

Mercados y Negocios

1665-7039 printed

2594-0163 online

Year 23, N. 46, May-August (2022)

Omnichannel Marketing Model Applied at the Shopping Centers in Medellín City

Modelo de marketing omnicanal aplicado a centros comerciales en la ciudad de Medellín

<https://doi.org/10.32870/myn.vi45.7651.g6725>

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Received: December 7, 2021

Accepted: March 8, 2022

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to form an omnichannel marketing model applied at the shopping centers in Medellín city. For this, a qualitative methodology was applied. Two (2) focus groups with shopping center customers, two (2) in-depth interviews with experts in Omnichannel, Sandiego Shopping Center case study, and a theoretical review were carried out to obtain the fundamental components of the omnichannel marketing model applied to this category. The model is proposed in a circular structure, made up of orbits that revolve around the Omni-client. The model is made up of the consumer's journey, from 5A; the levels of transparency, coherence, and fluidity based on: (+) Greater consistency = (+) Greater loyalty; and the levels of online and offline interaction, which are transversal in the entire proposal of the model.

Keywords: Omnichannel marketing; Omni-client; consumer journey; shopping centers; retail; online; offline.

JEL Code: M3, M31.



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RESUMEN

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo principal formular un modelo de marketing omnicanal, aplicado a la categoría de centros comerciales de la ciudad de Medellín. Para ello se aplicó una metodología cualitativa, donde se realizaron dos (2) grupos focales con clientes de centros comerciales, dos (2) entrevistas a profundidad con expertos en omnicanalidad, estudio de caso del Centro Comercial Sandiego y una revisión teórica, a fin de obtener los componentes fundamentales en un modelo de marketing omnicanal, aplicado a esta categoría. El modelo propuesto se plantea en estructura circular, conformado por orbitas que giran alrededor del omniciente. El modelo está constituido por el recorrido del consumidor, desde las 5A; los niveles de transparencia, coherencia y fluidez basados en: (+) Mayor congruencia= (+) Mayor lealtad; y los niveles de interacción online y offline, que son transversales en toda la propuesta del modelo.

Palabras clave: Marketing omnicanal; omniciente; recorrido del consumidor; centros comerciales; retail; online; offline.

Código JEL: M3, M31.

INTRODUCTION

The shopping center industry has based its business focus during the last decades on constructing physical experiences. However, due to the digital transformation and, specifically, the crisis caused by the pandemic (covid-19), the vast majority of shopping centers in Colombia and the world had to close their doors for several months. At this point, the question began to be asked: "how to reach our customers?". An industry that was always ready to receive them in person should now reach their homes digitally.

The opening of the shopping centers revealed that the digital transformation was also immersed in this sector. Consumers had changed, now with greater demands and accustomed to having solutions at a click, without the need to mobilize. This transformation primarily implies a social change, which involves the behavior of people and organizations and the relationships between them and objects (Rey, Lirola and Mato, 2017).

This study starts from the accelerated growth of digitization and digital density, represented by mobility, social networks, big data, the cloud, the Internet of things, emerging electronic commerce, and the changes in the category of shopping centers.

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The study's main objective is to formulate an Omnichannel Marketing Model applied to the shopping centers category in Medellín city. For this, the critical question is: what components should an omnichannel marketing model have to be implemented in the shopping centers of Medellín city?

To arrive at the formulation of the model, we start by determining the fundamental variables that compose it and identify the implementation tactics in an omnichannel strategy from a marketing perspective. Next, find the minimum parameters that a shopping center must consider implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy; establish the principal moments of truth in the consumer's journey and how his journey is throughout the model.

This model will allow shopping centers to guide their marketing strategies based on their current consumers, building on contact portals and creating consistent experiences across online and offline channels.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The road to omnichannel

“The concept of customer experience is generally defined as the customer's multidimensional responses (cognitive, emotional, sensory, behavioral and relational) in the service of a company” (Siebert et al., 2020)

Consumers today tend to use more channels and touch points with brands during their buying journey. For this reason, in each phase of the journey, whether in search, purchase, or post-purchase, customers mix channels (Weinberg, Parise and Guinan, 2007). These are when the channels become the critical contact points where the brand can interact with its consumers. (Mosquera, Olarte and Ayensa, 2017)

The combination of new sales formats, the application of new information and communications technologies (ICT), changes in the environment, and the socio-cultural conditions of people, have led to a transformation of the behavior of the individual throughout the entire consumer journey (Frasquet, Mollá and Ruiz, 2012).

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This evolution in consumer behavior is accompanied by the increasing complexity of the purchasing process (Mosquera et al., 2017). It means a mandatory challenge for companies, which invites them to seek new forms of management for their businesses and thus compete in the new commercial environment, where being single-channel is not enough.

Today, companies at the forefront apply Inbound marketing, a methodology that combines non-intrusive marketing and advertising techniques, to create valuable experiences that positively impact their consumers and users (Moriuchi, 2021; Holden, Salinas and Zhang, 2021). The main objective of this method is to attract prospects and customers through relevant content, having customer/consumer satisfaction as its core and rotating in the cycle of attraction, retention, and delight.

Companies are being forced to develop digital marketing strategies to stay current. At this point, omnichannel makes all the sense, to the extent that the simultaneous use of different communication and purchase channels for consumers is promoted (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2019).

Thanks to the internet, smaller brands and businesses no longer face the logistical constraints they faced in the past. As a result, marketing has ceased to be vertical to become horizontal, and in this new model, we speak of empowered consumers (Kotler et al., 2019). In this way, the form of vertical market, known by some authors as dominant, has evolved towards

horizontality to be free; here, consumers have the power to condition companies to develop products and/or services.

At the same time, horizontality forms a more inclusive market, where a multilateral power structure prevails that gives value to the options of buyers and consumers (Kotler et al., 2019). Therefore, it is valid to differentiate that buyers execute the transactional action. At the same time, consumers do not necessarily take part in purchasing but are directly linked to consuming of the product, experience, or service.

Now, talking about Omni-clients, also known as online and offline consumers, is a primary issue when thinking about the design of omnichannel marketing models for businesses. Kotler (2018) highlights that each consumer has the freedom to build an individual shopping experience. They can take their journey as buyers by combining different contact channels with a particular brand, and the order they want.

The combination of new sales formats responds to a channel integration strategy, which primarily seeks to reach more consumers and provide them with complete and satisfactory shopping experiences. The omnichannel strategy responds to a transformation in the purchasing behavior of consumers and, in turn, highlights an evolution in their purchasing habits and the forms of contact they seek with brands. (Kotler et al., 2019).

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Currently, it is usual to find brands that include different channels in the purchase process in their marketing strategy, the above to reach different consumer segments and have a greater breadth in their market (Acquila, 2019).

The Omni-customer and omnichannel marketing

“To develop a good omnichannel marketing strategy, companies have to perceive the consumer journey with a higher level of detail.” (Kotler et al., 2019).

Following the previous premise, today's consumer finds different possibilities of contact with brands. With this variety of possibilities, various channels offer the opportunity to receive shopping experiences.

A study carried out by the International Data Corporation (2020) shows that the amount and persistence of Omni clients exceed that of single-channel (single-channel) consumers by 30%. Therefore, it is worth highlighting the relevance of this type of marketing and the possibilities it generates for consumers and brands. In this scenario, the role of social networks cannot be ignored. Which become a valuable and necessary tool to build horizontal relationships; they remove geographic and demographic barriers, facilitate communication between companies and drive innovation in companies (Kotler, Setiawan and Kartajaya, 2010).

Understanding how people buy is a very granular task, and for this understanding, the roadmap will always be mediated by the buyer's journey. This model was previously known as AIDA, a scheme with a proposal focused on the purchase: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. With author Derek Rucker of the Kellogg School of Management, the scheme went from AIDA to becoming the 4 “A” model: Attention, Attitude, Action, and Additional Action. This change responds to the need to monitor the consumer's post-purchase behavior to evaluate retention. The 4 “A” model is an essentially personal journey since the most significant influence on the purchase decision comes from the contact points that the brand has to connect with the consumer; in theory, all these factors can be controlled by the organization.

New buyer's journey in the age of connectivity

Today, we find a buyer's journey known as the 5As: Aware, Appeal, Ask, Act and Advocate. However, first, let us see a brief explanation of each phase:

- Aware: this phase is the gateway to the consumer journey; there, consumers are exposed to a long list of brands, communication messages, and different media. In addition, from the memories built from previous experiences with the brands and the positive or negative comments they have received from others (Kotler et al., 2019).
- Appeal: after the consumer is aware of the existence of several brands, the different advertising messages of the same are processed, and this is how short-term memories are created, amplifying their remote memory (Kotler et al., 2019). At this point, the process of attraction occurs.
- Ask: when the consumer is curious about a brand, the asking phase takes place, where the consumer investigates the brand(s) of their interest through different channels, both online and offline. In this phase, the consumer journey goes from being individual to becoming social. Their decisions are primarily based on information that they extract from external factors, including friends' recommendations and/or comments on other customers' experiences.
- Act: when the information found by the consumer is clear and attractive to him, the purchase action occurs. It is essential to understand that the purchase is not the only action that it seeks. For example, in the shopping centers, the necessary action is the visit and the relationship with the Brand.
- Advocate: the journey does not end with the purchase; on the contrary, a new path begins here: the advocate, where the Brand's recommendation is given and, therefore, the consumer's loyalty. This phase reflects the feeling of loyalty that consumers have towards a brand. (Kotler et al., 2019)

After having a context of each phase, the Consumer Journey Map is presented through the 5 “A”, proposed by Kotler et al. (2019) in his work Marketing 4.0 Transform your strategy to attract the digital consumer (Table 1).

Table 1. Map of the consumer journey through the 5As

CONSUMER JOURNEY MAP	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
Consumer Behavior	AWARE	APPEAL	ASK	ACT	ADVOCATE
	Customers are massively exposed to brands and recommendations of others.	Customers process the messages they are exposed, to creating short-term memory.	Customers seek information through media from brands, friends, and family. Consumers process messages to which they are exposed.	Customers decide to buy and interact with the brand	Over time, customers may develop a sense of loyalty to the brand. Repurchase and recommendation at best.
Possible Customer Touch Points	-Learn about a Brand from others. -Inadvertently exposed to brand advertising. -Recall experience	-Become attracted to brands. -Create a consideration set of brands	Call a friend for advice, search online, phone, shop, compare prices...	Purchase online or in-store, use the product, after-sales service.	Continuity in the use of the Brand. Recommendation and communication of the positive experience with the brand.
Key Customer Impression	I KNOW	I LIKE	I'M CONVINCED	I'M BUYING	I RECOMMEND

Source: Own elaboration (Kotler et al., 2019).

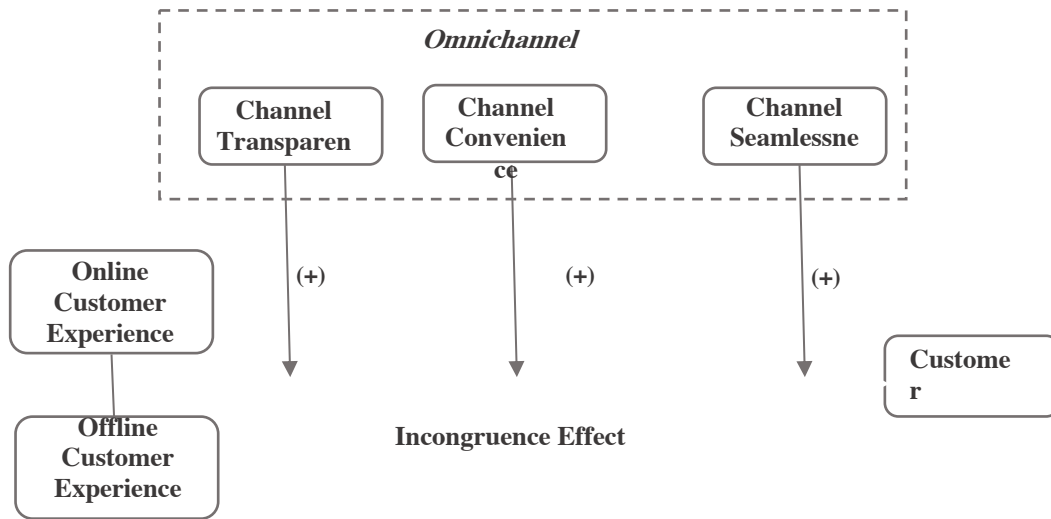
The consumer journey from the perspective of the 5 A's is a flexible model that can be adapted to different sectors. It is essential to clarify that this route is not always linear. In most cases, it takes place in the form of a spiral; for this reason, the map is a guide to the phases, but it does not represent a linear model (Kotler et al., 2019). The exercise of each brand is to understand the different types of journeys that its consumers carry out, to interact directly with its brand.

As a result of the new digital technologies, the archetype of an omnichannel consumer, known as an Omni-client, emerges. For example, who expects a brand to be able to offer its services through various channels; they also want to have consistent experiences when switching between the channels provided by the omnichannel business or brand (Gao et al., 2021). In other words, when interacting with an omnichannel business, this type of consumer expects the online experience to be consistent with the offline experience.

In an omnichannel shopping landscape, customers use online and offline channels to complete their purchase process and thus obtain the product, service, or experience they want

(Gao et al., 2021). For this reason, the online customer experience and the offline customer experience are critical components within an omnichannel strategy, as both contexts are reflected in the overall Omni customer experience. The research developed by Gao et al. (2021) shows that companies must consider the variations given in the customer experience, through the different online and offline channels, to provide their consumers with a congruent shopping and relationship experience with the brand. Here is the omnichannel experience model created by the authors mentioned above (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Omnichannel Strategy Conceptual Model



Source: Gao et al. (2021).

The main challenge marked by the presented model is managing and balancing the existing relationship between the offline and online customer experience. As a result, companies that decide to implement an omnichannel strategy will need to find a way to effectively address the potential incongruence around the experience between the two channels.

After having a context of the referenced model, we proceed to define the main elements of the said proposal:

Incongruity effect: The incongruity effect refers to the discrepancy between the online and offline experience. Such inconsistency occurs when the online customer experience is better or worse than the offline customer experience (Gao et al., 2021).

Transparency: the effect of transparency occurs when the consumer is aware of all the online and offline channels that a company offers. The transparency effect is high when customers are familiar with the omnichannel environment, effectively finding and using the company's products and/or services through its different channels (Gao et al., 2021).

Convenience:

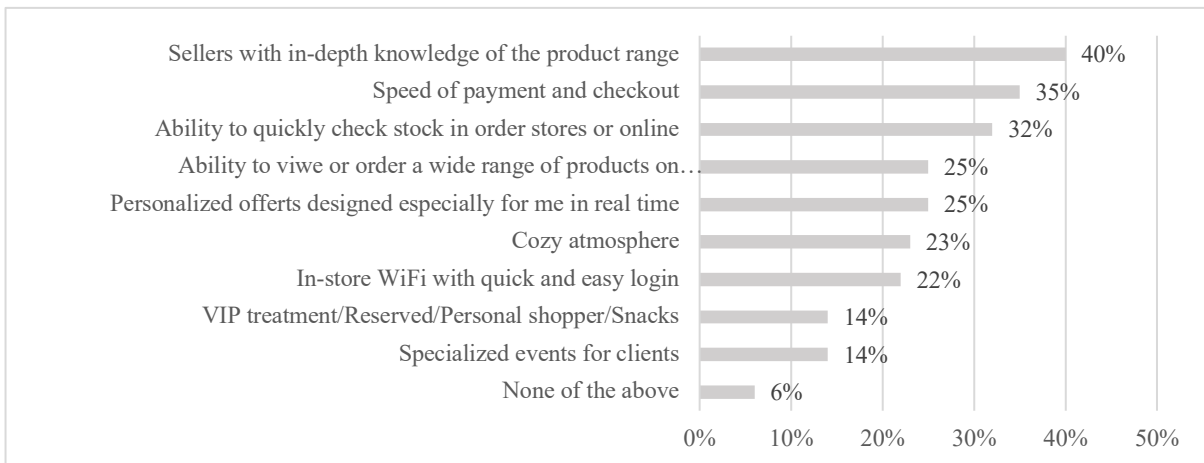
“Channel convenience describes how customers can minimize the effort and time spent on purchasing processes. A high level of channel desirability generates positive attitudes towards companies.” (Gao et al., 2021).

Fluidity: Channel fluidity refers to the consumer's fluidity from one channel to another. This factor indicates how an omnichannel company has eliminated the barriers between the different channels, allowing customers to move between the online and offline channel system with a high level of fluidity (Gao et al., 2021).

On the other hand, this disruptive irruption of the digital has led to the announcement of a new retail revolution. Although in global terms, the physical establishment is still the king of distribution, many experts have predicted an accelerated and revealing growth for the online channel (Rey et al., 2017). The balance moves between the experts who announce the fall of physical stores and the change of business model for shopping centers, as some assurance that the physical store will not disappear, and that success will be in the way it is achieved. Merge the physical universe with the digital one.

To better illustrate the above approach, we talk about consumers who, despite being in a digital age, continue to value significantly the sensory atmosphere offered by physical spaces, 39 where kinesthetic aspects are crucial in their shopping experience. These aspects are touching and trying the product, going through the commercial space, interacting with the components that make up the space and interacting with other clients and sales advisors (Rey et al., 2017). Below are the attributes consumers value most when shopping in a physical store in the study carried out by PwC in 2016 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attributes that online shopper's value to improve their experience



Source: Rey-García et al. (2017).

It is how the digital transformation enhances the role of the physical store based on its omnichannel marketing strategies, which include issues of logistics, communication, price, and technology, among other aspects that cross both ecosystems.

Channel management represents a process of analysis, organization, and control. Each channel must go through this process, assuming that this management can present changes from the total separation of channels or integration (Norbert and Rygl, 2015).

Purchasing processes and channel integration

To better understand the evolution of retail trade, an illustrative table of concepts and the implications that each one contains for channel management is presented below (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences between a multichannel, cross channel, and omnichannel in the retail sector.

	Multichannel	Cross Channel	Omnichannel
Concept	Division between channels	Partial channel integration	Extended integration of all channels
Degree of integration	None	Allows switching between specific channels and touchpoints.	Total
Channel reach	Retail channels: store, website and mobile.	Retail channels: store, website, mobile, social networks, points of contacts with de client.	Retail channels: store, website, social media, customer contact points.
Focus on the relationship with the clients: Brand vs. channel.	Focus on the customer retail-channel	Focus on the customer retail-channel	Focus on the customer retail-channel
Objectives	Sales per channel, experiences per channel.	By channel or connected channels and points of contact.	All channels work together to deliver a holistic customer experience.
Channels management	Channel-by-channel management and point of contact with the client, aimed at optimizing the experience with each one.	By channel or connected channels. Partial interaction with the brand.	Connected channels. Synergic management of channels and contact points. Holistic experience.
Customers	There is no chance to activate the interaction. Use of channels in parallel.	Partial interaction. Use of channels in parallel.	They can fully activate the interaction. Use of channel simultaneously.
Retailers	No possibility of controlling the integration of the channels.	Partial control of the integration of all channels.	Complete control over the integration all channels.
Sales Staff	Does not suit selling behavior.	They adapt to sales behavior using different arguments, depending on the channel.	They adapt to the sales behavior using different arguments, depending on the customer's needs and product knowledge.
Data	Data is not shared between channels.	Data is partially shared between channels.	Data is shared between channels.

Source: Own elaboration (Rigby, 2011; Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014; Beck and Rygl, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015; Picot-Coupey et al., 2016; Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016; Mosquera et al., 2017).

After reviewing the differences between the multichannel, cross-channel, and omnichannel concepts, it is pertinent to look at the purchasing process in an omnichannel environment. First, the Consumer Decision-Making Model is referenced, where the process is explained from a sequential mode of stages (Blackwell, 2010).

This model shows that the activities carried out by consumers throughout their purchase journey are grouped into three different stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

In order to clarify each phase, a descriptive table of the phases of each stage of the journey is proposed, where a contribution is generated from the present study, adding a stage between the pre-purchase and purchase process, as well as an emphasis on the process of content.

Table 3. Consumer Decision Making Model

	Pre-purchase	Decision analysis	Purchase	Post-purchase
Phases by stage	1- Recognition of problem.	After evaluation, a more detailed analysis is given, where the information investigates the brand, previous experiences, and comments from friends and/or experiences shared by other clients influences.	Transaction for the acquisition of the product.	Consumption activities and evaluation of the product or service. The WOW (word of mouth) effect is expected.
	2- Search for information.			
	3- Evaluation of alternatives			
Content	Inbound content for each phase.			Loyalty program.

Source: Own elaboration based on Blackwell (2010).

It is how the purchase decision process has benefited from the integration of channels, which gives consumers the freedom to compare various products, prices, and experiences simultaneously, allowing them to make more conscious decisions. In other words, if brands manage to integrate their channels fully, they will be able to interact with their customers, thus providing a relevant omnichannel experience. Below is a diagram that shows the level of channel integration (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Channel integration level.

	Null	<i>+ of one</i>	Multichannel
Channel integration level	Partial	<i>All</i> <i>Not all</i>	Cross channel
	Total	<i>All</i>	Omnichannel

Source: Adapted from Beck et al. (2015).

The overview of the presented scheme shows that in an omnichannel model the channels coexist and connect. The user then has the possibility of mixing channels to interact with the brand, and the brand provides a unique and integrated experience in its entirety. Consequently, the barriers that may exist from one channel to another are eliminated, and the customer is left with the freedom to choose the contact or purchase portal they want. The client will be able to access a contact portal, such as a WhatsApp line with the brand; start the purchase process from there, and then finish it in the Marketplace or the physical store.

Kotler et al. (2019) present three steps for the construction of an omnichannel marketing strategy or model:

Step 1: Locating the channels and possible points of contact that the brand has throughout the consumer journey.

Step 2: Identify the most critical channels and touchpoints along the consumer journey.

Step 3: Improvement and integration of channels and most critical contact points.

Category of shopping centers and omnichannel processes

Many experts say that the shopping centers of the future will be authentic micro-cities, and from that vision, each business in the category should be located for the construction of alternative proposals that seduce the community; from infrastructure changes that make it easier for its customers to have a better shopping and stay experience within the facilities, to sensory experiences and alternatives that make them fall in love; in addition to implementing omnichannel strategies that allow them to be in tune with changes in consumer behavior.

During the year 2020, it became clear that consumers are not only looking for functional and emotional satisfaction in brands but also spiritual satisfaction. As a result, searches are now much more human, and when choosing a product, service, or experience, the human factor is the key (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021).

New technologies, social networks, and digital marketing, in general, are revolutionizing the way we reach our audiences. It is the first time in history that five generations have come together with different attitudes, preferences, and behaviors (Kotler et al., 2021). This generation gap represents a new scenario for brands and a challenge in communication.

Shopping centers should guide their communication strategies from TRUST IN THE FACTOR that Philip Kotler planets in his vision of Marketing 4.0 (Kotler et al., 2019):

- Family
- Friends
- Fans
- Followers

METHODOLOGY

This study was developed with a qualitative methodology, which allowed an approach in the process of inquiry in the investigation, facilitating the researcher's interaction with his informants.

The study was of an interpretive type under a line of grounded theory (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987) to obtain the necessary components to approach the omnichannel marketing model applied to shopping centers in the city of Medellín. In this way, the researcher developed the necessary concepts for the model; from their understanding of the phenomenon in question, based on the information provided by their informants and interpreting it through a process of constant comparison with the theory that supports the topic in question (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987).

In-depth interviews and focus groups were applied in the study to identify the main variables that make up an omnichannel marketing model. The focus groups allowed us to understand the consumer's vision from their purchase journey, and find the top moments of truth presented along the route (Quintana, 2006). The in-depth interviews, applied to experts, were instruments designed to qualitatively explore the content of the omnichannel experience; understanding the variables that make up an omnichannel strategy, as well as its implementation tactics and the minimum required parameters that a shopping center that is interested in implementing a model of this type must consider (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987).

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In addition, a theoretical review and a case study of the Sandiego Shopping Center were carried out, which allowed us to deepen the theory and compare this information with the real experiences of a business in the category.

Method

For the study, the development of two (2) focus groups with clients of shopping centers in the city of Medellín was proposed; in order to explore from a qualitative approach, the content of the omnichannel experience that the participants have, to find their points of view, opinions and selection criteria when choosing a communication channel with a shopping center. In addition to their experience along the touchpoints that interfere with the consumer's journey. The following is the technical sheet of the proposed population for the focus groups (Table 4)

Table 4. Technical sheet focus groups

Focus groups	Age range	Geographic area	Socioeconomic level	Gender	Omnichannel experience
Focus group A (8 people)	18-35 years	Medellín	3, -4	F-M	Yes
Focus group B (8 people)	36-55 años		4, 5	F-M	

Source: Own elaboration.

For the study, it was necessary for the population participating in the focus groups to have had a shopping experience and/or omnichannel contact with a brand belonging to the offer of shopping centers in Medellín. In this sense, the informants' selection was carefully to filter the population adequately. There was a population of 16 informants, 8 for each focus group. The design of open questions was proposed that allowed knowing broad points of view and opinions of the consumers interviewed. The defined socioeconomic strata corresponded to the most representative population groups for the economy of the shopping center sector, in the case of strata 3, 3+, 4-, 4, and 5 (Mall and Retail, 2019).

On the other hand, two in-depth interviews were planned with experts from the shopping center sector and the omnichannel theme. An expert from ACECOLOMBIA (Colombian Association of Shopping Centers) and an expert in Omnichannel Marketing was interviewed. The following is the technical file of the informants proposed for the interview (Table 5).

Table 5. Expert interviews

Experts	Position	Organization	Experience
Expert 1	Rethink Marketing CEO	Rethink Marketing- Spain	Omnichannel marketing, shopping centers, technology, Retail
Expert 2	ACECOLOMBIA CEO	Colombian Association of shopping centers. ACECOLOMBIA.	Shopping centers.

Source: Own elaboration.

The interviews with experts allowed us to focus the analysis of the approach to the omnichannel marketing model from an objective perspective and focused on the current context. Their vision made it possible to identify the critical components in structuring the model, and the fundamental parameters in the implementation process for the shopping center sector. On the other hand, the experts' profiles mix the experience from the shopping center sector and the experience of omnichannel marketing itself, which substantially nourishes the research.

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In order to carry out the research, five stages were presented to arrive at the formulation of the omnichannel marketing model (Castro et al., 2018):

Stage 1: Marketing theories that make up the development of an omnichannel marketing model.

For the elaboration of the model, a review of the specialized literature on marketing schemes and models was carried out, which are directly related to the theories that underlie and make up the omnichannel ecosystem.

Stage 2: Analysis and identification of general variables for the omnichannel marketing model.

After reviewing the specialized literature, a format was built to analyze and identify general variables for the model. The format consisted of the following fields: theory, author, and variables that make up the theory.

Stage 3: Definition of the variables indicated for the omnichannel marketing model.

Starting from the format built for the analysis and identification of general variables for the model, the guides for the focus groups and the questionnaires that directed the interviews to experts were built. The questions for both cases were related to the previously identified variables.

Stage 4: Design of the omnichannel marketing model.

The approach to the omnichannel marketing model was built based on the results of the focus groups, the interviews with experts, the theoretical review reflected in the referential framework, and the case study of the Sandiego Shopping Center; the above from a triangulation of variables.

Therefore, the model presented in the study is made up of factors that start from three perspectives: 1) The consumer's gaze (focus groups), 2) The panorama of the shopping center category (interview with an expert in the category in Colombia and case study of the Sandiego Shopping Center) and omnichannel for this sector (interview with an expert in omnichannel) and 3) The theoretical review on the topic of omnichannel marketing.

Stage 5: Sandiego Shopping Center Case Study.

After carrying out the theoretical review of the topic of omnichannel marketing, the case of the Sandiego Shopping Center was reviewed in detail, based on the importance of knowing the general panorama of the category and taking as a reference the first shopping center in Colombia and which has been a leader in the category.

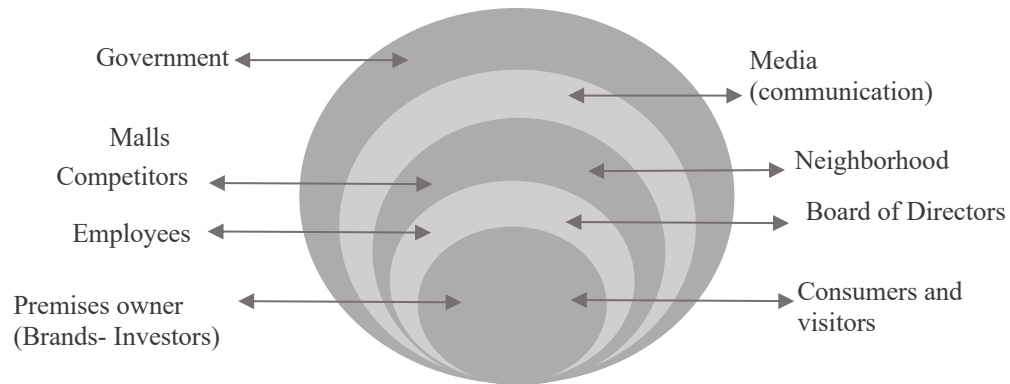
Sandiego Shopping Center Case

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Sandiego is a shopping center with 49 years of experience in the market. This shopping center operates under the co-ownership modality, which implies a non-profit entity with a large group of owners.

From a communication perspective, the company bases part of its strategies on its track record in the market, mainly defining the brand's DNA. Sandiego is much more than a shopping center. Years of history have made it a benchmark for the city and a meeting point for many citizens.

Over the years, the shopping center has been recognized for the city events that have achieved large numbers, such as the 40 Horas Sandiego (discount promotional event), Bonsai Exhibition, Cheerleaders, and Salsa Festival, among others. In addition, its communication strategies for many years have focused on attracting the masses to the mall; For this reason, its strategy of building city events becomes relevant. Below is the Map of the main Stakeholders of the Sandiego Shopping Center (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Stakeholders Map Sandiego Shopping Center

Source: Own elaboration based on ethnographic studies developed by Sandiego Shopping Center.

The map above shows the four most representative visitor/consumer profiles for the Sandiego Shopping Center. In this profiling, there is a balance that responds to the theory of the most valuable digital subcultures in the current economy, the JMI: Young people, Women and Netizens (Weinberg, Parise and Guinan, 2007; Kotler et al., 2019)

Young people: the first to adopt new technologies, they are generally the trendsetters. This public represents a challenge for the shopping center, understanding that its commercial mix, entertainment, and technology are not comprehensive for this market.

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Women: quintessential holistic buyers and information gatherers. A large part of the purchasing decisions of Antioquian households is in their hands. In Sandiego, there is a strong female audience, especially the profile that the organization describes as "The dedicated mom."

Netizens: They are known as "social connectors" thanks to their impressive level of connection, dialogue, and communication with the community. This public represents the current economy based on their influence as evangelizers of brands and content. Internet users define themselves as brand prosumers, and constantly contribute their content to the digital ecosystem.

FINDINGS

In the present study, the triangulation of variables extracted from the methodological instruments defined in the research is carried out: theoretical analysis/case study Sandiego Shopping Center, interviews with experts, and focus groups. Next, we proceed with the triangulation to then present the model resulting from the said analysis:

- The theoretical review allowed us to understand the implementation tactics of an omnichannel marketing model, starting with the steps that indicate the location of the channels and points of contact throughout the consumer's journey. They were followed by identifying of the most critical channels and touchpoints and, finally, the improvement and integration of those critical channels and touchpoints. In addition to this, both the theory and the experts interviewed in the study agree on the importance of synchronizing the work teams that work in each channel, collaboratively merging the teams, from the fulfillment of objectives and management of their budgets. Therefore, the common objective will be to offer the best possible omnichannel experience, maximizing sales and satisfying the consumers.
- The theory points out the 5As of the new consumer journey, defined by Kotler et al. (2019) as the main variables of an omnichannel model. In addition to the integration of the different online and offline contact channels and the detailed reading of the stages of the consumer's journey, to fully understand the omnichannel shopping experience.
- In theory, Gao et al. (2021) proposed an omnichannel strategy model. They point out three fundamental levels within their model: transparency, fluidity, and convenience, components that are executed and evaluated throughout the entire omnichannel consumer experience. Likewise, the Expert 1 indicates that the connection of the offline world with the online ecosystem is essential to developing omnichannel models, providing the consumer with experiences without borders from both ecosystems.
- Both experts, Expert 1 and Expert 2, indicate that developing a loyalty strategy, where the "reward" is given, in an omnichannel model, is essential. It should be noted that the theory highlights the reward systems within the apology phase described in the new consumer journey, where the reward becomes the axis that drives the recommendation by the consumer.
- The theory analyzes of each stage of the consumer's journey as an essential factor in constructing a coherent omnichannel model. In addition, from the perspective of Expert 1 and Expert 2, we talk about the identification and subsequent analysis of each of the moments of truth that occur throughout the customer experience.
- Expert 1 indicates that the use of technology requires the approach of a coherent strategy, that a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system is integrated that allows shopping centers to analyze data intelligently. In order to build strategies aimed at the specific segments that the shopping center wishes to attract. The theory states that CRM is a critical factor in the construction of loyalty strategies and, in general, in the development of omnichannel models aimed at attracting new audiences to the shopping

center, retaining those who already have and supporting those who already have an advanced level of loyalty.

- The experts interviewed presented opposite positions regarding a shopping center as a Marketplace. Those who defend the idea do so mainly by arguing the importance of the shopping center having a direct impact on the sales of its businesses beyond the generation of physical traffic. In contrast, while the opponent to this idea highlights the high level of complexity that it would have for a shopping center to get involved in the sales processes of its stores, in addition to distorting the central axis of the business model of a shopping center.
- On the other hand, there is the theory where absolute and radical positions are not given. However, some theorists affirm the importance of connecting the online world with the offline world and, in the case of shopping malls, being able to carry traffic from one ecosystem to another. Other (on/off, off/on). In other words, showrooming experiences (purchase on the web per visit to the store) and webrooming (purchase in the store per visit to the web).
- Theory and experts agree that the consumer journey is not linear. Therefore, each consumer can organize their journey from a different perspective; For this reason, the brand must build coherent strategies and models that integrate transparency, convenience, and fluidity in each phase of its structure.
- The focus groups point out the importance of navigating freely from each point of contact that shopping centers present, both physically and digitally. In some cases, they were giving prevalence to physical experiences and, in other situations, to the unlimited possibilities offered by the digital ecosystem.
- In both focus groups, conflicting positions regarding online purchases are reflected. Some defend the face-to-face shopping experience at the mall, and some people place more excellent value on the ease of online shopping.

Finally, most participants agree on how rewarding it is to access the purchase from any channel, be it online or offline.

- The Expert 1 points out the following factors as minimum parameters required for a shopping center to implement an omnichannel marketing model or strategy: clear value proposition, technology with strategy, strategy to expand retail sales beyond physical borders, the opening of channels that allow converting a lead into a sale, reward plan and incentives that boost online sales directly from shopping center platforms, instead of independent e-commerce of each retailer. The focus of the channels towards the same

direction. Personalization strategies, implementing a CRM system with strategic vision and intelligent data reading. In the words of Expert 1: “the basis is the ability to store data and use it to encourage behavior”.

- The Expert 2 points out that the shopping center is a physical channel, part of the omnichannel consumer experience. To that extent, he places omnichannel to hold the same conversation online and offline, where the shopping center has a presence on both roads, without getting involved with the retailer's sale. From the theory, there are no specific omnichannel models for shopping centers. However, a generic model applicable to different types of business is presented, where the purchase or transaction does not appear as a critical element.

In the words of Expert 2

“Instant gratification schemes are phenomenal because you leave with an initial experience free of dissatisfaction. Face-to-face purchases, not online give this” (Expert 2, 2021).

Unfortunately, this statement is somewhat contradicted by both focus groups, who report feeling instant gratification in both ecosystems: online and offline, even if the product is not in their hands at the transaction, as is the case with online purchases.

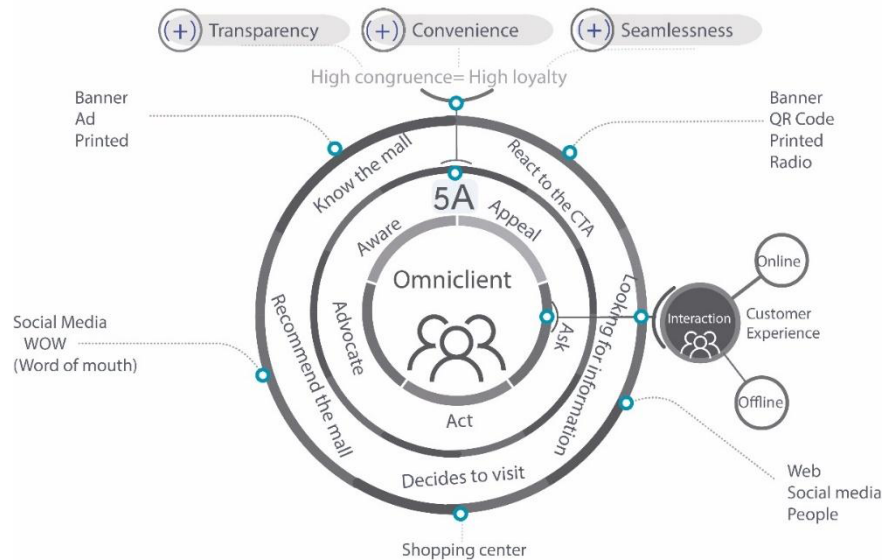
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- "The shopping center is an oasis of security- This is valued more due to the marches" Words of Expert 2. This expert approach is equated with one of the most representative conclusions of both focus groups: the security generated by shopping centers, not only for purchases but also for bank procedures, health procedures, entertainment for the family, and meetings of friends, among other associated activities.
- The map of stakeholders studied in the case of the Sandiego Shopping Center reflects the most lucrative and influential audiences in the digital age. The JIM: Young people, Internet users, and Women.

On the other hand, the arrival of large competitors in shopping centers poses a challenge for the Sandiego Shopping Center. The challenge begins in the way in which the shopping center manages to think from a broader perspective and in coherence with market trends, listening to new audiences, taking into account what they are looking for in fashion, technology, entertainment, experiences and leisure, the new audiences that belong to the millennial and centennial population; in addition to taking advantage of the opportunities that the city of Medellín brings in terms of infrastructure, public transportation and housing development around the shopping center (Figure 5).

Figure 5. The omnichannel marketing model applied to the category of shopping centers in Medellín.

Omnichannel Marketing Model Applied at the shopping centers.



Source: Own elaboration based on the triangulation of variables of the present study.

The presented model has a circular structure with orbits around it, where the center is the Omni-client, who travels from the 5A, starting from any point and freely building his journey as a consumer. Each phase of the 5A fulfills an objective and, in turn, is made up of different channels, both online and offline.

The model has the interaction of online and offline channels as its transversal axis, where the aim is for the Omni-client to remain in the circuit. The model has the primary levels that direct it at the top: transparency, convenience, and fluidity. Likewise, to the extent that the three levels mentioned achieve a positive factor (+), the congruence will be more significant. Consequently, the Omni-customer will have greater loyalty toward the shopping center. While a harmful level in the (-) levels will result in no brand loyalty.

The main challenge in applying the model is to ensure that consumers remain in the circuit, trace their routes, and identify where the online and offline traffic comes from. It is an opportunity for future study, the monitoring of Omni-clients throughout the model, and the identification of friction points between the different channels.

CONCLUSIONS

- One of the fundamental variables within an omnichannel marketing model is based on the new consumer journey, known as the 5A Journey: Attention, Attraction, Inquiry, Action and, Apology.
- In the model proposed by Gao et al. (2021), the structure of an omnichannel strategy model is presented based on the following factors: transparency, convenience, and fluidity. These elements allow measuring the traceability of the consistency and effectiveness of the integration of online and offline channels, throughout the omnichannel consumer experience.
- The level of transparency of the channel facilitates the control of the purchasing behavior of customers. In addition, this level promotes the satisfaction of the autonomy needs of customers in their purchasing processes. On the other hand, convenience allows customers to minimize the effort and time spent in the purchasing process. Finally, the fluidity effect makes it easier for consumers to move between online and offline channels, reducing effort in switching channels and making their experience more satisfying.
- It is noteworthy that the channel's level of transparency also facilitates the communication process of customers with a brand or business, which can essentially satisfy the autonomy needs presented by consumers. The previous contributes to mitigating the negative effect of inconsistency that can occur in the experience of an omnichannel consumer.
- The Omni-client is the center of the model, and its online and offline interaction may take place in a spiral fashion from the 5A route.
- Integrating online and offline channels deploys different implementation tactics of an omnichannel marketing model. The tactics may vary depending on the business and types of consumers. However, the fundamental elements identified in the study are: simulation of the possible purchase paths of consumers (the most popular paths in the customer segments that the brand has), from the perspective of the 5As; evaluation of the moments of truth given in the pre-purchase phases, analysis of the purchase decision, purchase and post-purchase. Finally, implementation of the model from the factors of transparency, convenience, and fluidity.

- Omnichannel marketing models applied to shopping centers were not found, which means an area of an interesting opportunity in terms of research and applicability in the category. For this reason, the minimum parameters required for said model arise from interviews with experts and focus groups. Which are:
 - Identification of the stakeholders of the shopping center
 - Development of online and offline channels, from an omnichannel perspective
 - Integration of channels under a scheme of transparency, coherence and fluidity
 - Identification of the most popular purchase paths of customers
 - Pilot testing of the channels, based on the most popular purchase paths in their customer segments
 - Identification of the critical points presented in the circuit of the omnichannel strategy
 - Development of a CRM system
 - Socialization of the omnichannel strategy with all the company's teams

A flawless omnichannel marketing strategy lowers channel transition barriers and enables customers to reach their initial goal with less effort; It is there where the moments of truth become necessary from the channel strategy developed by the brand.

- The moments of truth around the omnichannel consumer experience are constantly changing; however, each moment of truth moves from the 5A's of the new consumer journey: Attention, Attraction, Inquiry, Action, and Apology. Therefore, they were transversally locating the online and offline routes for each journey phase.
- The development of an omnichannel marketing strategy implies the integration of the most frequented channels, starting from the detailed analysis of each phase of the consumer journey. It is essential to understand that there may be different combinations of channels. We speak of multiple consumer journeys; therefore, the shopping center that decides to implement said strategy or model must identify the most popular routes within its audiences, understanding that these routes may vary over time. One of the experts agrees with this idea, highlighting the location of the main channels and contact points as one of the first steps when implementing an omnichannel marketing model.
- The consumer's journey throughout an omnichannel strategy is not linear. On the contrary, it is known more in the form of a spiral. The said route is constituted from the 5A, presenting a flexible structure from each phase. The connection of online and offline channels is the basis of said journey. Therefore, the challenge for brands is to permanently identify the possible crossings of channels that make their customer profiles and thus define the most popular purchase journeys within the business.

- The greater control of behavior the consumer has, the greater freedom he will have in his purchasing processes. The customer wants to move between online and offline channels all the time, to meet their purchase or communication objective with the brand.
- Consumers want to combine online and offline channels with brands. Their greatest expectation is to have satisfying experiences in the different channels they decide to use to buy or get in touch with brands. However, satisfaction is not valued only for the purchase. Access to channels in a fluid and transparent manner is also part of the expected satisfaction.

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