

**ABSTRACT: MANAGING RETAIL IN AN OMNICHANNEL ENVIRONMENT –
CONSUMER BEHAVIOR, TRENDS, AND CHALLENGES**

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Retailers are facing major changes, including intensified competition, increased internationalization and technological advances, which are transforming the competitive landscape at a fast pace. Simultaneously we see an emerging paradigm shift in consumers' buying behavior. Digital devices such as smartphones and tablets allow consumers to search and shop online, irrespective of time and place and without geographical boundaries. While these devices originally were used mainly for information search, mobile purchases are becoming a natural part of many consumers' shopping habits.

Today, consumers increasingly utilize online and offline channels during different phases of the buying process, and they expect a seamless experience. Sometimes channels are used simultaneously, such as when searching information online while being in a physical store. Consumers also have higher expectations about products and services, and are generally more knowledgeable and well-informed about the products they want to buy.

Retailers have a great need to understand and respond to the changing consumer buying habits. Physical stores therefore need to learn how to manage their business both online and offline as well as how the different channels can complement and support each other and generate additional sales. Some main challenges of omnichannel management as pointed out in a global survey of retail CEOs include providing seamless cross-channel experiences and redefining the role of the store in the path to purchase (PwC, 2014). Often, the same product is offered through digital channels and in the physical store – but what is it that determines consumers' choices between the different channels? What is their behavior, expectations and attitudes toward the different channels? How and when are they using mobile devices during the buying process?

This special session addresses questions such as these, through a presentation of results from an ongoing project, as well as through discussion of the general trends and challenges facing retailers today. Among other things, results from our survey of Swedish consumers indicate that segmenting customers based on their channel preferences could give useful insights into which features or services are most important for different segments.

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