

Extending the Role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System for an Omnichannel Customer Experience

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Abstract – Multi-channel model in business is gradually going through a transition into becoming an omnichannel model. The omnichannel approach allows retailers to drive sales and traffic, as well as integrate digital touchpoints for a seamless customer experience. The purpose of this research is to develop an omnichannel prototype by extending the current multi-channel CRM system used by a retail company. The prototype aims to improve customer experience and prevent repetition of complaints, inquiries, or service requests made by customers. A user acceptance test through the means of survey was conducted to assess the aspects of usability and validity of the omnichannel prototype, participated by both customers and employees of the retail company. Results reveal that positive usability score, standard deviation grouped around the mean and low-variance of the data distribution in the pilot and actual user testing are well-administered and dependable. The findings further demonstrate that the extended CRM successfully integrates multi-channel interaction platform to facilitate omni-channel interaction.

Keywords – multi-channel, omnichannel, CRM, customer experience, retail

I. INTRODUCTION

The internet and digital technologies have tremendously transformed the retailing landscape in the recent years. Online channels have become so influential in many sectors which resulted retailers at large to adopt multichannel strategies [1]. Literature suggests that multichannel retailing is gradually moving towards an omnichannel model in which the total integration of various platforms shapes the service interface and creates a seamless experience for the consumers [2]. Since its first appearance by [3], the omnichannel term has been referred

in academic literature in recent years appearing as the main or a supportive subject of several studies.

Omnichannel retailing aims to address the limitations of a multichannel approach by coordinating processes and technologies across all channels, to provide seamless, consistent and more reliable services for consumers [4] provided by the retailers. Moreover, the omnichannel system assures maximum information availability, visibility and consistency across multiple channels [5]. This provides various benefits such as total sales growth, cost saving, extended trust, synergy, and differentiation through value-added service [6-8]. In reality, omnichannel presents the retailer with the opportunity to make the experience so smooth that the customer wants to keep coming back. It is also the next step from multi-channel to achieve a seamless customer experience at the same time elevate employee experience and service.

To overcome the limitations of a multi-channel approach, an omnichannel framework was formed through comprehensive interpretation of research [9]. This study proposes and develops a prototype of system enhancements for a retail business. In response to that, this study extends the omnichannel framework [9] by developing an omnichannel prototype that has the main focus of providing customers with a better experience. Two online surveys for customers and employees are carried out to collect their feedbacks of the improvements made in the system, to determine whether an omnichannel model enhances the company's overall customer experience.

The structure of this paper is organised in various sections, as follows. First, literature is reviewed, followed by design principles, methodology and results. Lastly a discussion of the research, implications, limitations followed by future research directions is presented.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

A. *Multi-channel*

The multi-channel approach of a business strategy was the foundation that this paper aimed to ameliorate through omnichannel strategy. Multi-channel is defined as the design, deployment, coordination, and evaluation of different channels to increase customer value through customer interactions [10]. The main focus of a multi-channel retailing interaction strategy is handling and enhancement of each existing channel's performance. However, this approach seems to lack the integration aspect, making it incapable of delivering a seamless customer experience [11].

B. *Omnichannel*

A seamless customer experience is the key goal of an omnichannel strategy. Verhoef et.al. [12] particularly stated that omnichannel retailing aims to attend to the limitations of the multi-channel strategy to provide consumers with seamless, consistent, and more reliable services. This is achieved through maximum information availability, visibility, and reliability across all channels with the objective to improve a company's current system that is set on a multi-channel approach.

C. *Customer Relationship Management (CRM)*

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System is a system that manages a company's relationship and interaction with customers and potential customers, helping the company to remain connection, streamline processes, and improve profit [13]. When it was first introduced, it suffered before soaring in various industries. Rigby and Ledingham [14] stated that CRM was successful only when companies started applying them in a more disciplined manner; where and when they are needed. There are seven factors that bring about the failure of CRM, according to [15] perceiving CRM as a technology inventiveness, losing the sense of a customer-centric concept, unable to grasp customer lifetime value, lacking of management support, underrating the role of change management, lacking the effort to revise the business processes, and miscalculating the complexity of data mining and data integration.

According to Houda Khelif and Rim Jallouli [16], the CRM successful factors are customer orientation, system quality, customer satisfaction and business profitability. Shanmugam et al. [9] highlighted the technological factors and customer engagement factors of successful omnichannel system. Addressing the two interrelated concepts' comparison (i.e. system quality vs technological factors and customer satisfaction vs customer engagement factors), CRM successful factors complements an omnichannel system. This is because the technology used in the omnichannel system must meet certain qualities while at the same time the ultimate goal of customer

engagement is to gain customer satisfaction that eventually leads to customer retention. It is deduced that the CRM system that the retail company utilizes already possesses some omnichannel factors, including technological factors such as centralized database, security requirements, wireless networking, front office system, back-office system, and data warehouse; and customer engagement factors like breadth of channel choice and channel service awareness.

The omnichannel strategy framework [9] does contain more technological and customer engagement factors that the current CRM system lacks. This study aims to enhance the existing factors in the CRM system while also filling in the gaps through technological aspects (AI-assisted communication & fully integrated channel), and customer engagement aspects (content consistency & process consistency). The retail company's system although apt, could still use an improvement when it comes to providing the best customer experience. The issue at hand was the fact that customers were often required to repeat their complaints/service requests/enquiries on different channels. Hence, in the attempt to resolve this issue, this study implemented the omnichannel strategy into the retail company's current CRM system, in which a prototype was developed after thorough observations, inquiries, analyses, and discussions.

III. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

A. *System Architecture*

The system architecture for the omnichannel CRM is based on three-tier architecture. Three-tier is a client-server architecture in which the Presentation Layer, Application Layer and the Data Layer are maintained independently. In a web-based application, the presentation layer is content rendered by the browser. For omnichannel CRM, the content is generated both statically and dynamically depending on the functions. Figure 1 illustrates the three-tier architecture of omnichannel CRM. The presentation layer is the user interface of the application. Users of the omnichannel CRM can access the application through the web browser on their computer. The web browser supports HyperText Markup Language (HTML).

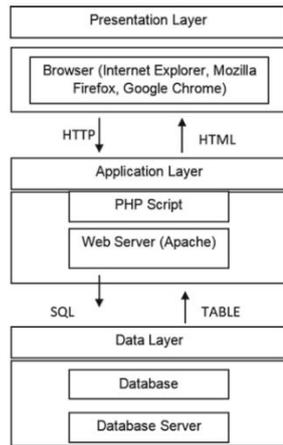


Figure 1. Three Layer Architecture

B. Software Design

The use case diagram represents the specific flow of events in the prototype. For omnichannel CRM, the main actor is the agent. An agent is a customer service executive who is responsible for managing customer feedbacks on the front end. Figure 2 shows the use case diagram for omnichannel CRM. Users of omnichannel CRM are able to login, view customer profile/history, update customer via sms/email, view customer details, view feedback submissions, access 360 degree fact sheet, and agent inbox.

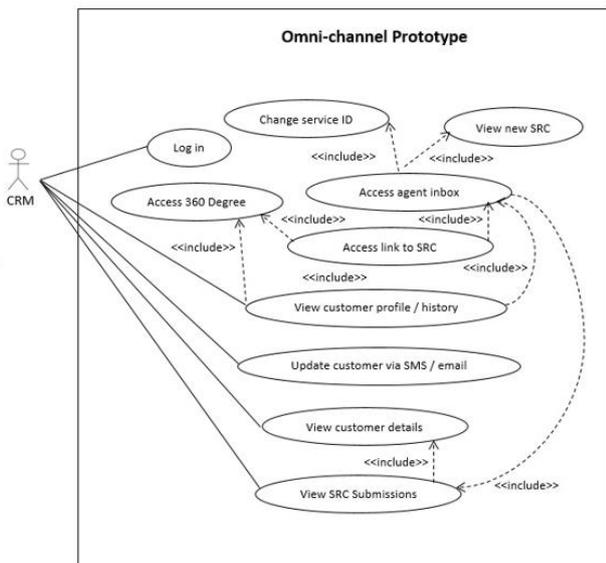


Figure 2. Use Case Diagram

C. Technology Platform

As per the requirements of omnichannel CRM, it requires a web server which accepts the HTTP requests from the web browser. For that purpose, the Apache web server was used. The XAMPP tool was used to setup a web server locally. XAMPP is a free and open-source cross-platform web server solution stack package consisting mainly of the Apache HTTP Server, MySQL database and interpreters for scripts written in the PHP and PERL programming languages. A database engine is required to store the

information related to omnichannel CRM. The MySQL database engine was used for the development of omnichannel CRM because it is highly compatible with Apache server. The tool used for the development of web pages of omnichannel CRM is Notepad++. As Notepad++ is open source, easy to use, fast and customizable, it is a good choice for developing web pages. In addition, HTML5, CSS and JavaScript were used for developing the graphical user interface.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A series of pilot user testing and actual testing were conducted on the retail company’s employees and customers. Faulkner [17] highlighted that original user-interface designs often expose glaring errors promptly and need less participation. The respondents are customers and employees of the retail company who come from various departments. The actual usability test survey was conducted on ten (10) customers and eight (8) employees. Prior to that, three (3) employees were involved in the pilot testing. This phase is necessary for face and content validation. The improved prototype was demonstrated to the participants prior to the survey. The participants were then provided with the links to the current system, prototype, and survey. They were given the chance to explore and observe the improvements made in the current system before proceeding to answer the online survey that requested on their experience and feedback on said enhancements.

Aforementioned, the usability test survey was divided into two parts: Customers’ and Employees’. The aim of customer user testing and employee user testing are to test whether the omnichannel prototype is usable and valid. The online survey given to the retail company’s customers asked for their perspective on the improvisation made to both the ‘submit feedback form’ in the retail company’s website and ‘submit new enquiry’ in the company’s portal. On the other hand, the employees’ usability tests were also divided into two parts: pilot testing, tested by 3 respondents; and actual testing, tested by 8 respondents. The employee survey focused on all the enhancements made to the CRM page for agents and the users were asked to answer whether the enhancements fix the limitations addressed.

The questions in the usability test form are initially pilot tested by 3 employees from the retail company and were found to be well-structured and comprehensible. An actual testing was then conducted on said company’s 8 employees. The data extracted from the online survey was analyzed using existing instrument to measure the usability and validity of the proposed omnichannel prototype namely Usefulness, Satisfaction, and Ease of use Questionnaire (USE) and Computer System Usability Questionnaire (CSUQ). The demographic profiles of the respondents involved in the usability test survey is shown in Table 1-3.

Table 1. Demographic profiles of the user testing survey respondents (customer)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	50.0
Female	5	50.0
Age		
31-40 years old	7	70.0
41-60 years old	3	30.0
Race		
Malay	5	50.0
Indian	5	50.0

Table 2. Demographic profiles of the pilot survey respondent (employee)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	3	100.0
Age		
31-40 years old	3	100.0
Race		
Malay	3	100.0
Previous Designation		
Telephone service	3	100.0
Current Designation		
Telephone service	3	100.0

Table 3. Demographic profiles of the actual testing survey respondents (employee)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	62.5
Female	3	37.5
Age		
31-40 years old	6	75.0
41-60 years old	2	25.0
Race		
Malay	4	37.5
Indian	6	62.5
Previous Designation		
ICT	1	12.5
Retail strategy	1	12.5
Telephone service	2	25.0
Retail operation	4	50.0
Current Designation		
Customer Experience	1	12.5
Physical store	1	12.5
Telephone service	4	50.0
Energy Experience Centre	2	25.0

V. RESULTS

A. Prototype

The respondents were asked to execute three items in this phase which were: (i) all respondents were instructed to watch a demonstration video of the improvements made in the system, (ii) to perform testing on the prototype, and (iii)

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to click on the survey link and complete the online survey form based on their experience using the prototype.

The research constructed the user acceptance test to measure the user experience and satisfaction in using the improved prototype. The Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use (PUEU) instruments was the guideline that the online survey was based off. A descriptive analysis was carried out using SPSS to observe the PUEU test. Each item in the survey was provided with a scale of 5, 1 being ‘Strongly disagree’ and 5 being ‘Strongly agree’. Items rated with scale 4, which denotes ‘Agree’ and scale 5 which denotes ‘Strongly Agree’ prove that those items are measured highly useful.

The agreeable level of respondents using the given Likert scale is the dimension observed to determine the perceived usefulness and ease of use of the prototype. The five-point Likert scale is a suggestion of the level of agreement on a agree-disagree gauge. Many types of benchmarks are used to judge the level of agreement obtained for Likert scale scores however literature suggest that an average score of 75% is rated as high usability [18,19]. For the purpose of this research, a threshold value of 75% is therefore used as a benchmark.

B. Usability Test Survey

a) Customer User Testing

The participants involved in the user testing sessions rated the system’s usability positively. The USE and CSUQ scores obtained from the responses of ten (10) respondents for the entire eight (8) evaluation questions surpasses the average score of 75% which signify a high overall usability of the system. Figure 3 illustrates the mean scores obtained by all eight items. The average mean scores for all items are above 4 (agree) showing that the overall participants agree with the system’s usefulness, satisfaction and ease of use as well as computer system usability.

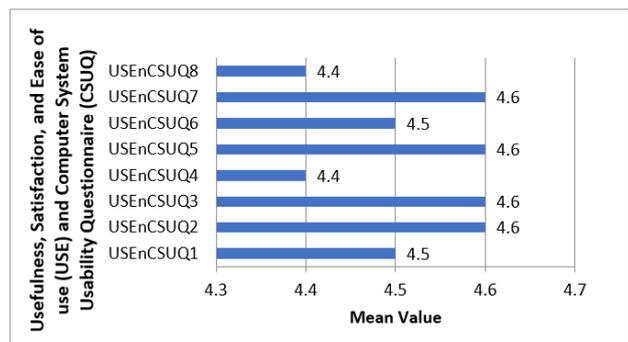


Figure 3. The mean value for USE and CSUQ

Figure 4 depicts the standard deviation whereby the scores of all eight items are closely gathered around the mean value indicating the data is well-dispersed and reliable.

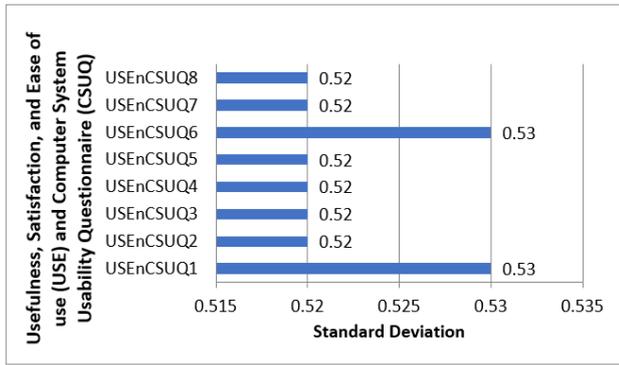


Figure 4. The standard deviation for USE and CSUQ

The distribution of the data is considered as low-variance. The coefficient of variation (CV) is calculated by dividing the scores of the standard deviation and mean value. The CV for the eight evaluated items can be seen in Table 4. It can be concluded that the distribution of data for user testing are well-distributed considering the entire eight items' CV score are less than 1.

Table 4. The coefficient of variation for USE and CSUQ

Items	CV
USEnCSUQ1	0.12
USEnCSUQ2	0.11
USEnCSUQ3	0.11
USEnCSUQ4	0.12
USEnCSUQ5	0.11
USEnCSUQ6	0.12
USEnCSUQ7	0.11
USEnCSUQ8	0.12

b) Employee Pilot Testing

The participants involved in the pilot testing rated the system's usability optimistically. The USE and CSUQ scores obtained from the responses of three (3) respondents for the entire 37 evaluation questions surpasses the average score of 75% which signify a high overall usability of the system. Figure 5 illustrates the mean scores obtained by all 37 items. The average mean scores for all items are above 4 (agree) showing that most of the participants agree with the system's usefulness, satisfaction and ease of use as well as its usability.

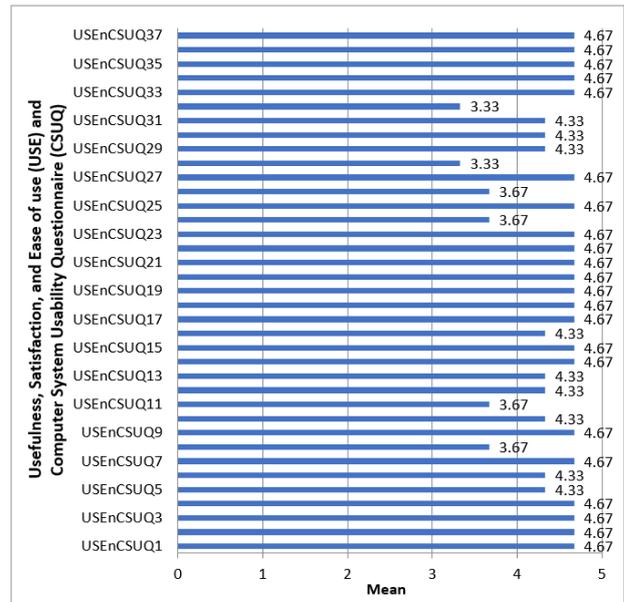


Figure 5. The mean value for USE and CSUQ

The standard deviation for all 37 items are 0.058 indicating that each data set has the same average distance from the mean of the whole data set despite the data set taken separate data and were used to compare with the mean value. Nevertheless, it points toward the data of the pilot testing is well-structured and comprehensive as the standard deviation is close to zero. The CV for all 37 evaluated items for the pilot testing are well-dispersed around the mean value as all items' CV score are less than 1.

c) Employee Actual Testing

The participants involved in the actual testing rated the system's usability positively. The USE and CSUQ scores obtained from the responses of eight (8) respondents for the entire 37 evaluation questions surpasses the average score of 75% which signify a high overall usability of the system. Figure 6 illustrates the mean scores obtained by all 37 items. The average mean scores for all items are above 4 (agree) showing that most of the participants agree with the system's usefulness, satisfaction and ease of use as well as computer system usability.

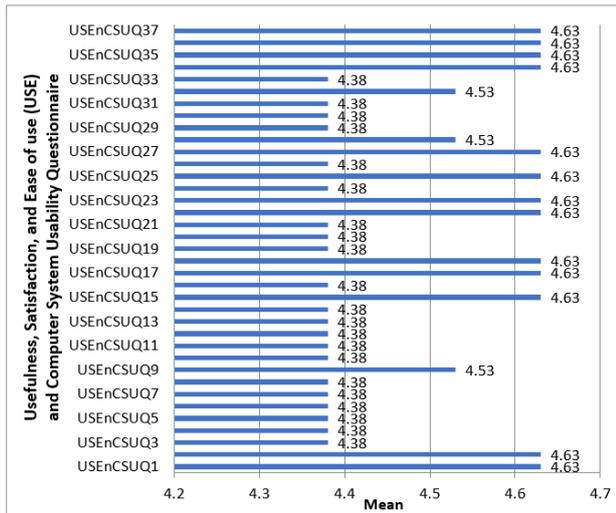


Figure 6. The mean value for USE and CSUQ

Figure 7 depicts the standard deviation whereby the scores of 37 items are clustered around the mean value showing that the data of the actual testing is well-distributed and consistent.

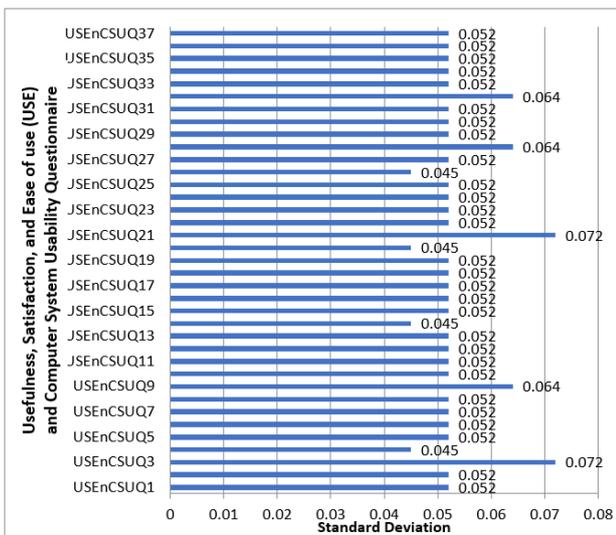


Figure 7. The standard deviation for USE and CSUQ

The CV for the 37 evaluated items can be seen in Table 5. It can be concluded that the distribution of data for the actual testing are well-spread around the mean value since every item's CV score are less than 1.

Table 5. The coefficient of variation for USE and CSUQ

Items	CV
USEnCSUQ1	0.012
USEnCSUQ2	0.012
USEnCSUQ3	0.016
USEnCSUQ4	0.010
USEnCSUQ5	0.012
USEnCSUQ6	0.012
USEnCSUQ7	0.012
USEnCSUQ8	0.012
USEnCSUQ9	0.014
USEnCSUQ10	0.012
USEnCSUQ11	0.012
USEnCSUQ12	0.012
USEnCSUQ13	0.012
USEnCSUQ14	0.010
USEnCSUQ15	0.012
USEnCSUQ16	0.012
USEnCSUQ17	0.012
USEnCSUQ18	0.012
USEnCSUQ19	0.012
USEnCSUQ20	0.010
USEnCSUQ21	0.016
USEnCSUQ22	0.012
USEnCSUQ23	0.012
USEnCSUQ24	0.012
USEnCSUQ25	0.012
USEnCSUQ26	0.010
USEnCSUQ27	0.012
USEnCSUQ28	0.014
USEnCSUQ29	0.012
USEnCSUQ30	0.012
USEnCSUQ31	0.012
USEnCSUQ32	0.014
USEnCSUQ33	0.012
USEnCSUQ34	0.012
USEnCSUQ35	0.012
USEnCSUQ36	0.012
USEnCSUQ37	0.012

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present study is to improve customer experience and prevent repetitive complaints, inquiries, or service requests which is currently present using the multi-channel interaction platform. The authors addressed these gaps by developing an omnichannel prototype which extends the current functions within the CRM system used at the retail company. The enhancements include add-ons of tagging for feedback categories and related units on the retail company's official website and portal, a CRM overview that summarizes all service requests, complaints and enquiries data in Agent Inbox and 360 Degree Fact Sheet, a link for new complaint page whenever service type is changed in Agent Inbox, staff access to customer's details and historical logs, access to branch that deals with customer complaints in CRM, a reminder system to remind agents of unattended cases and the remaining days to meet service level agreement (SLA) and an omni-channel database. Additionally, the added function of the agent view allows the retail company's employees to have a comprehensive outlook on the types of feedback tabs. The improvements made creates a seamless customer journey as customers' are no longer required to repeat their complaints, inquiries and/or service requests. Besides, employees greatly benefit from the enhancements as they

are quicker at serving their customers which increases productivity.

In a recent research, the authors had come up with an omnichannel strategy framework which was reviewed by 5 expert reviewers from social commerce domain. The framework served as a guideline for both researchers and practitioners on the important factors required for ensuring successful implementation of an omnichannel system. Subsequently, an omnichannel prototype is developed to validate and test the framework's efficacy. The prototype is an improved version of the current CRM system that the retail company is currently employing. The researchers concentrated on delivering a more customer and employee-friendly system by taking in measures to avoid data input repetition. The Apache web server alongside XAMPP, Notepad++, HTML5, CSS and JavaScript were used in the development of the omnichannel CRM.

Findings from the deployment of the prototype to 10 customer responses are positive, while all 11 employee responses are optimistic. All three groups of respondents (user test survey, pilot & actual testing for employee) perceived the improvements made in the prototype as useful. The result of the study indicates that the CRM successful factors complement the omnichannel system. Results further revealed that the data distribution for both user testing and actual testing are well-circulated and trustworthy. This is because of the positive usability score, standard deviation clustered around the mean value and low-variance of the data distribution for all three tests. The allocation of the data is considered low-variance when the coefficient of variation (CV) is lower than 1 ($CV < 1$). In addition, the quality of the current CRM provides a seamless effect that can be applied in both front and back offices as the system incorporates customer-oriented activities and organizes reporting and compliancy activities (e.g invoicing, cashflow management, etc.). A successful implementation of an omnichannel CRM system helps increase employee efficiency as less data error occurs when the amount of human intervention rate is reduced.

An extended and improved CRM system allows employees to serve customers better. By providing customers with a more detailed feedback options, employees also get to have a better understanding of the issues that customers are facing. Furthermore, an omnichannel strategy that enforces consistency through information visibility and reliability ensures that employees receive the correct data with ease within the system. As important as an external comprehensive system, a system that is integrated internally plays a rather significant role in warranting a high satisfaction score. With numerous new methods to run a company and how they interact with their customers, it is most critical to provide more footing in regards to the claims made about the advantages of an omnichannel strategy. Thus, the present study makes its contributions in strengthening those claims. In order to increase customer satisfaction, companies must look into their ways of interacting with their customers, both externally and internally – especially when the interactions are done through an online system.

In the case of the retail company in this study, the effort to improve customer satisfaction rate is done by adopting an omnichannel approach into their current CRM system that aims to lessen data error, repeated entries, and misinformation.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

As much as the findings of this paper do strengthen the significance of an omnichannel model, a number of limitations throughout the whole process can be outlined. First of all, the omnichannel prototype was developed based on findings from literatures that were mostly related to the retail industry. The opportunity of the paper was also restricted due to Covid-19, where inputs were unable to be gathered in a more ideal and encouraging setting. Therefore, future research should consider vaster industry options when making comparison and looking for its foundation, and a more competent environment that cultivates better discussions and inputs. Lastly, the omnichannel prototype which is an extension to the CRM currently in use should further be tested in other circumstances and companies to further prove its validity and reliability.

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