

**LEVERAGING ON THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY FOR RETHINKING
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE: A MULTI-METHOD FIELD WORK IN GROCERY
RETAILERS**

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ABSTRACT

Driving to the store, finding parking, defective carts, difficulties in finding items, poor product info, long lines for checkout, unclear receipts, carrying heavy shopping bags home, and forgotten items are some of the most common barriers experienced by grocery shoppers. These are also the most common reasons why shoppers decide to switch to alternative retailers or to online grocery channels. COVID-19 accelerated this trend with online grocery shopping and home delivery services became prevalent and grew significantly during the pandemic (Gupta & Mukhejee, 2022). Today, e-grocery has reached 11% of the total grocery sales and being expected to reach 19% by 2025 in US (source: Statista, 2022). Brick and mortar grocery retailers declare to suffer from low loyalty of their customer and margin pressure. On the other side, the recent investments of online pure players such as Amazon and Alibaba in physical retail, including grocery, show that the physical shopping has still potential to lead retailers' growth, also within grocery. Grocery retailers should therefore find new ways to attract and retain customers to their stores. Offering a better customer experience (CE) may be a valuable strategy to this end. A great CE has emerged at the base of a sustainable competitive advantage for companies, and it is at the heart of customer loyalty (Grewal et al., 2017) in several sectors but has often been neglected within grocery selling.

So how can a traditional grocery retailer master CE?

This is the question this paper tries to address. Several challenges are ahead of this sector that sells low involvement, routinary products (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000) with consumers being substantially indifferent about from which retailer they buy them. Creating differentiation while selling this type of product is particularly challenging for retailers and investing in CE can make a difference for a store to be the one selected by a customer.

In our view, the customer journey (CJ) represents the framework retailers should use in order to plan and deliver a great CE. Analyzing the CJ and reshaping the retailers' strategy according to the inputs received brings the retailers to become really customer-centric.

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This paper, by means of a multimethod approach, analyzes and compares the customer journeys in two different stores of a grocery retailer and identifies the key elements that contribute to a great customer experience. By illustrating the case of a retail chain, the present work wants to show how (1) in order to create and deliver a great CE the key is to rethink and reshape the CJ, and (2) how CE impacts grocery store performances. This paper answers the call that previous researchers (Kranzbühler et al., 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Towers & Towers, 2021) have made on the need for empirical testing and validation of the construct of CE and its relationship with the CJ idea in different sectors.

Keywords: Customer journey, Customer experience, In-store technology integration, Touchpoints

References Available Upon Request