

**ADOPTION AND USAGE OF MULTIPLE CHANNELS ON THE PART OF THE
SALESPERSON IN A RETAIL CONTEXT FOR SERVICES**

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Abstract:

Retailers have added digital channels in the context of a broader multichannel strategy. The addition of digital channels has a profound impact on their internal organization: the salesperson in the store can now communicate with customers through multiple channels that change his way of managing customer relationships.

This study aims at investigating the adoption and usage of a multichannel system (the whole set of traditional and digital channels) on the part of a salesperson for services, namely insurance. The understanding of how this adoption impacts the job of the salesperson in the store is a main contribution of this research.

The research is based on 50 face-to-face interviews with insurance agents. On the basis of the exploratory study we develop a taxonomy of salespersons, whose profiles differ according to categories identified through content analysis: breadth and intensity of multichannel usage, attitude towards digital channels and multichannel strategy (positive or negative), usage of channels, evolution of the role of the salesperson in the store, management of the customer relationship, barriers in multichannel adoption.

Agents are classified according to four profiles, enthusiasts, pragmatists, conservatives and skeptics. The four profiles are in line with profiles for technology adoption familiar from the IS literature (Rogers, 2003; Bhattacharya, 2015).

The findings indicate that different salespersons react to organizational change in different ways and adopt channels differently; the characteristics of individual salespersons and the market in which they operate should be considered by managers wishing to implement a successful multichannel strategy. Our taxonomy can be used by managers to categorize their sales agents. Compensation should be aligned with the required behaviors: virtuous salesperson using multiple channels according to customers' preferences should be awarded (Webb and Lamb, 2007). Salespersons should now be able to use the different channels in the most appropriate situation and this behavior should be rewarded.

Salespersons state that the customer–salesperson relationship is evolving into a distance one. The transition towards a distance relationship should be carefully managed by companies. This change can require the introduction of teleworking, appropriate training and incentives.

Keywords: adoption of multiple channels, salesperson, physical store, retail, services

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