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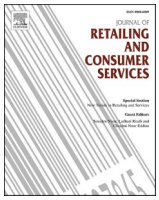

Customer inspiration in retailing: The role of perceived novelty and customer loyalty across offline and online channels

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ABSTRACT

Inspiring customers allows retailers to increase purchase intention and customer loyalty. Customers employ multiple channels for shopping, and they can be inspired to buy products both online and offline throughout the customer journey. However, no studies have focused on the antecedents and consequences of customer inspiration in the omnichannel environment. This study was based on novelty categorization theory and affect transfer theory and employed a survey to investigate how customer inspiration develops across channels. Results showed that cross-channel effects exist between customer inspiration states and highlighted the role of channel perceived novelty and customer loyalty as, respectively, antecedents and consequences of inspiration.

1. Introduction

Customer inspiration is an emerging construct in marketing that offers interesting research opportunities to understand consumer behaviour and advance marketing theory (Saha and Mukherjee, 2022). Suggested by Böttger et al. (2017), customer inspiration has been used by several marketing researchers to analyse consumer behaviour in social media (Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2020; Cao et al., 2021) or to explain tourist behaviour (Khoi et al., 2020; Kwon and Boger, 2021). Customer inspiration has been under-researched in retailing and basically restricted to understanding how new technologies, such as Augmented Reality (AR), can drive customer inspiration in the store (Hinsch et al., 2020a; Nikhashemi et al., 2021; Rauschnabel et al., 2019). More specifically, no studies have employed the construct of customer inspiration to understand shopper behaviour in an omnichannel retailing context.

This research gap contrasts with the potential interest among retailers in understanding and fostering customer inspiration across online and offline channels. Marketing literature has highlighted that customer inspiration can bring substantial benefits, such as higher brand attachment (Park et al., 2013) or increased customer loyalty (Böttger et al., 2017). With the growing number of channels and touchpoints, omnichannel retailers are called to foster customer inspiration not only in-store but also in online channels. For instance, in December 2022 Amazon announced the launch of "Inspire", a new short-form video and photo feed that allows consumers to explore products and ideas and shop from content created by influencers, brands and other customers (Perez, 2022). Retailers are moving from multichannel to omnichannel integrating multiple channels to allow a seamless experience for consumers in their search and purchase process (Thaichon et al., 2022; Timoumi et al., 2022). In this effort to become omnichannel, retailers would benefit if they were able to inspire customers in one channel and this motivational effect were transferred to another channel. Thus, understanding the cross-channel effects of customer inspiration is important to achieve channel synergies and advance towards omnichannel management. As a matter of fact, affect transfer theory points to the existence of cross-channel effect. Consequently, customer inspiration states might influence each other and ultimately build loyalty across online and offline channels.

Understanding customer inspiration across channels also brings the need to identify its drivers. Customers could be inspired when they shop in novel and stimulating environments. Many retailers are constantly redesigning stores, websites and mobile apps with a view to bringing novelty into the shopping experience (Breugelmans et al., 2023). The perception of novelty is the interpretation that something is new, unfamiliar, or not yet understood (Silvia, 2005). By drawing on novelty categorization theory, it can be expected that when shoppers are elicited by novel stimuli in a channel, they process the novel elements in a way that broadens their mental horizons, thus increasing customer inspiration.

This paper aims to investigate, by employing the customer

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inspiration framework (Böttger et al., 2017) complemented by affect transfer theory and novelty categorization theory, the contribution of perceived novelty of offline and online channels in inspiring omnichannel customers and the cross-channel effects related to customer inspiration and customer loyalty in offline and online channels. The results demonstrate the benefits of designing novel shopping environments and integrating online and offline channels as part of an omnichannel strategy, where shoppers are inspired to engage in shopping behaviours that extend from offline to online channels and vice versa.

This study makes the following contributions. First, it contributes to omnichannel retailing literature by investigating the cross-channel effects of shoppers' motivational and attitudinal states related to customer inspiration throughout the customer journey. Second, it contributes to consumer behaviour literature by extending the research stream on customer inspiration to the omnichannel context and uncovering the role of channel perceived novelty as an antecedent of customer inspiration. Adopting a channel perspective when focusing on customer inspiration would allow academics and practitioners to better understand which channel is more appropriate for driving customer inspiration and how synergies might be leveraged to influence purchase behaviour among omnichannel customers.

2. Literature review and conceptual development

2.1. Customer inspiration

The concept of inspiration was developed in the field of psychology to explain spiritual and creative processes and has attracted the attention of academic researchers from diverse fields (Hart, 1998; Thrash and Elliot, 2003, 2004). Three characteristics define the concept of inspiration: transcendence, evocation, and approach motivation (Thrash and Elliot, 2003). Being inspired means becoming aware of an idea that transcends the ordinary, which is evoked by an external stimulus, and motivates the individual to act and realise the new idea or vision.

Böttger et al. (2017) adapted the concept of inspiration from psychology to marketing and introduced the concept of 'customer inspiration'; customer inspiration is defined as "a customer's temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal" (p.117). The 'customer' label of inspiration, as argued by Böttger et al. (2017), gives rise to a new concept stemming from, but different to, 'general' inspiration. The main difference is the focus on marketing stimuli that trigger consumption-related goals such as purchasing, exploring products or services, or engaging with a firm. Customer inspiration could be activated from advertisements, new product offerings, or other stimuli present in the customer environment (Böttger et al., 2017; Saha and Mukherjee, 2022). In a shopping context, customers are inspired by external stimuli when they are receptive to new ideas, such as when they start a shopping journey (Böttger et al., 2017) and use the online and offline channels of a retailer.

Thrash and Elliot (2004) conceptualised inspiration as a hybrid construct with two component processes: an activation state (inspired-by), and an intention state (inspired-to). The authors highlighted the importance of decomposing the concept, as one can be inspired-by without being inspired-to, for example, the individual is awoken by the beauty of a place, but is not motivated to take any specific action, thus, inspired-by would be a necessary but not sufficient condition of inspired-to. Based on the transmission model of inspiration proposed by Thrash et al. (2010), Böttger et al. (2017) conceptualised customer inspiration as a two-dimensional construct and developed a scale to capture both components: first, an external marketing stimulus evokes a state of inspiration in the consumer (inspired-by); and second, inspiration motivates the consumer to act (inspired-to).

The construct suggested by Böttger et al. (2017) has generated significant interest among marketing researchers who have tested its robustness across varios research contexts, notably within the domains of tourism and hospitality, as well as social media. In the tourism context, Khoi et al. (2020) delved into the antecedents and moderators of inspiration among tourists, uncovering the relevance of place attachment and openness to experience as precursors. Within the realm of green tourism, Kwon and Boger (2021) examined brand experience as a driver of customer inspiration, subsequently resulting in pro-environmental intentions. A recent investigation in the field of hospitality (Wu et al., 2023) focused on the role of repurposed design servicescapes in fostering customer inspiration. In parallel, research in social media has also embraced the construct of customer inspiration. Izogo and Mpinganjira (2020) investigated social media content as an antecedent of customer inspiration by Facebook posts, and its effects on purchase intention and engagement behaviours. Cao et al. (2021) explained how online brand communities' climate and interaction act as precursors of customer inspiration. Ki et al. (2022) investigated how social media influencers drive customer inspiration, which in turn, motivates consumers make purchase choices imitating the influencers. In a different research context, AR marketing, several studies considered the role of customer inspiration in the chain of effects from AR attributes to behavioral intentions (Hinsch et al., 2020; Nikhashemi et al., 2021; Rauschnabel et al., 2019). However, they did not account for the reciprocal influence of online and offline channels.

The literature review above shows that the emerging body of research on customer inspiration has been developed mostly within two research contexts: social media and tourism and hospitality. Hence, it emerges a gap in the study of customer inspiration in omnichannel retailing. Literature has not adopted a channel perspective when analyzing customer inspiration, thus ignoring reciprocal online and offline relationships. Omnichannel retailing is related to engaging and influencing consumers using various channels and achieving channel synergies that optimise the customer experience and channel performance (Verhoef et al., 2015; Thaichon et al., 2022). Understanding how inspired-by translates into inspired-to across channels would allow us to better understand new mechanisms occurring in omnichannel retailing, thus offering a key contribution to omnichannel research.

2.2. Perceived novelty of offline and online channels

Accordig to Novelty categorization theory, perceived novelty is a subjective experience based on different characteristics, involving unexpectedness, complexity, atypicality, innovativeness, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Berlyne, 1960; Förster et al., 2010). Even though novelty is certainly influenced by the characteristics of the stimulus perceived as novel, everyone might perceive a given object as novel even if he/she has been previously exposed to it multiple times. Perceived novelty has been found to be a positive driver in influencing an individual's attitude towards adopting an innovation, especially a technological innovation, by decreasing perceived risks associated with the innovation and increasing its perceived benefits (e.g. Wells et al., 2010; Truong, 2013; Mani and Chouk, 2017). In addition, perceived novelty has been also found to positively influence consumers' attitude towards an ad (Neudecker et al., 2014) and feeling of interest in marketing communications (Sung et al., 2022). Perceived novelty has also attracted attention in retailing research. Adapa et al. (2020) have found that perceived novelty of a Smart Retail Technology (SRT), such as self-service technologies or radio frequency identification systems (RFIDs), can increase the perceived shopping value when using an SRT, thus leading to higher retail store and loyalty and higher intention to use the SRT. Perceived novelty has also been reported to be a positive driver of positive word-of-mouth for experiential stores (Pape and Toporowski, 2023) and to be a key driver of excitement in marketplaces (Pham and Sun, 2020). From the above review it emerges that perceived novelty has been considered only with reference to the adoption of specific technologies and its potential as a driver of customer inspiration has not been investigated. Novelty categorization theory (Förster et al., 2010) offers support to the link between perceived novelty and customer inspiration.

The theory aims to understand how subjects process novel events and it focuses on the information processing style of a novel stimulus. The information processing style involves procedural memory, and it is related to how we look at new information and how new information is assimilated to existing knowledge structures or categories (Rosch, 2013). Specifically, Novelty categorization theory states that when an individual is exposed to a non-threatening novel stimulus, a global processing style is adopted because it allows the novel element to be integrated into the existing knowledge framework (Förster et al., 2010). Global processing refers to processing information in abstract and superordinate terms and it allows individuals to broaden both their perception and mental categories: to understand novel information it is essential that it be integrated into sufficiently broad pre-existing knowledge structures. Since broadening mental horizons is a key characteristic of being inspired by something (Böttger et al., 2017), it can be expected that the perceived novelty of an object would be an inspiring external source for customers.

In the omnichannel retailing context, offline and online channels are able to offer shoppers many stimuli that might drive a certain degree of perceived novelty. Retailers can introduce new online or offline channels or they can re-design existing ones. When shoppers perceive the online or offline channel as new, they might broaden their mental categories to incorporate new information into existing categories, thus feeling more inspired. Novelty perception related to the online (offline) channel might thus inspire customers in the same online (offline) channel, as it entails a global processing related to the channel itself. This prompted us to posit the following hypotheses:

H1. Offline channel perceived novelty has a positive influence on customer inspired-by state in the offline channel

H2. Online channel perceived novelty has a positive influence on customer inspired-by state in the online channel

2.3. Customer inspiration states in offline and online channels

The transmission model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2010) suggests that individuals make a transition from being inspired-by an external stimulus to being ready to implement this idea. This conceptualization is included by Böttger et al. (2017) in their customer inspiration model by establishing a causal link between the inspired-by state and the inspired-to state, an approach that has been followed in subsequent customer inspiration studies (Cao et al., 2021; Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2020). In the retail sphere, the transmission model would imply that when shoppers are inspired by stimuli encountered at a physical store, they would be likely to carry out a purchasing behaviour in-store. For example, when the in-store shopper is attracted by a new product display, the state of inspiration is triggered, and this may prompt the consumer to purchase something at the store. Thus, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H3. Customer inspired-by state in the offline channel is positively related to customer inspired-to state in the offline channel

The same mechanism of transmission of inspiration from activation to motivation would work in the online channel. Online channels today present shoppers with a myriad of stimuli that attempt to counteract the otherwise less interactive environment when compared to physical outlets. In the past, shoppers tended to use online channels as information channels only because the perceived risks of purchasing online were high, but nowadays retailers increasingly use new technologies to provide rich online content that helps shoppers make purchase decisions (Zhong et al., 2023). Moreover, with increased security in online payment and data protection, and faster and more reliable deliveries (Vakulenko et al., 2019), inspired-by shoppers on an online channel are likely to be motivated to act on the same online channel. This lead us to formulate the following hyphothesis:

H4. Customer inspired-by state in the online channel is positively related to customer inspired-to state in the online channel

Building customer loyalty is a key outcome of channel management (Herhausen et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2020). In the design and management of multiple channels, retailers are challenged not to lose customers to competing firms during the purchase process, pursuing not only short-term but long-term goals such as customer loyalty (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The benefits of customer inspiration go beyond motivating the individual to purchase, as its effects would extend to post-purchase emotional and attitudinal states (Khoi et al., 2020). An inspired customer would develop a feeling of connectedness with the firm that would lead to increased loyalty (Böttger et al., 2017). Our concept of loyalty is channel-related; thus, it refers to re-patronage and recommendation intention within a given channel. We expect a customer who achieves inspired-to status in the offline (online) channel to develop attitudinal loyalty towards the offline (online) channel. Thus, we formulated the following hyphotheses:

H5. Customer inspired-to state in the offline channel is positively related to offline channel loyalty

H6. Customer inspired-to state in the online channel is positively related to online channel loyalty

2.4. Cross-channel effects of customer inspiration

The omnichannel approach increasingly used by retailers means that consumers can easily switch from one channel to another along the customer journey (Verhoef et al., 2015). Thus, cross-channel effects are expected when a retailer coordinates different channels to offer a congruent experience (Timoumi et al., 2022). Cross-channel effects refer to synergies that are achieved by the combined use of channels (Wang and Zhang, 2018). Research has found that offline attitudes transfer to the online channel, for example offline trust has a positive effect on online trust (Badrinarayanan et al., 2012), and offline channel loyalty is positively related to online channel loyalty (Frasquet and Miquel, 2017). As reported by Timoumi et al. (2022), most studies to date have focused on the cross-channel effects of adding an online channel by an offline retailer. Notwithstanding the foregoing, interest in researching the effect of online channels on offline channels has increased. Dinner et al. (2014) found strong online to offline cross-channel effects. As channel attributes differ, cross-channel effects may be asymmetric; in this line, Shankar and Kushwaha (2021) found that primarily informative channels, such as websites, have a positive effect on shopping outcomes in a balanced channel, e.g. brick-and-mortar stores.

As stated by Neslin (2022), cross-channel effects are common and important and marketing actions can guide them. In this respect, affect transfer theory offers key guides to understanding the process of cross-channel effects. Affect transfer theory originally refers to a person's affect related to object components being transferred to the overall object (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Kim et al., 1998). Affect transfer theory has been employed in marketing to relate consumer attitudes towards advertisement with attitudes towards brands. The theory posits that individuals' pre-existing affect toward an object can be transferred to another closely-related object. Previous studies have hypothesized that this transfer might occur through a cognitive process (Aaker and Keller, 1990), an unconscious process (Oikawa et al., 2011) or both at the same time (Xiaofei et al., 2021). The valence of the transfer of the outcome affect could be similar to the original level of affect or it could differ (lower/higher) (Machleit and Dale Wilson, 1988).

As far as customer inspiration is concerned, it could be hypothesized that customer inspiration stemming from experience with one channel could be transferred to another channel. Thus, the mechanism of transmission of inspiration from inspired-by to inspired-to would be triggered between two channels through a cognitive or unconscious process. Based on affect transfer theory (Aaker and Keller, 1990), we

expect that a customer inspired-by in the offline channel would be inspired-to act in the online channel and vice versa. Therefore, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H7. Customer inspired-by state in the offline channel is positively related to customer inspired-to state in the online channel

H8. Customer inspired-by state in the online channel is positively related to customer inspired-to state in the offline channel

Affect transfer theory would also explain that the state of customer inspired-to in the offline and online channels have cross-channel effects in terms of attitudinal outcomes; thus, a customer inspired-to act in the offline channel would develop attitudinal loyalty towards the online channel as well, and a customer inspired-to online would also become loyal to the physical channel. The state of customer inspiration creates a connection with the firm and positive affect (Böttger et al., 2017; Saha and Mukherjee, 2022). This feeling of connectedness would not be restricted to the channel where inspiration occurred, particularly when retail channels are integrated. When customers can interchangeably use more than one channel, cross-channel effects are likely to appear so that a positive perception of a channel transfers to a positive attitude towards the other (Badrinarayanan et al., 2012; Frasquet and Miquel, 2017). Thus, the last two hypotheses of our model posited the following:

H9. Customer inspired-to state in the offline channel is positively related to online channel loyalty

H10. Customer inspired-to state in the online channel is positively related to customer offline channel loyalty

Our research framework (Fig. 1) of customer inspiration in omnichannel retailing was developed based on novelty categorization theory and affect transfer theory. The framework focused on the inspiring role of the perceived novelty of offline and online channels, which act as antecedents of customer inspiration. A key contribution stemmed from the analysis of the cross-channel effects of customer inspirations that, if significant, would prove the synergies between online and offline retail channels.

3. Methodology

To test our conceptual framework, data were collected by means of an online survey conducted in 2023 on a national representative panel of Spanish shoppers. Quota sampling was employed by age and gender to involve a panel of shoppers that was representative of all the age ranges relevant for the omnichannel context; additionally, quotas were also established to obtain an equal representation of the eight product categories considered. To select omnichannel shoppers qualified to provide information on the variables of our research model, we applied two screening questions, similarly to Cui et al. (2022). The first screening questions was "In the last three monts, have you interacted with both offline and online channels of a retailer before buying a product?", only those who answered "Yes" were allowed to answer the survey. The three-month period was used as to minimise recall bias. Then, interviewees were asked to report the product category, related to the shopping experience they recalled in more detail in which they employed both online and offline channels of the same retailer. Specifically, eight product categories were displayed: apparel items, accessories, perfume and cosmetics, sport equipment, furniture, electronic appliances, consumer electronics and games. They were requested to think about that shopping experience when answering the remaining questions. The second screening question asked respondents to recall whether they used online only, offline only or both online and offline channels for information search in that specific shopping journey. Only those answering that both channels were used could continue the survey.

Constructs were measured using multi-item scales available in the literature of reference: the wording of the items is displayed in the following section (Table 2). A pre-test was undertaken on a convenience sample of 36 respondents to assess the clarity and reliability of the questions and no issues were detected. Perceived novelty was measured using a scale described by Argo et al. (2010) and separately adapted to the online and the offline channel. Offline and online customer inspiration (both inspired-by and inspired-to) was measured by adapting the scale from Böttger et al. (2017). Online channel loyalty and offline channel loyalty were measured by adapting the scale from Zeithaml et al. (1996). A series of control variables were also employed, such as product involvement, age, gender, product category, number of online and offline touchpoints used during the information search and type of channel where the purchase was made (in case it was made). Product involvement was measured by means of a scale adapted from Zaichkowsky (1985) and McClure et al. (2023). Information on age and gender were provided by the research company managing the panel. Moreover, respondents had to indicate which of the following retailer touchpoints and external touchpoints they used for information search during the recalled shopping experience: retailer's physical store, retailer's website, retailer's flyers, retailer's employees, retailer's mobile app, email marketing, retailer's social media page, competitors' physical store, competitors' website, competitors' flyers, influencers, word-of-mouth, search engines, and price comparison platforms. Finally, the respondents had to mention if they bought or not the product in the recalled shopping experience and whether they bought offline or online.

After data cleaning, 453 responses were used for further analysis. Covariance-based Structural Equation Models (SEM) analysis was employed using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R. The majority of the sample answered with reference to fashion products (48%), while the remaining respondents answered with reference to furniture and consumer electronics products (31%) and cosmetic products (11%). The average age of the participants in the sample was 36, ranging from 18 to 65 years old. Almost all shoppers (93%) declared that they purchased something during the shopping journey, and out of them, 65% bought offline and 35% online. On average, each shopper employed more than one offline touchpoint (1.5) and more than one online touchpoint (1.8)

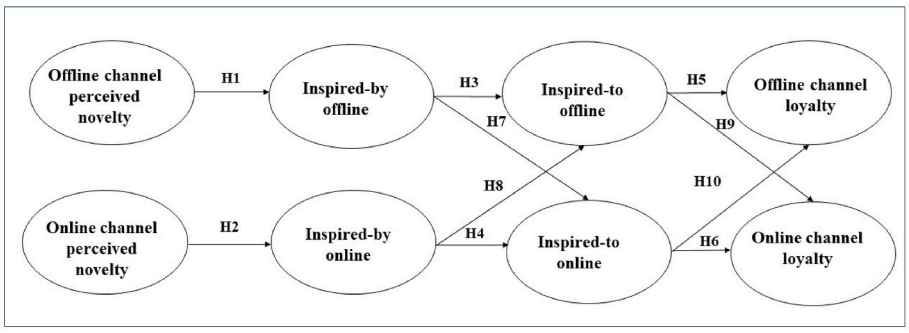

Fig. 1. Customer inspiration across offline and online channels.

during the information search stage. Demographic information is also reported in Table 1.

4. Results

As a first step of analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The model had a satisfactory fit: CFI (Comparative Fit Index) and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) were respectively equal to 0.96 and 0.95, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) was equal to 0.06, while SRMR (Standardised Root Mean Square Residual) was equal to 0.04. Cronbach's alpha was measured to assess reliability and all measures displayed values above 0.80. Convergent validity was indicated with the average variance extracted (AVE) and all values were above the 0.50 threshold. All the standardised loadings displayed values higher or equal to 0.70. Table 2 shows the results from the confirmatory factor analysis and the items employed. We evaluated discriminant validity by checking if each pair of latent correlations was sufficiently below one (in absolute value terms), so that the latent variables could be considered as representing distinct constructs: the results confirmed discriminant validity as each factor correlation estimate was below 0.80 and significantly different from 1. Moreover, for each construct pair, each construct square root of AVE is higher than their corresponding correlation, complying with Fornell and Larcker's criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (see Table 3).

The presence of common method bias was also tested by using the Harman's Single Factor approach (Harman, 1967): results show that found that the first factor explained a portion of variance smaller than the critical value of 50%, thus confirming that our model was free from common method bias. SEM analysis was performed to test the research framework with the addition of age, gender, product involvement, product category, number of offline touchpoints and number of online touchpoints employed during the information search and purchase channel as control variables. Product category was expressed as a dummy variable, distinguishing between personal and non-personal items (other expressions of product category with multiple dummies have been tested displaying similar results). The results showed that the model had an adequate fit: CFI and TLI were respectively equal to 0.94 and 0.93, RMSEA (was equal to 0.06, while SRMR was equal to 0.06. The results on the tested relationships are shown in Fig. 2. With reference to H1 and H2, offline channel perceived novelty was significantly and positively related to inspired-by offline (standardised path coefficient: 0.51, $p < .001$) and online channel perceived novelty was significantly and positively related to inspired-by online (standardised path coefficient: 0.65, $p < .001$). Therefore, perceived novelty of each channel was found to be a relevant source of inspiration within each channel. As regards H3 and H4, customer inspired-by state in the offline channel was positively related to customer inspired-to state in the same channel (standardised path coefficient: 0.48, $p < .001$) and customer inspired-by state in the online channel was positively related to customer inspired-to

Table 1
Descriptive statistics on the sample.

Variable	Category	Value
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
Age	Average	36.5
	18–30 years old	42.2%
	31–50 years old	42.1%
	51–67 years aold	15.7%
Product category of reference	Apparel items	47.7%
	Accessories	2.7%
	Perfume and cosmetics	10.8%
	Sport equipment	7.5%
	Furniture	3.5%
	Electronic appliances	8.2%
	Consumer electronics and games	19.6%

Table 2
Summary of results from the confirmatory factor analysis.

ITEMS	Standardized loading	Cronbach alpha	AVE
ONLINE CHANNEL PERCEIVED NOVELTY		0.92	0.80
The online channels (website, social media, app) of the retailer were …			
Novel	0.88		
Unique	0.88		
Striking	0.92		
OFFLINE CHANNEL PERCEIVED NOVELTY		0.86	0.68
The physical shops of the retailer were …			
Novel	0.77		
Unique	0.82		
Striking	0.86		
ONLINE INSPIRED-BY		0.92	0.74
While using the online channels (website, social media, app) of the retailer …			
My imagination was stimulated.	0.82		
I was intrigued by a new idea.	0.80		
I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	0.93		
I discovered something new.	0.88		
OFFLINE INSPIRED-BY		0.87	0.63
While using the physical store of the retailer …			
My imagination was stimulated.	0.70		
I was intrigued by a new idea.	0.79		
I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	0.85		
I discovered something new.	0.83		
ONLINE INSPIRED-TO		0.93	0.86
While using the online channels (website, social media, app) of the retailer …			
I was inspired to buy something online.	0.90		
I felt a desire to buy something online.	0.94		
My interest to buy something online was increased.	0.94		
I was motivated to buy something online.	0.93		
OFFLINE INSPIRED-TO		0.96	0.77
While using the online channels (website, social media, app) of the retailer …			
I was inspired to buy something offline.	0.80		
I felt a desire to buy something offline.	0.86		
My interest to buy something offline was increased.	0.91		
I was motivated to buy something offline.	0.92		
ONLINE CHANNEL LOYALTY		0.89	0.73
How likely would you be to …			
Visit the retailer's online channels next time you need to purchase a similar product	0.84		
Consider the online channels of the retailer your first choice for shopping a similar product	0.83		
Recommend the physical stores of the retailer to friends and others	0.89		
OFFLINE CHANNEL LOYALTY		0.88	0.71
How likely would you be to …			
Visit the retailer's physical store next time you need to purchase a similar product	0.82		
Consider the physical store of the retailer your first choice for shopping a similar product	0.87		

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (*continued*)

ITEMS	Standardized loading	Cronbach alpha	AVE
Recommend the physical stores of the retailer to friends and others	0.83		
PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT		0.90	0.76
This product …			
means a lot to me.	0.86		
is important.	0.82		
is of concern to me.	0.93		

state in the same channel (standardised path coefficient: 0.59, $p < .001$). Following the chain of relationships, H5 and H6 were supported as, respectively, customer inspired-to offline was positively related to offline channel loyalty (standardised path coefficient: 0.61, $p < .001$) and customer inspired-to online was positively related to online channel loyalty (standardised path coefficient: 0.53, $p < .001$).

Cross-channel relationships were also observed. With reference to H7 and H8, customer inspired-by state in the offline channel was positively related to customer inspired-to state in the online channel (standardised path coefficient: 0.16, $p < .05$) and customer inspired-by state in the online channel was positively related to customer inspired-to state in the offline channel (standardised path coefficient: 0.27, $p < .001$). Customer inspired-to state in the offline channel was positively related to online channel loyalty (standardised path coefficient: 0.12, $p < .05$), while customer inspired-to state in the online channel was not positively related to offline channel loyalty (standardised path coefficient: 0.04, $p > .05$): H9 was supported but no support was found for H10. A summary of the support per each hypothesis is provided in Table 4.

5. Discussion

Marketing scholars and practitioners are increasingly directing their focus towards the significance of customer inspiration in engaging consumers. This study seeked to address a research gap by examining customer inspiration within the context of omnichannel retailing. Retailers transitioning to omnichannel are challenged with the task of achieving synergies from the integration of offline and online channels: this paper shows that inspiring customers across channels can be an

Table 4
Summary of support per each hypothesis.

Relationship	Support
H1: Offline channel perceived novelty - > Inspired-by offline	Yes
H2: Online channel perceived novelty - > Inspired-by online	Yes
H3: Inspired-by offline - > Inspired-to offline	Yes
H4: Inspired-by online - > Inspired-to online	Yes
H5: Inspired-to offline - > Offline channel loyalty	Yes
H6: Inspired-to online - > Online channel loyalty	Yes
H7: Inspired-by offline - > Inspired-to online	Yes
H8: Inspired-by online - > Inspired-to offline	Yes
H9: Inspired-to offline - > Online channel loyalty	Yes
H10: Inspired-to online - > Offline channel loyalty	No

Table 3
Discriminant validity results.

	$\sqrt{AVE}$	IN-BY_OFF	IN-BY_ON	IN-TO_OFF	IN-TO_ON	P_NOV_OFF	P_NOV_ON	LOY_OFF	LOY_ON
INS-BY_OFF	0.79								
INS-BY_ON	0.86	0.53							
INS-TO_OFF	0.87	0.55	0.42						
INS-TO_ON	0.93	0.32	0.51	0.17					
P_NOV_OFF	0.82	0.36	0.38	0.32	0.18				
P_NOV_ON	0.89	0.35	0.57	0.29	0.34	0.59			
LOY_OFF	0.84	0.25	0.23	0.45	0.10	0.36	0.29		
LOY_ON	0.88	0.23	0.45	0.18	0.42	0.30	0.52	0.37	
PROD_INV	0.87	0.19	0.25	0.22	0.13	0.21	0.19	0.10	0.16

Note: INS-BY_OFF=Offline inspired-by, INS-BY_ON=Online inspired-by, INS-TO_OFF=Offline inspired-by, INS_TO_ON= Online inspired-to, P_NOV_OFF=Offline channel perceived novelty, P_NOV_ON = online channel perceived novelty, LOY_OFF=Offline channel loyalty, LOY_ON=Online channel loyalty, PROD_INV=Product involvement.

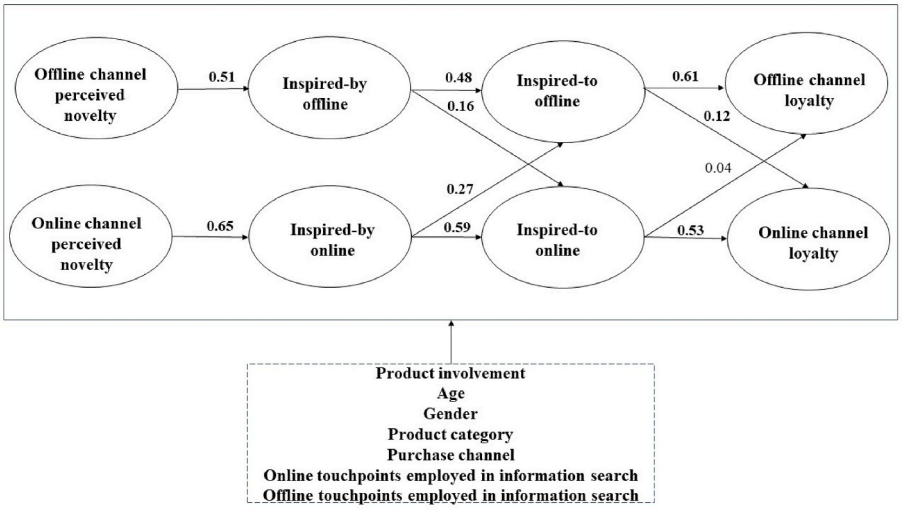

Fig. 2. Summary of results from the SEM Analysis
Standardised path coefficients are displayed in bold if they are significant at least the 0.05 level.

effective approach.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This paper has demonstrated the interest in understanding the novel construct of customer inspiration in the omnichannel retail context. Thus, the first contribution of our research is to extend the theoretical framework of customer inspiration to a new field. This means employing the inspired-by and inspired-to constructs proposed by Böttger et al. (2017) to capture customer inspiration in offline and online channels and uncovering new antecedents and outcomes.

Our research model is based on the customer inspiration framework (Böttger et al., 2017) complemented with the novelty categorization theory to show the role of perceived novelty as an antecedent of inspiration, and with the affect transfer theory to explain the cross-channel effects of inspiration states that can build channel loyalty. The inspired-by state is positively and strongly related to the inspired-to state within each channel (H3, H4) and the same occurs in the link between the inspired-to state and channel loyalty (H5, H6). Previous research has shown that customer inspiration is positively related to customer engagement behaviours in social media (Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2020) or in a hospitality context (Kwon and Boger, 2021), however, these positive consequences have not been examined in a retail channel context as our study does.

Novelty categorization theory (Förster et al., 2010) has proved to be a valid framework to understand how inspiration in both offline and online channel can be triggered by the perceived novelty of the channel. The processing of novel events or stimuli related to each channel can broaden mental categories and stimulate inspiration. In this respect, it was observed that the online channel plays a prominent role in inspiring shoppers. This could also be explained by the fact that online channels are relatively new compared to offline channels, so the processing of online stimuli might stimulate a more global processing style to incorporate new elements into existing knowledge, thus enabling a higher degree of customer inspiration. In this respect, the present study contributes to literature on customer inspiration by shedding light on the role of the perceived novelty of these channels as a key antecedent of customer inspiration across channels. Novelty categorization theory thus deserves to be considered when focusing on the antecedents of customer inspiration.

Affect transfer theory (Kim et al., 1998) supports our hypotheses related to the cross-channel effects of customer inspiration in omnichannel retailing. Our results show that being inspired by offline channels could bring shoppers to act online (H7) and, in the same vein, online inspired-by relates to offline inspired-to (H8), with the cross-channel effect of online customer inspiration once again playing a prominent role. These findings extend the affect transfer theory to the concept of inspiration in an omnichannel retail context. Therefore, when analyzing the transmission mechanism occurring between inspiration states, it is important to consider cross-channel dynamics to fully account for its potential. This finding mirrors spill-over effects that have been identified in the literature with reference to other variables, such as loyalty (Frasquet and Miquel, 2017) and trust (Badrinarayanan et al., 2012). Cross-channel effects are not limited between customer inspiration states, but they extend to loyalty, albeit not completely. As a matter of fact, the inspired-to state offline has a positive relationship with online channel loyalty (H9), while the contrary does not occur (H10). Thus, the results suggest that the inspired-to state occurring offline has a stronger relationship with offline and online channel loyalty. This can be probably explained by the fact that the shopping experience in offline channels involves more senses than online, resulting in a greater intention to undertake purchase behaviour and to re-patronage the store and the website. The fact that H10 is not supported, that is, the lack of transfer from the inspired-to online state and offline channel loyalty, can be explained by the characteristics of the online channel. In the inspired-to state the customer is inspired to actualize the idea stemming from the inspited-by state. This urge to act might be satisfied in a more immediate and convenient way in the online channel (e.g, via smartphones, at home), thus reducing the possibilities of the affect transfer occurring from the online channel to the offline channel: offline channel loyalty does not significantly increase. Therefore, the present study highlights that the context where inspiration occurs cannot be ignored and connects the stream of studies on cross-channel effects with the emerging concept of customer inspiration by highlighting the role of affect transfer mechanisms.

5.2. Managerial implications

The results obtained in this study have interesting implications for multichannel and omnichannel retailing. Firstly, retailers that wish to inspire their shoppers are called to re-design channels in order to increase the channel perceived novelty. This would be particularly important for all retailers that rely on a strong in-store and online shopping experience (e.g. LEGO). For instance, the increase in perceived novelty of a store or a website will be translated into higher customer inspiration offline and online, respectively. Retailers can consider redesigning their website and the content on their social media pages periodically or re-design certain areas of their stores every two or three week to increase the perception of novelty. This might have positive consequences in terms of loyalty and word of mouth.

Secondly, our study identifies that customer inspiration transfers across channels, highlighting the need for multichannel retailers to transition towards omnichannel retailing: inspiration can serve as a means for engaging shoppers in more than one channel, and thus obtain channel synergies. Omnichannel retailers can better take advantage of spill-over effects of inspiration across channels, as they can ensure a seamless experience that maximises the role of inspiration from one channel to another in a smooth process. This highlights the need for designing channels that are not only able to inspire but, by being integrated, allow for a seamless purchase process that can take advantage of the elicited inspiration.

A third managerial insight is related to the role of the store for e-commerce pure players. Evidence shows that the store could be a valuable source of customer inspiration that could also bring relevant benefits as far as online channel loyalty is concerned. Therefore, the present study supports and fosters the trend for e-commerce players to open temporary or flagship stores with the specific goal to leverage the synegies across channels in terms of customer inspiration.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

The present study is not without limitations. Firstly, a cross-sectional survey was conducted, which did not allow us to measure the timing of the transition between inspired-by and inspired-to states across channels and to provide conclusive evidence for causal effects among the identified constructs. Future studies should employ a longitudinal design or experimental methods to address the issue. Secondly, other variables in addition to channel perceived novelty might drive customer inspiration. Thirdly, we employed a channel level approach without distinguishing the temporal sequence of channel use for information search and purchase and specific touchpoints, namely a mobile app compared to a website. Fourthly, we focused specifically on customers that used both channels of the same retailers. We did not include possible sources of inspiration originating from other retailers or other touchpoints that fell outside of the control of the focal retailer. Future studies could incorporate other sources of inspiration and consider effects originating from other parties, such as competitors or influencers. More specifically, as our results did not support a positive influence of online inspiration in offline channel loyalty, it would be interesting to continue examining cross-channel effect of customer inspiration considering, for example, the moderating role of consumers' experience with online channels. Finally, the present study investigated a perception of novelty under

general circumstances, not specifically related to a recent channel redesign or introduction. It would be worthwhile determining whether there are specific circumstances, such as a channel introduction or restructuring, when channel perceived novelty could backfire, thus hampering customer inspiration.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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