

Exploring Customer Engagement in Omni-Channel Fashion Retail: Evidence from Chennai City

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Abstract

The way people shop for fashion has changed quite noticeably over the past few years, especially with the growing presence of omni-channel retailing. Customers today do not rely on a single mode of purchase; instead, they move fluidly between physical stores, mobile apps, websites, and even social media platforms before making a decision. In a city like Chennai, where traditional in-store shopping habits still coexist with increasing digital adoption, understanding how customers engage across these multiple channels becomes particularly important. This study focuses on examining customer engagement in select omni-channel fashion retail outlets in Chennai, with attention to how different touchpoints influence their overall shopping experience. The research is based on primary data collected from 180 respondents through a structured questionnaire, supported by insights drawn from relevant academic and industry sources. A descriptive research design has been adopted, and tools such as percentage analysis, correlation, and basic statistical measures have been used to interpret the responses. The observations from the study suggest that customers tend to feel more connected with brands that offer a smooth and consistent experience across channels. Features such as checking product availability online before visiting stores, receiving personalized suggestions, and having flexible purchase or return options seem to play a meaningful role in shaping engagement. At the same time, a few gaps are still visible, particularly when customers experience differences between what is promised online and what is delivered in-store. Overall, the study indicates that customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing is not driven by technology alone, but by how well these channels are connected in practice. For retailers operating in Chennai's evolving market, the ability to create a simple, reliable, and connected shopping journey appears to be more important than just expanding digital presence.

Keywords: Customer Engagement, Omni-channel Retailing, Fashion Consumption, Retail Experience, Channel Integration

Introduction

Background of the Study

Fashion retailing has been undergoing a steady transformation, shaped largely by the way customers now approach shopping. Instead of relying on a single channel, customers often move between multiple platforms—browsing products online, checking reviews, visiting stores for a closer look, and sometimes completing their purchases through entirely different channels. This shift has contributed to the growing relevance of omni-channel retailing, where all customer touchpoints are expected to function as a connected system rather than isolated platforms.

What makes this transition particularly interesting is not just the presence of multiple channels, but the expectation of continuity between them. Customers today value the ability to move from one channel to another without disruption—whether it is checking availability online before visiting a store or expecting the same pricing and service standards across platforms. In this sense, omni-channel retailing reflects a change not only in retail operations but also in customer expectations.

The Chennai market offers a meaningful context to examine these changes. The city continues to hold strong to its traditional retail culture, with well-established shopping areas attracting consistent footfall. At the same time, there is a visible rise in digital engagement, especially among younger consumers and working professionals who prioritize convenience and speed. This combination creates a setting where both physical and digital retail experiences coexist, making it important to understand how customers actually engage across these channels in practice.

Significance of Customer Engagement in Omni-Channel Fashion Retailing

Customer engagement has gradually evolved from being viewed as simple interaction to a more layered concept that reflects how customers think, feel, and behave in relation to a brand. In the context of omni-channel fashion retailing, this engagement becomes even more complex, as customers encounter the brand through multiple touchpoints each influencing their perception in different ways.

From a practical perspective, engagement can be understood across three closely connected dimensions. The first is the **cognitive aspect**, where customers seek information, compare options, and evaluate products across platforms. The second is the **emotional aspect**, which relates to how customers feel about their shopping experience, including comfort, trust,

and satisfaction. The third is the **behavioral aspect**, which is reflected in actions such as repeat purchases, store visits, or interactions with digital platforms.

In fashion retail, these dimensions are particularly significant because the product itself involves both functional and experiential elements. While online platforms provide convenience and access to information, physical stores offer sensory experiences that many customers still value. When these channels are well integrated, they contribute to a smoother and more meaningful customer journey. However, when there are gaps—such as inconsistencies in pricing, availability, or service quality—customers may experience confusion or dissatisfaction.

Understanding customer engagement in this context is important not only for improving immediate shopping experiences but also for strengthening long-term relationships. Retailers who are able to manage engagement effectively across channels are more likely to build trust, encourage repeat interaction, and enhance overall customer value. In a competitive and evolving market like Chennai, this makes omni-channel engagement a key area of focus for both researchers and practitioners.

Problem Statement

The expansion of omni-channel retailing has enabled fashion retailers to interact with customers across multiple platforms, offering greater flexibility in the shopping process. However, this development has also brought forward a number of operational and experiential challenges that directly influence customer engagement.

A key issue lies in the lack of consistency across channels. Customers often encounter differences in product availability, pricing, or promotional offers between online and offline platforms. This form of **channel conflict** creates confusion and disrupts the continuity of the shopping experience. In fashion retail, where customers frequently depend on both digital information and physical verification before making a purchase, such inconsistencies can weaken trust and reduce confidence in the brand.

Another concern is the fragmented nature of customer behavior. Many customers use digital platforms primarily for browsing and comparison, while preferring to complete purchases in physical stores. Others may engage with brands through social media but do not necessarily translate that engagement into actual buying decisions. This variation makes it difficult for retailers to clearly understand how different channels contribute to overall customer engagement.

In a market like Chennai, these challenges are further shaped by the coexistence of traditional shopping preferences and increasing digital adoption among urban consumers. While some customers value the convenience of online platforms, others continue to prioritize the in-store experience, particularly in the case of fashion products that require tactile evaluation.

The inability to effectively integrate these channels and address inconsistencies can lead to reduced customer satisfaction, lower repeat purchase intention, and ultimately a decline in long-term customer value. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine how customers engage with omni-channel fashion retailing and to identify the gaps that affect the overall shopping experience.

Scope of The Study

The present study focuses on analyzing customer engagement in select omni-channel fashion retail outlets with special reference to Chennai. It aims to understand how urban consumers interact with multiple retail channels, including physical stores, websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms.

The study is limited to **organized fashion retail brands** that have adopted omni-channel strategies, ensuring that the analysis reflects structured and integrated retail environments. Unorganized local outlets are excluded, as they typically do not operate within a formal omni-channel framework.

Geographically, the study is confined to the **metropolitan area of Chennai**, where a diverse consumer base demonstrates varying levels of digital adoption alongside established traditional shopping practices. The research considers respondents from different demographic backgrounds, including age, income, and occupation, to capture a broader understanding of engagement patterns among urban consumers.

The study primarily relies on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire, supported by secondary data from academic journals, industry reports, and relevant publications. It examines key aspects such as customer interaction across channels, satisfaction levels, purchase behavior, and post-purchase engagement.

While the study provides useful insights into omni-channel engagement, it is subject to certain limitations, including the size of the sample, time constraints, and the possibility of response bias. Despite these limitations, the study offers a focused understanding of customer engagement within the selected context.

Literature Review

Customer engagement in retail has gained increasing attention with the expansion of omni-channel strategies, particularly as retailers attempt to create a unified experience across digital and physical platforms. Rather than viewing channels as independent, recent studies emphasize the importance of integration in shaping customer perceptions and behavior.

A foundational perspective is provided by **Verhoef et al. (2015)**, who explain that omni-channel retailing is defined not by the number of channels offered, but by how effectively these channels are connected. This view is further extended by **Lemon and Verhoef (2016)**, who frame customer interaction as a continuous journey involving multiple touchpoints before, during, and after purchase. Together, these studies highlight the structural and process-oriented aspects of modern retailing.

While these perspectives explain how retail systems are designed, understanding customer engagement requires a closer look at how customers respond to these systems. In this regard, **Hollebeek (2011)** conceptualizes engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements. This framework helps explain not only what customers do, but also how they think and feel when interacting with a brand across different channels.

In fashion retail, the nature of engagement becomes more complex due to the experiential characteristics of the product. **Blázquez (2014)** observes that even with the growth of digital platforms, physical stores continue to play a significant role because customers often rely on sensory evaluation such as touch, fit, and appearance. This suggests that omni-channel strategies in fashion must balance informational convenience with physical experience.

From an operational perspective, **Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014)** identify several practical challenges in implementing omni-channel retailing, including lack of coordination between channels, inconsistencies in inventory management, and technological limitations. These issues often result in gaps between customer expectations and actual experience, which can negatively influence engagement.

Further insights are provided by **Gao and Su (2017)**, who highlight that customers do not use all channels in the same way. Instead, they selectively combine them—using online platforms for information search and physical stores for final purchase decisions. This pattern reflects the importance of channel integration in supporting different stages of the shopping process.

In the Indian context, the adoption of omni-channel retailing has accelerated, particularly in urban markets. **Kumar and Anjaly (2017)** note that consumers increasingly depend on digital

platforms for product comparison, while still valuing in-store interaction for confirmation before purchase. Similarly, **Singh and Sinha (2020)** emphasize that factors such as convenience, personalization, and trust significantly influence customer engagement in retail environments.

More recently, the post-pandemic retail environment has further strengthened the relevance of omni-channel strategies. Changes in consumer behavior, including increased reliance on digital platforms combined with a renewed preference for in-store experiences, have made integration across channels more critical than before. This shift is especially visible in urban centers, where customers expect flexibility in how they interact with brands.

Research Gap

While the existing literature provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding omni-channel retailing and customer engagement, much of it remains broad and context-independent. Many studies focus on general retail environments or developed markets, with limited attention to region-specific consumer behavior.

In the Indian context, although research has acknowledged the growing adoption of omni-channel practices, there is relatively less focus on how these strategies operate within specific urban settings such as Chennai. The city presents a distinct retail environment where traditional, experience-driven shopping coexists with increasing digital engagement, creating a unique pattern of customer behavior.

Moreover, while prior studies have discussed customer engagement conceptually, fewer have examined its **cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions** in an integrated manner within the omni-channel framework. There is also limited empirical evidence on how these dimensions influence purchase decisions and satisfaction in fashion retail.

In addition, the rapid changes in consumer behavior following the pandemic have not been sufficiently explored in relation to omni-channel engagement at a regional level. This creates a need to revisit existing assumptions and understand how customers currently interact with multiple retail channels.

Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by examining customer engagement in select omni-channel fashion retail outlets in Chennai, with particular attention to how different dimensions of engagement influence customer experience and behavior across channels.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the level of customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing.
- ii. To identify the factors influencing customer engagement across online and offline channels.
- iii. To analyze the relationship between demographic variables and customer engagement.
- iv. To evaluate customer satisfaction towards omni-channel retail experience.
- v. To study the impact of omni-channel practices on purchase behavior.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a **descriptive research design** to analyze customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing.

Sources of Data

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire
- **Secondary Data:** Journals, websites, and industry reports

Sampling Technique - Convenience sampling method

Sample Size - **180 respondents**

Area of Study - Chennai (Urban consumers)

Tools Used

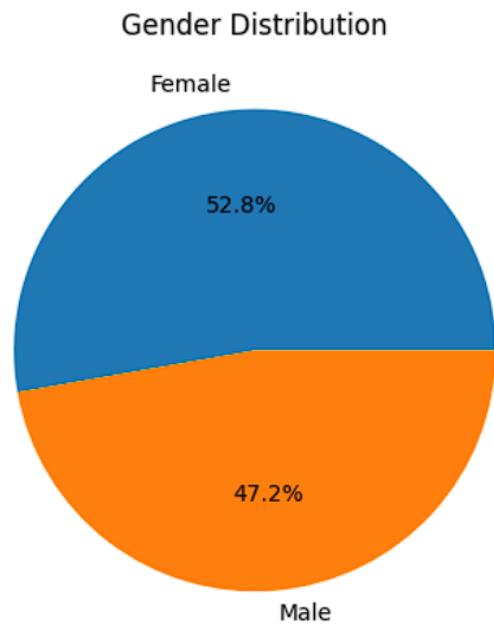
- Percentage Analysis
- Descriptive Statistics
- Correlation Analysis

Data Analysis

Table 1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Count
Female	95
Male	85
Total	180

Source: Primary Data



Interpretation

From the above table, it can be observed that female respondents slightly outnumber male respondents. This indicates that women show marginally higher participation or interest in fashion retail engagement, which is quite expected considering the nature of the product category.

Table 2 Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25	36	20%
25–34	48	27%
35–44	52	29%
45+	44	24%
Total	180	100%

Interpretation

The data shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 25–44 age group. This segment represents active consumers who are more likely to engage with both digital and physical retail channels. It also suggests that omni-channel strategies are particularly relevant to this age group.

Table 3 Income Distribution

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₹3,00,000	32	18%
₹3,00,000 – ₹6,00,000	46	26%
₹6,00,000 – ₹9,00,000	50	28%
Above ₹9,00,000	52	28%
Total	180	100%

Interpretation

The income distribution indicates that a large proportion of respondents belong to middle and upper-middle income groups. These consumers are more likely to spend on fashion products and are actively involved in omni-channel shopping experiences.

Table 4 Correlation between Customer Engagement and Satisfaction

Variables	Customer Engagement	Customer Satisfaction
Customer Engagement	1	0.62
Customer Satisfaction	0.62	1

Interpretation

The correlation value (0.62) indicates a positive relationship between customer engagement and satisfaction. This suggests that as customers interact more effectively with different retail channels, their satisfaction levels tend to improve.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I find omni-channel shopping convenient	3.8	1.2
I prefer brands with online & offline presence	3.9	1.1
I am satisfied with omni-channel experience	3.6	1.3
I will repurchase from omni-channel retailers	3.7	1.2

Interpretation

The mean values indicate that respondents generally have a positive perception of omni-channel retailing. However, the moderate standard deviation shows that opinions vary among customers, suggesting that while many appreciate omni-channel features, there is still room for improvement.

Overall Analysis

The analysis highlights that customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing is influenced by demographic factors such as age and income, as well as by the quality of integration across retail channels. Customers who experience convenience, consistency, and personalization across platforms tend to report higher satisfaction levels. However, variations in responses indicate that not all customers experience omni-channel services in the same way, pointing to gaps in execution.

Hypothesis of the Study

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1 - There is a significant relationship between demographic variables and customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing.

H2 - Omni-channel integration has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

H3 - There is a significant relationship between customer engagement and purchase behavior.

H4 - Customer engagement significantly influences repeat purchase intention in omni-channel fashion retailing.

Conclusion

The present study examines customer engagement in omni-channel fashion retailing with special reference to Chennai. The findings show that customers are gradually adapting to a shopping pattern where multiple channels are used together rather than separately. Digital platforms provide convenience and quick access to information, while physical stores continue to play an important role, especially in the case of fashion products where customers prefer to see and feel the product before making a purchase.

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