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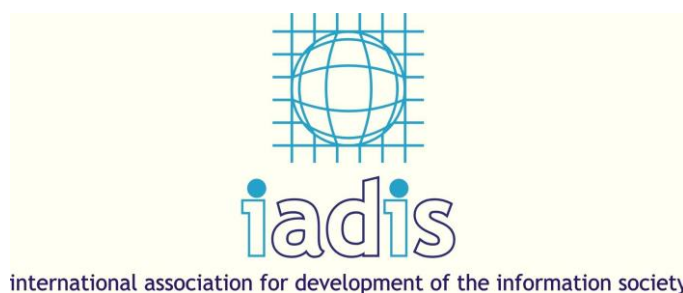
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CHANGING ATTITUDES OF RETAILERS TOWARDS CROSS-CHANNEL COMMERCE AND ITS SUCCESS FACTORS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Cross-channel commerce concepts are increasingly being implemented and are almost universally accepted as a panacea for many current retail problems. In practice, however, these concepts are extremely complex and the question arises as to whether and under which conditions multichannel concepts can be successful. This paper shows how retailers assess the trend towards multichannel concepts and how their attitude has changed over the last years. Further, current success factors for cross-channel commerce are derived. The opinions of leading industry experts in Switzerland serve as a qualitative empirical basis. In contrast to previous years, the experts have estimated the cross-channel concepts as a whole to be successful since 2014. The analysis results further show that the success factors described in the literature so far have to be supplemented by two further factors: the density of physical stores with simultaneous scaling of the online channel and a transformation in management and organization. These results and experiences from Switzerland might help retailers who think of expanding their traditional business into the online channel or the other way round.

KEYWORDS

E-Commerce, Online Trade, Multichannel, Cross-Channel, Success Factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Science has dealt with cross-channel commerce concepts – also known as multichannel retailing – for more than 15 years now. Nevertheless, only a few retailers have realized integrated multichannel distribution networks so far, even in highly developed economies. However, the number of multichannel merchants and the variety of emerging business models increase which – in combination with the fast development of e-commerce – leads to a high dynamics (Schramm-Klein 2012). This is the case in Switzerland, where such developments can be observed and analyzed exceptionally well because the Swiss market is relatively small and tightly structured.

Cross-channel commerce concepts cause uncertainty and effort because of their complexity. Physical retailers have to decide whether they want to take up the challenge and whether they will be able to fulfill the resulting requirements. Online retailers on the other hand face the question whether it was worth setting up an additional physical channel (Avery et al. 2012; Crockford et al. 2013).

The goal of this paper is to find out how the opinions of Swiss merchants about multichannel retailing concepts have developed during the last years. In general, these concepts are seen to be of great significance because they meet the requirements of many consumers and increase customer loyalty (Schramm-Klein 2012; Heinemann 2013). However, the question is whether and how many retailers will be capable of managing the related costs and complexity. It depends on the answer to this question whether multichannel concepts are promising concepts for the retail trade. In addition, this paper identifies factors that decisively influence the success of those concepts. The knowledge about such factors can support the retailers to make the right decisions. The success factors of multichannel retailing described in the literature so far are partly rather abstract and mainly based on theoretical thoughts. Because of this and because of the dynamic development of e-commerce, it seems to be necessary to explore the current success factors on an empirical basis.

The term multichannel commerce can be used as an umbrella term for the distribution of products via different channels, for example brick-and-mortar (physical or offline) store, online shop, e-mail, phone, order form. The paper at hand focuses on the last stage of the distribution chain between retailing companies and private consumers (B2C). It includes only online channels and physical (offline) channels (physical stores or similar touchpoints) because B2C transactions take place mainly via these channels nowadays (Heinemann 2011). Other channels become less important and serve mainly as a channel for additional or after-sales services. Orders sent with mobile devices are assigned to the online channel (Heinemann 2011). Direct B2C online sales channels of manufacturers are not included in this study.

Besides the term multichannel retailing, the term multiple-channel retailing is used for independent and not coordinated sales channels (Ahlert/Evanschitzky 2004). The differentiation between multi and multiple points out that in a multichannel setting the channels are somehow coordinated and connected to each other. The term cross-channel retailing that is more specialized emphasizes the connection of the channels even stronger (Emrich 2011; Heinemann 2011; Rittinger 2014). The term omnichannel does not denote a multichannel strategy but rather a special customer behavior, where a customer uses different media and channels at the same time (Heinemann 2013), for example a smartphone in a physical store in order to enrich the real environment with online content (Brynjolfsson et al. 2013). In the following, the term cross-channel will mostly be used, specifically to emphasize the interplay of the channels and the customer perspective: With cross-channel retail concepts, the customer can switch between the channels during the transaction process (Steinfeld et al. 2002) according to his or her search and purchasing attitude (Wang et al. 2016). The challenge for the retailer in such a setting is to create appropriate channel strategies (Wang et al. 2016) and to avoid losing the customer during channel switching (Rittinger 2014). In addition, the channels have to be integrated and coordinated in order to prevent channel conflicts, use synergy effects and provide a consistent customer experience (Neslin/Shankar 2009; Emrich 2011; Wagner et al. 2013).

The analysis is based on data of a qualitative longitudinal study about the Swiss e-commerce conducted on a yearly base since 2009. The repeatedly conducted interviews with around 30 persons who are responsible for the e-commerce business of trendsetting online retailers in Switzerland allow to observe and analyze the dynamics of the market as well as the changing attitudes of the retailers. Statements as of 2014, 2015 and 2016 provide insight specifically into the current situation. Switzerland as a small and highly developed country seems to be an appropriate research region because new business models and concepts can spread quickly. Additionally, big multinational players do not yet dominate Switzerland, as it is the case for example in Austria or Germany. The Swiss consumers are regarded as innovation oriented; in 2014, more than 55 percent of the population aged 15 and over have used the Internet in the last three months for purchasing goods (Federal Statistical Office 2016).

The following section gives a short overview of selected research topics and previous results in the area of cross-channel commerce concepts. Section 3 describes the methodology and the procedure of the empirical investigation. Section 4 explains the results of the study. Section 5 draws the conclusions and provides suggestions for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The *benefits* of cross-channel commerce are analyzed from the consumer and supplier perspective. From the customers' point of view, the easy access to services (Swaid/Wigand 2012), the possibility of switching between channels and the complementary specific value of the channels are highlighted (Seck 2013). From the point of view of the retail companies, the realization of synergy effects and the achievement of special customer segments are of particular importance (Gensler et al. 2007, Konus et al. 2008). Research shows that multichannel consumers are the more profitable customers: they are more active, loyal and buy more frequently (Seck 2013).

Design and operation of multichannel concepts present a huge *challenge* for companies. In particular, the following core topics are identified and described: data integration, understanding of customer behavior, channel evaluation, resource allocation between channels, coordination of channel strategies (Neslin et al. 2006), performance measurement, adaptation of organizational structure (Zhang et al. 2010) and design of the channel configuration (Sulser 2012). Neslin and Shankar (2009) develop a model from the central multichannel management tasks and elaborate open questions.

A key *problem* of cross-channel concepts are channel conflicts, which are triggered mainly by cannibalization. According to Kollmann et al. (2012), customers whose need for comfortability is bigger than their risk aversion and service orientation prefer the online channel for the actual purchase, whereas customers with a high demand for personal services tend to choose the offline channel. Even more problematic than cannibalization is the cross-channel free riding: The consumer not only changes the channel but also the provider, for example, to combine the pre-sales service of one provider with the low price of another. In order to avoid such a behavior, the creation of switching costs is particularly important (Chiu et al. 2011).

One way of avoiding cannibalization and other channel conflicts is to achieve synergies between channels (Wagner et al. 2013). Synergies are created when the integration and coordination of the channels enables consumers to gain a continuous user experience, increases customer loyalty and thus improves the profitability of the provider as a whole (Joo/Park 2008). The increased total profit can then be divided between the channels (Yan et al. 2010). Reality has shown, however, that many retailers control the channels separately (Zhang et al. 2010). Thus, synergies can hardly be realized and there may be a competition between the channels and a price fight.

Another frequently discussed problem is *price setting* and, above all, the question of whether the prices in online and offline channels should be the same. Some argue that uniform prices are a central precondition for multichannel trade (Seck 2013). On the other hand, due to a different price sensitivity of online and offline customers, a room for price differences is also considered (Wolk/Ebling 2010, Shao 2013).

In recent years, attempts were made to identify *success factors* for cross-channel concepts in order to give companies concrete guidelines. Schramm-Klein (2012) mentions some concrete factors: the highest possible number of channels, the communication of the similarities and advantages of the channels, integrated customer processes and integrated back-end processes. The integration of the channels as a prerequisite for cross-channel effects plays a special role, also in Bauer/Eckart (2010) and Wagner et al. (2013). The latter emphasize the importance of synergies in integrated channels. Consistent with and based on a consumer survey, Rittinger (2014) shows that the customer-oriented integration of the sales channels and the branding of the sales network are two key success factors for cross-channel commerce concepts.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory, interpretive research approach is applied to answer the research questions about the attitude of Swiss retailers and the current success factors of cross-channel retail concepts. This research approach seems to be suitable because qualitative assessments and changes are usually not directly observable or measurable at all. In order to collect the necessary data, personal expert interviews were conducted (Gläser/Laudel 2010) which follow a structured interview guideline containing primarily open-ended questions. Experts have in-depth insights into the object of investigation, and they express them on the strength of their context, experience and opinion (Bogner/Menz 2002). The statements have, therefore, to undergo an interpretive analysis, before they can be merged and compared (Oates 2006).

To enable a long-term observation a panel with industry experts was established. A vendor survey proves to be suitable to answer the research questions. As experts were selected CEOs and e-commerce representatives from leading Swiss B2C trading companies. For professional reasons this group of people has the necessary insight into the industry and the retail concepts. This opens insights that cannot be gained from pure market observations or consumer surveys. Leading companies in the sense of this study are companies that play a leading role in e-commerce (for example LeShop, Digitec, ebookers) or in their industries (for example Orell Füssli Thalia, Hotelplan, Swiss International Airlines) or that have distinguished themselves by the introduction or adaptation of innovative concepts (for example Blacksocks, DeinDeal, QoQa Services). In the first study year 2009, the panel consisted of 19 experts and it grew gradually. From 2012, it consisted of more than 30, in the year 2016 of 36 experts.

The data used here stems from the interviews of the years 2009 to 2016. Per year, about 30 members of the panel are personally interviewed. The selection of the interviewees bases primarily on content-related aspects. The interviews take place from mid-January to mid-March. The majority of the questions is the same for all experts, some questions are asked in several years in order to observe the developments. For special topics, such as for example the analyzed success factors of cross-channel commerce, the questions are adapted. In this way, questions related to the realization of cross-channel concepts are only put to the experts of multichannel companies who pursue an integration strategy under a uniform brand. This group includes, for example, coop@home, Ex Libris, Weltbild (Switzerland), Manor, Kuoni Reisen or TUI Switzerland.

A summarizing transcript is created of every interview – based on audio recordings (Höld 2009). Thus, the amount of text can be reduced through interpretation and compression, which facilitates the ensuing paraphrasing and analysis. The analysis compares the experts' statements question by question in order to identify the relevant aspects as well as commonalities and differences. The basic procedure is always the same; however, it has been refined from year to year based on the experience of the previous years. Since 2014, data handling and analysis have been supported with a Microsoft Access database. The goal of the process optimization is to optimize the results under the constraint that the costs stay within acceptable limits.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The qualitative analysis of the experts' statements given in the period from 2009 until 2013 shows clearly that the attitude towards cross-channel commerce concepts changes during the years (4.1). A second analysis step based on the survey results from 2014 until 2016 derives factors, which might be crucial for the success of cross-channel trade concepts (4.2).

4.1 Changing Attitudes towards E-Commerce and Cross-Channel Strategies

Since almost twenty years Swiss travel companies and media retailers offer sales via multiple channels (for example Weltbild (Switzerland) (media) since 1997 with stores, catalogs and online shop). However, most of today's cross-channel concepts, which go further than several isolated channels, have been developed – more or less – since 2005. The analysis of the experts' statements made in the time from 2009 to 2013 reveals the following development stages of multichannel concepts in Switzerland (according to Wölfle/Leimstoll 2013):

In 2009, half of the questioned multichannel companies show a cautious attitude towards e-commerce. Their primary goal is to protect the traditional physical channels, whereas online channels are mainly used as service channels. The other half of the companies follows a clear growth strategy in e-commerce and accepts the cannibalization of their other channels. The travel industry for example shows an example for the different attitude: The Hotelplan Group started much earlier to drive their online activities forward than their competitors Kuoni Reisen or TUI Switzerland.

In 2010, companies who pushed e-commerce only half-heartedly until then have to recognize that they lose significant market share in favor of pure online players. As a result, the multichannel retailers change their mind and start to extend their online channel. This was the case for example with the bookshop Orell-Füssli.

In 2011, cross-channel concepts show a considerable diffusion, for example with Ex Libris and Weltbild (Switzerland) (media) and TUI Switzerland (travel). Established offline vendors recognize their cross-channel potential and use it together with their traditional strengths like brands and large purchasing volumes in the competition with pure online vendors. However, the realization of the concepts shows clear weaknesses: information systems, organizational structures and remuneration concepts have not yet adjusted to the requirements of multichannel commerce. Beyond that, e-commerce is not yet anchored in the management and in the heads of the employees.

In 2012, the number of established offline vendors entering the field of e-commerce or redefining their strategic online positioning increases considerably: A race to catch up begins. The physical stores make the most of their prominence and local presence. Examples of this are the largest Swiss department store chain Manor and the fashion store chain PKZ Group. The attitude towards online commerce changes. This is driven by the observation that consumers appreciate services like pick-up, payment and returns in physical stores or other pick-up locations. However, the realization of cross-channel concepts still poses a big challenge for the retailers.

In 2013, the multichannel retailers still invest in the online channel, often without considering the other channels. This can be seen for example with the media store chain Orell Füssli Thalia. A stronger anchoring of the e-commerce on the executive management level leads to the conclusion that the strategic significance of e-commerce increases. With the help of cross-channel services, some companies are able to connect the channels with each other and reduce the rivalry between the channels. A good example for this is the media store chain Ex Libris.

The question now is how successful such multichannel concepts are. In many European countries, e-commerce sales increase on a two-digit level while the overall sales stagnate in many industries. If multichannel concepts are successful, they should be able to participate in the growth of e-commerce. However, the sales development that is gathered yearly in the scope of this study shows that – measured as the average growth in the three years period between 2010 and 2013 – the sales development of the pure online players is still better compared to the multichannel companies.

Based on the observations made in the time from 2009 to 2013 (section 4.2 will analyze the recent situation) the following conclusions can be drawn:

- With the development of e-commerce, the online channel gains in importance in the strategies of the retailers. Traditional companies change their attitude and develop multichannel concepts. The cross-channel approach seems to be crucial in these concepts because it leads to connected channels that complement each other and improve the customer experience.
- Strategies, which treat the online channel only as a service channel in order to avoid cannibalizing the other channels, have no good prospects of becoming successful. At least, participating in the growth of e-commerce and thus compensating the losses of sales in traditional channels is not possible.
- For traditional offline retailers the step towards e-commerce means to build up an almost completely new business. Considerable investments in expertise, information systems, logistics and marketing are necessary even if the retailers have good preconditions for cross-channel solutions and can profit from the prominence of their brand. In addition, it proves to be necessary to initiate a rethinking and often to transform the structure of the company. It is obvious that such processes can last up to several years.

4.2 Today's View on Cross-Channel Commerce Concepts and Their Success Factors

In order to characterize the current situation, it will first be described how the experts assess the current trend towards cross-channel commerce concepts. Subsequently, prerequisites and success factors will be derived from the statements of the experts. For this purpose, a number of measures will be shown which Swiss companies have already introduced to implement cross-channel concepts.

4.2.1 Assessment of the Current Trend towards Cross-Channel Commerce

In the current situation, many companies further develop their multichannel concepts. Figure 1 shows this for both kinds of companies: The originally physical stores extend their investments in the online channel whereas the originally pure-online players extend their business into the physical area. The respective questions were addressed to all participants of the study in 2015. The figure also shows that there is clearly a stronger movement from offline to online than the other way around. According to their answers, almost every expert observes that offline companies strengthen their activities in e-commerce. On the other hand, only half of the experts observe offline activities of the online players. The reason for the different meanings is that the interviewees answer the questions from the view of their industry: The extension from offline to online can be observed in almost every industry, an extension from online to offline primarily in the industries IT and Consumer Electronics, Fashion and Travel. The analysis of the answers of the interviewees to several other questions about multichannel activities identifies the following central advantages of cross-channel concepts.

- Click & collect: Swiss consumers pick relatively many ordered products in physical stores. Therefore, the click & collect principle seems to provide a considerable benefit for consumers. The benefit results from the certain receipt of the goods at a time determined by the customer, from avoiding delivery and payment costs, from the comfortable return of the goods and partly from the realization of same-day delivery (which is often not available for home deliveries). The vendors see benefits for themselves in the creation of additional purchases during pick-up. Thus, the collection process can be a means to guide customers into the physical store.
- Transparency and homogeneity of the channels: It is quite clear that not only the channel diversity corresponds to a customer's needs, but that customers also need to be able to freely select and switch between the channels. The matching of the channels to one another and a cross-channel communication therefore not only generate a value for the customer, but also offer the dealer several accesses to the customer.

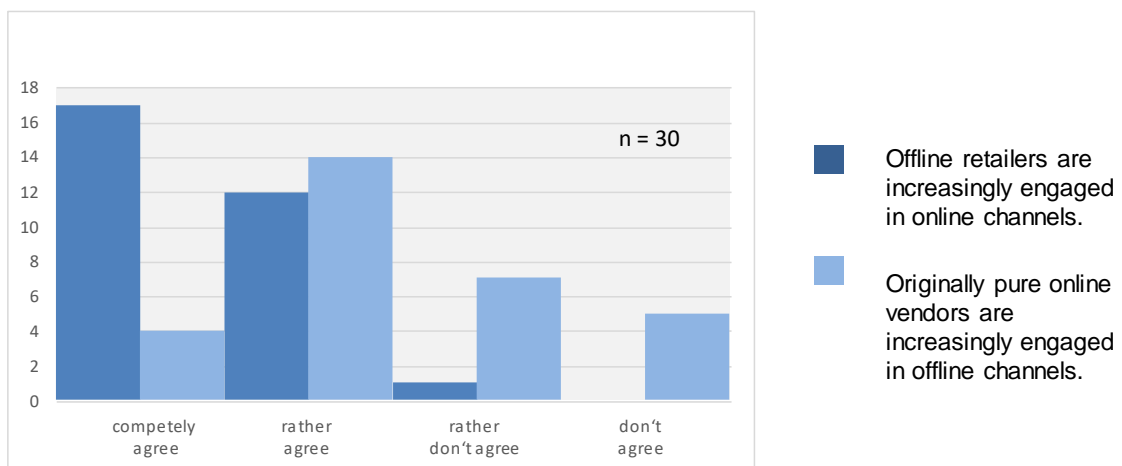


Figure 1. Current tendencies to expand channels. Source: Own expert interviews in 2015

As the main disadvantages or failure factors, respondents consider the following aspects:

- Investment requirements: The realization of cross-channel concepts requires considerable investment in the development of the organization, the processes, the information systems and the expertise. As it usually is uncertain whether the turnover increases accordingly, there is a risk of wrong investments and lower profitability.
- Channel conflicts: Significantly less experts than in previous years address channel conflicts and self-cannibalism. If, however, channel conflicts are present, they are significantly hindering the multi-channel trade, according to the experts.
- Different price and cost levels: The existence of channel conflicts is mainly attributed to different cost and revenue structures between offline and online areas. Offline, the fixed costs are often higher (for example with large sales areas), whereas online the variable costs can be higher (for example with free delivery). The prices would have to be channel-specific, but this is not possible if customers expect uniform prices in the online and offline channels of a vendor.

As additional channels create additional costs, the question arises about the profitability of cross-channel trading concepts. A basic precondition for justifying the costs of an additional online channel would be the creation of additional sales or at least the avoidance of sales shifts to online competitors. Respondents are now very optimistic about the impact on offline retailing: in 2016, 12 out of 24 respondents believe that a reduction in sales shifts is possible. Already between 2013 and 2014, a clear rethink has taken place in this regard. The following section will now analyze what has to be considered when designing and implementing cross-channel concepts.

4.2.2 Success Factors and Preconditions of Cross-Channel Commerce Concepts

Overall, the surveyed experts consider a very strong *standardization of the channels* necessary, in particular with respect to prices, positioning and communication, as well as the underlying information systems. This is in line with the idea that the channels grow together and enable the customer to make a smooth transition between the channels. Statements, which consider a specific configuration of the individual channels to be relevant to success, are not contradictory. A basic unification of the channels can be combined with a specific configuration of individual channels (Avery et al. 2012), especially if the physical conditions require this (for example long-tail assortments online, expert advice offline). Thus, new and individual bundles of value-added functions can be created in each channel.

The *price differentiation* on the channels is a topic with which the experts are particularly concerned. It is observed that channel-specific prices are accepted only for intangible goods (in particular travel). This can be justified for the travel industry because of daily prices and because consumers are accustomed to the fact that there are in some cases considerable price differences. The companies from the travel sector, which consistently pursue a cross-channel concept, nevertheless do without channel-specific prices and instead charge a service fee for consultancy services in the travel agencies. This is nowadays accepted in Switzerland according to the statements of the experts. A price differentiation in the case of material goods takes place in part via adapted assortments in the online channel (for example additional high-quality products or only products with a minimum margin) or special online deals in the form of flash sales. The scope for price differentiation between the channels identified by Wolk/Ebling (2010) and Shao (2013) is, according to these results, rather small.

As a prerequisite for the realization of cross-channel commerce concepts, the respondents emphasize the need for a *willingness to invest heavily and to spend a long period of investment* (fashion, travel). In general, a constellation is deemed necessary in which the costs of the different channels are not different in order to avoid channel conflicts. If the costs in the channels are nevertheless different, a solution is seen in the constellation to primarily use the cost-intensive channel (for example showrooms in the IT and consumer electronics sector or flagship stores in the fashion industry) as access to the customer and thus also as a feeder to the other channels. For the design of branches, it is proposed to have at least parts of the assortment available in the store. A good example for this is Digitec (consumer electronics), whose offline stores have fast-moving articles in stock; the rest can be ordered to the store or to the home. In the same industry, Microspot has almost 20 pure pick-up centers, which are also well accepted by customers.

Many experts see a need for *organizational adjustments*, but only a few companies have already implemented such transformations. Reasons for this are usually the still existing thinking in channels and conventional areas of responsibility, habits, existing contracts and remuneration systems. Over time, it can be observed that central functional areas such as purchasing, marketing and customer service are increasingly no longer separated by channels. The tour operator Hotelplan filled the management positions with persons from the former online area after repeated restructuring. Some experts consider the allocation of online sales to channels as a key success factor in cross-channel commerce. At Manor (department store chain), the online sales are not only allocated to the e-commerce area, but also to the department stores according to the customer's delivery address. This way, the department stores profit from online sales. This measure has completely changed the attitude towards online commerce in the department store. At Ex Libris, the online sales are allocated to the branches if the branches are included in the transaction process in any way. The cross-channel allocation of sales as a solution to avoid channel conflicts expands the spectrum of the previously proposed allocation of costs (Gasenzer 2007) and division of profit (Yan et al. 2010).

From many further prerequisites mentioned above, further success factors of cross-channel commerce concepts can be derived. Table 1 lists these factors, assigns them to different categories, and describes concrete recommendations by the experts. The terms in brackets indicate the industry for which the experts speak.

Table 1. Success Factors of Cross-Channel Commerce Concepts. Source: Own Expert Interviews

	<i>Success factor</i>	<i>Recommendation of the experts</i>
General	Adjust channels to customer requirements	The channels should be designed in a way that they correspond to the customer's needs and that the costs in the channels are not too different (consumer electronics, fashion).
	Use strengths of the individual channels	Create channel-specific values (N.N.), if only on one channel possible (consumer electronics, travel). Example: tasting wine offline and ordering online.
	Use knowledge about the customer	The knowledge about the customer should be used to design channels, assortment, communication (N.N., fashion).
Information systems	Special design for cross-channel commerce	The IT systems are to be adapted to the special requirements: data actuality, realization of services, automated processes, for example return of goods ordered online at the store (media, fashion, marketplaces, travel).
Product range	Design according to the strengths of the individual channels	Core assortment or only selected products offline, if appropriate adapted to the local situation; core assortment plus complementary assortments (for example long-tail, all sizes, colors, variants) online (consumer electronics, fashion, marketplaces)
	Large product range	A wide product range (online and offline together) should be offered (fashion).
Prices	Uniform prices on all channels	This is recommended for material goods and a uniform brand (consumer electronics, media, travel).
Management	Financial control of the channels	The sales of the entire company should be considered, not the sales of the individual channels (food, marketplaces, N.N.).
	Providing incentives	An internal competition between the channels should be avoided (fashion). Incentives for employees should be independent of the channel (travel).
Communication	Uniform branding over all channels	All channels are to be designed according to a uniform brand in order to realize cross-channel potentials (media, N.N., fashion, travel).
	Communication over all channels	All channels should be used for communication (N.N., marketplaces).
	Communication of the channels	The possibility to use several channels should be actively communicated (N.N.).
Service	Offer services on all channels	The customer service should be a priority and offered on all channels (media, consumer electronics).
	Uniform deals on all channels	Marketing and sales campaigns are to be designed uniformly on all channels (N.N.).

N.N.: The industry is not mentioned because of anonymity.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the development of multichannel commerce concepts between 2009 and 2016 shows that the attitude towards cross-channel commerce in Switzerland has changed. A large proportion of companies is positive about these concepts today and believes it is realistic that multichannel providers can at least avoid the loss of sales with cross-channel services. The central and clearly prevalent cross-channel service of the Swiss multichannel retailers is the collection, payment and return of the items in the store.

From the observations, it can be concluded that, because of the necessary high investments in the online channel and in cross-channel services, offline retailers must be able to generate a transaction volume suitable for cost coverage. A regional retailer with few outlets cannot offer cross-channel services across the country. The same applies to previously pure online retailers: For the realization of a cross-channel concept, they must also be able to set up sufficient physical touchpoints close to the customer. The *physical store density and the simultaneous scaling of the online channel* is therefore a decisive success factor for the realization of cross-channel concepts. This success factor complements the factors described by other authors (section 2.).

In addition to the unification of prices, positioning and communication, combined with channel-specific services (see also Seck 2013) there is an outstanding importance of *transformations in management and organization*. On the one hand, the organizational structures have to be adapted to the special requirements of cross-channel concepts, which is time-consuming and can only be achieved in several transformation steps. On the other hand, there is a need to let the losing channel – usually the physical stores – participate in the sales of the other channel in order to increase the acceptance of online activities.

Even if cross-channel trading concepts spread across Switzerland, they are not yet a commodity. There are still few stable best-practice experiences for their design, and the required functions are not yet standard in today's information systems. The sum of the requirements suggests that cross-channel commerce concepts are most likely to be realized by supra-regional retailers with capacity for investment.

However, what are the alternatives for smaller regional traders who cannot realize multichannel concepts? Could cross-channel services be offered as standardized services, for example by wholesalers? Could market places be a suitable online channel for them? These could be future research questions. It would also be useful to elaborate best practices and to promote the development of standard information systems that contain specific functions for cross-channel commerce.

The results of this paper are based on the statements of some selected Swiss companies. This is certainly a limitation, and the results are not to be regarded as final, complete or representative. However, it can be assumed that the results can be transferred to other companies, also outside Switzerland. Particularly retailers in countries where e-commerce is still at an earlier stage as well as retailers who plan to expand their channels can learn from the Swiss experience.

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