

"INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF LULU'S OMNI-CHANNEL MARKETING STRATEGY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY: EVIDENCE FROM A UNIVERSITY IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN"

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Abstract

The factors affecting Omni-channel experiences at LULU, an Omani retailer, were investigated in a study. A conceptual model comprising four key factors is proposed and empirically tested in this study: customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value. Based on a sample of 100 teaching faculties from a university in Oman, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. The findings demonstrate positive correlations between customer engagement, convenience, customer service, perceived value, and customer satisfaction. Notably, perceived value emerges as the most influential predictor of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer satisfaction significantly impacts customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction being the strongest predictor. The study concludes that customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value are pivotal in determining customer satisfaction, with customer service and perceived value exhibiting particularly noteworthy effects. These findings have important implications for retailers, underscoring the importance of enhancing these factors to improve customer satisfaction and foster loyalty. Future research could explore additional factors influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty within the Omni-channel marketing context.

Keywords: Omni-channel, customer engagement, convenience, customer service, perceived value, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty.

Introduction:

The term "Omni" is derived from Latin, indicating "all" or "every" (Briel, 2018). Omni-channel marketing involves the integration and collaboration of diverse channels utilized by organizations to engage with consumers, aiming to ensure a consistent brand experience (Briel, 2018). These

channels encompass both physical outlets like brick-and-mortar stores and digital platforms such as websites (Briel, 2018). The key objective of an Omni-channel marketing strategy is to establish a convenient and seamless user experience that provides various options for fulfilling customer needs. These options may include online purchases, in-store shopping, or a combination of both, such as the well-known "buy online and pick up in-store" model (Briel, 2018). Presently, organizations spanning various sectors, including healthcare, retail, finance, and technology, are capitalizing on Omni-channel strategies to enhance their customer engagement and overall performance (Briel, 2018).

The goal of Omni channel marketing is to provide a seamless customer experience throughout the sales funnel by integrating branding, messaging, and a variety of online and offline touchpoints. This customer-centric approach recognizes that consumers interact with brands through multiple channels, including social media and customer service hotlines. By implementing an Omni-channel strategy, brands can provide a consistent and positive experience for customers across all channels they engage with.

The number of Omni-shoppers, customers utilizing multiple channels for their shopping journey, is increasing (Yurova et al., in press). These customers have high expectations for a seamless experience across channels. The core principles of an Omni-channel environment involve offering merchandise and services through various channels, integrating channels into a unified system to ensure consistent task fulfilment, and enabling easy inter-channel interaction for customers (Beck and Rygl, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015). Recent technological advancements have digitalized the retail industry, presenting both opportunities and challenges (Crittenden et al., 2010; Medrano et al., 2016). The rise of interactive media and the integration of new channels such as mobile, tablets, and social media have caused significant shifts in customer behavior (Verhoef et al., 2015). Operating channels independently can lead to fragmented supply chains and an inconsistent consumer experience. Omni-channel retailing aims to address these issues by coordinating processes and technologies across channels, providing seamless and dependable services (Verhoef et al., 2015). Retailers strive to ensure consistent product and service information across channels to enhance the multi-channel experience for consumers (Müller-Lankenau et al., 2006). Cross-channel systems are implemented to simplify data gathering and decision-making for consumers, offering uniform information across channels, and enabling cross-selling opportunities for retailers and manufacturers (Schoenbachler and Gordon, 2002).

Research Objective

A primary objective of the study is to examine how LULU's Omni-channel marketing strategy influences customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Secondary Objectives

To examine how Lulu customers perceive the Omni-channel experience.

To assess the effectiveness of LULU's Omni-channel offerings in terms of customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value in the Omani market.

To identify the key factors that are impacted by LULU's Omni-channel strategy, and their role in influencing customer loyalty.

Review of Literature

Customer engagement:

Snihur and Bell (2017) define customer engagement is defined as the emotional connection customers have with a brand. Engaging with retailers through multiple channels can lead to a stronger emotional connection. Srivastava (2016) defines A seamless shopping experience is achieved through the integration of various channels in omni-channel retailing. In social media, customer engagement plays a crucial role in building relationships is highlighted by Weber and Langer (2018). Additionally, Wang, Chen, and Zhang (2019) emphasize the importance of studying customer engagement in the digital age. Javalgi, White, Ali, and Ali (2018) define customer engagement as the emotional and behavioral responses of customers to a brand's social media presence.

Convenience:

Customer convenience is an easy, comfortable, and convenient way of using a product or service to meet the needs of the customer (Cook, 2014; Grewal et al., 2017; Sopadjleva, 2017; Zhang, 2018). Cook (2014) Describes the convenience of accessing product information anytime, anywhere by Omni-channel customers. The integration of omni-channel technologies within physical stores is discussed by Margetis et al. (2019), emphasizing the use of interactive kiosks, tablets, and walls to enhance the customer's purchase experience.

Customer service:

Zhu and Wang (2019) find that it is more likely that customers will exhibit loyalty to a brand if they have a positive customer service experience. Kim and Ko (2017) suggest that providing a variety of channels for customer service, such as phone, email, and live chat, increases satisfaction and loyalty. Wang et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of consistent and personalized customer service experiences across all channels. Li et al. (2020) reiterate that positive customer service experiences contribute to customer loyalty.

Perceived value:

Wang and Chen (2019) find that multiple channels of engagement with a retailer lead to a higher level of loyalty and perceived value. The relationship between perceived value and loyalty is stronger in customers utilizing multiple channels (Ghazali and Zailani, 2018). Sharma and Grewal (2018) establish a positive association between perceived value and satisfaction, trust, and

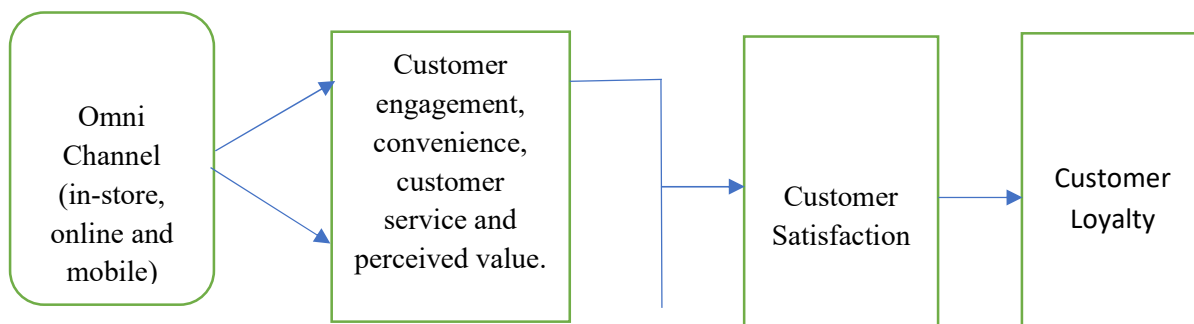
commitment in an omni-channel retail context. Chen and Hsu (2017) find that trust has a positive effect on loyalty, particularly when customers perceive high value. Chen and Wang (2016) also demonstrate that customers with higher perceived value exhibit higher loyalty levels.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty:

For omni-channel strategies to be successful, physical and online channels must be synchronized and integrated (Kumar and Reinartz, 2016). Personalized services, offerings, and advertisements contribute to customer satisfaction and subsequent loyalty (Tyrvaainen et al., 2020). Li et al. (2018) finds that customers engaging with a brand across multiple channels exhibit higher levels of loyalty and repeat purchases. Javalgi et al. (2018) report that customers engaged with a brand on social media display higher loyalty levels. The implementation of omni-channel strategies, including seamless experiences, personalized promotions, and consistent branding, enhances customer loyalty (Wang et al., 2019). Gao et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of positive experiences for fostering loyalty in both online and offline channels, taking a brand's reputation and perceived value into account.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study explores Lulu Hypermarket's Omni-channel marketing approach, focusing on customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value as key factors. Customer engagement aims to establish a personal connection through various touchpoints. Convenience involves providing easy and flexible shopping experiences through mobile apps and online platforms. Customer service ensures consistent support across channels. Perceived value is created through promotions, discounts, and loyalty programs. The interaction between these factors contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Lulu Hypermarket aims to enhance the overall customer experience and foster long-term loyalty by effectively implementing this Omni-channel marketing approach. The empirical analysis will further investigate these factors based on collected data.



Methodology:

In this study, a quantitative approach was utilized to examine the perception, satisfaction, and loyalty of LULU customers across various Omni-channel platforms. The data was collected through a survey administered to 100 academic staff members from a university in Oman who had

utilized LULU hypermarket's Omni-channel offerings. The survey included closed-ended and Likert-scale items to capture participants' experiences and opinions. Statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis were employed to analyse the collected data. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, ensuring participant confidentiality and consent. The study's findings will provide valuable insights for improving Omni-channel strategies in retailing.

Data Collection:

A structured undisguised questionnaire was utilized to collect the data, which consisted of Likert's five-point scale questions along with other relevant inquiries. Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire as a data collection instrument.

Data Analysis:

The collected data underwent statistical analysis using techniques such as correlation and regression analysis. These analytical methods were employed to explore and assess the relationship between LULU's Omni-channel strategy and the levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Scope:

This study focused on evaluating the effectiveness of LULU's Omni-channel strategy and its influence on purchase decisions and customer loyalty specifically among academic staff at a university in Oman. The research was conducted using a sample of 100 respondents who had visited LULU hypermarket in Oman and had utilized at least one of their Omni-channel offerings. It is important to note that the study was limited to LULU as the chosen retailer and did not encompass other retailers or markets outside of LULU in Oman.

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of LULU's Omni-channel strategy and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. These insights can be utilized by LULU to enhance their Omni-channel offerings and improve the overall customer experience. Moreover, other retailers aiming to implement similar Omni-channel strategies can benefit from these findings by learning from LULU's experiences and adapting their own approaches accordingly.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between customer engagement and customer satisfaction in an Omni-channel retail environment.

H2: Convenience has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction in an Omni-channel retail environment.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between customer service and customer satisfaction in an Omni-channel retail environment.

H4: Perceived value has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction in an Omni-channel retail environment.

H5: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty in an Omni-channel retail environment.

Reliability

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Customer Engagement	4	.807
Convenience	4	.884
Customer Service	4	.928
Perceived Value	4	.884
Customer Satisfaction	6	.921
Customer Loyalty	5	.935

The Cronbach Alpha for all variables are above 0.60 so it is an indication of satisfactory reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016)

Demographic profile

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	75	75.0	75.0
Female	25	25.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Reference: primary data

the gender distribution of the respondents in the study. Out of the 100 participants, 75 were male, accounting for 75% of the sample, while 25 were female, accounting for 25% of the sample.

Department

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Business	32	32.0	32.0
ELC	24	24.0	56.0

Engineering	32	32.0	88.0
IT	12	12.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Reference: primary data

Out of the 100 respondents, 32% of the sample belongs to the Business department. The ELC department representing 24% of the sample. The Engineering department accounting for 32% of the sample. Lastly, the IT department making up 12% of the sample.

Descriptive statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Customer engagement	1.00	5.00	3.4275	.74391
Convenience	1.00	5.00	3.4525	.78793
Customer service	1.00	5.00	3.5625	.75660
Perceived value	1.00	5.00	3.4600	.71925
Customer satisfaction	1.17	5.00	3.5167	.77615
Customer loyalty	1.00	5.00	3.5280	.73445

1=Strongly Disagree ----- 5= Strongly Agree

The descriptive statistics for the variables involved is given above. Results shows that based on the survey participants' perception, the Lulu is witnessing high level of customer service (M=3.56, SD=.75); high level of customer loyalty (M=3.52, SD=.73); above average level of customer satisfaction (M=3.51, SD=.77); and above average level of perceived value (M=3.46, SD=.71). The convenience is also above average (M=3.45, SD=.78) and Further, customer engagement is also above average (M=3.42, SD=.74).

Correlation

		Customer engageme nt	Conveni ence	Customer service	Perceived value	Customer satisfaction
Customer engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.790**	.706**	.620**	.648**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100
Convenience	Pearson Correlation	.790**	1	.801**	.656**	.690**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100

Customer service	Pearson Correlation	.706**	.801**	1	.703**	.739**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100
Perceived value	Pearson Correlation	.620**	.656**	.703**	1	.849**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100
Customer satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.648**	.690**	.739**	.849**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100	100

The correlation analysis indicates the relationship between the variables. There is positive and significant correlation between customer engagement and customer satisfaction ($r=.648$, $P<.05$). There is positive and significant correlation between convenience and customer satisfaction ($r=.690$, $P<.05$). There is positive and significant correlation between customer service and customer satisfaction ($r=.739$, $P<.05$). Finally, there is positive and significant correlation between perceived value and customer satisfaction ($r=.849$, $P<.05$).

Regression results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-.010	.208		-.047	.963		
Customer engagement	.071	.087	.068	.812	.419	.352	2.839
Convenience	.066	.097	.067	.687	.494	.254	3.929
Customer service	.205	.093	.200	2.199	.030	.298	3.357
Perceived value	.672	.078	.623	8.619	.000	.470	2.128

R=.876

Rsquare=.767

Adjusted Rsqaure=.757

Fstat=78.154(.000)

Dwstat=2.090

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

While testing the regression model, we tested the assumptions including normality of error term, no multi-collinearity, homoscedasticity, and no autocorrelation. The normality of error term is checked by plotting the histogram and normal PP plot and found satisfactory result.

In histogram, the regression standardized residual are following a normal bell curve. Similarly, in NPP plot, the dotted lines are in accordance with the straight diagonal line so it is an indication that their normality of error term assumption is satisfied in our data. The Rsquare value indicate that the independent variables including customer engagement, convenience, customer service and perceived value explains 76% explanation in the dependent variable. The Durbin Watson statistics is 2.09 so it is an indication that there is an autocorrelation in our data.

The coefficient table indicate that all four independent variables exert a positive effect on customer satisfaction including customer engagement ($\beta=.071$); convenience ($\beta=.066$); and a positive and significant effect of customer service ($\beta=.205$, $P<.05$); perceived value ($\beta=.672$, $P<.05$) on customer satisfaction. The VIF values are less than the critical value of 5 so it is an indication that the no multi-collinearity assumption is satisfied in our data.

Further to know the impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty it is observed that the Rsquare value indicate that the independent variable customer satisfaction explains 68% explanation in the dependent variable. The ANOVA table indicate that the F-value is above the critical value of 4 so it is an indication that model is highly fit and significant (Fstat=211.549, $P<.05$). The coefficient table indicate that the independent variables exert a positive and significant effects on customer loyalty ($\beta=.782$, $P<.05$).

Hypotheses

H. No.	Statement	Remarks
H1	Customer engagement has effects on customer satisfaction	H1 Not supported
H2	Convenience has effects on customer satisfaction	H2 Not supported

H3	Customer service has significant effects on customer satisfaction	H3 Supported
H4	Perceived value has significant effects on customer satisfaction	H4 Supported
H5	Customer satisfaction has significant effects on customer loyalty	H5 Supported

Results

The analysis reveal meaningful positive associations between customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value, indicating that enhancing these factors can improve customer satisfaction. The model exhibits strong fit and significance, affirming its reliability in predicting customer satisfaction.

Moreover, the analysis reveals a significant positive impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty, also exhibiting robust fit and significance. This implies that increasing customer satisfaction can result in higher levels of customer loyalty.

Upon examining the coefficient table, all four independent variables - customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value - exhibit positive effects on customer satisfaction. Particularly, perceived value emerges as the most influential predictor of customer satisfaction, indicated by its substantial beta coefficient of 0.672.

Concerning customer loyalty, the coefficient table indicates that customer satisfaction has the most significant impact, with a beta coefficient of 0.782. This underscores the importance of enhancing customer satisfaction to cultivate increased customer loyalty.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value play vital roles in determining customer satisfaction. Notably, customer service and perceived value exert particularly strong influences. Additionally, the findings underscore the significance of prioritizing customer satisfaction to bolster customer loyalty and retention.

These findings hold profound implications for retailers, emphasizing the necessity to enhance customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value to amplify customer satisfaction and foster customer loyalty. By focusing on these factors, retailers can create a more gratifying and captivating Omni-channel experience for their customers, ultimately leading to improved customer loyalty and business success.

Discussion and recommendations for improving customer loyalty:

The study's findings offer valuable insights into enhancing customer loyalty within the Omni-channel retail environment. Customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value are identified as crucial factors that contribute to overall customer satisfaction. Lulu Hypermarket can employ various strategies to improve customer engagement, such as tailored marketing through social media, targeted messaging, and loyalty programs, aiming to establish stronger emotional connections with their customers. Enhancing convenience can be achieved through the development of user-friendly mobile apps, online ordering options, optimizing in-store experiences, and providing multiple payment methods and efficient customer support. Customer service excellence is vital, and Lulu should invest in employee training to ensure attentive, friendly, and knowledgeable service, while implementing hassle-free return policies to build trust. Moreover, Lulu can focus on offering high-quality products at reasonable prices, emphasizing their unique value proposition, and further enhancing perceived value through promotions, discounts, and rewards programs. Overall, prioritizing a positive and satisfying customer experience is paramount for fostering increased customer loyalty.

Conclusion and future research

In conclusion, this research study has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing the Omni-channel experience in the specific context of LULU in Oman. The empirical findings confirm the significant impact of customer engagement, convenience, customer service, and perceived value on customer satisfaction. Notably, perceived value has emerged as the most influential factor, while customer satisfaction drives customer loyalty. These findings have important implications for retailers not only in Oman but also in other regions, as they strive to enhance their Omni-channel strategies and cultivate customer loyalty. By prioritizing improvements in customer service, convenience, and perceived value, retailers can elevate the overall customer experience, leading to higher levels of satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.

Future research could explore potential mediators or moderators that could influence the established relationships in this study. Additionally, investigating the role of technology in shaping the Omni-channel experience, including emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality, presents an intriguing area for further exploration. Extending this research to different retail settings and cultural contexts would enhance the understanding of the model's applicability and generalizability. As this study was conducted in Oman, conducting similar investigations in diverse retail environments would provide valuable comparative insights.

In summary, this study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Omni-channel retailing and offer practical implications for retailers. By focusing on improving customer service, convenience, and perceived value, retailers can create a more satisfying and engaging customer experience, fostering customer loyalty and retention.

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