**Customer’s Perspective on Service Configuration Quality in Omnichannel Fashion Department Store**

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**Introduction**

 Fashion department stores are in a volatile position in the current retail environment. The costs to meet customers’ demands to purchase any time and anywhere they want, combined with the costs to keep up with customers’ other expectations, are very high. As a result, many fashion department stores, such as Macy’s, Nordstrom, and Kohl’s, have closed some of their physical stores. Fashion department store retailers have moved their business strategy to omnichannel retailing (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017; Beck & Rygl, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015) to adapt to customer demands and to continue to be competitive in the market. This study aims to assess customer’s perception of channel integration quality (i.e., content and process consistency), behavioral beliefs (i.e., fluency), and behavioral attitude (i.e., brand attitude), which consequently influence customer’s behavioral intention (i.e., patronage intention).

**Literature Review**

 Channel integration quality has been regarded as the key success factor in managing customer relationships across all channels (Neslin et al., 2006). Channel integration can refer to any or all of the retailer’s channels, the retailer’s media, the fulfillment mode, the website, and/or the physical stores. The first component of channel integration quality is content consistency, representing the consistency of information features across the different channels (i.e., product description across all channels). The second component is process consistency that represents the consistency of process features across different channels (i.e., process features in the omnichannel retail environment are a retailer’s website and that retailer’s app). Behavioral beliefs were described as the users’ perceptions of the fluency of information processing in previous research about IT (Lee & Choi, 2019). In omnichannel retailing, fluency factors have been described as influenced by users’ cognitive perceptions, trust, attitudes, and choice outcome judgments (Kahn, 2017; Mosteller et al., 2014). Behavioral attitude in the context of omnichannel retailing, we represent as brand attitude. A brand’s strength depends on what customers have experienced in the past with the brand. The customers’ attitude toward a brand shapes their behavior toward the brand, which affects patronage intentions (de Villiers et al., 2018). Patronage intention is an indicator of whether a customer will visit, re-visit, or not visit a store at all (Kim & Lennon, 2008).

 Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, 1967) distinguishes attitudes toward an object and attitudes toward behaviors (or behavioral beliefs). The theory explains that customers’ brand attitude comes from their beliefs from past experience with the brand, thus formulate their intention (Kim & Karpova, 2020). Because consumer perceptions of omnichannel retailing are heavily influenced by technology, we integrate the IT framework that was developed by Shen et al. (2018) for use in the omnichannel retailing research environment. Therefore, the following hypotheses were suggested.

*H1*: Content consistency has a positive effect on customer’s perception of fluency.

*H2*: Process consistency has a positive effect on customer’s perception of fluency.

*H3*: Perception of fluency has a direct positive effect on customer’s patronage intention.

*H4*: Perception of fluency has a positive effect on customer’s brand attitudes.

*H5*: The effect of perception of fluency on patronage intention is mediated by brand attitude.

**Methods**

 The measurement items were adapted used in previous research using a 5-point Likert scale. An online survey using a self-administered questionnaire was collected through Dynata. In the beginning of the survey, a selection of omnichannel fashion department stores (i.e., Nordstrom, Bloomingdales, Neiman Marcus, Macy’s, Kohl’s and JC Penney) was presented for the respondents to choose from to ensure that the respondents have shopped in one or more of the department store listed in the past 12 months. A total of 552 participants were used for the data analysis (males 49% and females 48%; median age = 34). Next, participants were asked to answer questions adopted from the literature (ex. Hure et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2018; and Zhang et al., 2018). To test the hypotheses, this study employed structural equation modeling using MPlus.

**Results**

 The confirmatory factor analysis $(CFI=.98, GFI=.97, RMSEA=.045, SRMR=.023, χ^{2}= .169.54, df=80, p<.001) $and SEM analysis $(CFI=.98, GFI=.97, RMSEA=.044, SRMR=.024, χ^{2}= .175.68, df=84, p<.001)$. In the model $(n=552)$, content consistency $(H1;β=.439, p<.001)$ and process consistency $(H2;β=.576, p<.001)$ had a positive effect on fluency. Fluency had no significant effect on patronage intention $(H3;β=.052, p<.001)$. However, fluency had a positive effect on brand attitude $(H4;β=.841, p<.001)$, and brand attitude was found to mediates fluency on patronage intention $(H5;β=.946, p<.001)$.

**Discussion and implications**

 Findings reveal that content and process consistency have a positive influence on customers’ belief in channel fluency. Thus, we suggest that omnichannel department store retailers focus on the quality of their channel integration. Importantly, we found that customer’s belief in channel fluency does not directly influence customers’ patronage intention. Instead, customers’ brand attitudes indirectly influenced customers’ patronage intention. This finding implies that industry practitioners need to focus beyond the quality of channel integration and channel fluency. Finally, this study suggests practical implications for omnichannel fashion department store retailers to focus on building a favorable brand name. A customer who has a positive attitude toward a brand will be more likely to patronize the retailer.

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