

Executive Summary

Reciprocal Effects of Cognitive, Affective, and Social Customer Experience on Customer Loyalty and Word-of-Mouth in Omnichannel Fashion Retailing

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That cognitive dimension of customer experience (CX) affects the affective or social dimensions of CX and vice versa in consumers' thoughts and behavior seems to be obvious, as scholars have conceptualized that or even teaches that when speaking about CX in the consumer journey. However, such interdependent relationships have never been hypothesized or empirically analyzed. We know that the cognitive, affective, and social CX dimensions independently impact consumer behavior differently, but that impact likely changes when we hypothesize and test their reciprocal relationships. In particular, omnichannel retailers, which provide a seamless experience in the consumer journey, need to know how the CX dimensions affect each other in a loop and which dimensions affect consumer behavior most, as otherwise, the possible synergies or combined effects of the associated dimensions in consumers' minds may be overlooked and harm the application of the respective competitive advantages.

The authors fill this gap by offering novel insights into the reciprocity of the cognitive, affective, and social CX dimensions and by applying categorization theory rationales to analyze whether reciprocity exists among important CX dimensions in consumer shopping at omnichannel retailers and how reciprocally linked CX dimensions affect consumer loyalty versus Word-of-Mouth (WoM). Reciprocity goes beyond unidirectional mediation models, accounts for links between CX dimensions that may emerge in all directions in a circular fashion, and may change previous and inconclusive findings regarding CX on loyalty versus WoM. The authors argue that consumers reduce their mental loads in cognitively complex omnichannel shopping by differentially considering the differently linked CX dimensions in certain long-term and short-term decisions.

The authors empirically analyze longitudinal data from 528 consumer evaluations of leading German omnichannel fashion retailers in three waves via cross-lagged panel models. The results show that the cognitive CX dimension increases the affective and social dimensions and vice versa but to different extents. The reciprocal effects of the CX dimensions are different for consumer loyalty and WoM, i.e., different CX dimensions are most important when examining their reciprocally. Importantly, the results are stable in randomly split half-sample tests, differ from nonreciprocal effects of the CX dimensions in alternative, cross-sectional studies, and differ in models that omit one of the CX dimensions, i.e., only including cognitive and affective CX, or those that bundle them into one overall CX, i.e., one second-order construct.

Scholars have recommended that the research should move beyond an overall view of CX or of CX dimensions as unconnected, independent variables. These findings contribute to our knowledge. Consumers categorize CX dimensions into a retailer category and reciprocally transfer knowledge among them, as indicated for these three dimensions. We extend previous studies, most of which have conceptualized two CX dimensions as unconnected independent variables or as variables connected only in a mediation, not reciprocally. The different effects of reciprocally linked CX dimensions on loyalty and WoM clarify inconclusive insights into cognitive and affective experiences and extend the mixed results for overall CX concerning loyalty vs. WoM. Our findings have direct implications for managers interested in understanding how the reciprocity of CX dimensions affects consumer behavior, as few omnichannel firms differentiate different CX dimensions, and no one, to our knowledge, studies their different effects on different behavioral outcomes.