





Mix Method Assessment of Sustainable Consumption Preferences Towards Omni-Channel Operations

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Abstract. This study investigates consumer perceptions towards sustainable omnichannel operations and evaluates their effects on consumer decision-making. This study helps to find differences and commonalities in consumer preferences (i.e., difficulties customers face while ordering goods or services) that assist businesses in making decisions. An extensive survey and statistical analysis were performed on the responses collected over sustainable purchasing decisions. The Shapiro-Wilk's test for non-parametric data (i.e. consumer preference for omnichannel services) combined with Mann-Whitney U-test was performed using SPSS. It was found that consumers prioritize seamless experience, sustainability efforts (SDG 12), technological integration and customer service. Different demographic groups valued sustainability, with transparent practices being the most valuable. A visualization over consumer preference for sustainable products was performed using PowerBI. It was also found that consumers prefer durability, composition, and comfort over price in apparel products. These factors will boost consumers' brand loyalty towards certain brands. The findings can contribute to knowledge (consumer attitude and behaviour) and offer practical guidance to businesses trying to combine industry standards, customer expectations, and long-term outcomes in the future.

Keywords: Omnichannel, sustainable consumption preferences, statistical tests, SDG 12.

1 Introduction

The modern supply chain has witnessed drastic changes with the incorporation of information technology, such as sales automation. Consumer power has increased over time. Today, the consumer can choose to order and return the product via offline and online platforms. Thus, the word "Omnichannel" concerns the business firms that provide both of these services. In retail, omnichannel refers to the whole consumer contact across all available channels, with the retailer controlling channel integration

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N. Pathak et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Emerging Technologies and Sustainable Business Practices-2024 (ICETSBP 2024)*, Advances in Economics,

Business and Management Research 296,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-544-7_32

[1]. The boom of omnichannel retailing has revolutionized consumer engagement with merchants for purchase. Figure 1 highlights the outline of an omnichannel supply chain.

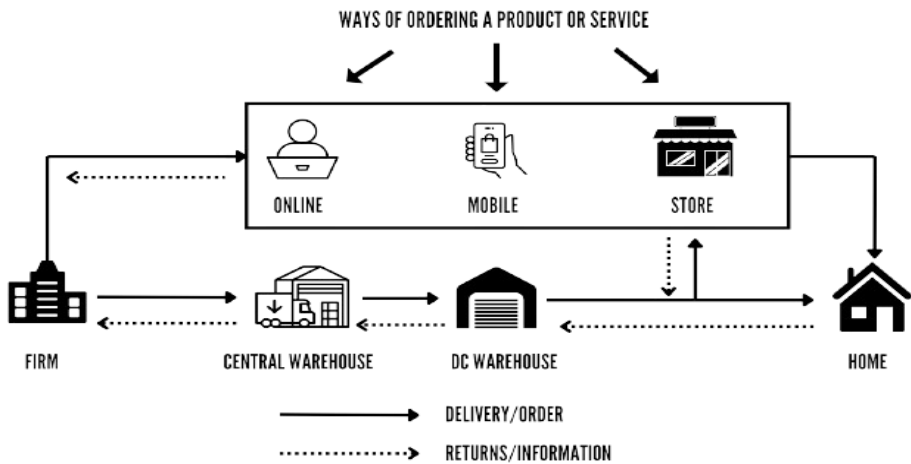


Fig. 1. Omnichannel Supply chain view (Source: Authors' work)

The omnichannel setup improves consumers' shopping experience by integrating online and offline channels with a decentralized warehouse-cum-retail outlet [2]. It becomes essential for businesses to understand consumer preferences via both subjective and analytical evaluations. Meanwhile, subjective assessments help determine various aspects related to consumer attitude. The analytical tests help to understand key performance metrics [3]. Consumers are moving away from price sensitivity to sustainable change (i.e. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 12)) while preferring products. The businesses are supposed to capture the aspects of decision-making in production and retail [4].

This research was performed to observe the consumer perception with the presence of different omnichannel setups. The consumer survey not only highlights consumers' delivery preferences but also awareness levels of consumers towards sustainability and sustainable consumption. The earlier research performed for omnichannel in the Indian context, i.e., [5], has not considered sustainability, i.e., Environmental, Social and Governance (E.S.G). Thus, this study encapsulates the buying behaviour and sustainable design aspects for a unique set of sports apparel. An attempt is made to understand the contrast and correlation between changing consumers' preferences towards sustainable business efforts during delivery. The focus of the research was limited to observing consumer preference from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities in the western region of India. The expanse of e-commerce services is limited to Tier 3 cities and rural areas of India. The introduction and need for research are highlighted in Section 1. The literature survey in Section 2 consists of a detailed review of omnichannel operations and shifting to sustainable consumer preferences. Section 3 explains the research

methodology used for subjective and analytical assessment, followed by data analysis in Section 4. Section 5 highlights conclusion & discussion, and Section 6 highlights future study.

2 Literature review

The introduction of e-commerce has rapidly changed the retail landscape, which is observant of the consumer buying pattern. With smartphones and other tech devices, consumer trust is increasing with secure fund transfers [2]. This has increased omnichannel retailing and operations responsibilities [6, 7]. The various omnichannel ways are Ship from Store (SFS), multichannel retail outlets, online and offline banking [6], Buy online and pick up in store (BOPIS) [5, 8], Buy online and return in-store (BORS) [3, 5] etc. The SFS models existed in the early 1980s in the United States and during the 2000s in India. The metropolitan customers could call the stores for food, furniture, services, etc. [9]. Yet, certain constraints existed in SFS models, such as limited brand/retail exposure, limited knowledge of available product range, unsuccessful customer transactions, and delayed deliveries [10]. There was a need for digitalization in the SFS [1]. Hence, multichannel retail stores began in the US in the 1990s and India has slowly adopted [11]. Customers can digitally view product variety online and offline and get it delivered to their doorstep [12]. However, customers often faced issues with returns management, such as vendor's doorstep collection inability and payment returns [13]. BOPIS has benefits like the ability to inspect the quality of goods while picking them up from the store, low transportation costs, and the ability to skip the delivery time at home. It makes shopping more efficient [14]. Afterwards, the Buy Online and Return in Store (BORS) served the customer with ease of returns, improved service and instant payment returns [15]. The BORS fosters competition, such as merchant contracts with return policies, and provides refunds to consumers in almost every situation (i.e., even without packaging or manufacturing/performance defects) [5]. Suppliers and retailers alike prefer to facilitate returns management with improved efficiency and profitability [4]. When businesses adopt omnichannel shopping, it becomes increasingly crucial to understand the opinions and preferences of their customers [16]. A thorough analysis, including quantitative and qualitative methodologies, is necessary to examine omnichannel retailing performance in the supply chains [17]. Sustainable product selections, brand and consumer preferences can be understood by evaluating online channels [17]. The omnichannel consumer experience is observed through interviews and case studies [4]. Key performance metrics like fast checkout processes, removal of product delivery delays and low shipping costs have increased the adoption of omnichannel operations [5]. Consumers have started to prioritize environmentally friendly buying habits and become conscious of how their purchases affect the environment [8, 18]. Businesses are becoming more transparent and have started to include sustainability in operations [16]. Businesses adopt sustainable practices for brand positioning, consumer satisfaction and cost reduction. To improve their reputation, firms must incorporate sustainable practices with consumer expectations in omnichannel operations. This will reduce carbon footprint across the supply chain. Consumers want assurance that the goods are being manufactured sustainably [18]. This can help businesses keep environmentally

conscious customers. Similarly, eco-scores on food products can help consumers make informed decisions about meat [8]. Various trends and connections between sustainability and purchase behaviours can be analyzed using statistics to find patterns [19]. Likert scale was used to gather responses and explore consumers’ perception towards sustainability w.r.t. omnichannel operations [5]. A subjective analysis was performed based on consumer perception w.r.t. fervour for sustainable omnichannel operations [20]. A combination of non-parametric tests was used to understand the differences in consumers’ choices based on their demographic characteristics. This comprised the Mann-Whitney-U test, which compares and relates the different aspects between two groups [5]. Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis-H (K-S) test comprehends the differences in results concerning different groups’ age, work status, monthly income and qualification [5].

3 Research Methodology

This study has utilized a mixed method approach comprising subjective and analytical means to understand and correlate the complex consumer perception towards sustainable omnichannel operations, as shown in Figure 2.

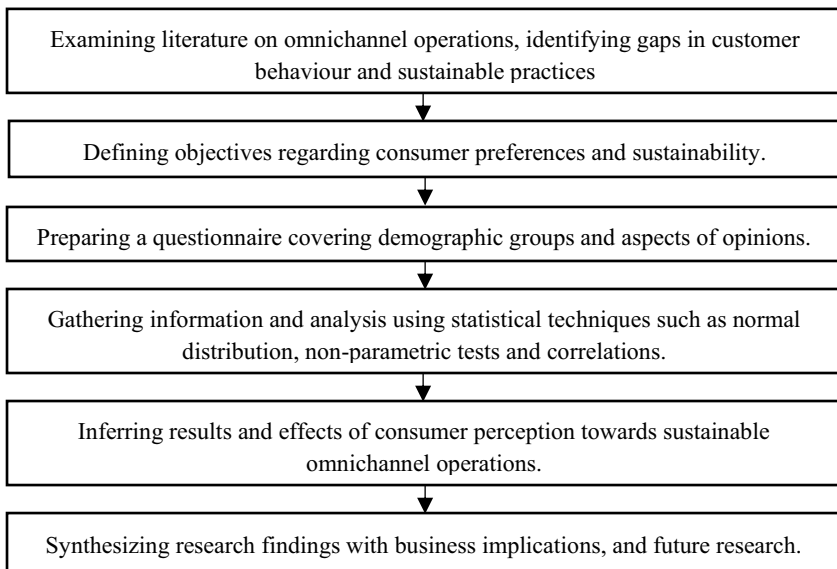


Fig. 2. Flowchart to the Proposed Approach (Source: Authors’ work)

Survey Design. The survey was floated to a diverse adult audience to collect responses to understand consumer preferences across different demographics. Due to the presence of omnichannel operations, the survey was only feasible in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. The survey includes questions about industry practices that perceived efficacy, satisfaction, and sustainable consumption.

Data Collection. The data is collected from different age groups via Google Forms. Performing descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests for better understanding. The first step is to check whether the data is normally distributed. The below Table 1,

describes the variety of respondents chosen for data collection from metropolitan cities. The residents of metropolitan are observed to be avid users of Omnichannel supply chains.

Table 1. Respondents’ information for Omnichannel

Sr. No.	Nature of respondents	Age range	Edu. level	Freq.
1.	Students	18-22	Undergraduates and Graduates	44
2.	Working professionals	23-37	Graduates, Post-graduates and PhDs	42
3.	Senior citizens	60-80	Graduates, Post-graduates and PhDs	16
4.	Gender - Male	70	Total	100
5.	Gender - Female	30		
Total		100		

(Source: Authors’ work)

4 Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics and non-parametric tests. The common descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation will give an overview of consumer preferences and changes with different factors. The analysis uses a variety of statistical techniques, such as the non-parametric test (i.e. Shapiro-Wilks test), to check the normality of the distribution. Correlation is used to observe complex patterns in customer behaviour w.r.t. sustainable consumption.

The questions are divided into three parts per the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework, as shown in Table 2. A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect responses with the help of a questionnaire to observe consumer preferences.

Table 2. Shapiro Wilk’s test

Questions	Taxonomy	ESG framework	Shapiro-Wilk test	
			Statistic	df
How often do you engage in omnichannel shopping (i.e. both online and offline)?	Q1	Social	0.832	100
How important is it for you that retailers offer a seamless experience across different channels?	Q2	Governance	0.817	100
Do you use mobile apps or other technology tools during your shopping experiences?	Q3	Social	0.791	100
How satisfied are you with the customer service and support you receive when interacting with retailers through different channels?	Q4	Governance	0.875	100
How often have you encountered challenges in resolving issues related to omnichannel purchases?	Q5	Governance	0.9	100

How does a retailer's commitment to sustainability affect your loyalty to their brand?	Q6	Environmental	0.894	100
How do you envision the role of sustainability in omnichannel retail evolving in the coming years?	Q7	Environmental	0.823	100

Significance (p-value) was observed to be less than 0.001

(Source: Authors' work)

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Test for normal distribution: Shapiro-Wilk's test. Seven distinct survey questions were subjected to seven normality tests. The Shapiro-Wilk test rejected the null hypothesis at a 0.001 significance level for each of the seven questions. This indicates that none of the questions' data fits into a normal distribution. Hence, a non-parametric test (i.e. Mann-Whitney U test) will be utilised since it does not assume normality [21]. A dataset size as small as 30 or 43 can bring efficient results [21, 22]. Mann-Whitney U test and Correlation were performed to understand the relations between the variables better. Table 3 below provides the magnitude of responses received.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q1	2.58	0.794	100
Q2	4.05	0.989	100
Q3	3.93	1.139	100
Q4	3.73	1.053	100
Q5	2.92	1.186	100
Q6	3.24	1.28	100
Q7	3.86	1.137	100

(Source: Authors' work)

- *Omnichannel purchasing frequency.* The average respondent makes 2.58 omnichannel purchases per month.
- *Importance of a seamless experience.* The respondent assigns a 4.05 importance rating to a seamless shopping experience.
- *Usage of mobile applications and other technology.* 39.3% of respondents use apps or other technology during shopping.
- *Customer service satisfaction.* The typical respondent prefers a customer service satisfaction level of 3.73. The average respondent has faced difficulties 2.92 times/year when resolving problems with omnichannel purchases.
- *Impact of sustainability on brand loyalty.* The average respondent places a retailer's dedication to sustainability at a level of 3.24.

Non-Parametric test: Mann-Whitney U-test

The Mann-Whitney-U test was performed to compare differences in gender, profession, and age groups using the SPSS tool. The Mann-Whitney U test numerically scales all the observations from both groups and compares the position of observations

among the two groups. Women are happier to use technological tools such as mobile phones for shopping and happy to receive customer service. Women are more likely to stick with brands that prioritise sustainability. Students are happier with customer service and prefer a smooth buying experience to working professionals. Students are more inclined to value sustainability in terms of brand loyalty. Older adults prefer a seamless shopping experience more than younger people. They are happier with the help and customer care they get from shops and see sustainability playing a more significant part in multichannel retail in the years to come. The results of the test are presented in Table 4. The results table below includes only the factors that showed significant differences between the categorical values.

Table 4. Results of Mann-Whitney U test for Gender, profession and age groups

Question	Dependent Variable	Key Findings
Q2	Seamless experience	Students and Women prefer a seamless experience
Q3	Mobile apps usage	Women use more technological tools.
Q4	Customer satisfaction	Women, Students and older people prefer customer satisfaction more.
Q5	Challenges faced	Women face more challenges.
Q6	Loyalty towards brand w.r.t sustainability	Women and students are more loyal to brands
Q7	Role of sustainability in the future	Women and students believe sustainability will be important in the future.

(Source: Authors' work)

These results can be seen in Table 4. Overall, the test's findings imply that to give customers a satisfying shopping experience, businesses must consider the requirements and preferences of various demographic groups.

Correlation.

Customer satisfaction and omnichannel shopping. The frequency of multichannel shopping and the degree to which customers are satisfied with the service and support they receive from various channels are negatively correlated. People who purchase through online and offline channels typically express slightly lower satisfaction levels with the customer care they receive.

Omnichannel purchasing and seamless experience. The value of seamless experience across channels is positively correlated - consumers like similar products/services across all channels and value businesses' efforts to adopt omnichannel operations.

Technology use and omnichannel shopping. The use of digital tools has a strong relation to consumers preferring omnichannel operations. The increase in the usage of digital technology has led to the rise in omnichannel shopping.

Customer satisfaction and omnichannel challenges. Consumers who encounter difficulties in omnichannel operations are dissatisfied with customer service due to a lack of coordination in omnichannel.

Sustainability and brand loyalty. Businesses adopting sustainable practices are likelier to have loyal customers who appreciate the changes.

Sustainability and future of omnichannel retail. What consumers think about sustainability strongly correlates to their futuristic thought process. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Correlation

Questions	Metrics	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Q2	Correlation	1	0.34	0.47	-0.16	-0.05	0.45
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	0.09	0.57	<.001
Q3	Correlation	0.335	1	0.43	0.22	0.08	0.406
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	0.03	0.42	<.001
Q4	Correlation	0.469	0.43	1	-0.1	-0.05	0.382
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		0.33	0.62	<.001
Q5	Correlation	-0.17	0.22	-0.1	1	0.45	-0.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.09	0.03	0.33		<.001	0.99
Q6	Correlation	-0.06	0.08	-0.05	0.445	1	0.141
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.57	0.42	0.63	<.001		0.161
Q7	Correlation	0.447	0.406	0.382	-0.001	0.14	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.99	0.16	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

(Source: Authors' work)

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The non-quantifiable aspects of consumer behaviour were explored with a visualization tool, i.e., Power BI. The demographic information such as gender, age and profession were compared against delivery options and channel preference. The other aspect considered was what people think is vital to trust in a brand.

Sustainability practices preferences. The respondents selected one of the four factors as essential to trust a brand for sustainable practices. The most crucial factor for all age, gender and professional groups is the transparency of practices. The results can be seen in Figure 3.

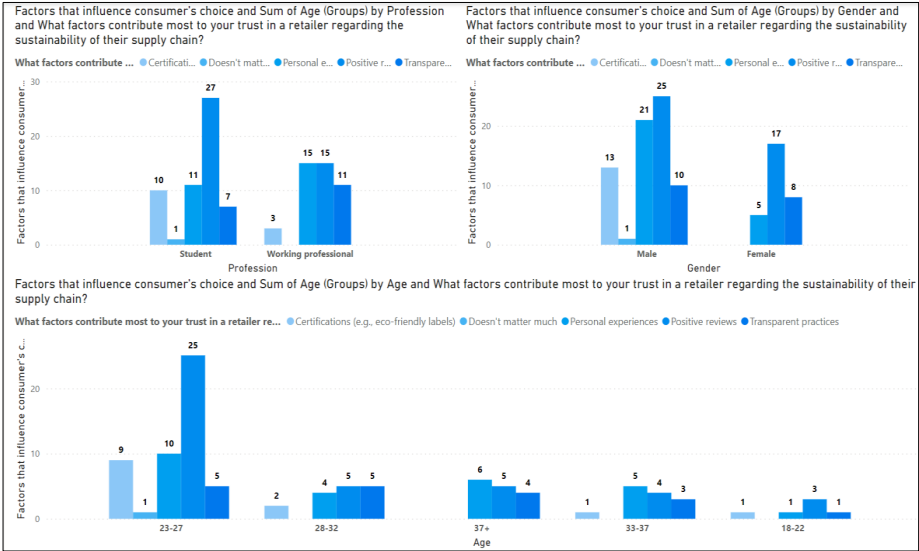


Fig. 3. Sustainability factors that consumers feel important in different demographics (Source: Authors' work)

Delivery preferences. Express shipping is observed to be the most popular option for all consumers as it ensures speedy delivery, and they don't mind paying a little extra for it. Students prefer express shipping more than working professionals, while professionals prefer standard shipping. Click and collect is the least favoured option. Men prefer express shipping more compared to women. The second preferred option is standard shipping. While looking at different age groups, express shipping is the most preferred option for consumers. Consumers generally want fast shipping and care relatively less about the cost of faster delivery. This can be seen in Figure 4.

This study was performed to observe consumer behaviour w.r.t. sustainability aspects such as sustainable design, durability, comfort and price. The product focus was on a unique set of sports apparel. This is evident from Figure 5 that consumers want to pay for sustainably designed products for comfort. It was also observed that price is the least favoured option of all the factors. This means that if a brand offers comfort, sustainable design, durability, etc., consumers will buy the product and stay loyal to the brand.

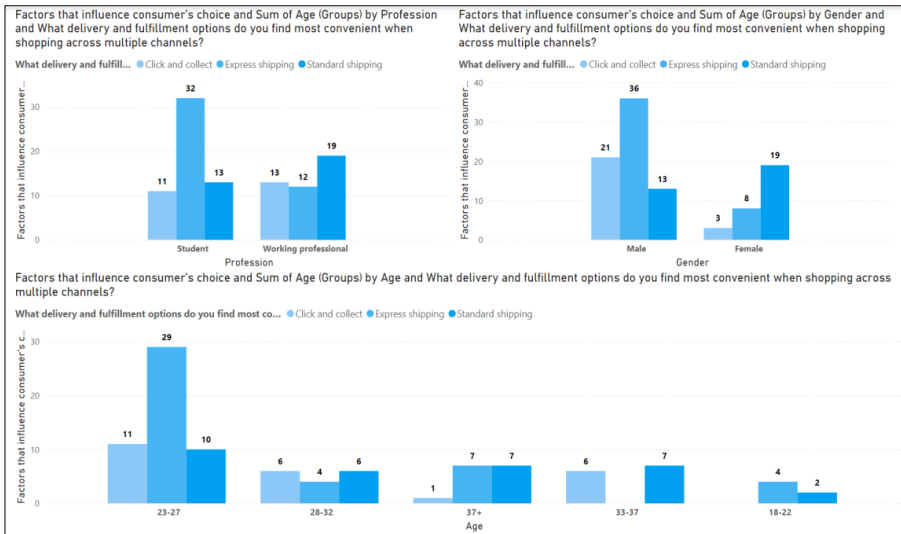


Fig. 4. Delivery factors that consumers feel important in different demographic groups (Source: Authors' work)

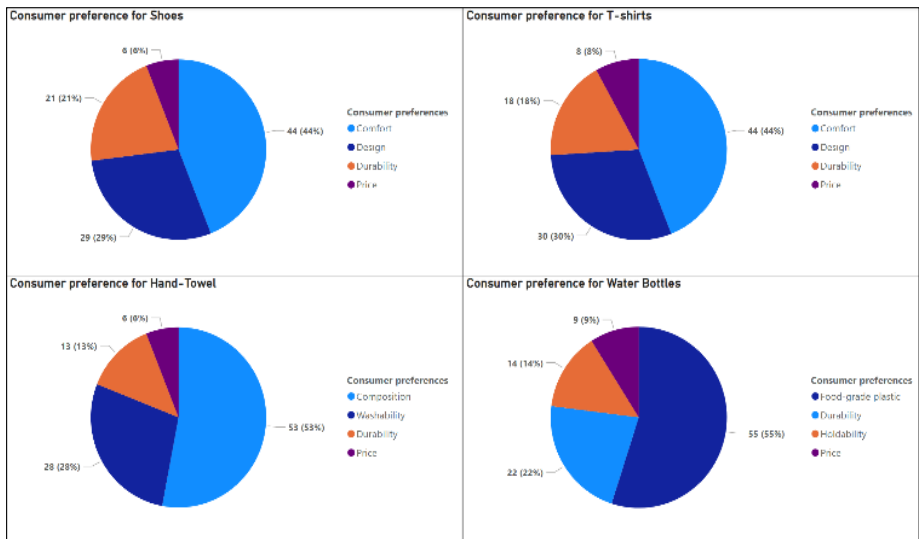


Fig. 5. Consumer preference on essential factors for different products (Source: Authors' work)

5 Conclusions & Discussion

The study reveals that consumers prefer sustainable consumption, convenience, and technology in their shopping experience [6]. This preference is supported by demographic segmentation, such as gender, profession, and age, which play essential roles in defining consumer preferences and priorities [5]. Consumers prefer express shipping over standard shipping and pay a premium for faster delivery. The findings also confirm a shift in consumer behavior towards sustainable practices, such as SDG 12.

The analysis suggests that businesses can use the results to understand consumers and improve omnichannel operations [1]. Seamless experiences, technological integration, and sustainability practices should be the main focus of planning to address consumer expectations and brand loyalty. Strategic decisions can help with dynamic consumer tastes. Omnichannels are improving customer service by targeting targeted segments with lower satisfaction levels, reducing delivery time, and increasing customer motivation and brand loyalty [12].

The study also aimed to understand what makes people prefer different channels. The presence of omnichannels has improved customer experience and returns management. Consumers love brands that promote sustainability and are ready to accept it as the new standard [4]. However, brands must address different demographic groups and understand their preferences to target specific audiences [23]. Women/girls were happier with firm's custom-care and used more technological tools while shopping, and students prioritized a smooth buying experience across multiple channels compared to working professionals. Older individuals prefer standard shipping and report higher customer satisfaction than younger individuals, who tend to return products less due to sustainable consumption. The impact of technology has promoted more customers to leverage digital tools for shopping, and brands strive to provide a similar shopping experience through virtual reality, augmented reality, and 3D apparel trial features [12]. However, consumers generally feel there is room for further improvement in omnichannel operations.

6 Future Study

The research has given necessary insights into how the consumer behaves in certain conditions, there are limitations to the research that can be further studied. A sample size composing different areas of the world, e.g., Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), Asia Pacific (APAC), Latin America (LATAM), and North America (NA), might change the results.

Disclosure of Interests. This study was performed independently without any monetary support received from any concerned organization. All the authors, co-authors have contributed voluntarily to bring a fruitful outcome.

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