Will an investment in omnichannel deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market place?

Dissertation submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Business Administration
Dublin Business School

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Declaration:

I, Daniel Kavanagh, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School’s academic honesty policy.

Signed:

Daniel Kavanagh
Date: 21st of August 2015
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who helped and supported me throughout both the two year MBA programme and the dissertation.

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I am very lucky and grateful to have had such great people around me.

Daniel Kavanagh
Abstract

The concept of Omnichannel has emerged in the last number of years and is an evolution of multichannel distribution strategies. Unlike multichannel strategies, it is more than just having multiple channels that customers can interact with, it is the idea that consumers view and interact with brands rather than the channels like retail or online etc., that they can start an interaction or transaction with a business in one channel and finish it in another. Consumers expect brands to have a full view of all interactions they have had with it and when this isn’t the case they have difficulty understanding why.

This paper explores this concept from the context of a business operating in the highly competitive Irish telecoms market. It measures and examines consumer usage of omnichannel services in the Irish retail market, their expectations for the availability of the service from the business, demand for the service and its impact on customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Omnichannel, Cross-channel, Retail, Multichannel Retailing, Multichannel coordination, Online selling, Supply chain, Customer satisfaction.
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1. Introduction

Background:

Omnichannel is a relatively recent topic that has emerged in the last number of years. It is the idea that consumers view and interact with brands rather than channels like retail or online etc., and that they expect those brands to have a full view of all interactions they have had with it. When this isn’t the case they have difficulty understanding why (Klie, 2014). From the business perspective it is about allowing the customer to start an interaction in one channel and finish it in another. For instance, a customer might view a product on a website and start the purchase process, they may then want to be able to walk into the retail store or call a customer service line and finish that process. Alternatively omnichannel can be looked at from the care perspective, a customer of a utility or service provider may seek help from the business on its website and then call or visit to discuss their issue and expect the person they deal with to know about their interaction online. This can be a difficult thing for a business to provide.

As technology has advanced retailers have come under greater pressure from new competitors using low cost channels. This led to many retailers adopting a multichannel approach. Traditionally these channels were managed independently of one another with little or no visibility of the activities in each. In the late 2000’s research began to focus on these multichannel strategies and recommended integrating disparate channels. This is what omnichannel evolved from.

This dissertation will explore the omnichannel concept and conduct research to look at whether it is something that has a place in the Irish telecoms industry.
Research Title:

Will an investment in omnichannel deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market place?

Research objectives:

The overall objective of this research is to determine whether omnichannel presents an opportunity for increased sales and improved customer experience in order to deliver value for a large telecoms company operating in Ireland. The approach to finding an answer to this question is very much customer orientated and the focus of the research will reflect this.

In order to answer that question the research objectives that need to be defined and examined are as follows:

1. To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland are already engaging in omnichannel shopping.

2. To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland expect an omnichannel retailing approach.

3. To investigate if there is a demand from customers of a telecoms company in Ireland for an omnichannel service.

4. To determine if providing an omnichannel service would increase customer satisfaction.

The first three objectives explore customer’s current use of omnichannel services, their expectations for the provision of these services from a telecoms business, and the extent to which there is a demand for the service. The purpose of this is to explore and determine if customers see any value in the service and
to determine the sales potential that could be achieved by an Irish telecoms company providing the service to their customers. If customers value and use an omnichannel service it may lead to increased sales for the business.

The last objective is to determine the customer satisfaction impacts of providing omnichannel services. It explores current satisfaction levels and whether the unavailability of omnichannel is a frustration for customers. The purpose of looking at this is to determine if providing the service would improve the customer’s experience. If the customer’s experience is improved it would likely lead to improved customer satisfaction. Increased satisfaction with the business may lead to reduced churn and increased revenue and this has been linked to improved profitability for service businesses (Anderson et al, 1994; Edvardsson et al, 2000).

The intention of the research work is to identify the answer to these objectives and the research questions as a whole, as improved sales and customer satisfaction could lead to a competitive advantage.

The research relates to the interaction between the customer and the business and will require the customer to be the focus of the research.

The research will only be focused on consumer sales and will not consider the business-to-business market.

Rationale for the study
As will be covered in the literature review, the development and implementation of an omnichannel service can result in a business incurring considerable expense. Because of this, businesses can be slow to develop omnichannel services (Lewis et al, 2014). For that reason, the rationale for carrying out this study is to investigate whether that expense is justified and will the implementation of omnichannel services deliver value to the business. As discussed this will be explored through the four research objectives that will ultimately answer the research question. This study will also contribute to the
overall knowledge on the developing topic of omnichannel by exploring its
development in the Irish telecoms market and its reception among consumers in
that market.

The dissertation road map

This dissertation is broken down into a number of chapters:

Literature review

Chapter one is the literature review and covers a number of themes. The main
themes identified and covered in the literature are the definition & evolution of
omnichannel, technology and omnichannel, supply chain implications,
competitive advantage, omnichannel and the customer, and common difficulties
with omnichannel. The review looks at some of the definitions that have been
put forward for omnichannel as well as examining the evolution of the concept,
how the rapid advances in technology have influenced the development of
omnichannel and the implications of this for businesses, the supply chain
impacts and considerations that moving to an omnichannel distribution
approach has to a business. It also looks at how omnichannel can potentially add
value to a business and whether or not it can provide a competitive advantage
and if that competitive advantage is sustainable in the long term or not. It
explores how the development of omnichannel has impacted the empowerment,
expectations and satisfaction of the consumer. Lastly the literature review covers
some of the common difficulties that businesses encounter when trying to
introduce omnichannel services into their business.

Research Methods

The research methods chapter details the research methodology that was used
while carrying out this research. It looks at and justifies the research philosophy
and approach taken by the author and documents how the survey was designed
and the strategy used in the field to get responses to the survey. It also discusses
the credibility and the limitations of the research
Research findings & analysis

The research findings chapter is where the survey results are discussed. It looks at the demographic and market segmentation measurements followed by the research objectives. The chapter splits the findings into the four research objectives where the data is discussed and analysed in the context of the literature review.

Conclusion

The conclusion chapter brings together the results for each of the four research objectives that were analysed in the previous chapter in order to determine if each objective has been met. It then discusses the consequences of this and what it means in the context of the overall dissertation research objective.

Recommendations for further research

This chapter examines some of the opportunities for future research that would benefit the overall body of knowledge that exists on the topic omnichannel. The topics discussed came to light while the author was carrying out this dissertation, that this work was not designed for and/or was unable to cover.

Reflections

The overall experience of carrying out the dissertation and the MBA programme as a whole is reflected upon here. The key learnings and the impact that the programme has had upon the author both over the two years and into the future is discussed along with thoughts and feeling about how the author has developed.

The scope of this work

As mentioned already this work is looking to determine if introducing omnichannel services will be of value to an Irish telecoms company. The dissertation looks at one business in the telecoms market and does not include any other business or industry. The research will examine the consumer market and will not include business customers. It is also carried out in context of retail and online sales and does not consider the impacts of introducing omnichannel
services for care purposes. The telecoms company in question will remain anonymous and will be referred to in this paper as simply the *Company* and this will be written in Italics for the purposes of clarity.

**The contributions of this study**

As stated, the purpose of this study is to identify if introducing omnichannel services will bring value to a business operating in the competitive Irish telecoms market. It examines issues such as customer expectations, the relationship between omnichannel and satisfaction along with the current use of omnichannel services among customers of the *Company* and whether those customers would use the service if it were introduced. It is the hope of the author that the results will be of use to other researchers carrying out similar work and perhaps the methodology used here can be used at a later date in the same or other contexts and will add to the body of knowledge on omnichannel in general.

2. **Literature review**

**Definition & evolution of omnichannel**

Pophal (2015) describes how in the past, consumers had much less access to information. If they wanted to make a purchase, they went to the retailer to get educated about the product and then made their purchase. This was complemented by various consumer magazines and through contact with friends and family. Over time this evolved and more & more channels were used to sell to consumers, for example through door-to-door sales and telesales. With the steady advance of technology, the Internet, laptops, and smartphones were introduced into the mix and this has revolutionized the situation as it allows consumers to carry out their own research, compare offerings and even make purchases online. These changes forced businesses to rethink their distribution strategies as traditional bricks and mortar retailers started to see their business get undercut by online retailers with much lower costs (Griffiths & Howard,
In order to combat this, the multichannel strategy, which has been in existence for over 100 years (Cao, 2014), became much more prominent. A multichannel strategy allows firms to offer their customers products, services, information and support through 2 or more channels (Kushwaha & Shankar, 2013).

Retailers began to add an online channel and in time, mobile and social channels to their existing distribution strategies so as not to be left behind by the competition (Pentina & Hasty, 2009). This gave the customer the choice of how they were to interact with the retailer, they could research on the website, then visit the store and eventually purchase on their mobile or any combination of these. This multichannel environment is where omnichannel evolved as a concept. The main difference between them is that multichannel sees the different channels as separate entities, independent of each other whereas omnichannel breaks that barrier down and allows for free movement between and integration of those channels (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Pentina & Hasty's (2009) article on the effects of multichannel coordination points out some of the synergies that can exist when the separate channels are integrated. These synergies increase the organisations effectiveness through coordination of the channels branding and imagery, cross selling and cross promotion, easier information search, removal of duplication etc. Advantages such as these are what led to omnichannel as a concept. And now traditional bricks and mortar retailers are using omnichannel strategies to combat and face off competition from pure online retailers (Warc, 2014)

Omnichannel is an approach that accepts and encourages customers to switch between and even simultaneously use the different channels available. It is about seeing the business as one entity from the point of view of the customer. For instance a customer may be reading the content on your website while browsing or shopping in your retail store (Pophal, 2015), however this customer does not see a business with different channels, they only see a brand and expect that brand to have one standardised view of all of their interactions, not just with the channel they are currently interacting with (Klie, 2014; Piotrowicz &
Cuthbertson, 2014). These arguments put forward to say that customers are expecting omnichannel services is explored by the second research objective of this work.

As omnichannel is a term that has only become popular recently, the definition is still not pinned down, below are just some of the definitions available:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haire (2005)</td>
<td>“A marketing campaign that communicates with, educates and transacts in every medium — from TV to online to social to print to retail to mobile, and more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigby (2011) &amp; Wisner &amp; Wisner</td>
<td>“An integrated sales experience that melds the advantages of physical stores with the information rich experience of online shopping.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.0: Various definitions of omnichannel

The development and increasing use and awareness of omnichannel is having huge impacts. For example, the traditional view of the path to purchase for customers has been turned upside down. The simplistic sales funnel concept of marketeers using mass media to reach as many people as possible with one generic message to create awareness followed by generating interest and desire followed by eventual purchase in a physical store is, in a lot of cases, redundant. Technology is allowing customers to access in depth information; product reviews and compare pricing at any time and in almost any location (Fulgoni, 2014). This is putting the power in the consumer’s hands. The ease at which information is available means that consumers are more likely to be aware of competitors pricing and offers and can compare their options in the market very quickly, they are also expecting quicker delivery and wider choice than in the past (Wisner & Wisner, 2014). In some industries it is even possible for consumers to access comparison websites and immediately compare the value of different offerings. Indeed there is even evidence that some consumers are more
informed than the sellers themselves and this is reversing the original relationship between customer and supplier (Pires et al, 2006).

These changes have brought about their own difficulties and frustrations for businesses and customers alike. Customers find it frustrating that their interactions with one channel of a business are not visible, understood or transferrable to another channel. Businesses that had set up the channels independently of one another find it difficult to integrate their myriad systems and reporting structures (Klie, 2014). These experiences could damage customer satisfaction and this is something businesses need to be mindful of. For this reason customer satisfaction is a key theme in the research objectives.

Technology and omnichannel

Rigby (2011) discusses in the Harvard Business Review how disruption is nothing new to retail. Historically every 50 years or so some kind of disruptive change happens, from the growth of large cities and railroads to specialty retailers to out of town shopping malls. The technology revolution is just the latest disruption.

Without the advent of the Internet and the exponential growth of mobile technologies in the past 10 to 15 years the concept of omnichannel would not be possible. These advances coupled with developments in software such as mobile apps and mobile payments are really what has enabled and driven this phenomenon. Improved IT infrastructure in businesses has allowed for capabilities such as personalisation and targeting which have reduced costs and improved services online. While in the physical world interactive displays, self-service technologies, QR codes and technologies such as the iBeacon (a technology that allows for location based messages to be delivered to shoppers) are changing the way consumers shop and retailers sell (Griffiths, 2014; Rigby, 2011; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). While these technologies allow for more interactive shopping experiences and improved customer experiences, care must
be taken to make sure that they are relevant for customers and add value to either the customer’s experience or the business (Blazquez, 2014).

The Internet has been a powerful driver for these changes and, along with the advances in mobile technology in particular, has been a real enabler for the development of omnichannel services. Mobile technology has allowed retailers to optimize their website and build apps to be displayed on mobile devices which allow the consumer to get information or to shop anywhere, anytime and this is what is really bringing the channels together. Mobile devices can be used to research and compare products and services, look at user reviews and even compare prices with apps that avail of barcode or QR code scanning. A recent article by Warc (Warc.com, 2014) reported that smartphone penetration in the US & UK had reached 56% and 62% respectively and that of those users, 77% & 73% had used their mobile to research a product or service. These figures really highlight how important the mobile has become and omnichannel businesses need to incorporate it.

In conjunction with the changes in mobile technology, the growth of social media in the past ten years adds yet another way for consumers and businesses to interact with one another. Social networks can also influence the shopping process as consumers may use their wider social network (via Facebook or twitter for example) to seek advice. Blazquez (2014) found that 23% of fashion shoppers had consulted blogs, forums or social networks prior to their last visit to a fashion shop. This is a delicate area for businesses and can be a double-edged sword. It is difficult as the business has no direct control over the social arena and this raises the importance of managing the relationship with each customer. A poor experience can lead to a consumer criticising a brand and that can be shared and reach hundreds if not thousands of people very quickly but the opposite can also be true. Customers can also be employed as brand ambassadors by making product recommendations to their wider social network (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).
Supply chain implications

A retailer’s supply chain is designed in such a way as to allow the business to profitably serve its customers. An omnichannel strategy requires the supply chain or business model to be designed in such a way as to integrate the different channels into a single distribution system (Cao, 2014). This has a number of supply chain implications. Coordination of all of the steps in the supply chain process of each channel is a complicated process and literature on the topic has a number of common themes. Some of the areas identified where these implications exist are examined in the next number of paragraphs.

The same information and policies should be in place in all channels. The information available in store for instance should be also available online and vice versa. The same applies for policies such as returns, product ranges and pricing; the experience should be the same regardless of channel. Customers that view an online price and then walk into a retail store and come across a higher price or find the product is unavailable are unlikely to purchase in the retail store. There is potential that the customer may leave and choose another retailer (Cao, 2014). A contrast to this point is put forward by Pentina and Hasty (2009). They argue that effective integration allows for easier price discrimination through the effective use of customer purchase history and patterns to customise offerings that can then command a price premium.

Omnichannel implementation should also allow for new services to be provided to the customer such as buy online and collect in store or aftersales care for online sales in the retail channel (Cao, 2014) and cross channel discounts or loyalty programs can be used to reinforce the omnichannel experience (Pentina & Hasty 2009). “Showrooming” is another alternative. This is where the product is viewed or experienced in store, ordered by a sales assistant or through self service technology and then delivered to the customer. It is a service that is particularly useful for the sale of large items that cause storage issues or for slow moving expensive lines (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).
A well implemented omnichannel strategy may allow for optimisation of the retail distribution network. Underperforming stores that are in locations to provide convenience to customers may be closed if the online or other channels can provide that convenience (Cao, 2014). There are also logistical considerations with an omnichannel strategy. The method of fulfilment of orders through different channels can vary and will need to be integrated. For instance traditional retail distribution centres handle items packed in bulk that are delivered to the retail store in bulk and then broken down into individual items to be sold to the end user whereas online distribution requires the items to be dispatched from the distribution centre individually packed and delivered direct to the customer. Distribution centres would need to be redesigned to be able to fulfil both of these requirements for a business introducing omnichannel services (Lewis et al, 2014). Businesses may also need to be innovative and use novel approaches such as parcel delivery points in store for example (Cao, 2014). Other considerations are inventory management across channels. Stock availability should be visible through each channel and made available to other channels where stock-outs occur in order to support each channel and reduce lost sales. For instance, if the retail store was to stock out they should be able to offer to the customer the option to purchase from the online stock and have it delivered direct to the customer or for in store pick up (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

**Competitive advantage/Strategic capability**

The performance of a business is to a large extent determined by its strategic capabilities. These strategic capabilities determine the businesses ability to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage and ensure its long term survival. Strategic capabilities are made up of threshold and distinctive capabilities. Threshold capabilities are the minimum capabilities needed to compete in a marketplace and distinctive capabilities are those that are required to achieve a competitive advantage. Businesses need to be able to alter or recreate their strategic capabilities in order to keep up with a changing environment, this
concept is known as Dynamic capabilities (Johnson et al, 2011, p85-87). Businesses that achieve dynamic capabilities are able to sustain competitive advantage in the long term.

Pentina and Hasty's (2009) work on the effects of multichannel coordination (omnichannel) on the performance of retail business offers a thorough look at omnichannels impacts on competitive advantage. They argue that through the synergies provided by omnichannel (multichannel coordination as they call it) a source of competitive advantage can be found. The research that they carried out proved that retailers that had effective integration of their channels experienced improved sales. It is noted that where consumers perceive that the channels were well integrated, they prefer to shop in one of the retailers alternative channels in cases of stock-outs rather than to shop in a competitor's outlet. (Bendoly et al, cited by Pentina & Hasty, 2009). Pentina and Hasty (2009) also found that interchannel coordination of customer information, inventory, logistics, marketing and merchandising was a source of competitive advantage. In conjunction with this, shoppers who use more than one channel tend to purchase more, have higher incomes and concentrate more of their purchasing on the same retailer than their single channel counterparts (Chatterjee, 2010; van Baal & Dach, 2005). This makes them an attractive target for retailers to serve and numerous businesses are already of this opinion and are in the forefront of developing these services, examples include Macy's (Rodriguez, 2014; Low, 2014) John Lewis (Clift, 2014) and Nordstrom (Low, 2014). John Lewis are a prime example, 23% of their customers research online and buy in store and a further 12% research in store and buy online, and they already offer a click and collect service (buy online and collect in store) (Clift, 2014).

Interestingly though, not all research agrees with this point of view. There is a view that a retailer's total demand is fixed and that by adding extra channels you are cannibalising sales from one channel into another and not gaining any incremental sales. This is increasing the costs incurred without bringing any additional revenue into the business (Deleersnyder, et al, 2001, cited by Chatterjee, 2010; Hansen & Siew Kien, 2014) . To make matters worse, by then
integrating these channels, large expense is incurred and the ability to use price discrimination can be lost (Schmeiser 2006, cited by Chatterjee, 2010). This leaves single channel retailers or retailers without integrated channels at an advantage. However these views are in the minority and most literature on the topic supports an integrated omnichannel approach as a source of competitive advantage.

As most literature suggests or implies that omnichannel services are a source of improved competitiveness or even competitive advantage (Grau 2009, cited by Chatterjee, 2010; Rigby, 2011; Lewis et al, 2014; Pentina & Hasty, 2009) it is reasonable to assume that it is a distinctive capability. However the lack of barriers to hinder the ability of competitors to obtain omnichannel services leads one to believe that it is unlikely to be a dynamic capability or a sustainable competitive advantage. It is feasible that it may one day become a threshold capability as more and more retailers begin to offer the service.

**Omnichannel & the customer**

Whether retailers like it or not, customers are already in an omnichannel mindset. For example, Chatterjee’s (2010) research surveyed customers of a US bookstore chain that was already providing a buy online and collect in store service and 35% of those surveyed had bought online and collected in store. Customers are using all channels that are available to them to evaluate the market and make purchasing decisions and if there is no effort to engage with them or a poorly developed one then a business may find itself dropped from the consumers consideration set (Sluis, 2014). For this reason, this dissertation will attempt to measure the extent to which customers are already using omnichannel services in the Irish market. Consumers who have done their research may just use a retail store to touch and feel the product before purchasing it elsewhere. ‘Showrooming’ as discussed earlier, does not need to be a threat. A retailer who engages the customer may still close the sale if they are able to offer a well designed omnichannel experience (Piotrowicz &
Cuthbertson, 2014). For example John Lewis, a UK retailer, encourages customers to try its price match guarantees in order to reassure customers (Price & Norris, 2014). As just discussed, if the business does not engage with their customers they may never know that they were dropped from the customers consideration set, for this reason the customers communication preferences are important. If consumers are contacted in a way that they are comfortable then they are likely to be much more receptive to the communication, a good indicator is to contact them the way that they contact you for example via phone, email, or social media etc. (Sluis, 2014). This engagement with the customer in a way in which they are comfortable and offering a well designed omnichannel experience may be an opportunity to improve customer satisfaction.

Technological progress, in particular the internet and mobile, have created a huge shift in power from the retailer to the consumer. The availability of information means consumers are much more informed on what is going on in the market place. This has made them much more demanding and less forgiving of service failure (Blazquez, 2014). Pires et al (2006) outline the key areas that determine consumer empowerment:

- The number and quality of offerings in the market (the choice available)
- Market knowledge
- Ability to search for market information
- The consumers ability to take advantage of offerings (due to time, logistical or cost constraints)

The last point is of particular interest as omnichannel offerings may allow for an increase in a customer’s empowerment by removing constraints on their ability to take advantage of a businesses offering. This could be the case in scenarios whereby the ability to switch channels provides convenience to the customer that if not provided would otherwise result in the customer deferring purchase or availing of a competitors offer. The expense in terms of time, effort and
financial cost in using different channels can be a determining factor as to which channel a consumer uses. Retail stores require time and effort to travel to the store and evaluate the offerings and wait for service. Online allows for easy research and a fast transaction but requires a time and sometimes financial cost for delivery. The use of a crosschannel shopping experience potentially allows for the reduction of a number of the costs of using only one of these channels. Customers can research and purchase online then travel to pick up the product thus reducing research and waiting times and saving on delivery costs. The ability to carry out more extensive research and price comparison online also allows the price conscious consumer to be confident that they have availed of a good deal. Consumers that are price conscious or are concerned with minimising their effort will likely avail of an omnichannel service (Chatterjee, 2010). These customers are likely to use their knowledge of the market in their selection of supplier and they are unlikely to choose a supplier with a perceived lower quality offer. Thus technological progress has empowered customers and this empowerment has in turn increased consumer’s expectation levels (Pires et al 2006), and the measurement of these expectation levels are a large component in this dissertation. Social networking further pushes this by allowing consumers to share information and experiences and perhaps even allow for collective buying groups potentially increasing consumer power even further. These increases in consumer power are potentially causing long term change in the business environment and the design of marketing strategies that businesses need to employ (Pires et al , 2006).

As well as finding that omnichannel is attractive to those that are price or effort conscious, Chatterjee’s (2010) research found that the phenomenon of customers cancelling their order was found to be higher for those that avail of an omnichannel service, likely due to the fact that they do not have to incur any cost to return the purchase however the repurchase intentions at a retailer offering an omnichannel service were higher than at an unintegrated multichannel retailer. These findings suggest that it is likely that an omnichannel service has the potential to deliver greater profitability, however care is needed as increased cancelled orders may reduce this effect.
Hyun-Hwa & Jihyun (2010) show that shoppers that use multiple channels tend to be better educated, have a higher disposable income, are more favourable to email marketing campaigns and have a strong appreciation for in-store customer service teams. In order for a business to take advantage of these findings, it is important that the business’s marketing communications, offerings and sale and return policies are consistent across channels and allow the customer to self select the appropriate channel for service. The importance of this integration is demonstrated by Bendoly et al (cited by Pentina & Hasty, 2009) in their findings that if a customer perceives that a retailer’s channels are closely integrated, when faced with a stock shortage in one channel they will opt for the retailer’s other channels rather than a competitor’s. This reduction in lost sales will obviously have a positive impact on any business providing an effective omnichannel experience.

It is however important not to assume that all consumers are the same and want to avail of omnichannel offerings. Many customers, particularly older shoppers, will not be as technologically savvy and will continue to prefer traditional channels such as retail stores. For this reason technology in store should be an enabler and not a barrier to those less able (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

This section has highlighted in a number of points areas in which omnichannel can have an impact on customer satisfaction, for example, through improved customer engagement, empowerment and convenience. Improved customer satisfaction has been shown to lead to improved profitability in the long term, due to increased future purchasing (Anderson et al, 1994). This effect has been shown to be stronger in service businesses rather than product businesses (Edvardsson et al, 2000). This is therefore very relevant to a service business such as one involved in telecoms and is another reason for customer satisfaction being a key theme in this research.
Common difficulties with omnichannel

With omnichannel becoming more and more popular, many businesses are having difficulty developing omnichannel capabilities.

It can be problematic for retailers moving from distinct online and retail channels towards an omnichannel environment. The legacy problem of having two separate channels run as separate “silos” needs to be overcome. In some cases without effective integration, the separate channels may have differences in pricing, promotion, marketing, branding, supply chain, or even be competing with each other (Piotrowicz & Cuthbert 2014). This is a difficulty for customers as they want to experience a seamless transition and see the business as one entity which shouldn’t treat them differently dependent on the channel they happen to be looking at. A common question for businesses trying to provide an omnichannel experience is how to integrate these existing channels. Frequently their channels were set up some time ago with a silo mentality and are using various legacy systems that do not talk to each other. This can be compounded by organisational structures that are not set up to facilitate omnichannel, the channel owners and departments might be run by different people that aren’t cooperating. This can cause a lot of difficulty and frustration for the business and customers alike and can be expensive to fix (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

According to Klie (2014) this system integration issue is the biggest problem that companies struggling with omnichannel face. Indeed 51% of retailers report that they are unable to fulfill cross channel orders due to their inability to see accurate store inventory (Cardona, 2014). Klie (2014) suggest that the best solution is, where possible, to use a single vendor for all systems as this will allow for much easier integration, while this can be expensive in itself the alternative is a complex and costly process of customisation of existing and new systems. The expense of both of these choices can sometimes be another barrier to implementation and many businesses will be slow to commit the resources required to make these changes (Lewis et al, 2014).
Another difficulty that can be encountered with omnichannel is the organisational culture and attitude of staff. This was identified by research carried out by Lewis et al (2014). Salespeople may be slow to engage with omnichannel if they feel they are losing out on sales or are competing with other channels. This issue comes up in some of the literature and research on this topic. A common theme is the problem of cannibalisation of sales from one channel to the next or how to choose the right channel mix and not on how best to integrate the channels (Hansen & Siew Kien, 2014). This is not really looking at the situation from an omnichannel point of view. In order to prevent this, Lewis et al (2014) recommend that sales people and each channel should be accredited with a portion of the sale in order to counteract the feeling that they are losing sales. There is also an educational requirement, businesses need to make sure that staff are well trained where systems have changed in order to ensure that all staff are up to speed and confident with using any new systems or functionality. Failure to do this can result in staff not using or encouraging customer use of omnichannel initiatives (Lewis et al, 2014).

Another dimension is in the area of customer care or aftersales care, some staff may not feel comfortable with dealing with customers through another channel, call centre staff may not want to deal with customers through social media for instance. Klie (2014) makes the point that this isn’t necessarily a problem as long as they are working in a channel they feel most comfortable and that they have the tools they need to see any interactions that have happened in other channels. Consistency & continuity of the service customers receive is the key rather than the ability of teams to use multiple channels.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion this literature review looked to see if the literature supported the idea that there is scope for an omnichannel approach in a telecoms environment to deliver value to a business in this industry. As outlined in the introduction, this dissertation aimed to measure that value through the sales potential it provides along with any improvements to customer experience and satisfaction.
Omnichannel as a concept is the latest step in a long process of evolution in the retail environment. Advances in technology are driving a steady movement towards omnichannel. The growth of the internet, social media and mobile technologies have changed the shopping experience by enabling customers to interact with the various distribution channels that exist in many retail businesses. Having grown out of multichannel sales environments, an omnichannel approach accepts that customers don’t live in silos and even goes so far as to encourage customers to interact across the different channels available.

This literature review has discussed the many advantages that exist for a business implementing an omnichannel approach to their distribution. It has looked at the synergies that can exist between the channels in areas such as inventory management, logistics, marketing effort, and customer information. On top of this, omnichannel offers numerous ways to improve customer satisfaction by providing convenience and increasing customer empowerment. And customer satisfaction has been shown to improve profitability, not to mention the possibilities that satisfied customers can act as brand ambassadors on social media. This demonstrates that omnichannel presents an opportunity to obtain competitive advantage for any business that can effectively deploy it, including in terms of increased sales potential, customer experience and satisfaction. For that reason the author feels that the literature review supports the objectives of this research, to measure customer use and expectations of omnichannel services along with the potential impact that introducing them will have on customer satisfaction levels, and the overall premise that omnichannel is a source of value for a business operating in the highly competitive telecoms market in Ireland.

3. Research methods
The purpose of this research is to understand whether an omnichannel approach can deliver value to a telecoms firm operating in the highly competitive Irish market. The research looks at the question predominantly from the point of view of the consumer and considers questions such as do consumers expect the service, would they value it and would they use it? The purpose of that is to determine if there is both a sales, and improved customer experience potential that is being missed by not providing an omnichannel service to customers.

**Research objectives**

To carry out this research it is necessary to define the research objectives. The research question itself is as follows:

*Will an investment in omnichannel deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market place?*

In order to answer that question the research objectives that need to be defined and examined are as follows:

5. To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland are already engaging in omnichannel shopping.

6. To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland expect an omnichannel retailing approach.

7. To investigate if there is a demand from customers of a telecoms company in Ireland have for an omnichannel service.

8. To determine if providing an omnichannel service would increase customer satisfaction.

The researcher is examining if customers see any value in an omnichannel service and if there is demand for it in the Irish telecoms market. This is to determine the sales potential that could be achieved by an Irish telecoms
company providing the service to their customers. If customers value and use an omnichannel approach it may lead to increased sales for the business.

The research will also look at whether the unavailability of omnichannel is a frustration for customers to determine if providing the service would improve the customer's experience. If the customer's experience is improved it would likely lead to improved customer satisfaction. Closely linked to this is whether customers expect this service to be available and if providing it would improve customer satisfaction. Improved satisfaction may lead to reduced churn and increased revenue. These research objectives link back to the research question as improved sales and customer satisfaction could lead to a competitive advantage which is obviously of value to any business in a competitive environment.

**Research philosophy**

In preparing this paper the author studied Saunders Research Onion (2012)(figure 3.0) to determine the best research method to take when carrying out this research.

![Figure 3.0: Saunders research onion (Source: Saunders et al, 2012)](image-url)
The research onion is a step-by-step process that allows a researcher to construct a research method in a logical fashion. This author followed this process in carrying out the research. The first step in the process is the research philosophy.

In considering which research philosophy would be most appropriate to the different aspects of this dissertation the author looked at numerous options including pragmatism, objectivism, subjectivism, positivism, critical realism, and interpretivism. These options were narrowed down to pragmatism, positivism, interpretivism and critical realism however after careful consideration the approach that seems most appropriate to this research is critical realism. Justification for this is as follows.

Saunders et al (2012, p130) quote Keleman and Rumens by describing pragmatism as the assertion that the only concepts that are of relevance are those that support action, i.e. the researcher is not rigidly stuck in one position and can adopt different philosophical approaches depending on the question at hand. This appears to be a valid approach to adopt in answering the research questions that are intended and as such was seriously considered as an option. However further reading led the author to believe that there were other more relevant choices available.

In considering ontology the author looked at objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is explained by Saunders et al (2012, p131) as the position whereby the researcher believes that social entities exist separate to those that make up the entity. For example that management exists in independence to the managers themselves. In contrast to this subjectivism is the idea that the “social actors” determine the reality that management exists because of the actors themselves and if the actors were to change then management itself is different. In considering whether either of these ontological approaches would make sense to this dissertation the author concluded that the subjective approach is more appropriate. This is because a
fundamental element of the question looks at the consumer, and an individual's experiences with a firm do not exist independent of the consumer, it exists only in the consumer's mind and therefore an objectivist approach would be an inappropriate position. However further consideration of the other choices available also eliminated subjectivism.

While deliberating whether an epistemological approach was appropriate the author looked at a number of choices including positivism, critical realism and interpretivism. Interpretivism puts the researcher in the position of the subject being researched and for a question such as the one being considered this is highly relevant. It would allow the researcher to consider the complex relationship between the customer and the service provider and the variables that influence each individual customer's relationship to the service provider and the factors determining their choice of channel. However the strong focus of this philosophy on the social world and understanding it from your subject's point of view lends itself to qualitative work and this work is not of a qualitative nature.

The author's natural outlook and position would be one of positivism and its focus on real world measurable physical realities. The research approach will be one of a quantitative nature and as such this lends itself to the quantifiable nature of positivism, however critical realism is another epistemological approach that naturally sits well with the author and was also considered a viable option to consider for carrying out this dissertation. It is closely related to positivism however the fact that the mental processes involved in making sense of reality are considered makes this approach very relevant (Saunders et al, 2012, p136). This combined with the fact that the author will be using quantitative methods, which lend themselves to this approach, were strong influencing factors in deciding to look at this work from a critical realism philosophical point of view while carrying out this research.
Research approach

The research approach taken by this researcher is primarily one of an inductive nature. Given the research is placed in the social sciences as opposed to the natural sciences this seems appropriate. The author felt this was also most appropriate as he does not want to draw a hypothesis out of the research question, rather he would prefer to carry out the research and draw conclusions from the data.

While the inductive approach usually lends itself to research of a qualitative nature the majority of the research carried out is of a quantitative nature. Whilst this may be considered unusual considering the subject, it is still appropriate. Saunders et al (2012, p120-121) point out that where a topic that is new is being researched, then the inductive approach can be useful as there is little existing literature or data. Considering that the concept of omnichannel is a relatively recent development, this is relevant.

The research carried out for this dissertation was conducted through surveys. This is a valid approach and one that other researchers have used in the past (Blazquez, 2014; Chatterjee, 2010). The researcher carried out surveys of customers in retail stores. The survey was also be placed on the Company’s website for customers to complete of their own accord. The main research question has been broken down into four research objectives and the survey questions were designed around these areas. The answers to these surveys were then analysed in order to draw conclusions on the topic. The survey itself is broken into five sections. The first section was to determine what the customer purchased and which channel it was purchased in, along with reasons for their choice of channel. The second section measures customers existing use of omnichannel services. The next section examines customer expectations and demand for omnichannel services. The fourth determined satisfaction with current services and if there are frustrations with the lack of omnichannel offerings at the moment and the fifth was to capture demographic information.
The questionnaire design process, discussed at length by Malhotra & Birk (2007), was used to aid the author in the construction of the survey. The questionnaire design process has a number of steps to be followed to create an effective questionnaire and these steps were followed to create the survey that was finally used. The steps that the author followed are detailed in the next number of paragraphs.

**Specify the information that is needed**

The research question being considered for this dissertation is very much focused around customer satisfaction with the current multichannel approach, customer expectations in regards to the availability and implementation of omnichannel and demand levels for omnichannel. Therefore careful consideration was required to ensure that the questions that are used would deliver the information needed to make conclusions around these areas. In order to start to understand how the questions would provide the information required, provisional questions were drawn up. As recommended by Malhotra & Birk (2007) a dummy table (figure 3.1) was also drawn up to understand how the information would be compiled once the surveys are complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Channel used</th>
<th>Customer type</th>
<th>Researched</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Click &amp; Collect use</th>
<th>C&amp;C Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Retail Store</td>
<td>PAYG NEW</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Online at Company.ie</td>
<td>For advice</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>PAYG PORT</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Online at a competitor site</td>
<td>To find/avail of deals</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Call Centre</td>
<td>PAYG UPG</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Other online website</td>
<td>No need to wait for delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BILL NEW</td>
<td>Company store</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impulse buy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>BILL UPG</td>
<td>Competitor store</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience, close to home/work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>BILL PORT</td>
<td>Call centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experience product before buy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family and friends advice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experience the selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1: Dummy table for research data
Interviewing Method

The next step in the process is to select the type of interviewing method to be used. The selected method is survey, this was chosen after the elimination of grounded theory and ethnography as viable alternatives. The decision to eliminate these is discussed in the research strategy section below. In the retail environment, customers who have entered one of the Company's retail stores will be asked if they would be willing to partake in a survey. The survey will address the research objectives as well as collect demographic information. The survey will also be placed online in the forum on the Company's website for customers to take part of their own accord as well as placed on the Company Twitter account. For this survey method there are some bias considerations, such as order bias, that need to be considered when administering the survey. For this purpose multiple randomised orders will be used in the surveys answer choices to negate this effect. The goal was to attempt to survey approximately 100 people so as to allow the surveys to be statistically valid and for conclusions to be drawn.

Question Content

Step three in the process is to determine the content of the questions and decide if each one is necessary and straightforward. For this purpose it was necessary to consider whether each question actually provides the answers that are needed. It was also necessary to ensure that each question is written in a straightforward way and that there were no questions that could be broken down into multiple questions. A number of questions were altered and added at this step to simplify the study and to aid analysis.

Willingness and ability

Step four of the process is to consider the respondents’ willingness and ability to answer the questions. Malhotra & Birk (2007) outline a number of aspects to this step that need to be considered. They include issues about the respondents’ ability to remember, if they are informed about the topic, the purpose of the research and any sensitive topics. These issues were taken into consideration
during the creation of the survey and should not present an issue. Some of the more relevant issues are as follows:

Respondent information level.
This is to determine whether you are asking respondents something they know the answer to. For the purposes of this survey, the respondents will be answering questions around their own behaviour in relation to recent purchase behaviour and intentions. For this reason respondents should be adequately informed and be able to answer the questions.

Respondents’ memory.
Concerns in relation to memory are around three issues, omission, telescoping and creation. Omission is the respondent simply failing to recall something, telescoping is around respondents’ failure to adequately place their memory in time and creation is in relation to consumers recalling something that never occurred. For the most part, the author doesn’t feel these three issues caused any problems in the research as generally the respondents are recalling events that happened relatively recently. The only exception to that may be in relation to determining the respondents’ past use of omnichannel services.

Legitimate purpose & sensitive information.
Respondents may be unwilling to participate in the survey if they feel the information is not going to be used for a legitimate purpose. For this reason the survey was prefaced with a brief introduction and description of the purpose of the research. It is felt that this was able to allay any concerns that respondents may have had. On top of this the survey was kept anonymous so respondents were able to feel free to respond honestly. The information that was collected was not of a sensitive nature so respondents were not made to feel uncomfortable answering the questions. Demographic questions were left until the end of the survey.
Respondents’ willingness to take part in the survey.

As this survey was placed on the company’s website, it was felt that an incentive would be needed to encourage participation. For this reason a prize was made available for respondents who took part. In order to maintain anonymity, an email address was provided at the end of the survey for participants to email to enter and then a single entry was randomly selected as the winner.

**Question Structure**

This survey consisted mainly of structured questions as they allow for standardised responses that make analysis of the responses much easier. The questions themselves consisted of multiple choice, dichotomous questions and questions consisting of scales. Some of the concerns with this approach include order bias and position bias. These issues pertain to respondents’ tendencies to answer in a certain way based on the position or order of the answers. To counteract this, when constructing the survey, the position and order of certain answers were randomized each time the survey was carried out.

**Question wording**

The wording that is used in the questions is critical as there are a number of issues that can be caused if caution is not taken. Malhotra & Birk (2007) offer guidelines on the issue and these are comprehensive and were carefully noted when drawing up the survey. Of particular note is the use of ordinary unambiguous words and leading questions. The author has been careful to follow this and to refrain from using terms such as omnichannel which respondents may be unfamiliar with and to construct the questions in such a way as to ensure they do not encourage a particular response.

**Question Order**

The order of the questions in the survey has been carefully considered. The question order is done in a logical systematic way with consideration taken on the effect of earlier questions on subsequent ones and it is not felt that any of the
questions presented much difficulty for respondents to answer. The survey opens with a brief introduction and is then followed by questions about the recent purchase, the respondents’ expectations, respondents’ likely future use of omnichannel in order to determine demand, the respondents’ satisfaction with the current experience and the potential for improving this and closed with questions relating to demographics. This follows the recommendations made by Malhotra & Birk (2007).

**Pilot test**

In order to ensure the survey ran well, a pilot test was conducted. 15 respondents were asked to complete the survey in advance of the actual survey taking place. The method used was the debrief method which was discussed by Malhotra & Birk (2007). This method is where respondents are asked after the survey is completed to provide feedback on each section and question. This practice run was very useful and identified a number of issues with the survey that needed to be amended.

Some of the issues that were identified included issues with the design of the survey whereby some fields would not allow the respondent to move forward. This was due to a requirement to complete each question and had to be removed for questions with “other” comments to allow respondents to move through the survey. Another issue that came to light involved how the randomising that was employed to remove order bias confused some respondents for the questions that required yes or no answers. Respondents were surprised the order was different for each question; this randomisation was removed for the dichotomous questions.

Despite the author’s best efforts, some respondents still found the question wording and order confusing. For this reason some more amendments were made to wording and question order prior to the full survey being carried out. It is important to note however that questions relating to buy in store for home delivery included the line “in the circumstances that the product you wanted was
out of stock,” prior to asking respondents the question. This line was added because during pilot testing, respondents did not understand why they would want to use a buy in store and deliver service if they could just pick up the handset there and then.

Lastly, some respondents felt that the introduction was too long and this may put off people who are impatient. This potentially would cause poor responses online more so than in the store, so for this reason the introduction was shortened for both the in store and online questionnaire with the online one being significantly shortened.

**Research strategy**

As stated earlier the research that was conducted is inductive in nature and made use of quantitative techniques. The author carried out surveys of customers in the company’s retail stores or online on their website. The researcher was careful to maintain the anonymity of the surveys in order to promote honest and frank opinions while ensuring the privacy of the customers. The length of time to complete the survey is between 6 and 10 minutes per survey and the goal is to gain the perspective and opinions of real customers in relation to the 4 research objectives. The survey was placed on the boards section of the website of the company and customers were able to volunteer to take part in the survey. In order to encourage participation, a prize was made available to those who complete the survey. Anonymity of the respondents was maintained by providing an email address for respondents to enter the competition at the end of the survey. This prevents any way to link any email entry to a particular survey response. In conjunction with the online survey, customers in a selection of retail stores were surveyed during their visit to the store.

The in store surveys were carried out on random customers of telecoms companies in Ireland. The researcher made every effort to ensure the surveys are reflective of the demographic split of consumers in Ireland and also made
attempts to contain a split of customers that shopped in each channel. The demographic split was measured via a number of demographic questions that were asked at the end of the survey.

As mentioned earlier the research strategy that has been adopted for this research is survey. This is an approach that has been used before; indeed some of the authors mentioned in the literature review used the survey method in their own work (Blazquez, 2014; Chatterjee, 2010). Blazquez’s (2014) survey approach is similar in a number of ways to this study, it considers two channels, retail and online, and it asks respondents to evaluate their last shopping experience. Both of these are included in the approach this author took in this study. Chatterjee’s (2010) survey was also carried out in both retail stores and online and offered an incentive to those that complete the survey in either channel. In comparison this study only offered the incentive when the survey was completed online and not in store, this is because the survey that was carried out in this work was much less onerous than that carried out by Chatterjee. Chatterjee’s survey took between 30-40 minutes in comparison to 6-10 minutes for this survey.

Saunders et al (2012) outline the main advantages to this approach being that once the research is carried out that the analysis can be done in the researchers own time and there is no dependency on others to make time available to you. However there are a number of disadvantages including the length of time required to enter and analyse the data and the dependence on a well-constructed survey. The author has been careful to be mindful of these issues throughout the research process. In order to minimize these disadvantages, the survey was constructed in survey monkey (See appendix) and analysed using the SPSS analytical software. The reason survey monkey was used is that it would allow for a large amount of both the online and in store surveys to be carried out quickly and easily and is very straight forward for importing into SPSS. This import feature significantly reduced the amount of time required to enter the survey data into SPSS manually thereby allowing more time for thorough analysis. Other research strategies that were considered viable options include
grounded theory and ethnography. Grounded theory is a mixed approach described by Saunders et al as building theory based on observations. Observations are first taken without a theoretical framework and based on those observations predictions or theories are developed and tested. This would be a viable approach to take in this study but the requirement to carry out observations in the field and then later test them would require more time than would be possible to carry out this work in time for the submission deadline. For this reason this option was eliminated. Ethnography is a very interesting approach to take in carrying out research and involves a large amount of observation and interviewing in order to analyse the behaviours and thoughts of a particular group of people (Malhotra & Birk, 2007). This type of research would be ideal for a piece of work such as this as it is focused on the subject, the consumer and their thoughts and feelings about omnichannel. While ethnography was seriously considered, the time and logistical requirements to observe and interview customers was not feasible in the time available so regrettably this method was also eliminated.

**Time horizon**

This dissertation was conducted as a cross sectional study, which is a snapshot in time that outlines the situation as it is at that time. The surveys were designed to provide the researcher with data on customer experiences at that specific time. I believe that a longitudinal study on this topic would be beneficial as it would identify whether customer opinion and usage changes over time and as channel offerings in the market change, particularly in relation to business strategy and whether omnichannel could one day become a threshold competency. However it is not feasible in the time frame allowed for this dissertation to conduct a longitudinal study. This dissertation was carried out over the summer months from June 2015 until August 2015.

**Credibility of the research**

The issue of maintaining the credibility of the research is a key factor in the design process of this dissertation. The key factors in determining if the
research is to be credible are the research reliability and validity (Saunders, 2012). Saunders (2012) outlines how for the research to have internal validity it must answer the question that the researcher intended. For this to be the case the questions must be designed well, respondents must be able to understand the questions in the way the researcher intended and the researcher must be able to understand the respondent’s answer in the way the respondent intended. This is outlined in figure 3.2 below.

![Figure 3.2: Stages required for valid and reliable questions (Source: Saunders 2012)](image)

Careful consideration has been given to this process to ensure that the questions in the survey are clear and easily understood. The questionnaire design process and the pilot test that were used were able to help to mitigate problems of this nature and to maintain the survey’s validity.

For the research to have reliability, it must be a robust survey that is reproducible at different times and in different conditions. The ideal check for this would be to carry out the survey again at a later date however this is not a feasible solution in the time available. To attempt to counteract this, the survey has been conducted at 5 retail locations along with on the company’s forum and Twitter account so as to diversify the respondents selected.
Data collection

The author made use of both primary and secondary research in carrying out this dissertation. This data collection is broken down as follows:

Primary Research

As discussed extensively already the author carried out surveys on customers that have made a purchase from the company. The customers that were surveyed had made their purchase either through a retail store or via the online website. In the retail environment, customers that have entered one of the company’s retail stores were asked if they would be willing to take part in a survey. The survey was also placed online on the company’s website for customers to take part of their own accord. The survey itself ask about the purchase experience, and research the customer carried out in advance of the purchase, the reason for their choice of channel. Questions then examine the customer’s use of omnichannel services in the past and their expectations for the service to be provided as well as whether they would use them in the future. The survey also examines whether the provision of these services would improve the customers satisfaction with the shopping experience. The survey closes with demographic related questions.

Secondary Research

The author used secondary research while carrying out the dissertation. This secondary research was used for the literature review and also to help in designing the questions for the survey and indeed throughout the writing of the dissertation. The author used the DBS library resources, which allows access to thousands of journal articles and research papers through Ebsco. The author reviewed many articles and research papers through the DBS library resources and these were used extensively when carrying out the literature review. The DBS library also has access to electronic versions of textbooks and these were used in the literature review and in the survey design process.
Ethical issues

Saunders et al describe ethics as “the standard of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subjects of your work, or are affected by it” (2012, p226). In considering this, the author does not feel that there were any ethical issues with the research being carried out. The areas of risk that the author is conscious of are the confidentiality of the participants in the surveys, and the disclosure that the company of which the respondents are customers employs the author. In order to ensure that the confidentiality of participants was maintained, all data was kept anonymous and was not attributable to any individual. The author also endeavored to remain impartial and to not allow his employment to bias the results of the research. The author also wore identification that identified that the author is employed by the business. The author took all steps necessary to ensure that the dissertation adheres to the ethical standards required.

Limitations to the research

One of the largest limitations to the research is that the customers surveyed were all customers of the same organisation. The researcher’s employment in one of the companies in the industry makes it very difficult to gain access to customers of competing organisations. This presents an opportunity for others in the future to carry out a similar study on other businesses in the same or similar industries to determine if the results hold true in those circumstances.

There were also difficulties in carrying out the survey. Some respondents found it difficult to understand the meaning of the questions, in particular those that were particularly elderly or where English was not their first language. Future similar studies should provide translated versions of the study for those that have poor English skills and should consider whether to have an upper age limit to the study.

Other limitations include the inability to carry out a longitudinal study to assess how customers’ expectations of the service evolve over time. This would be an
opportunity for future research on the subject as omnichannel services become more and more available.

4. Research findings

This chapter reviews the analysis of the results of the primary research carried out in store and online. The objective is to determine if an investment in omnichannel services will deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market place. In order to answer that, four research questions need to be examined and answered. As discussed earlier, those four research questions are as follows:

Objective 1:
To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland are already engaging in omnichannel shopping.

Objective 2:
To determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland expect an omnichannel retailing approach.

Objective 3:
To investigate if there is a demand from customers of a telecoms company in Ireland for an omnichannel service.

Objective 4:
To determine if providing an omnichannel service would increase customer satisfaction.

As discussed in the research methods chapter, in order to answer these questions, a pilot survey was carried out followed by surveys that were carried out in a number of retail stores, on the forum section of the company website and via twitter. This resulted in 140 responses. 15 of these were from the pilot
survey and 8 were incomplete. This resulted in 117 usable survey responses, which were analysed using the software package SPSS to attempt to answer the research questions stated above.

It is important to note that questions relating to buy in store for home delivery included the line “in the circumstances that the product you wanted was out of stock,” prior to asking respondents the question. This line was added because during the pilot test, respondents did not understand why they would want to use a buy in store and deliver service if they could just pick up the handset there and then. It also relates back to the literature review where Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson (2014) and Bendoly et al (cited by Pentina & Hasty, 2009) points were discussed. This is that where consumers perceive that the channels were well integrated, they preferred to shop in one of the retailers alternative channels in cases of stock-outs rather than to shop in a competitor’s outlet and that stock should be made available across the various channels so that where stock-outs occur in one channel; other channels can support them by taking the order and thereby reducing lost sales. For instance, if the retail store was to stock-out they should be able to offer to the customer the option to purchase from the online stock and have it delivered directly to the customer or for in store pick up, and vice versa for the online channel. For these reasons it was felt that the explanation was justified to enable the respondents to accurately understand and answer the survey.

**Demographics & Market segments**

It was identified in the literature review that older shoppers might not be as technologically savvy and therefore less likely to use omnichannel services (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). For this reason, the demographics of the respondents are an important consideration. It can be used to understand and validate the results and can allow for a deeper understanding of the data and its relationship with different demographic metrics.
During this research, the demographic data that was captured and examined were age, gender, purchase location, purchase type and customer type.

**Gender**

The gender split of respondents was 62% male to 38% female. This is not reflective of the general population, which according to the CSO (2011) had a gender split of 49% male to 51% female. This means that females are underrepresented in the survey data.

![Figure 4.1: Gender of respondents](image)

**Age Group**

The age of respondents is heavily skewed towards the younger age groups with 77% of respondents under 44. This compares with 41% of the general population aged under 44 (CSO, 2011). Again this means those over 44 are underrepresented.

![Figure 4.2: Age of respondents](image)

**Purchase location**

The majority of respondents (78%) made their last purchase in store as opposed to online (22%).

![Figure 4.3: Purchase location](image)
65% of respondents were postpay customers that pay a monthly bill and 35% were prepay customers that top up in advance of their use.

The majority of respondents were upgrading, 79%. Upgrade customers are those that were existing customers purchasing a new handset.

Port customers are those that switched from another provider. New connection customers are those that are new customers that are getting a new number.

Research objective 1

Earlier in the literature review, it was discussed how regardless of whether retailers provide omnichannel services, customers are already in an omnichannel mindset and are likely engaging in omnichannel behaviours. Customers are using all channels that are available to them to evaluate the market and make purchasing decisions and if there is no effort to engage with them or a poorly developed one then a business may find itself dropped from the consumers consideration set (Sluis, 2014). In order to examine this in the context of the Irish telecoms market, the first research objective of this dissertation is to determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland are
already engaging in omnichannel shopping, both with the Company and with other retailers. Questions 6, 7, 8 in the survey were designed to examine this objective and as such are the main indicators of whether this is happening. These questions ask respondents about their current omnichannel research and shopping behaviours.

Did respondents show omnichannel research behaviours?

One definition provided in the literature review is that omnichannel is “an integrated sales experience that melds the advantages of physical stores with the information rich experience of online shopping” (Wisner & Wisner, 2014; Rigby, 2011). Questions six was designed to explore if respondents were already attempting to meld the physical and online experience despite the Company not providing omnichannel services at present. The question itself was “In advance of your purchase, where did you carry out research?” This was intended to investigate current omnichannel research behaviours, to identify whether respondents were interacting with various channels to carry out research in advance of their purchase. The survey data that came back was quite illuminating in this respect.

60% of respondents were engaging in some kind of online research. This included social media, the Company website, competitor websites or other websites. 16% researched on social media, this was considerably lower than the results found by Blazquez (2014). Blazquez’s research found that 23% of shoppers had used social media to carry out their research. One possible explanation for this is industry type; Blazquez research was focused on the fashion industry. This discrepancy might be down to differences between the
countries surveyed or perhaps consumers are more or less likely to use social media to carry out research depending on the industry or product they are researching.

Surprisingly only 26% of all respondents carried out any research in retail stores, either in a Company or competitor store. Even if only those that purchased in store were considered, this number increased to only 36% meaning that 64% bought in store but did not research in store.

Interestingly 13% carried out research in both the online and in store categories, this is a real example of omnichannel research behaviours. One surprising result was that 17% of respondents did no research at all.

Are respondents using omnichannel services in other retailers?

As mentioned in the literature review, some companies are already ahead of the competition when it comes to offering omnichannel services and questions seven and eight were included to investigate respondents use of omnichannel services in other retailers. Question seven was “have you ever used a buy online and collect in store service from any retailer?” and question eight was “In the circumstances where the product was unavailable in store, have you ever made a purchase in store but had the product delivered to your home?” These questions were asked to gain a direct answer as to the extent of omnichannel use by respondents in other retailers. The benefit of this is that if consumers are willing to use omnichannel services elsewhere then they are likely to use them with the Company.
For convenience purposes, the figures below refer to buy online and collect in store as “click and collect” and buy in store for home delivery as simply “delivery”.

The buy online and collect in store service was the most popular omnichannel service availed of with 42% of respondents having used it in the past versus 26% having used a buy in store and deliver service. 54% of respondents had used either service and 14% had used both services in the past. These results are a strong indication that respondents are already engaging in omnichannel shopping behaviours.

Did respondent research in one channel but purchase in another?

In order to further examine the interchangeable use of channels for research and purchase, a cross tab was run in SPSS to look at the relationship between purchase location and research location.

Interestingly, 55% of respondents that purchased in store carried out research in some form online. Surprisingly, only 7% carried out research on competitor sites with the largest share of online research being done on the Company site (31%). 15% of users reported using social media. These results are quite interesting and are above what was expected. Clift’s (2014) article on retailer John Lewis made the case that they were well along the process of implementing omnichannel
services and already had buy online and collect in store services yet they reported that 23% were researching online and purchasing in store.

Of those that purchased online, only 8% carried out research in a retail store with all of that being in Company stores. This is slightly below the 12% that retailer John Lewis had researching in store and buying online in 2014 (Clift, 2014). One very surprising result that came from the survey is that no respondents that purchased online carried out any research in competitor stores. These results are quite surprising as they are contrary to what other researchers discuss in relation to “showrooming” as was examined in the literature review (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Showrooming is where the consumer visits a retail store to experience the product and either orders the product there for delivery or buys it elsewhere, frequently online. The results from this analysis of the survey are clearly at odds with this trend, as 92% of those that purchased online did no research in store. Considering that 55% of respondents that purchased in store carried out research online, if anything it could be argued that online is being used for “showrooming” rather than the other way around.

Are there differences between demographic and market segments use of omnichannel services?

In order to determine if omnichannel use is more popular with certain segments of the market, the relationship between demographics and omnichannel use was examined.
**Prepay and postpay customers**

This looks at the percentage of prepay and postpay users that have used omnichannel services with other retailers in the past.

Omnichannel use is slightly more popular with postpay users versus prepay. 57% of respondents that were postpay have used omnichannel services with other retailers versus 49% of respondents that were prepay. In particular, buy online and collect in store is more popular with postpay users. Given that postpay users typically spend more than prepay users, this is an interesting finding.

**Transaction type and past omnichannel use**

In this statistic, respondents are grouped by transaction type and their omnichannel use is examined. Omnichannel use is either buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery.

Respondents that have upgraded have slightly more experience with using omnichannel services. However caution is required with this particular statistic as the sample sizes for port (14) and new connection (10) were significantly smaller than upgrades (93).
Some surprising results came through in the analysis of this statistic, the 18-24 and 55+ age groups both have much less omnichannel use than the average while those aged 45 to 54 had significant experience with using some form of omnichannel service. The results for the over 55 age group are consistent with the literature review, which discussed Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson (2014) article that made the point that older shoppers are less technologically savvy and prefer the interaction of more traditional retail shopping experiences. This is further reinforced when analysis is done on comfort level with technology and age, which indicates that 58% of those over 55 are less than comfortable with using technology.

However the low use of omnichannel services by the younger 18 - 24 year old group is a surprise and is not explained by the comfort with technology analysis. One possible explanation may simply be that they are still young and haven’t had the opportunity to use omnichannel services. This is reinforced when the results of the questions examining expectations for the provision of omnichannel services and willingness to use omnichannel services during the next purchase are examined. Both of these results for the 18 - 24 age group came back as 94% of those respondents expect the service and are willing to use an omnichannel service on their next purchase. In saying that further research would be required to confirm this as the reason for the low use of omnichannel services in this age group.
Omnichannel use and gender

Omnichannel use appears slightly more popular with males, 57% of male respondents have had experience with omnichannel services to 49% of females. The difference between the sexes on this measure is small enough to be considered insignificant.

Research objective 2

Previous authors that were discussed in the literature review identified that customers have strong expectations for the provision of omnichannel services. That they don’t see independent channels, only brands and expect brands to function as one entity with full view of all of their interactions and the flexibility to allow them to transact with them in a way that’s convenient to them (Pophal, 2015; Klie, 2014; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014) The second research objective of this paper follows from this and looks to determine if customers of the Company have expectations of omnichannel services being available to them. The results of questions 9 and 10 are the main indicators of whether this is happening as they directly ask respondents about their expectations for the provision of omnichannel services.

Do respondents expect omnichannel services to be available?

As discussed in the literature review, customers have expectations for businesses to have a full view of their interactions with them (Klie, 2014; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014) and that technological progress is empowering customers, which is in turn increasing their expectation levels (Pires et al 2006).
Question nine and ten examine this in the context of this research by looking at respondents’ expectations for the availability of omnichannel services. Question nine asked “would you expect the Company to offer a buy online and collect in store service?” and ten asked “In the circumstances where the product was unavailable in store, would you expect the Company to offer a buy in store for home delivery service?” For the purposes of clarity in the diagram, buy online and collect in store has been referred to as ‘click and collect’ while buy in store for home delivery has been referred to as simply ‘delivery’.

There are significant expectations for omnichannel services among respondents; indeed only 13% have no expectations for the service availability. Buy online and collect in store (78%) is only expected slightly more than a buy in store for delivery service (77%). This is an important finding as it is a strong direct answer to this research objective; respondents do indeed expect omnichannel services to be available.

**Is there a difference in expectation for omnichannel services between the different channels?**

This looks at the expectations for the provision of omnichannel services split across those that purchased in a retail store and those that purchased online. Once again click and collect refers to buy online and collect in store and delivery refers to buy in store for home delivery. Any omnichannel expectation is those respondents that answered that they expect either of the two choices.
Interestingly, the delivery expectations are noticeably greater for those that have purchased online and this is also driving a stronger expectation level for omnichannel services as a whole from those respondents. Buy online and collect in store services were expected almost equally as much in respondents that purchased in either the online store or a retail store.

**Is there a difference in expectation for omnichannel services between prepay and postpay?**

Interestingly, prepay respondents have higher expectations for omnichannel services to postpay respondents. This is driven by a higher expectation for the availability of the buy online and collect in store services. With 93% of prepay respondents expecting omnichannel services to be available; this is a strong finding in the context of the second research objective.

It is also a surprising result considering that earlier prepay users had lower usage experience of buy online and collect in store than postpay users yet now they have a higher expectation for the service.
There are no significant expectation differences between the genders, the most interesting aspect is that females have a greater expectation for omnichannel services where as earlier males were found to have been more likely to have used omnichannel services in the past. It is surprising to find that females have a greater expectation yet less use of omnichannel services.

Unsurprisingly in figure 4.20, expectations of omnichannel services appear to decrease with age. It is interesting to note that the 45 to 54 age group have significantly lower expectations for the availability of omnichannel yet are significantly more likely to have used it in the past while the opposite is true of the 18 to 24 age group. This illustrates that younger respondents have much greater expectations when it comes to the provision of omnichannel services. This is in line with the point made by Pires et al (2006) that technological progress is empowering consumers and that empowerment is increasing expectation levels and is reflected in figure 4.21 showing that younger users are more comfortable with technology. This may mean that...
in time overall expectation levels will increase as those comfortable with technology get older and start to become a larger share of the market. A longitudinal study would be a good way to examine this further. These results also reinforce Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson (2014) point that older shoppers may be less inclined to use technology and omnichannel service and that services need to be designed with that in mind.

Research objective 3

The third research objective of this work was to determine if there is demand for omnichannel services. This was measured in the survey by questions 11 to 14. These questions examined if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland would use omnichannel services, either buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery, during their next purchase and if those omnichannel services would be an influencing factor in the decision to potentially switch provider.

Will respondents use an omnichannel services during their next purchase?

63% of respondents said they would consider using a buy online and collect in store service during their next purchase while 72% said they would consider a buy in store for delivery service on their next purchase if the product they were looking for was out of stock. And combined, 85% of respondents said they would consider using either or both of these services. This compares favourably with Chatterjee’s (2010) results, which had 35% of respondents buy online and collect in store. However his results were for current purchases as opposed to next purchase. These results for the potential use of omnichannel services are quite strong and are a significant finding that shows that a very large portion of users would indeed use omnichannel services if they were available.
Of those that expect omnichannel services to be available, how many would use it?

Of those that said they expect a buy online and collect in store service to be available, 74% said they would use it on their next purchase, while 81% of those that said they expect a buy in store for home delivery service to be available said they would use the service in the circumstance that the device they wanted was out of stock. Combined, 92% of respondents that expect omnichannel services said they would use either of the two services when making their next purchase. Again these results are very strong and are significant results that show there is demand for omnichannel services.

Would the availability of omnichannel services influence a respondent’s decision to switch providers?

Considering that the Irish mobile market is mature with a mobile penetration rate of 124% (Comreg, 2015), one of the key ways providers compete is through convincing competitors customers to switch provider. With the literature strongly arguing that omnichannel services can improve competitiveness (Grau 2009, cited by Chatterjee, 2010; Rigby, 2011; Lewis et al, 2014; Pentina & Hasty, 2009), this analysis was carried out to determine if omnichannel services would influence respondents’ decision to switch providers.

The results for these questions were significantly lower than the previous two results. Interestingly only 41% of respondents felt that either buy online and collect in store or buy in store for home delivery would influence their decision to switch provider, inversely that means 59% would not consider it an
influencing factor. In the case of buy online and collect in store this increased to 77% of respondents. This may indicate that omnichannel services are considered a nice to have rather than a need to have service in the mind of the consumer. This is an interesting result as the literature review discussed how omnichannel services provided a convenience to customers and that without that convenience, customers may not be able to avail of a businesses offerings and in turn decide to avail of a competitors offering. The research clearly shows that in the case of the Irish telecoms industry, this is not the situation that is occurring at present.

**Does channel choice influence the willingness to consider omnichannel services for the next purchase?**

Those that purchased online were slightly more likely to consider using an omnichannel service on their next purchase than those that purchased in store. This may be because respondents that carried out their purchase online are more likely to be comfortable with technology and open to using less traditional omnichannel services. Figure 4.26 below
illustrates this point, 96% of respondents that purchased online consider themselves at least somewhat comfortable with technology compared to 89% of those that purchased in the retail stores.

Another aspect that was examined was the reason for channel choice. 14 respondents that purchased in store and 6 of those that purchased online said they were looking for deals, a proxy for price consciousness. This represents 17% of respondents. According to Chatterjee (2010) price conscious consumers are likely users of omnichannel services, and so it follows that those 20 respondents would be likely to use omnichannel services. Further analysis of the survey data does indeed support Chatterjee’s assertion. Of the 20 respondents mentioned, 12 (60%) had carried out research in one channel but made their purchase in another and 11 (55%) had used omnichannel services in other retailers. That is strong evidence that they are likely to use omnichannel services if they were available.

Does age influence the likelihood that a respondent will use omnichannel services during their next purchase?

Interestingly the willingness to consider using omnichannel services during the next purchase remained high in all age categories with the exception of the 55+ category. Only 50% of respondents in this category would consider using an omnichannel service. This is perhaps linked to the comfort level of this age group with using technology.
With the exception of the 45 - 54 age group, as age increases the comfort level with technology decreases, particularly in the 55+ category. A correlation analysis showed a significant correlation between age and comfort level at the .01 level. This is likely the cause of the significant drop in willingness to consider using omnichannel services during the next purchase among the 55+ group. This compliments what was discussed in the literature review and earlier in research objective two in relation to older customers. The assumption cannot be made that all customers will want to or be able to use technology and services like omnichannel (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). This needs to be considered in the design and delivery of any omnichannel services.

**Research objective 4**

The fourth research objective of this work was to determine the impact of omnichannel services on satisfaction levels. If customers have an expectation for the provision of omnichannel services, do they find it frustrating when they are not available? This objective explores the frustration levels caused by this and examines if that feeds through to damage customer satisfaction. This damage to customer satisfaction levels could have a detrimental impact on the overall business performance as customer satisfaction has been linked with profitability, particularly in service industries (Anderson et al, 1994; Edvardsson et, 2000). This is clearly something that any business would want to avoid.

The impact of the lack of omnichannel services available to customers was measured in the survey by questions 15 to 17. These questions examined the current satisfaction levels of customers of a telecoms company in Ireland and if the lack of buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery services are

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**Figure 4.28: Age and comfort with technology**

- **18-24**: 94%
- **25-34**: 86%
- **35-44**: 77%
- **45-54**: 87%
- **55+**: 42%

Percent of respondents at least comfortable with technology by age group.
a frustration for customers. As stated the purpose of measuring this is to determine if implementing omnichannel services would improve customer satisfaction levels by removing a frustration for customers.

**Are customers currently satisfied with their shopping experience?**

![Pie chart showing customer satisfaction levels]

Overall 81% of respondents were satisfied with their shopping experience while 9% were less than satisfied. This is quite a strong performance and is a high benchmark to set.

Figure 4.29: Customer satisfaction scores

Despite the strong satisfaction scores coming through in the survey, 32% of respondents said they found the lack of a buy online and collect in store service to be frustrating while 26% said the same for buy in store for home delivery. Digging deeper into this highlights an interesting result, figure 4.31 below shows the percentage of all respondents that were less than satisfied with their last shopping experience at 9% as reported above. Interestingly those that found a lack of buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery, a frustration reported a higher level of dissatisfaction with their last shopping experience. This reflects what was discussed in the literature review by Klie (2014), that customers find it frustrating interacting with various channels.
that have no visibility of the interactions in other channels and that these frustrations can damage customer satisfaction levels.

It illustrates that there may be a relationship between a frustration with the lack of omnichannel services and dissatisfaction. At the very least, the lack of omnichannel services is a factor influencing some of those 9% that were dissatisfied with their last shopping experience. This is a significant finding as it strengthens the argument that providing omnichannel services will increase customer satisfaction scores.

Is there a difference in the frustration levels between the respondents that choose online instead of retail?

Interestingly respondents that shop online have a higher level of frustration with the lack of omnichannel services to those that shop in store. In particular respondents that shopped online were more frustrated with the lack of buy online and collect in store services than those that shopped in store (38% to 30%). Nearly one in two respondents that shopped online said they found either the unavailability of buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery frustrating.
Is there a difference between the frustration levels for the different customer and connection types?

Prepay customers are significantly more frustrated with the lack of omnichannel services available with greater than 50% of respondents answering that they are frustrated with the lack of either of the two omnichannel choices available. Postpay customers were much less frustrated with the lack of omnichannel services with 29% reporting frustration.

Interestingly, respondents that switched to the Company from another provider (port) had high levels of frustration with the lack of omnichannel services, in particular with regard to buy online and collect in store. However once again caution is needed, as the response rates for both port and new connection were quite low.
Are there demographic differences with frustration at the lack of omnichannel services?

Males are more frustrated than females when it comes to a lack of omnichannel services, particularly with buy online and collect in store with 36% of males frustrated versus 24% of females.

The results for frustration with the lack of omnichannel by age grouping are quite surprising. The frustration level is significantly higher for respondents in the 35 - 44 and 45 - 54 age groups. This somewhat mirrors the results that came through for the use of omnichannel by age graph from earlier which has the 45 to 54 age group showing the highest usage.

However it is very different from the expectations for the availability of omnichannel (Figure 4.16), which one would intuitively think would be quite close to this measure. The result for expectation for the availability of omnichannel is highest in the lower age groups and decreases with age, quite a different result from here, although again the over 55 age group shows the lowest frustration which mirrors earlier results.
5. Conclusion

The analysis of the survey data has provided some very useful and interesting findings. We will now look to see if these findings have provided the answers needed to achieve the four research objectives and in turn for the dissertation research question itself to be answered.

Is research objective one answered?

A number of these findings provide useful data in the context of the first research objective, “to determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland are already engaging in omnichannel shopping”. In particular the following three findings offer the strongest evidence indicating that large amounts of customers are indeed engaging in omnichannel shopping:

- 54% of respondents have used omnichannel services from other retailers,
- 55% of respondents that purchased in store carried out research online,
- 13% are showing omnichannel behaviours when carrying out research by using both online and retail stores to carry out that research.

While 13% represents a small portion of the whole, it is representative of the fact the some shoppers are already attempting to ‘meld’ the physical and online world when carrying out their research and with 55% of those purchasing in store researching online, shoppers are almost at the definition of omnichannel provided by Wisner & Wisner (2014) & Rigby (2011). All of that is without an official omnichannel service in existence in the Company and is even ahead of John Lewis, a business considered to be doing well with omnichannel (Clift, 2014).

Other interesting points of note came out of the demographic results including:

- Postpay respondents have more experience of using omnichannel services
• Omnichannel is particularly popular with the 45 - 54 age group and the 18 - 24 and 55 and above age groups have noticeably less experience of omnichannel services. While the result for the 18 - 24 group was surprising the over 55 result is inline with expectations created by the literature (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014)

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the analysis of the survey data provides strong proof that customers are indeed already engaging in omnichannel shopping behaviours both with other retailers and to a limited extent in their shopping experience with the Company through their use of multiple channels for research purposes and in particular researching online and purchasing in store. It is therefore safe to say that research question one has been answered.

Is research objective two answered?

As with the first objective, these findings provide useful data in the context of the second objective “to determine if customers of a telecoms company in Ireland expect an omnichannel retailing approach”. As mentioned already, the literature led the author to believe that expectations for the provision of omnichannel services among customers are high (Pophal, 2015; Klie, 2014; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014) and the results from the survey did not disappoint. The answers to the overall expectations for omnichannel services from all respondents and by channel choice were particularly enlightening:

• 87% of respondents expect some kind of omnichannel service to be available from the Company.

• 92% of respondents that purchased online expect omnichannel services to be available.

Again other interesting insights that came out of the demographics questions include:
• A higher expectation for the availability of omnichannel services among prepay users, contrasting the finding in research objective one, that prepay users have less experience of omnichannel services.

• Females have a higher expectation for the service availability, again contrasting the finding in research objective one, that females have lower usage levels.

• Expectations for the provision of omnichannel services decrease with age again in line with Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson (2014).

All of these results provide a very strong indication that respondents do indeed have an expectation for omnichannel services to be provided by the Company thus research objective two has been achieved.

**Is research objective three answered?**

Research objective three was to investigate if there is a demand from customers of a telecoms company in Ireland for an omnichannel service. The analysis of the results from the survey have provided some very strong evidence that there is a demand for omnichannel services among the respondents:

• 85% of respondents said they would use either buy online and collect in store (63%) or a buy in store for home delivery service (72%). This compares favourably with the usage of buy online and collect in store in Chatterjee’s (2010) work which had 35% of users having bought online and collected in store.

• Of the respondents that said they expect omnichannel services to be available, 92% said they would use those services.

Other findings of interest that came out of the analysis of the survey were:

• Omnichannel services are, in general, not a factor in respondents’ decision to switch provider.

• Respondents that purchased online were more likely to use an omnichannel service.
• Older respondents were significantly less likely to use omnichannel services.
• Price conscious customers were more likely to use omnichannel services.

The finding in relation to price conscious customers was particularly interesting as it confirms Chatterjee’s (2010) assertion that price conscious customers would be more likely to use omnichannel services.

All of these findings taken together provide strong evidence that there is a level of demand among customers for the provision of omnichannel services. For that reason it can be said that research objective three has been achieved.

Is research objective four answered?

Research objective four was to determine if providing omnichannel services could improve customer satisfaction scores. In order to measure this, the survey was designed to identify current satisfaction levels and if respondents found a lack of omnichannel services to be frustrating. Analysis was then carried out to determine the relationships between the two to see if providing omnichannel would increase satisfaction scores and if so among which users.

The strongest results that came back from the survey were as follows:
• Respondents reported very high satisfaction scores in general with 81% at least satisfied with their last experience.
• 37% of respondents found either a lack of buy online and collect in store or buy in store for delivery to be frustrating, reflective of Klie’s (2014) point that consumers find it frustrating when their interactions between channels are not visible to each channel.
• Satisfaction scores among that 37% were lower than the general respondent populations. 11% in relation to buy online and collect in store and 13% in relation to buy in store for delivery were less than satisfied compared to 9% in general.
These results make a strong case for the argument that introducing omnichannel services would improve customer satisfaction scores. The fact that those that find a lack of omnichannel services frustrating report poorer satisfaction levels implies an immediate improvement among these users if the service was introduced. Further analysis of the data also allowed for the identification of those respondents that would most likely report the improved satisfaction scores:

- Online shoppers were significantly more frustrated than retail shoppers with the lack of buy online and collect in store service. Providing this would likely boost their scores.
- Prepay users, porting customers, males & those between 35-54 all reported higher levels of frustration than the general respondent population.

All of this data suggests that introducing an omnichannel service would improve customer satisfaction scores among those that were less than satisfied with their last experience and consequently research objective four has been achieved.

Therefore, in conclusion it can be said that customers are already using omnichannel services with other retailers; they expect the Company to provide these services; they would use them if they were available and providing them would increase customer satisfaction scores. With the four research objectives achieved, it is now possible to answer the overall research question of this dissertation:

*Will an investment in omnichannel deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market place?*

The answer to this question is, yes an investment in omnichannel services will deliver value to an Irish telecoms company in a highly competitive market. It will do that by providing their customers with services that they will use, and are already using with other retailers, and that they expect to be provided by the
Company, and in doing so will improve customer satisfaction scores which, as discussed in the literature review, has been linked to increased profitability in services industries (Anderson et al, 1994; Edvardsson et, 2000) which is obviously of value to the Company.

6. Recommendations for further research

Influences of omnichannel on business functions that were not investigated by this study

This research work has been mainly focused on the impacts of omnichannel services from the perspective of sales, however the literature review identified numerous other areas that can potentially impact the business. These areas include HR and organisational culture (Lewis et al, 2014), Customer services (Klie, 2014), and systems integration (Cardona, 2014; Klie, 2014; Lewis et al, 2014) to name a few. These areas present ample opportunity for future researchers to look at their impact on business. For instance, in relation to HR and organisational culture, what is the best way to implement an omnichannel service from the point of view of sales people in each channel and how they should be attributed for their sales efforts. If a sale originates in one channel but finishes in another, how should those sales people be rewarded in a way that is fair and encourages them to recommend the services use.

A deeper investigation into the impacts of a lack of omnichannel on customer satisfaction and the variables involved.

One of the more interesting results in this study was that those that reported they were frustrated with a lack of omnichannel services were more likely to be less than satisfied with their last shopping experience. Klie (2014) makes the point that customers find it frustrating that the various channels have no visibility of what has taken place in other channels. There is room to explore this
in more detail and see if this in particular is the aspect that is driving the frustration reported here or if there are other unexplored variables causing this. For instance, is it the lack of visibility of interactions as suggested by Klie (2014) or a lack of omnichannel shopping services, or a lack of consistency in policies, pricing & range across the channels (Cao, 2014) that are driving the poor satisfaction scores?

**The reason for the low use of omnichannel among younger users**

During analysis of the research data, one interesting finding was that those respondents in the age group of 18 - 24 reported lower usage of omnichannel services than average. This was despite high expectations for the availability of the service and intentions to use the service. The author suggests that the reason for this may simply be that these respondents are young and haven't had the opportunity to use omnichannel services, however there is no data to suggest this. This is an area that is open to investigation for future research to determine.

**Include customers from the industry as a whole and or from other industries.**

One limitation of this survey is that the researcher is employed in a company in the industry. This made it very difficult to impossible to survey customers from competitor organisations. For this reason, it would be beneficial to reproduce the survey for the industry as a whole as opposed to one organisation in the industry. It may also be beneficial to reproduce the survey in other industries or across industries to identify if the results vary by industry type.

**A longitudinal study of the topic**

This study was a cross sectional study and represents a snapshot in time of the situation as it is at that time. As stated, the study was designed to investigate the
experiences and expectations of customers as they are right now and does not investigate how they change over time. The author feels the topic would benefit from a longitudinal study that looks at how consumers’ experiences and expectations change over time. The reason for this is because of a lack of barriers to prevent those that successfully introduce omnichannel services from having those services copied. Others will likely introduce their own omnichannel services and as the provision of these services becomes more common, consumer attitudes towards them may change. The literature review identified numerous authors (Grau 2009, cited by Chatterjee, 2010; Rigby, 2011; Lewis et al, 2014; Pentina & Hasty, 2009) that identify omnichannel as a means to improve competitiveness or for competitive advantage but, this author suggests, in a world where every provider offers it, it may become a threshold competency. A longitudinal study may be able to explore this suggestion.

7. Reflections on learning

Introduction

I have found this MBA programme to be one that has significantly broadened my horizons. It has been an enjoyable yet incredibly difficult experience and one that has taught me nearly as much about myself as about the business world. Despite the fact that I had completed my degree only the year before, I found the experience of studying part time to be a very challenging yet, particularly now that I am at the end of the programme, rewarding experience. I will use the content of this chapter to outline my key learnings from the dissertation and the two-year MBA programme and to reflect on my experiences, both high and low.
The decision to do the MBA course

When I found myself in my mid twenties having a diploma as the only completed third level course I realised that I had significant gaps in my education that urgently needed to be addressed. For that reason I decided to do the DBS Degree in business management course over four years. The experience I had in completing that course was a very rewarding one in terms of learning, experience and networking. While I found that course to be challenging to complete, it was an experience I thoroughly enjoyed and was proud to achieve. Despite this it became obvious that in the economy as it exists today, a degree is nearly a “threshold competency” and is not enough to excel. For this reason I decided to start the MBA programme the very next semester after completing my degree. Some of the other motivations beside this for me deciding to do the MBA programme include improved job opportunities and career progression; increased earning potential and the prestige that comes with completing an MBA.

Why DBS?

Having decided to do an MBA, I then had to decide where to do it. In order to choose I attended a number of open days in other colleges along with a third level seminar held in the RDS Dublin. Having discovered that were numerous choices available, the main criteria that led me to decide upon DBS was the hours for course work. DBS offered evening lectures with the occasional Saturday and considering my employment at the time that suited my needs best. Costs were a secondary consideration and DBS came out favourably in this regard also. I also was confident in the quality of the educational experience that would be delivered having completed my degree there.
Learning

The Oxford English dictionary defines learning as “The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience or being taught”

Having reflected upon the learning experience that I have gone through while completing this MBA course, I am left in a situation whereby I feel I am well placed to move forward in my career and in my personal life to achieve my personal goals. In order to get here I have needed to consider the various ways in which learning occurs for me. Key to this understanding is Kolb’s Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).

![Kolb Learning Cycle](image)

Kolb’s cycle describes the learning process from an experiential point of view as opposed to other behavioural and cognitive theories. It consists of four stages that encompass the learning process through experience and reflection. It is interesting in the point that learning can occur anywhere on the cycle from experience, reflections and abstract thought. The first stage is “concrete experience”, this is the experience in itself and is sufficient on its own to produce learning. The second stage is reflective observation, which are the reflections and observations of the experience. This is followed by abstract
conceptualisation which is where thoughts and ideas are formed based on the observations and reflections made on the experience. The last step is the testing or experimentation stage, which is where your new thoughts and ideas are put into practice. The four steps taken together is the experiential learning cycle. (Kolb, 1984; Cottrell, 2010; Cameron, 2008; Smale & Fowley 2009)

Understanding Kolbs learning cycle has been key to how I have learned over the past two years completing the MBA programme. Knowledge of the cycle has allowed me to not just experience the lectures or to study notes and coursework material, it has encouraged me to think and reflect on those experiences and learnings and then attempt to put that into practice in my employment. This is something that will stay with me into the future and throughout my career and personal life. I feel this will allow me to be a better learner and therefore become more successful in my endeavours.

**Learning Style**

Honey & Mumford further developed Kolbs work by developing the learning styles questionnaire. Honey & Mumford suggested that individuals may have a preference for particular styles of learning and may learn more at different points in the learning cycle. They plotted four learning styles over the learning cycle and developed a questionnaire that could be taken to determine where on the cycle an individual may prefer to learn (Cottrell, 2010; Cameron, 2008; Smale & Fowley 2009).

The four learning styles and where they relate to Kolbs learning cycle are as follows:

- **Activist** -> Concrete experience
- **Reflector** -> Observations and reflections
- **Theorist** -> Abstract conceptualisation
- **Pragmatist** -> Active experimentation/implemention of concepts

(Smale & Fowley 2009)
Having completed a learning styles questionnaire in the personal development module in year one I learned a lot about my learning style. The scores for each of the learning styles came back that I had a very strong preference for ‘Theorist’, moderate preference for ‘Reflector’ and a low preference for ‘Activist’ and ‘Pragmatist’. I feel this is quite an accurate result as a lot of the information in the profile of theorists is reflective of my experiences while learning in the past. I particularly found relevant the point that theorists learn best in activities that are structured with a clear purpose and least in activities that are unstructured with a lot of ambiguity and no clear purpose, or those that deal mainly with emotions and feelings. This exercise made me reflect on some of the frustration I have experienced in exercises that are unstructured with tasks that seem pointless or where discussions about feelings are common.

In future I will try to seek out opportunities to learn using the theorist style to maximize my own learning and will understand that my frustration with exercises tailored to other learning styles is a consequence of my own preferred learning style and will be more patient as I now understand that for others, that style of learning can be quite effective.

Skills development

Research and analytical Skills

Baxter et al, (2010) list research skills as many of the everyday skills that we take for granted including reading, listening, watching, choosing, questioning summarising, organising, writing, presenting and reflecting. Many of these, writing, reading, listening etc, are areas I considered myself to be quite strong at prior to starting the MBA. However others such as reflecting, summarizing, organizing and questioning are areas that I have had to work on. This programme and particularly the dissertation has allowed me to develop these skills in a way that otherwise would not have been possible. In particular, reflection is something I would have considered a weakness, I am always eager
to get stuck into work however sometimes I never stop, stand back and consider how it went afterwards. Developing this skill in particular is something I am glad to have had the opportunity to do, and will continue to use into the future in both my professional and personal life.

In conjunction with this I have also enjoyed developing my analytical skills. Over the two years I have had to review many journal articles and academic papers and analyse them to find the information, patterns, comparisons and contrasts that were needed at that particular time. On top of this I have had to analyse the survey data from my dissertation work and identify the significant results to draw findings. The experience of having to critique academic papers and the work at manipulating and mining the survey data in SPSS has been enjoyable and eye opening and has developed my analytical skills in a very beneficial way. This skill is another that I would like and hope to have the opportunity to use in the future in my career.

**Team working Skills**

My strong ability to work in teams has been a key success factor in the two years of the MBA programme. Many of the elements of course work have been team based and as such I have had to work with people from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. This has helped develop my interpersonal skills and has made me a better team player. I have learned to be conscious of how my skills compliment the team, how to give feedback and share opinions in a constructive way and how to encourage and reassure others. Again the development of this skill will be very beneficial to me in the future in my career.

Team roles are an important concept when discussing teamwork. The idea of team roles were first outlined by Belbin at the Henley Management College and were the result of research into why some teams work well together while others do not (Smale & Fowlie, 2009). During the personal development module I completed Belbin's self-perception inventory questionnaire to identify my
preferred team roles. The roles identified as my preference were Implementer and Monitor evaluator. Now that I am conscious of my preferred role within teams, and am conscious of other role types, in future I will be able to best use my strengths and weaknesses to the benefit of the team as a whole.

**Challenges**

The most challenging aspect of completing the MBA has been time management. I have found the course work in itself to be mentally stimulating however the volume of work and the time commitments required were significantly greater than I had anticipated. As such at numerous times throughout the two years I found balancing my work, my personal life and my studies to be quite difficult and stressful. The most difficult period was during the three months to complete the dissertation and during this time I really learned a lot about myself. There have been highs and lows, at times I felt like I was climbing a mountain and could not complete the workload in the time allowed and at other times, particularly after completing the field work, I felt enthused and energised, ready for the next challenge. And while this has been challenging, having come through it I can now look back with pride at what has been accomplished through dedication and perseverance. I look back and think that if an MBA came without difficulties, it would not be worth accomplishing.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe that deciding to start the MBA programme in DBS has been one of the better decisions of my life and I have learned nearly as much about myself as I have about business. It has given me the skills I need to open the door to new opportunities for me and stoked the drive, passion and self-belief to know that I can succeed in those opportunities and any activity that I put my full attention to. I would advise anyone that is considering doing an MBA to do so but to do it with their eyes open and be conscious of the commitment and dedication that it requires and that it is worth every bit of that commitment
and dedication, if for no other reason than the sense of accomplishment one experiences at the end.

For myself, I look forward to applying everything I have learned, while carrying out this dissertation and throughout the many modules completed, in my work in its current form and in any future roles that I am lucky enough to have. I am confident that this will not be the last of my further education, if anything this programme has awoken a newfound appreciation for knowledge, learning and an awareness of all that I have yet to learn.
Appendix:

Online and in store survey

Introduction

The purpose of this survey is to determine whether customers of the company would find a buy online and collect in store or buy in store for home delivery service useful and of value to them.

The survey will measure the following:
- Current shopping and research habits
- Usage of services such as buy online, collect in store and buy in store, deliver to home.
- Expectations for the company to provide these services
- Demand for these services
- The potential impact providing these services would have on customer satisfaction and experience.
- Demographic information

All information in this survey is anonymous and no identifying information is captured.

Figure A.1: Survey introduction

Purchase details and location

* 1. Please select where you purchased your last mobile phone?
   - [ ] Company: Retail Store
   - [ ] Company: Online Store

* 2. Which of the following most accurately describes your purchase?
   - [ ] New Pay as you go mobile phone
   - [ ] New bill pay mobile phone

* 3. Along with your new mobile, did you?
   - [ ] Keep your old mobile number
   - [ ] Switch your existing number from a different provider
   - [ ] Get a new number

Figure A.2 Purchase details and location

Selection to question 1 will determine which of the following 2 questions will be displayed.
### Figure A.3: Reasons for choosing retail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for choosing retail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find or avail of deals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed or wanted the phone immediately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulse purchase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience - close to work or home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to experience the phone before purchase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to see selection of phones available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to see selection of accessories available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaware of the option to purchase on Company online shop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never considered shopping on the Company online shop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)

### Figure A.4: Reasons for choosing online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for choosing online</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience, no travel required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No need to talk to a salesperson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed, knew exactly what I wanted to purchase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better deals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have used the service before and like it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to carry out research about the product online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)
6. In advance of your purchase, where did you carry out research? Please select all relevant choices.

☐ No research carried out
☐ Online at Company website
☐ Online at a competitor website
☐ Online at another website
☐ At a Company retail store
☐ At a competitor store
☐ Customer care
☐ Advice from family and friends
☐ Social media
☐ Other (please specify)

Figure A.5: Research carried out in advance of purchase

* 7. Have you ever used a buy online and collect in store service from any retailer?

☐ Yes
☐ No

* 8. In circumstances where the product was unavailable in store, have you ever made a purchase in store but had the product delivered to your home?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Figure A.6: Past use of omnichannel services
**Expectations**

9. Would you expect the Company to offer a buy online and collect in store service?
   - Yes
   - No

10. In circumstances where the product was unavailable in store, would you expect the Company to offer a buy in store for home delivery service?
    - Yes
    - No

**Demand for the service**

11. Would you use a buy online and collect in store service when purchasing your next mobile phone?
    - Yes
    - No

12. Would the availability of buy online and collect in store influence your decision to switch providers?
    - Yes
    - No

13. In the circumstance that the product you wanted was out of stock, would you use a buy in store for home delivery service when purchasing your next mobile phone?
    - Yes
    - No

14. In the circumstance that the product you wanted was out of stock, would the availability of buy in store for home delivery influence your decision to switch provider?
    - Yes
    - No

Figure A.7: Expectations for omnichannel

Figure A.8: Demand for omnichannel for next purchase
**Satisfaction**

* 15. How satisfied are you with your shopping experience with the company?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat unsatisfied</th>
<th>Unsatisfied</th>
<th>Very unsatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 16. Do you find the unavailability of buy online and collect in store frustrating?

☐ Yes
☐ No

* 17. Do you find the unavailability of buy in store for home delivery frustrating?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Figure A.9: Satisfaction with last experience and frustration without omnichannel

**Demographics**

* 18. Please select your gender

☐ Male
☐ Female

* 19. Please select your age group

☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55+

* 20. How comfortable are you with using technology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
<th>Comfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable</th>
<th>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</th>
<th>Somewhat uncomfortable</th>
<th>Uncomfortable</th>
<th>Very uncomfortable</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure A.10: Demographic questions
End of the survey!

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Figure A.11: End of survey notice
Bibliography


Klie, L 2014, 'The 4 key customer service omnichannel considerations: contact centers have deployed new technologies in silos; integration is difficult but not impossible', CRM Magazine, 7, p. 44, Academic OneFile, EBSCOhost, viewed 22 June 2015.


