

Exploring the Role of Channel Integration Quality in Enhancing Relationship Quality and Customer Engagement: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract:

In the past few decades, marketing channels have undergone significant changes and reforms in terms of their concept, purpose, usage, structure, formation, functionality, and interactivity, resulting in a notable deviation from traditional channel design to omnichannel retail. Merely considering omnichannel integration alone is insufficient to address consumer behavior. It's crucial to analyze the influence of all stakeholders in order to understand how companies adapt their services to satisfy customer expectations in response to market changes like COVID-19. Therefore, this paper examines the link between channel integration quality and relationship quality with their crucial role in enhancing customer engagement. We have proposed a novel integrated conceptual model that has never been evaluated in the literature addressing the influence of channel integration quality on relationship quality. We have adopted a qualitative study to validate our conceptual framework hypotheses, and the findings were very promising.

Keywords: Channel integration quality, Transparency, Omnichannel, Retail, Relationship Quality, Customer Engagement.

1. Introduction

The satisfaction of today's consumers' expectations in terms of transparency and providing a seamless, consistent, and personalized shopping experience requires integrating all of the company's service delivery channels [1]. Research indicates that customer satisfaction is the result of the customer experience not just from one channel but from a combination of online and offline services [2], [3]. Channel integration is related to higher customer retention, purchase intent, customer satisfaction, customer relationship quality, and engagement. Several studies consider the channel integration quality as an important factor in providing a good quality of customer experience [4],[5]. Customers who experience a high-quality omnichannel/digital shopping experience are more engaged and more likely to purchase more products and services, significantly increasing the likelihood of cross-selling and upselling for retailers. Channel integration has therefore become imperative for stores to remain competent and relevant in the industry. Despite being important, research related the channel integration quality (CIQ) lacks cohesion and is primarily conceptual. There is a lack of studies that thoroughly examine the dimensions and practical applications of CIQ.

1.1. Motivation

Currently, the study of online channels integration quality in marketing is more important than ever for several reasons:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the trend toward digitization of business-customer interactions, which has increased the importance of online channels. The quality of online channel integration is essential for providing a consistent and satisfying user experience across all types of channels.

- Omnichannel has become a key strategy for companies aiming to deliver a seamless, personalized user experience across different online channels. The quality of online channel integration is crucial to guarantee effective coordination and consistency between these channels.
- The competition among online businesses is increasingly intense, and the quality of online channel integration can make a difference in customer satisfaction and loyalty. Companies that provide seamless user experience across online channels tend to attract and retain customers more efficiently.
- Technological advances such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and augmented reality are creating new opportunities for online channel integration and an even more personalized user experience. Therefore, the quality of online channel integration is an ever-evolving area of research that requires continued attention from marketing researchers and practitioners.

1.2. Real examples of CIQ

This subsection provides real-life examples of companies adopting channel integration quality in their purchasing platforms. A study conducted by Salesforce in 2020 [6] found that 80% of customers believe their overall experience with a company is as important as its products or services. Companies can deliver a more satisfying and consistent user experience by ensuring a high-quality integration of online channels. For example, the H&M retail chain offers an integrated online and in-store shopping experience, where customers can access the same products and promotions and pick up their purchases in-store.

The online channel integration quality is also critical to ensuring consistent marketing messages. For example, McDonald's uses an omnichannel approach for its "Big Mac" ad campaign. It uses the same visuals and messaging across TV ads, social media, and mobile apps to deliver a consistent brand experience.

Companies can reduce the costs associated with managing multiple channels by providing consistent and satisfying user experience across online channels. For example, Delta Airlines implemented an omnichannel strategy to reduce customer support costs by providing real-time flight information across channels (phone, website, mobile app, etc.).

The online channel integration quality can also help companies optimize their marketing effectiveness. For example, the cosmetics brand Sephora uses an omnichannel approach to track the end-to-end customer journey, using data and analytics to personalize offers and promotions based on individual customer preferences.

Therefore, studying the online channel integration quality in 2023 is very crucial to ensure satisfying, consistent, and personalized user experience, as well as to improve the effectiveness and profitability of omnichannel marketing strategies.

1.3. The main contributions of this research

The scope of this research focuses on how to improve customer engagement based on a relational and behavioral perspective. The relational perspective includes both channel integration quality and relationship quality (i.e., satisfaction, trust, and commitment). This later reflects the customer's perception and evaluation of the relationship with the brand, which in turn influences their behaviors and attitudes towards the channels. The main contributions of our research are as follows:

- Analyze the impact of perceived channel integration quality on customer engagement.
- Analyze the dependency between channel integration quality and relationship quality.
- Propose a conceptual framework for CIQ, relationship quality, and customer engagement.

This paper is organized as follows. Section I provides a literature review on channel integration quality, relationship quality, and customer engagement. We present in section II our proposed conceptual model.

Section III provides the methodology of our qualitative study. The results are presented and analyzed in section IV.

2.Literature Review

2.1. Channel Integration Quality: Definition & Dimensions

The channel integration quality refers to an omnichannel retailer's ability to provide customers with a seamless shopping experience across all channels [7]. Cao and Li [8] defined the CIQ as the degree to which a company aligns its channels 'goals, structure, and deployment to generate synergies for the company and provide specific benefits to its customers. These advantages include cross-channel sales growth and increased consumer experience [9].

Channel integration quality refers to the effectiveness of combining multiple marketing channels in a way that leads to a seamless and consistent experience for customers. It involves the process of integrating multiple marketing channels, such as social media, email marketing, mobile marketing, offline advertising, and search engine marketing, to create a cohesive and consistent customer experience. The quality of channel integration can impact a business's ability to effectively reach its target audience, increase brand awareness, and drive sales.

Effective channel integration requires careful planning, execution, and evaluation to ensure that each channel complements the others and helps to achieve the overall marketing objectives.

The dimensions of CIQ differ from one author to another. For example, Shi et al. [10] propose five dimensions of omnichannel experience (i.e., connectivity, integration, consistency, flexibility, and personalization). Besides, Lee et al. [4] and Sousa et al. [7] provide two groups of dimensions: channel service configuration and integrated interactions. The channel service configuration group contains two sub-dimensions: the breadth of channel service choice and transparency of channel service configuration. On the other hand, the integrated interaction group includes content consistency and process consistency. Therefore, in this paper, we will follow the same approach as Sousa and Voss, which has been widely adopted in literature.

2.1.1. Channel Service Configuration:

The channel service configuration refers to the combination of the breadth of channel choice and the transparency of channel service configuration.

a) Channel choice breadth:

The channel choice breadth refers to the consumer's ability to select and use various channels independently, along with the information obtained from these channels, which aligns with the customer's requirements and satisfaction [11] [12]. In other words, the wider the range of channels, the more options consumers have to choose from when deciding on their preferred purchasing channels. For example, multichannel retailers that can accept orders through various channels (e.g., phone, Instagram, social media, online website) are more efficient than e-commerce companies that only offer phone or online ordering options. As a result, the breadth of channel choice is a crucial factor in consumer participation [13]. An additional case is that customers who have the option to acquire iPhones either online or in physical Apple Stores will be delighted with the fact that they can select their preferred channel for a particular purchase task and thus are unlikely to be content if they are forced to use only one channel [14]. The combination of alternative channels, therefore, not only supplies the customer's overall cognitive experience of the brand by simply moving among the available channels and making the comparison of the pros and cons of the different channels to purchase but also results in the positive emotional customers have towards the brand, they feel free to choose the convenient channel, and become more engaged [15].

b) Transparency of channel service configuration:

The transparency of the channel-service configuration is characterized by the level of customer awareness of the channels and services available, as well as the changes in channel characteristics and service attributes resulting from the channels. It is possible that channels that serve multiple purposes also serve the same purpose to customers, who are therefore more likely to use different channels in their interactions with the same company [16]. Having multiple channels at one's disposal can also improve the benefits of convenience and consistency. Customers, for example, can check out what others have said about the company's products on social platforms and then visit a physical store to try them out and make an online order. This will not only increase the time customers spend with the company but also their attachment to it. The two channels not only complement each other but also create a well-rounded and end-to-end customer experience during each purchase [7]. Based on the Social Exchange Theory (SET), customers who are allowed to choose among alternative distribution channels for a shopping task are more likely to reciprocate by trying out more options with omnichannel retailers [17].

2.1.2. Integrated interactions:

To effectively engage customers, businesses must build seamless experience across all channels through which customers interact with them. Integrating channels allows companies to unify their marketing and customer engagement strategies, which not only reach but also remain consistent across all customer touchpoints [18]. Otherwise, integrated interactions are described as the uniformity of interactions across channels, thereby creating a harmonious service experience with two other sub-dimensions: content consistency and process consistency. Next, we explain in more detail the two sub-dimensions (i.e., content consistency and process consistency).

a) Channel Content Consistency:

Content consistency refers to a brand or company's reliable and uniform representation of its brand, message, and character across various platforms and channels. It is the consistency of content provided by retailers across channels [7]. For instance, a company using a conversational tone on social media and a formal one on the website can confuse the audience, lose their trust and engagement, and do a disservice to the brand. To maintain content consistency, a company needs to plan and establish a consistent tone, style, and messaging that can be steadily applied across all platforms.

Cross-channel consistency can reduce customer concerns about issues with product price or quality and even help them save time and money [19].

Content consistency enables customers to receive similar responses to an inquiry filed through either online or physical channels. Retailers who supply consistent materials (e.g., pricing, product specifications, and warranty services) across channels can provide a valuable exchange to customers. Apple, for example, provides the same product descriptions in both online and physical shops, and customers receive consistent replies to their queries across channels. A good experience is a result of a consistent experience. If customers cannot find consistency across channels, they change their minds quickly and feel frustrated rather than happy. Since content consistency lowers a barrier and simultaneously shortens the transaction process, customers will appreciate it and thus become more engaged.

b) Process consistency:

Process consistency has been explained as the extent of similarity in a service's level, image, feel, and speed that is recognized by customers across various channels [4]. Process consistency is also a system used to produce, organize, and distribute content. Establishing a consistent process ensures that the workflow for content creation and publication is more efficient and streamlined. This, in turn, helps ensure that the work is

completed on time, the content is delivered regularly and on schedule, and the quality is not compromised. This, in turn, goes a long way in building an engaged audience that views the company as a trustworthy source, which can lead to increased brand awareness and, ultimately, sales.

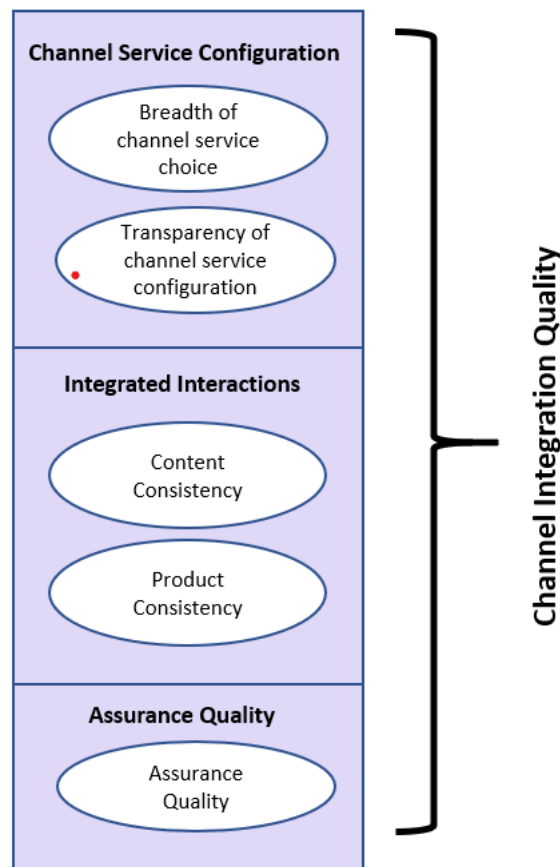


Figure 1: Channel integration quality dimensions

When a transaction becomes visible to the public, all participants gain complete visibility and understanding of the process, the decision-making, and the actions expected of them. This way, the probability of misunderstandings or mistakes is reduced, and the likelihood that the process will be performed consistently, leading to better results, is increased. However, inconsistency can appear if the processes are not transparent or if the stakeholders have different interpretations or expectations of how the process should be carried out. So, process transparency is one of the very important factors in achieving process consistency. A consistent experience across a company’s channels makes it easier for customers to switch channels [20]. For instance, a customer who has had a positive experience in a physical store will most likely expect the same level of service and quality when they visit the brand’s website or social media pages. Secondly, it is pretty easy to say that interaction consistency leads to satisfaction and customer engagement [4]. A good example is that, if consumers like a product they find while shopping offline, they can share the link to the product directly with their friends through the company’s internet channels, without fear of providing incorrect information. Customers also want to join the brand community of companies that give consistent service. Thus, customers’ perceived value of consistency in an omnichannel scenario can help identify the overall strength of customer-company connections, enabling customers to be satisfied with relationship strategies [21].

2.1.3. Assurance Quality:

Assurance quality is one channel integration quality dimension introduced by Hossain et al. [22]. It refers to the trust in various channel characteristics, such as the privacy and security of customers' personal

information across different channels, along with the accessibility of service recovery. Customers will not feel comfortable if they are in an untrusted environment that asks for their personal information. However, assurance quality is a primary factor in establishing customer engagement. To illustrate, a case where customers will be more motivated to engage psychologically and behaviorally with the company and its relationship programs is when they perceive the quality of the omnichannel environment as assured.

Drawing on the above literature review, Figure 2 provides an overview of the channel integration quality properties and features.

2.2. Relationship Quality

Customers are not always loyal and are inclined to switch brands. Therefore, establishing loyalty with a customer over a long period requires more than one factor, which extends beyond perceived service quality (for example, relationship quality). Several industries have already implemented relationship marketing to establish lasting customer relationships, which involves the use of marketing strategies to attract, develop, retain, and enhance customer relationships. When assessing their relationship with a firm, customers consider various factors, including their past experiences, expectations, goals, and desires. Relationship quality is found to be the most critical factor in determining customer loyalty, but there is no single definition for this concept. Generally, relationship quality is described as a range of components, including satisfaction, trust, commitment, and overall quality. Earlier research has primarily focused on the exploration of satisfaction and trust as the most prominent features of relationship quality [23]. Several studies have focused on these components as part of relationship quality [24], [25]. Relationship quality refers to a customer's overall perception of their relationship with the brand or company. It is an indicator of how the brand or company managed to create and nurture a relationship with the customer over time. Various factors, including brand trust can influence relationship quality, the extent to which products or services are valued, satisfaction, and the level of communication and customer engagement.

In [26], the authors maintain that relationship quality is the direct driver of customer retention. Since customers who are relationship quality perceivers are the most likely to be loyal to the brand, they will be the most likely to remain faithful to it. The term 'relationship quality' represents the overall quality of the connection between the customer and the company, encompassing aspects such as trust, commitment, and effective communication. Besides, the authors propose that the relationship between quality and customer retention is indirect, as it is mediated by its impact on customer satisfaction. In detail, they point out that relationship quality is a winning formula, as it enhances customer experience, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of customer retention. The authors of such a thesis survey customers of a German mobile telecommunications provider to validate their model. The findings reveal that both customer satisfaction and relationship quality have direct and indirect effects on customer retention intentions. The survey results indicate that relationship quality has a more powerful direct influence on customer retention intentions than customer satisfaction, and it also has a continuous and changing indirect effect on customer retention intentions through customer satisfaction.

No previous studies have been conducted to date researching whether the quality of channel integration impacts customer engagement on the dimensions of relationship quality.

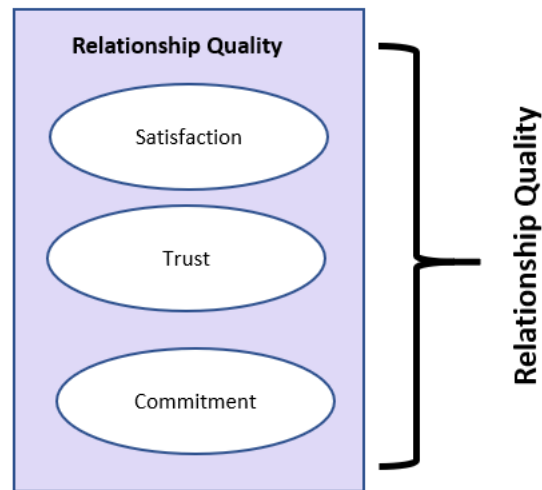


Figure 2: relationship quality dimensions

2.3. Customer Engagement

Customer engagement was defined in social exchange literature as a psychological state that signifies the experience of being dependent on a long-term relationship, and it also entails feelings of attachment towards a relational partner and a desire to continue the relationship [27]. Customer engagement has been primarily addressed from the perspective of relationship marketing [28], which aligns with the principles of the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

In modern usage, it refers to a relationship that extends beyond a simple transaction with a brand or company. The primary focus is not on building long-term connections, but on creating loyalty and enhancing the customer's experience. Customer engagement literature is a goldmine of insights into the different strategies, frameworks, and technologies that an enterprise can use for customer engagement. Engagement is a psychological bond or feeling with a brand in a specific market sector [34]. However, it is essential to recognize that customer engagement is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses various factors that extend beyond trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Besides, a brand's good reputation, a strong emotional bond, comfort, and personalized experiences are among the main factors that contribute to a customer's engagement with the brand.

3. Our Conceptual Framework

In this section, we provide an integrative conceptual model addressing the association between the three major concepts already discussed in the previous section (i.e., channel integration quality, relationship quality, and customer engagement) presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The first relation is between channel integration quality, which includes channel service configuration, integrated interactions, and assurance quality, with relationship quality (i.e., trust, commitment, and satisfaction). The second one is the impact of relationship quality on customer engagement.

When customers have multiple channel options to interact with a business, such as in-person, online, or through various communication channels (phone, email, live chat, social media), it provides them with convenience and accessibility.

They can choose the channel that best suits their preferences, availability, and needs. This flexibility helps in building trust by accommodating customers' diverse communication preferences. The breadth of channel choice enhances customer trust by providing convenience, personalization, consistency, availability, responsiveness, flexibility, and opportunities for tailored communication. It enables businesses to meet

Customers' expectations, engage with them effectively, and build long-lasting relationships based on trust and satisfaction.

Offering a wide range of channel choices allows businesses to cater to diverse customer preferences. Some customers may prefer in-person interactions, while others may prefer online or mobile channels. By providing multiple options, companies can accommodate different communication preferences, leading to higher satisfaction as customers can engage through their preferred channels.

The breadth of channel choice has a positive effect on building customer trust and satisfaction. (H1,H2)

Channel service configuration transparency involves providing clear and accurate information about the channels available for customer interaction. When businesses are transparent about their various channels, customers feel that the company is open and honest in their communication. This transparency builds trust by fostering a sense of credibility and reliability.

The transparency of channel service configuration enhances customer trust by setting clear expectations, ensuring consistency and reliability, enabling personalization and customization, providing clarity in service availability, and improving issue resolution. This alignment between customer expectations and actual service enhances satisfaction. By being transparent about how their channels are configured, businesses demonstrate their commitment to meeting customer needs, strengthening trust, and fostering long-term customer relationships.

The transparency of channel service configuration has a positive influence on trust and commitment. (H1,H2,H3) When customers experience consistent processes and content across different channels, it establishes a sense of reliability and predictability. They can expect and rely on consistent service delivery and information regardless of their chosen channel. This consistency builds trust by assuring customers that the business is dependable and committed to delivering a consistent experience.

The content and process consistency have a positive influence on customer trust (H2). Effective channel service configuration can lead to a commitment from customers by creating enhanced experience, improving accessibility and engagement, enabling personalized interactions, ensuring consistency and reliability, facilitating an integrated and omnichannel experience, and providing proactive customer support. When businesses optimize their channel services to meet customer expectations, it strengthens the relationship and encourages long-term commitment.

The channel integration quality leads to commitment (H3). We present in Table 1 the three new hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 related to the link between CIQ and relationship quality.

4.Methodology

Our Methodology is based on a qualitative study to understand the perceptions of customers related to the digital environment. We aim to clearly define the role of channel integration quality in improving the relationship quality of the company with the customer. It will lead us to validate our conceptual model and will allow us to extract verbatims for the creation of a measurement scale. This exploratory qualitative study completes the literature review and takes place before the formalization and testing of the theoretical model. In the following, we will discuss the methodological aspects of this exploratory qualitative study, and then we present the results of our analysis.

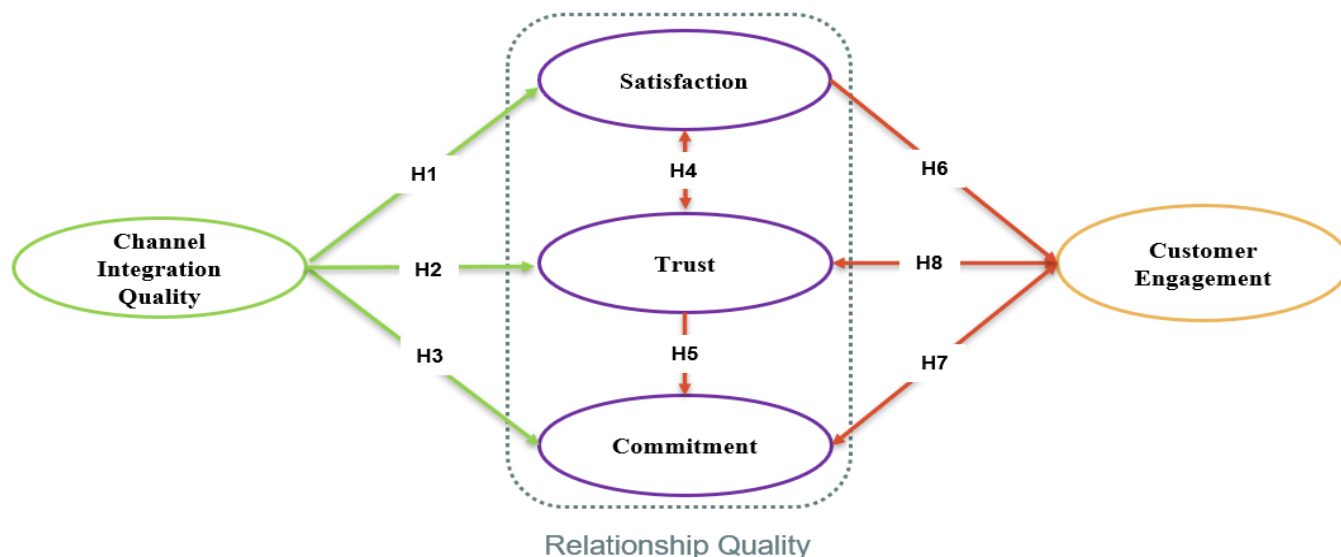


Figure 3: Our conceptual model

Table I: HYPOTHESES

ID	Hypotheses of our conceptual framework
H1	Channel Integration Quality is positively associated
H2	Channel Integration Quality can positively influence trust
H3	Channel Integration Quality positively affects customer commitment
H4	Trust has a positive effect on satisfaction
H6	Brand trust positively influences affective commitment.
H7	Satisfaction leads to customer engagement.
H8	Trust can positively affect CE
H9	Commitment has a positive impact on customer engagement
H10	Trust mediates the relationship between Channel Integration Quality and Customer Engagement.
H11	Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Channel Integration Quality and Customer Engagement.
H12	Commitment mediates the relationship between Channel Integration Quality and Customer Engagement.

4.1. Preparation

The preparation steps taken during this qualitative study are as follows:

- 1) We define the research question and the objectives of our qualitative study.
- 2) We identify the type of interview.
- 3) We define the structure of the interview guide.
- 4) We specify data sampling.

This qualitative study aims to:

- Specify the different components of the relationship quality of the company with the online customer (what is the most important factor for the company: trust, satisfaction, commitment).
- Evaluate the influence of relationship quality on customer engagement.

- Explain the role of channel integration quality in influencing the relational quality of the company with the customer and, subsequently, the customer engagement.

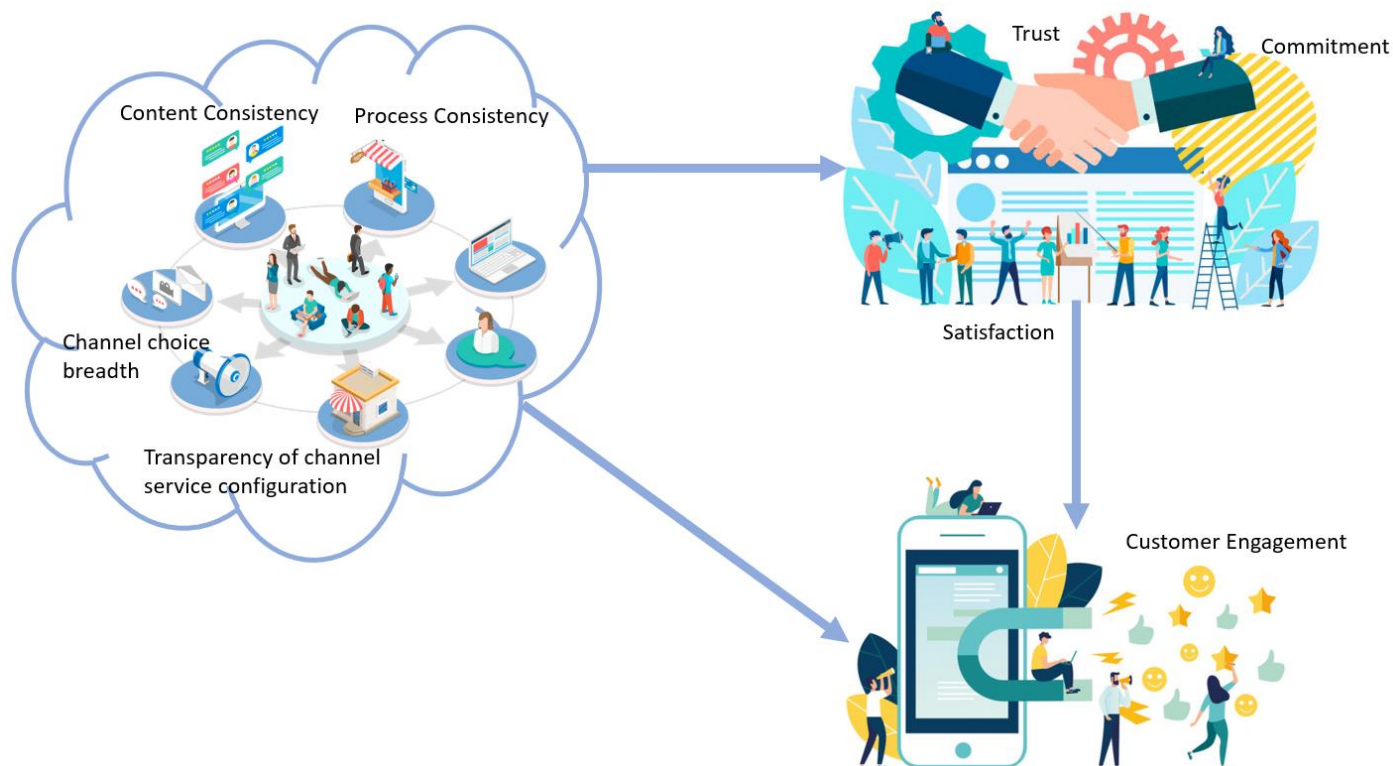


Figure 4: Pictorial view of the conceptual model

We summarize the specification of our qualitative study in Table 2.

All interviews began with a brief presentation of the research context and subject. Then, three themes were addressed. We sought to understand better what "the channel integration quality, the relationship quality with the client, and the customer engagement" means for professionals. The theme of the digital channel integration quality was implicitly addressed in all interviews. Still, we also wanted to explicitly study this issue at the end of the interviews through several questions: How can you define channel integration quality? What are the benefits that both the customer and the company can derive from integrated digital channels? How does channel integration quality impact the company's relationship quality with the client? Can relationship quality influence customer engagement? What is the difference between commitment and engagement? To what degree can a satisfied person be highly engaged? Similarly, for the second and third themes: can trust improve engagement? When can we consider a customer to be highly involved? What is the impact of relationship quality on customer engagement?

The first step of the interview guide involved having the interviewees reflect on an example of company practices in a hyper-digitalized context. We choose a real-life example.

This example was presented differently to professionals who do not have the same language and skills to understand this type of digital practice. When the interviews were conducted over the phone, the example was sent by email ten minutes before the appointment so that the recipient could read it when prompted." In this manner, the informants would already have a global vision of the interview.

Table II: Summary of Qualitative Study Specification

	With professionals	Justification
Interview Type	Semi-directive	The choice of the semi-directive interview is mainly due to its

		ability to collect information on the same principle as the directive interview. In contrast to the latter, the semi-structured interview allows us to go more deeply into a topic by asking new questions. This methodology allows the researcher and the interviewees to discuss a theme and deepen the studied problem while having the possibility of re-framing the debate around the essential themes. The advantage of a focused interview guide is the prevention of too many irrelevant topics while allowing a certain degree of freedom.
Sampling	By contrast	<p>The point at which collecting new qualitative data no longer changes, or only marginally changes, your coding manual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The point at which each new qualitative interview produces only previously discovered data. ▪ The point at which the yield of your study decreases, i.e., each new interview makes a more negligible contribution than the previous one.
Interview guide themes	Digital Marketing, Channel Integration Quality, Relationship quality, and customer engagement	It allows the interviewees' discourse to be partially oriented (semi-directive) around the different themes defined in advance by the interviewers and recorded in an interview guide. The aim of this technique is to ensure that all the questions of interest to the interviewer are addressed while remaining focused on the subject being interviewed. This technique also ensures comparability of results.
Sample characteristics	Digital Marketing specialists	Identify respondents with expertise in the customer journey, touchpoints, personal data management, customer experience, and marketing ethics.

4.2. Sampling

We interviewed 12 digital professionals who are experts in their field. Such variety among the respondents seemed necessary to understand the different perspectives on CIQ. These interviews help us better understand the scope of CIQ and the quality of relationships, including the associated expectations, their context, characteristics, background, and consequences.

The first step was to identify respondents with expertise in customer journeys, touchpoints, personal data management, customer experience, or marketing ethics. Identifying individuals within the company who possess such skills can be challenging at times, as job titles often vary significantly, even for the same responsibilities. Therefore, it was essential to employ multiple approaches and contact methods to secure appointments for conducting the interviews. Initial contacts were primarily established through the professional social networking site LinkedIn. We published a public message explaining the type of profile we were seeking for the interviews. We also targeted profiles based on their expertise and current roles and sent private messages proactively to initiate the initial contact. Furthermore, during each interview, we asked the respondents to provide us with contacts from their network who work on these issues and whom we could also interview. We also choose to interview diverse profiles to capture the variety of representations concerning the different concepts under study. The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour, which attests to the diversity of respondents' opinions on the subject: some were curious and asked many questions, while others were only reactive to the speeches.

5. Findings

The qualitative study enables the identification of key concepts that marketing managers should address to assess the quality of the relationship with online customers. These concepts include satisfaction and trust, which were all mentioned by all 12 digital marketing professionals. However, only eight individuals mentioned the construct of commitment, while others did not understand it. They were unfamiliar with the term "commitment," and one person even stated, *"I have never heard of this concept. Is it about engagement...?"* It was necessary to explain the meaning to them, and once they understood, they confirmed its importance.

Most professionals mentioned other concepts essential for analyzing the quality of online customers' relationships, such as involvement, engagement, and loyalty. The study results demonstrated a positive conceptual link between the quality of channel integration and trust. For the majority, it was evident that *"The quality of channel integration is a key element in building consumers' trust online. When our customers see that our brand is consistently and professionally present across all channels, it enhances their trust in our company and the quality of our products."*

To explore the quality of channel integration, professionals were questioned, and they mentioned three essential factors: the ability to choose between channels, the transparency of channel service configuration, process consistency, and content consistency. Marketing managers acknowledge that the quality of channel integration plays a crucial role in building consumers' trust. A seamless and harmonious integration of online channels is seen as a means to strengthen customer trust in the brand and encourage them to share their personal information.

A positive link is also confirmed between the quality of online channel integration and satisfaction. *"We found that when we offer consistent and frictionless customer experience across all our online channels, our satisfaction rates increase significantly. Customers appreciate the ease with which they can switch between channels and obtain consistent service or information. This translates into greater overall customer satisfaction."* Furthermore, we also receive convincing answers describing the positive influence of satisfaction on customer engagement. *"When customers are satisfied with a brand's products, services, or overall experience, they tend to exhibit higher levels of online engagement. This can be seen through their active participation with the brand's social media accounts, involvement in online discussions and communities related to the brand, positive reviews and feedback, content sharing, and repeat purchases."*

However, the link between online channel integration quality and commitment was unclear for the respondents. Yet, after defining the concept, they were able to confirm the positive relationship. *"We found that when we provide smooth integration of our online channels, customers are more likely to maintain a long-term relationship with our company. They feel valued and considered when they can move effortlessly between channels, find consistent information, and benefit from unified experience. This strengthens their commitment to our brand and encourages long-term loyalty."* Nevertheless, some verbatims mention the risks associated with poor channel integration quality. Deficient integration can lead to problems such as communication inconsistency, consumer confusion, fragmented experience, and data security issues. *"When online channels are not seamlessly integrated, there is a risk of providing contradictory information or inconsistent offers. This can generate consumer confusion and tarnish the company's brand image. Ensuring smooth integration is essential to avoid these risks."*

Others mentioned the impact of poor channel integration quality on data security and privacy. *"Poor integration quality can compromise the confidentiality and security of customer data. If online channels are*

not properly integrated technically, there is a risk of security breaches and vulnerabilities that could undermine consumer trust in the company."

By the end, we ceased conducting interviews once we received redundant answers. Overall, this qualitative study validates our conceptual model.

6. Conclusion

Research to date has considered customer engagement predominantly as an overall evaluation of customer behavior, thus restricting the understanding of the key factors the company must enhance to meet customer expectations. Customer experience should be consistent among all channels, and the companies should provide transparent content in their multichannel with seamless information. Our study is the first one that identifies, categorizes, and defines the influence of channel integration quality on customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment at different touchpoints. We have also highlighted the impact of relationship quality in improving customer engagement, as discussed in the literature. Our hypotheses were validated based on a qualitative study with professionals on digital marketing in different companies.

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