inventory holding costs and retain customers even in case of stockouts. Customers' in-store shopping experiences are significantly impacted when products are out of stock, and they have to wait in longer lines. Retailers can use omnichannel to overcome these obstacles. The prominent omnichannel with respect to sales and distribution employed by retailers are Click and Collect, Endless Aisle, Curbside Pickup and Inventory Check. These have been discussed below.

**Click and Collect:** Involves placing an order via an online platform and collecting it by visiting the designated store <sup>[6]</sup>. Uniqlo, Zara, Walmart and Shoppers Stop offer this as a part of their omnichannel offerings <sup>[7]</sup>.

**Endless Aisle:** Provides customers with an option to explore a retailer's full product range through digital screens installed in stores. Pepperfry, FabIndia, Lenskart, Nykaa and Walmart are among the brands offering this omnichannel <sup>[8]</sup>.

**Curbside Pickup:** Allows customers to buy products through online channels and collect their respective orders from the designated parking lot of the store, eliminating the need to get out of their car. Walmart actively provides this facility <sup>[9]</sup>.

**Inventory Check:** Enables customers to check real-time product availability at the store before visiting, helping them to plan their shopping trips effectively and reducing the likelihood of disappointment due to stock-outs. Zara and Uniqlo are some of the brands offering this omnichannel <sup>[10]</sup>. Global brands like Sephora, IKEA, and Zara are leading players in their respective industries. They provide noteworthy omnichannel to facilitate customer movement between their digital platforms and physical channels. IKEA is known for offering click-and-collect. Once the order is placed online, the customer can collect the order from a designated collection point in the store parking. Additionally, one has to bring an identity document and the order confirmation email. On reaching the designated area, co-workers guide the customers on how to collect their products. Sephora has further enhanced customer engagement through features like curbside pickup and the endless aisle, in addition to click and collect. While Zara offers various omni channels, including 'click and find' for

efficient in-store product location, and 'click and try' to enable customers to book fitting rooms in physical stores through its online application.

Indian homegrown brands have also embraced the omnichannel model to enhance their reach and customer experience. Various brands like Shoppers Stop, Pepperfry, Lenskart, and FabIndia showcase effective adoption of omnichannel strategies, combining digital and physical mediums to deliver a unified purchase journey for consumers. Pepperfry engages its customers across both channels through endless aisle. Shoppers Stop offers omnichannel like click and collect, endless aisle and buy online return in-store, making it easy for customers to move across various touchpoints in their purchase journey. Similarly, Lenskart offers click and collect, while FabIndia provides Endless Aisle to its consumers. This study focuses on omnichannel related to shipping services, sales tools and promoting cross-channel access such as click and collect, buy online return in-store, curbside pickup, endless aisle and inventory check.

## 2. Literature Review

Omnichannel retailing can be viewed as a comprehensive combination of channel strategies and operational resources to be considered by retailers <sup>[11]</sup>. Omnichannel operations require all channels to be synchronised and managed in a unified manner with the help of digital technologies by retailers <sup>[12]</sup>. The integration is beneficial when the customer uses it and finds it suitable. This means that customers will switch across channels and devices as part of the omnichannel shopping experience. Hence, the businesses must take this into account and ensure that the customer's experience is improved <sup>[2]</sup>. How much the online channel integrates with the other channels, specifically the offline store, which may affect customers' "stickiness" to a particular firm <sup>[13]</sup>. This has implications for inventory management, better customer service and help in fulfilling demand, thus ensuring retention of customers. The term "channel" denotes any touchpoint or medium a business uses to interact and communicate with its customers <sup>[14]</sup>. To foster long-term loyalty, retailers must integrate all customer touchpoints and redesign their loyalty programs to engage customers consistently across channels. An effective omnichannel strategy enables personalized communication throughout the customer journey, ultimately building deeper, lasting relationships. With the advent of omnichannel, the integration of various channels has increased, thereby implying greater means to interact with the customer. The customer's shopping experience is not solely limited to one particular channel; rather, there is an integration of channels, which can flow in either direction from store to Internet or Internet to store <sup>[15]</sup>.

Omnichannel retailing is described as a unified experience across channels where customers perceive all touchpoints as part of a single brand interface <sup>[15]</sup>. A study on the implementation of the "buy-online, pick-up-in-store" (BOPS) system concluded that there is a shift from online to offline purchases by customers <sup>[16]</sup>. Hence change in purchase behaviour requires a multi-pronged approach rather than studying a single channel lens. The issue is whether the customer chooses to purchase online and return in-store, or do a survey of the quality at a physical store and place an online order through their digital screens, omnichannel has everything covered. The main goal of omnichannel retailing is to offer a seamless experience

where the consumer interacts primarily with the brand, rather than with individual channels.

Retailers that have chosen to implement omnichannel retailing do so intending to better respond to the demands of the customers, to maximise use of separate sales channels, and to achieve competitive advantage <sup>[17]</sup>. As consumers become more and more aware of the different products, it becomes essential for retailers to identify key factors and challenges affecting omnichannel implementation to make a distinguishing mark for themselves and provide a unified, smooth experience across all channels. The transition has external and internal implications for retailers. Within the organisation, it entails internal reorganisation, conceptualisation of strategies, top management support, and externally it would require developing and synchronising appropriate touchpoints and a user-friendly technology and technical customer support system <sup>[18, 19]</sup>. They must cater to the ever-evolving customer demand. Providing customers with services that benefit them will help in increasing customer loyalty towards their brand <sup>[20]</sup>. To improve financial performance, businesses are motivated to transition into multiple channels. Omnichannel retailing offers considerable potential for brick-and-mortar stores to augment their position within the supply chain <sup>[17]</sup>. This refers to making the physical retail stores an additional distribution and storage facility. Options such as “click and collect” give customers freedom about their shopping decisions because they can have choice of a convenient location from which to pick up their purchase <sup>[21]</sup>. This eliminates the need for long wait periods and thus is useful in case of an urgent requirement.

In the dynamic retail environment, omnichannel has become essential to meet evolving consumer demands. Researchers have explored various aspects of multichannel and omnichannel retailing strategies in their studies <sup>[22, 23]</sup>. The authors have highlighted that omnichannel retailing is an ideal strategy to the most recent advancements and to align with current consumer behaviour. This strategy not only addresses the challenge of maintaining uniform brand perception across channels but also enhances the shopping experience.

84% of retailers surveyed at global level believe that providing a consistent and integrated purchase experience to shoppers is crucial to remain competitive in the evolving digitalized market <sup>[24]</sup>. There is a need to maintain the strategic advantage in the evolving digitalised market <sup>[25]</sup>.

A fully integrated and effectively executed omnichannel strategy can significantly improve the overall consumer experience <sup>[15]</sup>. Modern-day consumers are increasingly becoming discerning and expect a shopping experience tailored to their preferences. Consumers expect to be able to shop at any time, from any location <sup>[21]</sup>. This expectation highlights the necessity for retailers to implement an omnichannel and consumer-centric strategy to offer them an easy and comfortable shopping experience <sup>[26, 27]</sup>. In an era where buyers expect a frictionless shopping experience, retailers must differentiate themselves by building a strong omnichannel brand experience, which goes beyond advertising <sup>[21, 28]</sup>.

A multichannel approach alone is not enough to deliver a seamless and unified experience across all channels <sup>[29]</sup>. An omnichannel strategy becomes crucial for integrating customer experience and focusing on all customer interactions with the organisation from a customer's perspective <sup>[18]</sup>. However, certain challenges are faced while

implementing omnichannel strategies. Customers must have a standardised experience with a brand across all platforms. However, maintaining consistency across all channels is a major challenge. The franchise business model may pose a challenge, where independent franchisees may create variations in the customer experience <sup>[17]</sup>. The main challenge faced by retailers offering click-and-collect is to make the process a smooth and continuous solution, both for the retailer and the customer <sup>[21]</sup>. This involves ensuring that online orders are accurately processed, inventory is efficiently managed, and customers experience minimum delays or complications when collecting their orders from offline stores. If the process isn't seamless, the convenience factor for which this omnichannel is adopted remains unfulfilled. Channel conflict is a significant challenge faced by retailers offering click-and-collect services <sup>[17]</sup>. The issue arises because of how sales accreditation policies are set that the physical store does not get credit for the sale, even while it shoulders the operational responsibilities, like handling inbound deliveries. Additionally, with the rise of omnichannel shopping, there has been an increase in product returns by customers. This poses a challenge for retailers as they may have to incur additional shipping costs to send the inventory back to the warehouse. This challenge of handling an increase in the influx of returns can be mitigated by reducing the proportion of returns by providing clearer, more detailed, and reliable product descriptions on their websites, enabling consumers to make more informed purchase decisions <sup>[17]</sup>.

Significant investment in technology is required to effectively implement an omnichannel. An effective omnichannel strategy is built on the implementation of interconnected technologies <sup>[17]</sup>. These investments are necessary but can be financially unfeasible for small retailers. While omnichannel offers various advantages, retailers need to overcome the challenges of channel conflict, return management, technological investments, etc. By overcoming these challenges, brands can offer a consistent purchase experience to customers across all channels.

The evolution of technology has made the retail world increasingly dynamic, with innovations like omnichannel emerging frequently. Omnichannel retailing, though of great importance, is relatively unexplored. The existing studies are industry-specific, age-specific, and focus greatly on how to influence the use of omnichannel. While omnichannel proves to be an advancement of immense use, it remains to be seen what the consumer's take on this is. There is a lack of focus on customer perceptions and their awareness level of omnichannel. Addressing this gap, this study, with the help of surveys and interviews, investigates how consumers perceive omnichannel amongst individuals of all age groups. This study is not industry-specific; rather, it is a comprehensive study of omnichannel used for products from various industries. Additionally, this study also sheds light on the seller's point of view of omnichannel, thus giving a holistic standpoint on the topic. To address the gap identified, research with the following objectives has been conducted.

#### **This study aims to**

- To assess the awareness and perspective among Indian customers regarding the omnichannel offered by various retail brands.
- To examine the effectiveness and limitations of current

omnichannel implementations in the context of India's retail industry.

- To propose future omnichannel strategies for retailers in India.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The study employs a multi-method approach, integrating both a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews to provide comprehensive insights into consumer behaviour and managerial perspectives on omnichannel retailing. A structured questionnaire was distributed through digital platforms like WhatsApp, Reddit and LinkedIn. Out of the 310 responses collected, 294 fully completed responses were deemed valid and subsequently included in the analysis. The questionnaire consisted of seven sections. The first section collects the respondents' demographic information, summarised in Table 1. The following section explores the shopping habits, consumer awareness and perceptions regarding omnichannel.

Additionally, the questionnaire assessed the degree of awareness about omnichannel through three sections: one for respondents who are fully aware and have used omnichannel, one for those aware but not using them and one for those unaware of them. The responses were analysed by calculating percentages for each category to gain an understanding of the trends and patterns in consumers' awareness and behaviour in relation to omnichannel.

To supplement the quantitative data from the questionnaire,

in-depth interviews were conducted with managers of retail outlets offering omnichannel services in Delhi. The selected outlets include Uniqlo, Saket; Zara, Saket; Nykaa Luxe, Saket and Pepperfry, Lajpat Nagar. These interviews provide insights about operational challenges and benefits of implementing omnichannel.

### Respondents' Profile

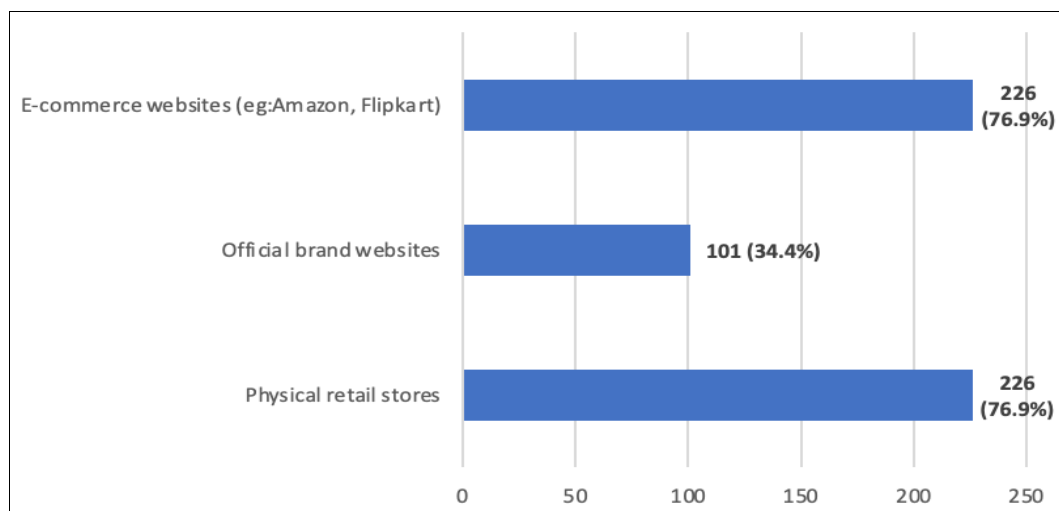
Out of the total responses, 44.6% comprised male respondents ( $n = 131$ ) and 55.4% of the responses were from female respondents ( $n = 163$ ). Participants represented various age groups: 16-18 (5.11%,  $n = 15$ ), 19-24 (37.42%,  $n = 110$ ), 25-40 (19.73%,  $n = 58$ ), 41-55 (20.41%,  $n = 60$ ), and 56 and above (17.35%,  $n = 51$ ). In terms of occupation, 39.46% were students ( $n = 116$ ), 35.71% employed ( $n = 105$ ), 8.84% self-employed ( $n = 26$ ), 6.8% homemakers ( $n = 20$ ), and 9.18% retired individuals ( $n = 27$ ). Regarding income, 44.17% belonged to the 0-6 lakh bracket ( $n = 125$ ), 18.73% to 6-12 lakh ( $n = 53$ ), and 37.1% reported earning 12 lakh and above ( $n = 105$ ).

The question regarding respondents' income was optional, hence, 283 complete responses were received in this regard as compared to 294 responses for all other questions.

## 4. Results & Discussion

### 4.1 Consumer Survey

A survey of 294 people was conducted to assess their level of awareness regarding Omnichannel in the retail sector.

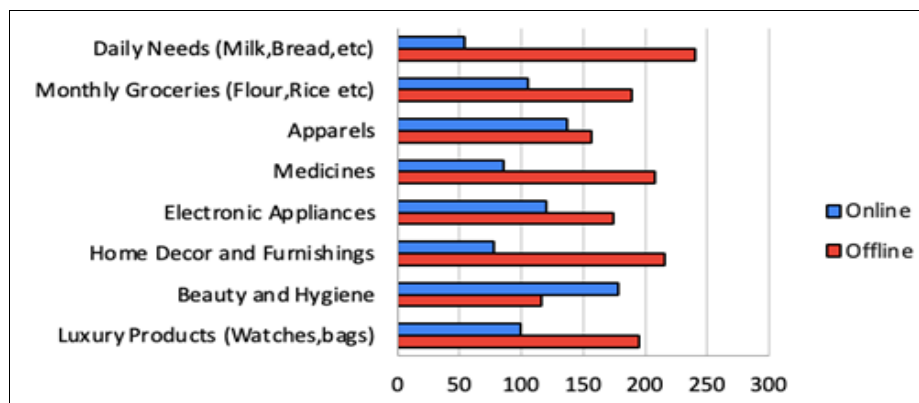


**Fig 1:** Distribution of shopping channel preference

The findings (Figure 1) show that 77% of the respondents use both physical retail stores and e-commerce platforms for shopping, indicating a nearly equal preference for the two channels. However, only 34% of the respondents shop directly from the official brand website. Thus, limited engagement with brand websites could be because of several factors such as higher pricing compared to major e-

commerce platforms, restricted brand options, shipping challenges and concerns about data privacy and security. Such low usage of brand websites undermines the reach and effectiveness of omnichannel, as information about omnichannel is more often communicated through the brand website.

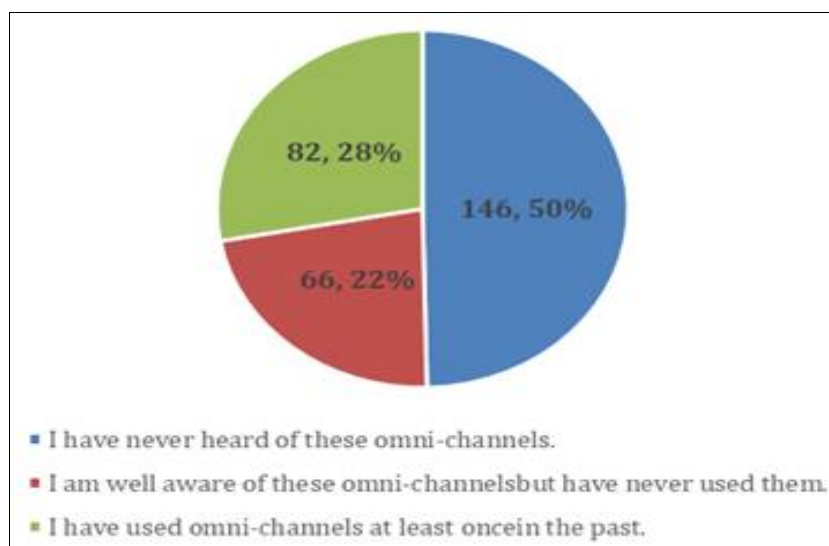




**Fig 2:** Preferred mode of shopping across product categories

When respondents were asked about their preferred mode of shopping for various product categories, the results indicate that respondents demonstrated a stronger preference for online shopping for beauty and hygiene items (Figure 2). In contrast, categories such as daily needs, medicine, apparel,

electronics, home decor and luxury items were predominantly preferred to be purchased offline. This preference for offline shopping is likely influenced by the need for a touch-and-feel experience or the desire for immediate possession of the product.

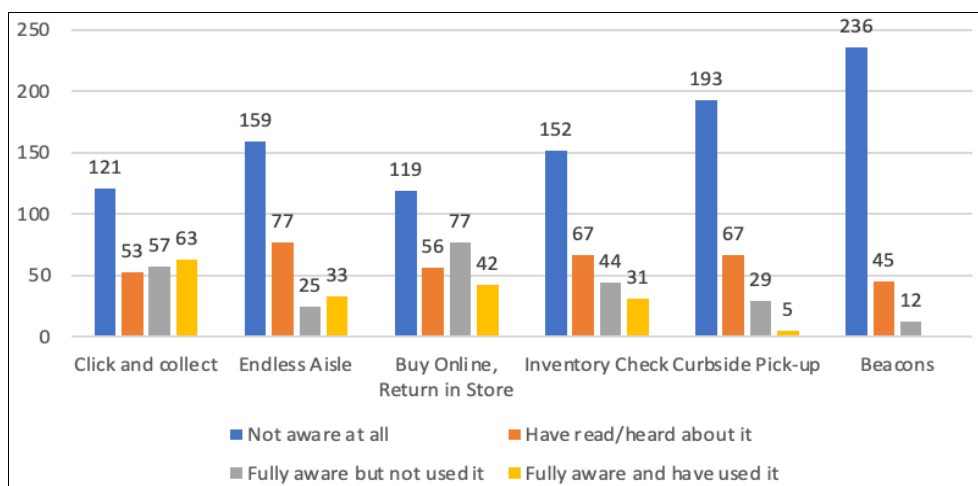


**Fig 3:** Familiarity with omni-channels

The survey identifies three distinct categories of respondents, with tailored questions provided based on their responses.

The survey suggests that almost half of the respondents have never heard of omnichannel. 22% of the respondents are

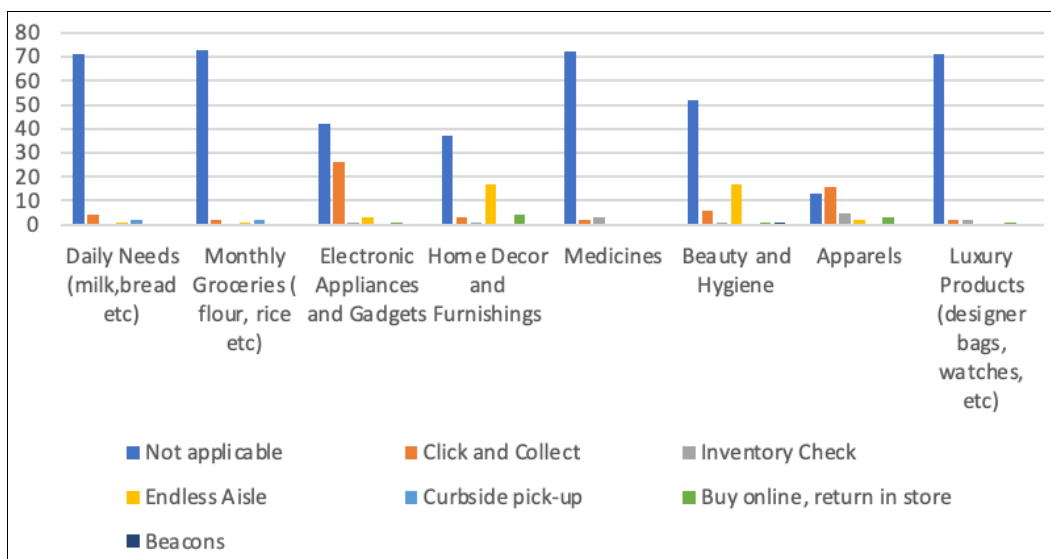
aware of omnichannel but have never used them, while 28% have used them at least once. These results indicate that the majority of participants lack familiarity with omnichannel, presenting significant potential for market development and consumer engagement.



**Fig 4:** Awareness level of various Omni-Channels

As per the survey, there is a general lack of awareness regarding most omnichannel. As depicted in Figure 4, curbside pickup has the lowest level of awareness and usage among all omnichannel options. In contrast, “Click & Collect” and “Buy Online, Return in Store” demonstrate relatively higher levels of awareness, though overall usage remains low across all omnichannel. This limited adoption

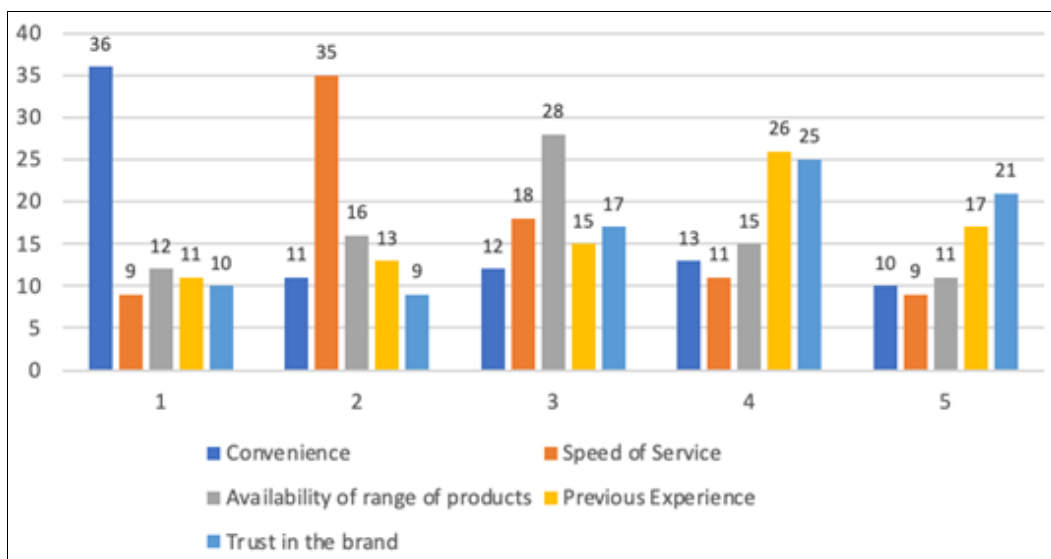
of omnichannel can result from many factors, including a communication gap between the consumers and the sellers. Respondents were directed to one of three questionnaire sections based on their awareness and use of omnichannel. Section 1 included 82 respondents who were “fully aware and using omnichannel”. The following insights are drawn from their responses:



**Fig 5:** Preference of Omni-Channels for different product categories

Click & Collect is widely used across most product categories, while Endless Aisle is primarily utilised in Home Decor & Furnishings and Beauty & Hygiene. Among all product categories, Apparel and Home decor & furnishings are the two categories that attract the highest number of omnichannel users.

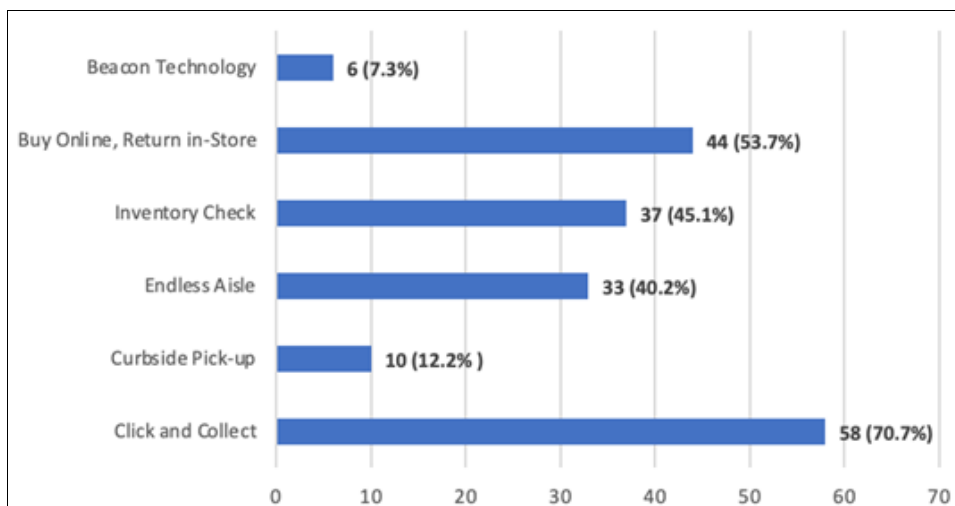
Omnichannel adoption is lower at both economic extremes. For necessity products such as daily needs, groceries, and medicines, customers prioritise the convenience and immediacy of offline shopping. Conversely, for luxury products, consumers prefer the tactile experience of touching and feeling items before making a purchase.



**Fig 6:** Ranked advantages of Omni-Channel usage

Based on the responses, 44% & 43% of the consumers prioritise convenience and speed of service, respectively, as the most important feature of omnichannel. In contrast, factors like the availability of a wide product range,

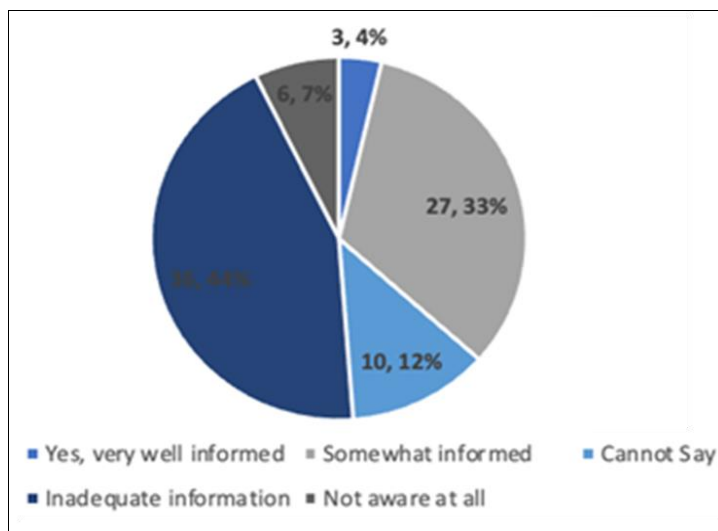
previous experience and trust in the brand are perceived as less important. However, while these factors may hold secondary importance, they still contribute significantly to the decision-making process during the purchase journey.



**Fig 7:** Omni-Channels most valued by consumers

As per the survey, Click & Collect emerged as the most beneficial omnichannel favoured by 70% of the respondents. Following that, 54% of respondents favoured the 'Buy Online, Return In-Store' option. With an increase in the working population, alternatives that offer delivery or

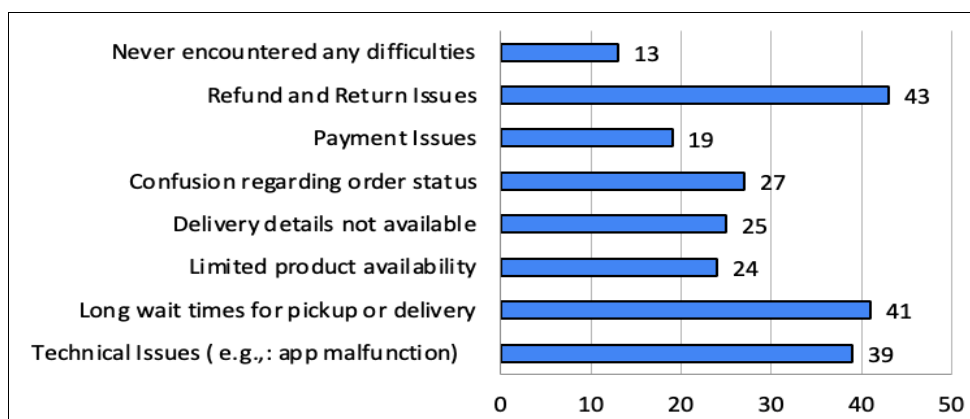
pickup at a convenient time are valued highly. In contrast, curbside pickup is perceived as relatively less beneficial by customers. This usage pattern could be attributed to the limited availability of the necessary infrastructure and technology.



**Fig 8:** Level of information about Omni-Channels

A mere 7% of the respondents feel that they are very well informed by the brands regarding omnichannel they offer. Whereas 51% of the respondents believe that they are either inadequately informed or not informed at all by the brands

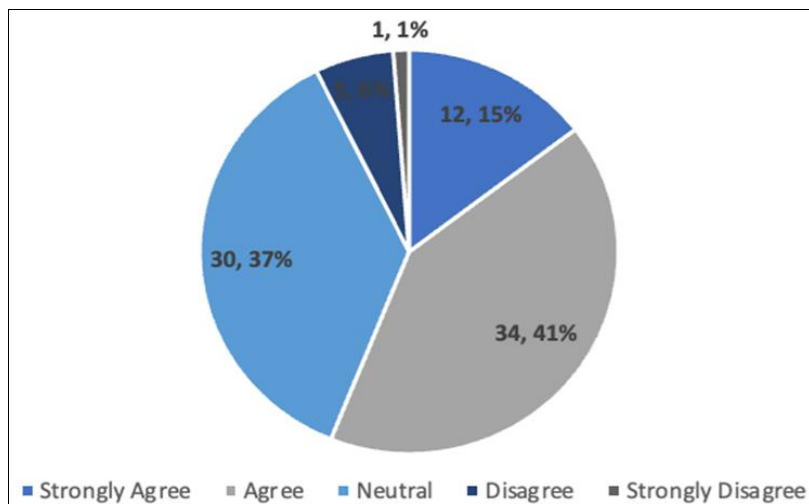
regarding omnichannel. This lack of awareness can be attributed to the emerging nature of omnichannel. As a relatively new addition to the retail landscape, it is not surprising that many brands are yet to adopt them, leading to customers being unaware of how to use these channels.



**Fig 9:** Challenges faced while using Omni-Channels

The data indicates that 16% of the respondents reported that they have never encountered any difficulties while using omnichannel. However, refund and return issues emerged as the most significant challenge affecting more than half of the respondents. This was followed by long waiting time for

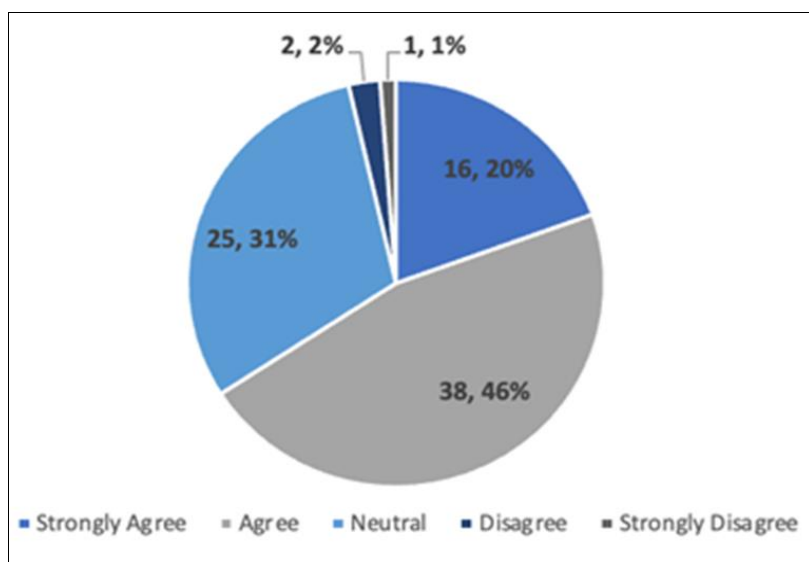
pickup or delivery. As highlighted in the analysis of Figure 8, omnichannel are a relatively new introduction, and it may take some time for the processes to be completely seamless and efficient.



**Fig 10:** Consumer willingness to switch to a competitor offering omni-channels

Figure 10 shows that more than half of the respondents are willing to switch to competitors that offer omnichannel services, posing a major challenge for brands that do not offer such services. This tendency is likely influenced by the convenience and time-saving advantages of omnichannel highlighted in Figure 6. With only 6% of respondents

resistant to switching, adopting an omnichannel strategy represents a critical opportunity for brands to attract and retain customers. This demonstrates that brands that offer omnichannel can gain a significant competitive advantage in the market.



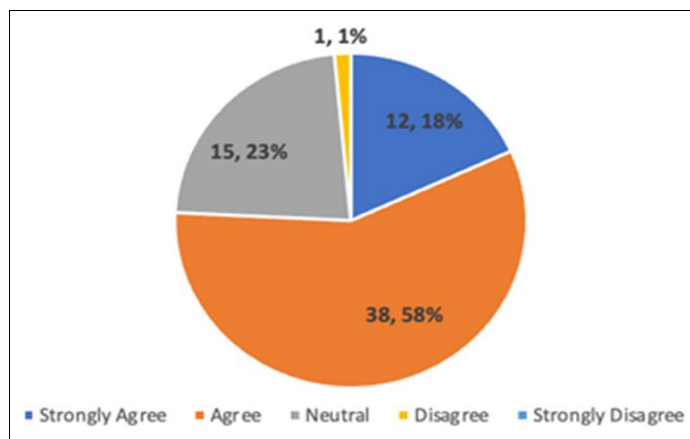
**Fig 11:** Consumer Preferences for Omni-Channel vs. Pure Online and Offline Platforms

As shown in Figure 11, 66% of respondents favour omnichannel platforms, highlighting that retailers offering such integrated experiences are likely to gain a competitive edge over those sticking to single-channel models. Among them, 20% are strongly in favour of omnichannel. This underscores the preference for an integrated shopping experience over purely online /offline. As technological

advancement continues, adopting systems that offer an integrated experience will be important for brands to remain competitive.

Section 2 included 66 participants who are “aware of but have not utilised omnichannel”. The following insights are drawn from their responses

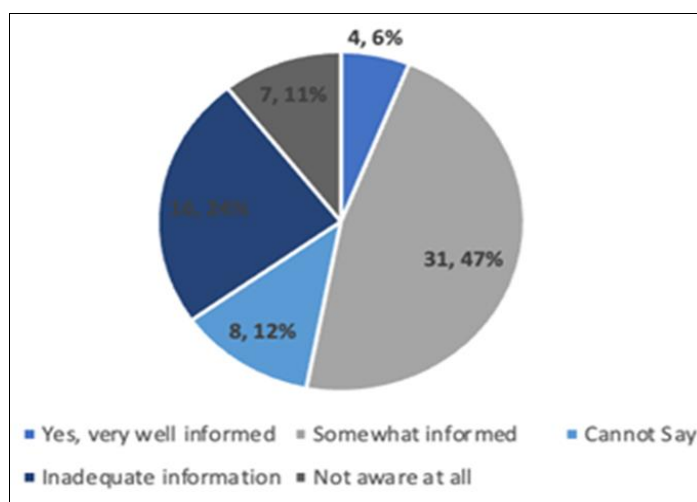




**Fig 12:** Consumers' perception of omni-channels

According to the survey, a significant majority, i.e. 76% of the respondents, agree with the given statement, i.e., whether the consumers consider omnichannel to be

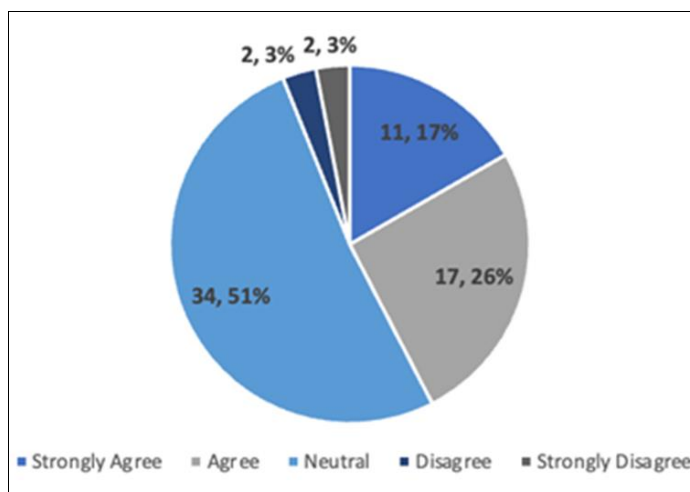
convenient and time-saving. In contrast, only 1.5 per cent disagree. The findings indicate that omnichannel are widely accepted and well-received by customers.



**Fig 13:** Consumer Awareness of Brand Promotions for Omni-channel Services

The data reveals that only 6% of the respondents consider themselves very well informed about omnichannel, while 35% of the respondents feel inadequately informed or not informed at all by the brands. Additionally, 47% believe they are somewhat informed. The results suggest a significant lack of awareness regarding omnichannel. The major reason for this gap can be inferred from Figure 1,

which shows that only 34% of respondents use official brand websites for shopping. These websites are currently the primary online platforms where sellers communicate information about omnichannel. This highlights an information disconnect and explains the low level of awareness among consumers.

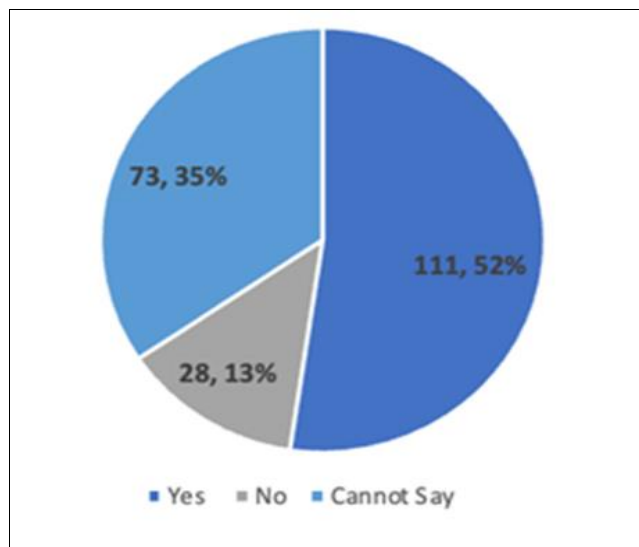


**Fig 14:** Consumer Preferences for Omni-Channel vs. Pure Online and Offline Platform

Figure 14 indicates that only 6% of the respondents prefer pure online or offline marketplaces over omnichannel. In contrast, 43% consider omnichannel to be a better option, while 52% remain neutral or indifferent. The neutral segment presents an opportunity for brands to enhance customer education and engagement with omnichannel. As technology continues to advance, adopting integrated systems that provide a seamless experience will be crucial

for brands to stay competitive and meet evolving customer expectations.

Section 3 relates to questions for respondents who have “not utilised omnichannel”. It comprised a total of 212 participants, out of which 66 respondents are “aware but have not used omnichannel” and 146 have “neither heard nor used omnichannel”. Based on the participants' responses, the following observations emerge:



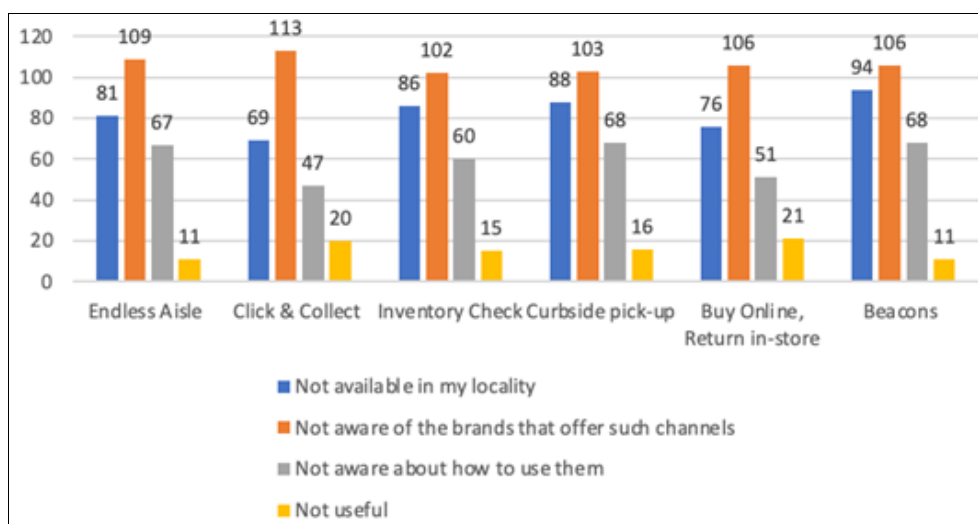
**Fig 15:** Consumer willingness to try Omni-Channels

The data indicates a favourable trend (Figure 15) with 52% of respondents who have never used omnichannel expressing openness to trying them. Only 12% are unwilling to do so.

Additionally, 34.4%- over 1/3rd of respondents are uncertain, representing a key segment that can be influenced

through targeted marketing, highlighting the benefits of omnichannel.

This is a strong encouragement for retailers to adopt omnichannel which can help them expand their customer base and enhance engagement.



**Fig 16:** Key barriers to the adoption of omni-channels by customers

Figure 16 highlights key reasons that consumers have not yet used omnichannel. The primary barrier is a lack of awareness, with a majority of the respondents stating they are unaware of brands offering omnichannel services. Additionally, a small portion of respondents perceive omnichannel as not useful.

Availability issues and insufficient information on usage and utility also contribute significantly to the lack of adoption. These findings suggest that brands must focus on

increasing awareness, improving accessibility and simplifying the user experience to boost the adoption rates among customers.

**5.2 Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Store Managers:** To really grasp the current landscape of omnichannel strategies, personal interviews were conducted with branch executives from well-known brands like Nykaa, Zara, Pepperfry, and Uniqlo. Open-ended questions were

included to initiate in-depth conversations, which led to rich, detailed insights into the operational realities from the retailers' perspectives. These discussions illuminated how these retailers are harnessing omnichannel approaches to elevate customer experiences and streamline their operations. The insights we gathered highlight the significant benefits these brands have reaped. One standout advantage is the enhanced accessibility of products. The Endless Aisle feature has truly transformed the shopping experience, driving sales and ensuring customers leave satisfied. At Nykaa, this feature has been pivotal in boosting sales, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. A store manager at Nykaa shared, "The implementation of these channels offers a greater variety to the customers. One major advantage is that it makes sure that the customer doesn't leave the store empty-handed."

Similarly, Pepperfry takes a comparable route by blending its vast online catalog with the in-store experience, enabling customers to browse a broader selection of products and physically inspect them before making a purchase. As one of the store managers at Pepperfry explained, *"We aim to ensure that customers are aware of the comprehensive product range available through the website within the offline studio environment"*. This blend of digital and traditional shopping enriches customer convenience and ensures a more seamless buying experience.

Zara's "Click and Find" feature available on its mobile app allows customers to find specific products in the store quickly. If a shopper is unable to find a product, they can simply use the app to pinpoint its exact location, making in-store shopping more seamless and efficient. The "Click and Go" feature facilitates clients to place their orders online and take delivery from a convenient outlet within just 120 minutes. This not only eliminates delivery wait time and shipping fees but also helps bring more people into physical stores, which often results in additional purchases and better customer interaction. A Zara store manager shared: *"Once the order is placed, customers get a confirmation along with instructions on how to collect their items. When they arrive at the chosen store, they can easily show their order confirmation or ID to grab their purchases."*

Click & Collect and Buy-Online, Return in Store have become increasingly popular because they combine the best features of online and in-store shopping by offering flexibility, speed, and convenience. As the Zara store manager shared, *"Once the order is placed, customers receive confirmation and instructions for collecting their items. When they arrive at the selected store, they can simply present their order confirmation or identification to pick up their purchases."* This method allows customers to enjoy the benefits of online shopping while collecting their orders from a store based on their schedule. Similarly, the Buy-Online, return in-store option adds convenience to the shopping experience. He said: *"When customers buy items online, they can return or exchange them at any of Zara's physical stores within 30 days of purchase."* This simplifies the return process as it eliminates the need to ship items back or wait for refunds, making the post-purchase experience smoother. Like Click & Collect, this option offers flexibility and helps build customer trust and satisfaction. Zara's 'Click and Try' enhances the in-store experience. Customers can book a fitting room by selecting a time slot that suits them on the app of the store. This means they get a designated trial room and spend less time waiting for their chance.

The cohesive blending of digital and physical channels makes Endless Aisle a key player in the world of omnichannel retailing. It not only broadens access to a wide variety of products but also significantly boosts sales by ensuring that customers can always find what they're looking for. Plus, the inventory check feature allows shoppers to see if their desired item is in stock at a nearby store. As one Uniqlo store manager put it, *"Customers can easily check if the product they want is available at their closest outlet."* This not only adds convenience but also encourages shoppers to visit physical stores, where they can truly experience the products. By drawing in more customers and making their decision-making easier, these features enhance customer satisfaction while driving sales.

While omnichannel offers a lot of benefits, it also comes with its fair share of challenges for retailers. Operational issues are among the most significant hurdles. A store manager at Nykaa pointed out that order mix-ups can sometimes occur when using the Endless Aisle feature. These mistakes confuse customers and disrupt operations, leading to decreased staff productivity and profitability. He highlighted the importance of better communication and coordination between warehouse and retail teams to make the system more reliable and enhance the shopping experience. Another challenge is the dependency on store staff for promoting and managing omnichannel. The manager at Nykaa explained that the Endless Aisle feature is primarily operated by in-store personnel. When customers ask for products not available in-store or in larger quantities, the staff assists them in placing orders and noting their preferences. This entails a high level of dependence on the store staff. During peak hours, staff may not be able to attend to all customers effectively, which can lead to missed sales opportunities and less satisfactory customer experience.

Navigating customer adoption of omnichannel strategies can be quite a hurdle. Many people rely heavily on mobile apps and digital payment systems, which can unintentionally leave out those who aren't as tech-savvy. This is especially true for older shoppers, who often prefer traditional shopping methods and may feel hesitant to dive into the digital world. As a result, they might be slow to embrace omnichannel services.

Cultural factors further complicate adaptability to this innovative mode of shopping. As mentioned by a store manager at Pepperfry: *"In the Indian market, customers typically prefer human dealing and multiple visits to check the durability of goods before finalising a purchase. It's understandable that some customers feel a bit uneasy about making purchases without being able to see the product in person first"*. This hesitation can lead to lost sales and unhappy customers. Many people prefer to physically engage with items before buying, which can make them reluctant to complete transactions through omnichannel platforms.

There are also challenges related to logistics and technology. It should be kept in mind the willingness and understanding of technology amongst consumers and retailers. Everyone is not necessarily aligned with the use of digital technology, which can act as a barrier to implementation of these systems.

For omnichannel strategies to work effectively, there needs to be a smooth integration of both digital and physical infrastructures. In remote or less developed areas, the lack of retail stores, warehouses, and reliable internet access

makes it tough to implement these systems. These infrastructural shortcomings can really hold back the potential of omnichannel approaches in a diverse market like India.

The interviews reveal some important insights about omnichannel retailing. It brings a lot of advantages, like improving the customer experience, boosting customer loyalty, reaching a wider audience, and driving more foot traffic to physical stores. However, there are still hurdles to overcome, such as managing inventory, dealing with order fulfilment challenges, and raising customer awareness. Retailers can tackle these issues by implementing quality control measures, embracing innovation, and investing in staff training and marketing. By doing so, they can make the most of omnichannel strategies and achieve lasting success.

## 6. Conclusion

For omnichannel strategies to be effective, there needs to be a smooth integration of both digital and physical infrastructures. In less developed areas, the lack of retail stores, warehouses, and reliable internet access makes it difficult to implement these systems. These infrastructural gaps can limit the potential of omnichannel in a diverse market like India. The interviews indicate important insights into the strengths and challenges of omnichannel retailing. On one hand, it offers advantages, like improving the customer experience, boosting customer loyalty, reaching a wider audience, and driving more foot traffic to physical stores. On the other hand, challenges such as managing inventory, dealing with order fulfilment challenges, and raising customer awareness limit its effectiveness. Retailers can address these issues through quality control measures, adopting innovation, and investing in staff training and marketing. Their outreach can be strengthened by using offline promotional tools such as signages, having dedicated counters in stores, and engaging with sales staff to fill the gap between customer awareness of these features and usability.

Schemes such as loyalty rewards can be offered for using omnichannel to boost adoption rates. Brands can also collaborate with influencers to help potential users understand the advantages of omnichannel. Moreover, retailers need to invest in staff training, as well-trained employees serve as a connection between the digital and physical shopping experiences. Additionally, customer feedback can be collected regarding their experience with using omnichannel. The retailers should share with the customers about how customer data is used and protected to reassure those who might be wary of using omnichannel due to privacy issues. Policy regarding maintenance and usage of data privacy should be clearly written and communicated to present and potential shoppers. Significant improvements in infrastructure, communication and investment in training of employees can make omnichannel a tool for long-term competitiveness.

While this study highlights the current state of omnichannel retail in India, it has certain limitations. The findings of the study are based on data based on perception, which can be affected by how well respondents understand or recall their experiences. Additionally, the respondents to the questionnaire were primarily people living in urban areas who were familiar with technology. The findings cannot be generalized to the broader Indian population, especially those from rural areas or smaller cities, with different shopping habits and limited access to digital platforms.

Finally, this study represents consumer perception at a specific point in time, which can change quickly as retail trends and technology evolve.

The analysis reveals that many consumers do not have knowledge or awareness about the omnichannel services that retail brands offer, or only have an ambiguous perception of them. A large proportion of customers are not aware even though brands are investing in these services. However, once they become familiar with these facilities, their views generally turn more positive. Clients value the convenience, flexibility, and time-saving aspects that omnichannel options add to their purchase experience. One of the primary reasons for the disconnect is the minimal engagement with the brand through its websites or mobile applications, where these features are highlighted. Users prefer to use other highly visible, broad-based, multi-product platforms for their shopping requirements. This indicates that simply offering omnichannel services is insufficient. In order to derive maximum benefit of technology, it is imperative to ensure that customers can easily find and access these channels at all touchpoints.

Preferences can vary based on the type of product, with some category of items revealing inclination towards in-store purchases. For example, luxury items and everyday goods show lower levels of omnichannel interaction, whereas the mid-range retail sector especially in clothing and electronics emerges as a strong area where these platforms can effectively distinguish themselves by providing added strategic value.

Despite the limited awareness, omnichannel retailing presents a positive outlook for broader adoption of omnichannel, which offers opportunities for retailers to attract and create customer loyalty. Notably, over half of the respondents who weren't familiar with omnichannel expressed a strong willingness to use them, underlining the chance for brands to seize a first-mover advantage.

As the retail landscape in India grows, having a strong and well-articulated omnichannel presence is crucial for brands aiming for competitive advantage and for catering to the evolving preferences of customers. While omnichannel strategies have been effectively employed to boost customer experience and loyalty in the Indian retail scene, their current impact is hampered by operational hurdles and a lack of consumer awareness. Retailers need to address issues like refund delays, delivery inefficiencies, and insufficient information. The positive aspect is the willingness of buyers to explore omnichannel services and their readiness to switch to such brands, which indicates significant growth opportunity. By making strategic enhancements in infrastructure, communication, and staff training, these channels can evolve into a powerful asset for long-term competitiveness and customer engagement.

It is estimated that number of online shoppers in India will reach approximately 500 million in number in 2030, an increase (addition) of 150 million in 2020 as well as the e-commerce market is predicted to reach US\$ 350 billion in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) by 2030 <sup>[30]</sup>. With a robust and exponentially growing retail scene unfolding in India, it is vital for a brand to implement a well-thought-out omnichannel presence to be in the forefront and to adapt to the diverse market /product segments. They have to be prepared to adapt to the change in demographic profile, urbanisation, penetration in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, increased purchasing power and aspiration levels of the population. From the customer perspective, their willingness to



experiment and explore these omnichannel services and to consider migrating to brands that offer these services is an indicator of opportunities to capture the market space. Future studies can investigate customer satisfaction post-adoption of omnichannel. Prospective studies can examine regional and generational differences in omnichannel adoption as well as the effectiveness of various promotional strategies. The purpose is to enhance customer experience through seamless interaction across various channels and ensure greater visibility of the brand. This area is very relevant in today's dynamic retail market place which is experiencing rapid growth projected to reach \$1.6 trillion by 2030, with local and global brands competing for the same customer base <sup>[30]</sup>.

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