



MANAGING SERVICE QUALITY AND COMPLAINT RESOLUTION IN OMNICHANNEL RETAILING

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Abstract

This article proposes a conceptual mechanism for maintaining service continuity across physical stores, websites, mobile applications, and support channels. It distinguishes the quality of individual channels from the quality of transitions between them and develops a process for identifying, resolving, and preventing recurring service discontinuities. Purposive literature synthesis and process modelling inform a mechanism based on a shared transaction identifier, preservation of channel promises, a unified case history, and clear resolution responsibility. The article presents testable propositions concerning customer trust, transition reliability indicators, and principles for economic evaluation. Its outcome is a managerial model for subsequent experimental and panel testing, not a set of estimated empirical effects.

Keywords: omnichannel retailing; channel integration; service continuity; complaint management; customer trust; service recovery.

Introduction

Customers may select a product online, collect it in a store, pay through a mobile application, and later contact a support centre about returns. Even when individual channels perform well, inconsistencies in prices, stock information, order status, or return conditions can undermine the overall experience. Retail digitalization should therefore be assessed through the preservation of service promises across channel transitions, rather than simply by counting available channels.

The research question concerns the mechanism needed to address discontinuities between channels and turn complaints into information for subsequent quality improvement. The central argument is that information integration must be accompanied by decision authority and unified accountability, so that a single customer case does not become fragmented across departments. Technical connectivity alone is insufficient to resolve a service dispute.

Literature review

Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman (2015) discuss omnichannel retailing as an approach encompassing customers' movement across channels during search and purchasing. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) provide a foundation for analysing touchpoints across the customer journey. Chung, Oh, and Kim (2022) use a scenario-based experiment to examine links among perceived channel integration, brand experience, and subsequent customer evaluations. A methodological implication is that within-channel outcomes should be distinguished from outcomes at channel transitions.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005) provide a foundation for electronic service measurement; however, digital interface quality is not equated here with the quality of the entire purchase journey. Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) distinguish fair outcomes,

fair procedures, and respectful treatment in complaint handling. This distinction helps explain why reimbursement alone may be insufficient: excessive waiting or repeated requests for the same information can constitute a separate adverse experience.

Methodology and unit of analysis

This is a conceptual study based on purposive literature synthesis and service process modelling. Sources were selected for their relevance to channel integration, customer journeys, electronic services, and complaint resolution. Their conceptual content informed links among information, processes, and accountability. The article does not present new empirical findings from a customer sample, company ranking, or post-intervention performance assessment.

The primary unit of analysis is a cross-channel transition within a purchase or support episode, rather than an individual channel. An episode may cover an order from selection to receipt or a case from opening to verified resolution. One episode can contain several transitions, each recorded by type and outcome. This prevents inappropriate comparisons between a simple in-store purchase and a complex order involving several channels.

Integrated management mechanism

The first component is explicit recording of the service promise. Price, availability, delivery or collection time, and return conditions are captured when the transaction begins. The next channel should be able to access this information. Changes require a recorded reason, timestamp, and customer notification. Subsequent updates must not erase the history of the original promise.

The second component is a shared order or case identifier. It connects information across channels and reduces repeated requests for the same details. Only information necessary for the service is transferred, with access rights aligned to roles and tasks. The third component is a single case owner. This person need not perform every operation, but retains responsibility for tracking progress and achieving resolution.

Table 1 Stages of the management mechanism

Stage	Main action	Control evidence
Promise capture	Record terms and timing	Transaction-start record
Cross-channel transfer	Transmit identifier and necessary history	Acknowledged handover record
Failure diagnosis	Classify discontinuity and cause	Incident code and evidence
Resolution	Assign owner, deadline, and remedy	Decision and completion time
Verification	Check that the remedy reached the customer	Confirmation or reopened case
Prevention	Address recurring causes in the process	Change record and follow-up observation

A crucial distinction is between administrative closure and actual resolution. Closing a case in a system does not automatically mean that a refund was received, a product replaced, or an information error corrected. A verifiable outcome is required for final status; customer

silence is not treated as evidence of satisfaction. Reopened cases remain linked to the original history, preventing artificially favourable resolution-speed measures.

Measurement and theoretical propositions

Transition reliability is measured as successful transitions divided by all observed eligible transitions. Success is defined before analysis: the promise is preserved, necessary information is received, and the agreed timing is met. Partially observed transitions are not counted as successful and are reported separately. Routine purchases and problem-resolution episodes are assessed separately because their process complexity differs.

$$T = N_s / N_e; \quad F = N_1 / N_{\square}; \quad R = N_r / N_v.$$

Here T is transition reliability; N_s denotes successful transitions and N_e observed eligible transitions. F is the first-contact resolution rate; N_1 denotes cases resolved at first contact and $N_{\square}$ eligible cases with sufficient observation. R is the reopening rate; N_r denotes reopened cases and N_v closed cases with an equivalent follow-up period. Ratios are undefined when their denominators are zero. Cases whose observation period has not ended are recorded separately.

Table 2 Indicators for monitoring service continuity

Indicator	Interpretation	Essential control
Transition reliability	Preservation of terms and information across channels	Separate reporting by transition type
First-contact resolution	Achievement of an outcome without unnecessary transfers	Adjustment for case complexity
Resolution time	Time from opening to verified outcome	Median and 90th percentile
Reopening rate	Durability of resolution	Equal follow-up periods
Repeated information requests	Avoidable customer effort	Separate necessary privacy checks
Perceived fairness of resolution	Evaluation of outcome, procedure, and treatment	Report survey nonresponse

The model yields three testable propositions. First, preservation of promises across channels is expected to be positively associated with perceived reliability. Second, a shared case history may be associated with customer effort and satisfaction through fewer repeated information requests. Third, perceived fairness of complaint outcomes, procedures, and treatment is expected to be associated with trust; this relationship may vary with prior experience and failure severity. These propositions are intended for testing and are not reported as confirmed findings.

Economic evaluation and empirical testing

Economic performance should not be evaluated solely through a decline in complaint numbers. Easier access to support can increase recorded complaints without indicating worse service. Evaluation should distinguish repeat-processing costs, compensation, losses associated with returns, and the contribution margin from attributable retained purchases.

Additional revenue is not equivalent to profit, and the full value of a returned item is not automatically a loss.

$$ROI = (\Delta B - C) / C \times 100\%, \quad C > 0.$$

Here ΔB is the incremental economic benefit reasonably attributable to the mechanism over a consistent period, and C includes implementation and operating costs. Integration, staff training, data cleaning, and system support must be included. If repeat-purchase contribution is already incorporated into customer retention value, it must not be added again. Longer-term evaluations should explicitly specify cash-flow timing and discounting.

Empirical testing may use phased implementation and comparison units where the mechanism has not yet been introduced. Prior trends, seasonality, promotions, and case complexity should be considered. A scenario experiment can compare perceptions of integrated and fragmented services, but cannot directly establish long-term purchasing behaviour. Surveys and transaction records should be linked using consent and data minimization. Sample size should be justified through power analysis reflecting the planned analysis, clustering, and expected effect.

Discussion and limitations

The theoretical contribution is to view service quality as a property of relationships between channels as well as of individual channels. The managerial contribution is the combination of case history, decision authority, and verified resolution. A small retailer may begin with a unified register and a named owner rather than a complex platform. Larger networks require common data definitions and handover controls. Where full integration is costly, implementation can begin with transitions exhibiting the most frequent discontinuities.

The proposed mechanism has not been empirically tested and does not promise universal outcomes across retail formats. Dissatisfied non-complainants may be absent from case records, and customers who do not use digital channels may be underrepresented. Complaint evidence should therefore be complemented by a broader customer survey. In Uzbekistan, language diversity and unequal digital access may warrant attention in future testing; this study makes no quantitative claims about their effects.

Conclusion

Managing service quality in omnichannel retailing requires monitoring individual channels while preserving promises, information, and accountability at transitions. The proposed mechanism combines a shared identifier, unified case history, resolution authority, and outcome verification. Complaints are treated as evidence for diagnosing recurring service discontinuities, rather than merely as cases to close. Future research should test relationships between the mechanism, transition reliability, customer effort, trust, and economic outcomes using actual transactions.

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