

Consumer behaviour in multi-channel-retailing – how do consumers use the channels of a multi-channel-retailer during the buying process?

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Abstract

This research into the buying behavior of the customers of a German multi-channel retailer that operates in store as well as non-store channels shows that the customers use the channels that best satisfy their shopping motives in each situation. Based on exploratory qualitative and quantitative research, this study identifies five shopping motives: “recreational orientation”, “convenience orientation”, “independence orientation”, “delivery-related risk aversion” and “product- and payment-related risk aversion”. Single-channel users of non-store channels look for convenience and strive for independence. In the store channel examined in this study, single-channel users primarily look to satisfy emotional and social needs. Multi-channel users, who obtain their information from the online-shop and then make their purchase in the chain store, are combining the independence of online-shop information with the reduction of risks associated with buying products in the chain store.

Keywords: multi-channel retailing, shopping motives, convenience orientation, recreational orientation

1 INTRODUCTION

Successful high street retailers are increasingly adopting multi-channel distribution strategies. They sell not only in stores but also through Internet (www) and other electronic devices or catalogs, seeking to target different consumers. By adopting a multi-channel distribution strategy and simultaneously offering customers different channels for alternative utilization they try to satisfy the distinct customers' needs in particular situations (Alba et al. 1997; Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon 2002).

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Previous research on customer behavior in the multi-channel arena has neither properly differentiated between the stages of the buying process, nor broken down the investigation of shopping motives, nor analyzed any patterns of behavior. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap through examining the behavior of the customers of a multi-channel retailer. This study reveals how customers use the channels of a multi-channel retailer during the buying process, which patterns of behavior can be identified, and which shopping motives can explain the various behaviors. This study has focused on the "information prior to purchase" and "purchase" stages. The basic patterns of behavior that come into consideration are the use of **several channels** and the use of a **single channel** for information and purchasing. The objects of the research are the customers of a retail enterprise in Germany, which offers its goods through store and two channels. Each channel offers customers the possibility to obtain information and make a purchase.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study examines the retail patronage decision process, paying particular attention to shopping motives. The cognitive paradigms of buying behavior theories regard purchase decisions as problem-solving processes with multiple stages. Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1995) differentiate between five stages: need recognition, search for information and information processing, pre-purchase alternative evaluation, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation. Depending on product category, personal characteristics and situational factors, a purchaser runs through these stages to differing degrees of intensity. A customer of a multi-channel retailer can use either the same channel, or different channels, for each stage of the buying process. The result is a combination of different channels, or the choice of a single channel, for conducting the buying process. The customers are divided up according to the channel, in which they seek the information, and the channel, in which they make the purchase. Single-channel users seek information and make their purchase in the same channel, while multi-channel users use two channels.

Sheth (1983) states that, within the context of a buying process, the customer compares the characteristics of a retail outlet with his/her shopping motives and chooses the retail outlet that best matches his/her needs. Shopping motives are "forces instigating behavior to satisfy internal need states" (Westbrook & Black 1985 p. 89). Gröppel (1993) uses the example of

furniture retailing to empirically establish that different types of store-based retail outlets satisfy different shopping motives. Transferring this concept to the sales channels of a multi-channel retailer, we could say that shopping motives determine whether the customer seeks information on a product in one channel and then buys the product in the same channel, or whether he/she spreads these activities over two channels.

In our preliminary work, i.e. literature review and explorative research (focus groups and one-on-one interviews) four shopping motives emerged as having a key role in the channel choice: “recreational orientation”, “convenience orientation”, “independence orientation”, “delivery-related risk aversion” and “product- and payment-related risk aversion”.

The **recreational orientation** motive refers to those aspects of shopping that go beyond the mere acquisition of goods and that lead to enjoyment and pleasure (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Babin, Darden & Griffin 1994; Arnold & Reynolds 2003). These include the emotional and social need for an interesting, enjoyable shopping experience, as well as social interaction with other customers, friends, acquaintances and sales staff (Jones 1999; Bellenger & Koargonkar 1980). Against this backdrop, most authors assume that the multi-sensual approach and the possibility for social interaction offered by store channels improve their ability to satisfy the recreational orientation motive than the non-store channels (Darian 1987; Diehl 2002).

The **convenience orientation** characterizes customers, who regard shopping as a rational problem-solving process. To these customers it is important to acquire the sought-after product with a minimum investment of time, physical effort, and mental effort. The specialist literature contains a wealth of definitions and types of convenience (for an overview, see Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist 2002). For customers that place convenience orientation in the foreground, the non-store channels (mail-order catalog, online-shop) might be superior to the store channels. The fact that they are easier to access means that they provide an opportunity to save time and energy (Akaah, Korgaonkar & Lund 1995; Li, Kuo & Russell 1999; Diehl 2002). In addition, it is easier to obtain information on other products and suppliers (at least on the Internet).

The **striving for independence** describes the customer's need to be able to shop free from external constraints, 24 hours a day and seven days a week, if they so wish, regardless of the retailer's location (Eastlick & Feinberg 1999; Darian 1987). Other authors characterize this motive as being another facet of the convenience motive: time-related independence is

designated as "schedule convenience" and independence relating to the shopping location is designated as "place convenience" (Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist 2002). We view independence as an aspect in its own right, since, in contrast to other convenience criteria, it covers the distinctive features of non-store retailing. Lingenfelder & Loevenich (2001) come to a similar conclusion in their analysis of online shoppers. We assume that customers use non-store channels if they strive for independence when shopping and seek the opportunity to obtain information and make purchases at any time and in any place.

The **risk aversion** motive refers to perceived risk, i.e. customer uncertainty as to the negative consequences of a purchase and the significance of these consequences. In non-store retailing, perceived risk is felt to be one of the most important barriers to purchasing (van den Poel & Leunis 1999; Bauer, Fischer & Sauer 2000; Schröder 2001; Ben-Ur & Winfield 2002). Baisch (1993) lists four types of risk factors. Product-related risks stem from the fact that the customer is not able to physically examine the goods and must instead rely on the illustration and the information provided by the seller. Delivery-related risks stem from the fact that the customer has no influence on the delivery process, e.g. on the delivery time, and on the correctness, completeness and quality of the delivery. As far as payment-related risks are concerned, the literature places a particular emphasis on the dangers of credit card misuse. After-sales risks refer to the inadequate performance or non-fulfillment of services required in the post-purchase period, such as warranties, exchanges and repairs, for example. Customers who are less inclined to shy away from these risks will prefer the non-store channels of a multi-channel retailer.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper presents the analysis of a case study concerning a retail enterprise in Germany, which offers its goods through store and non-store channels. The company's store-based retail outlets comprise chain stores and store-in-store-systems. We focus in this research on the chain stores. The non-store channels comprise a mail-order catalog and an online shop. The firm's merchandise selection features apparel (women, men and children), house wares, kitchen and gardening items, consumer electronics, office and school products, toys, etc. The market approach is, to a large extent, identical across all the channels: they all share common pricing, service, communication policies and store branding. A new range is offered each week, with only small differences between the channels. The **chain stores** have sales staff;

they are sited on high street locations and shopping centers, as well as in other heavily frequented locations, and some of these stores have coffee bars. The **online-shop** and the **catalog** offer the same range of goods as the chain stores. Orders from the catalog can be submitted by telephone (toll number, 24/7), letter or fax. The customer pays a €3.95 shipping charge per delivery. Delivery time is approximately one week.

As a preliminary investigation, 36 customers of the considered retailer business took part in four focus groups, and 30 customers took part in one-on-one interviews. The aim was to discover which shopping motives could be relevant to the shopping behavior witnessed for the multi-channel retailer. On the basis of the pertinent literature and the results of the preliminary investigation, the shopping motives construct was operationalized. Furthermore, a pre-test was conducted with 20 participants in order to check and improve the understandability of the questions and the viability of the questionnaire.

The main research was conducted as a telephone survey. The sampling frame was drawn randomly from the retailer's customer database. The standardized questionnaire consisted of two subject areas. The first subject area contained statements on the shopping motives (using a scale from one to five, where one indicates "Applies completely" and five indicates "Does not apply at all"). The second subject area dealt with questions relating to the use of the channels of the considered retailer. For a recent buying process, the respondents were asked to state the channel, in which they had bought the item, and also to state the channel, in which they obtained information on the item beforehand. Finally, the respondents were asked for socio-demographic information: age, gender, education, profession, income, household size, number of children, and size of residence. By the end of the telephone survey, we had obtained answers suitable for evaluation from 525 customers. In the sampling 80 percent of the respondents were women and the average age was 46.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

Shopping Motives

The 21 statements on shopping motives were subjected to exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring and varimax rotation with the scree test criterion used to identify the number of factors to extract. Five factors emerge that can be assigned to the motives "recreational orientation", "convenience orientation", "independence orientation" and "risk

aversion", with the two dimensions of "delivery-related risks" and "product-related and payment-related risks". Only items exhibiting factor loadings of 0.45 or greater were selected. Fig. 1 shows the factor structure of the shopping motives and the reliability coefficients.

Fig. 1: Factor structure of shopping motives

	Factor loadings	Cronbach Alpha^c
Recreational Orientation		0.7
Fun and enjoyment of shopping	0.773	
Contact with people	0.769	
Meeting friends	0.603	
Conversations with sales staff	0.584	
Keeping up-to-date with new things	0.495	
Shopping as a leisure activity ^a	0.494	
RA1: Risk Aversion / Delivery		0.8
Failure to deliver goods	0.807	
Incorrect delivery of goods	0.760	
Mistake on invoice	0.741	
Goods delivered too late	0.625	
Convenience Orientation		0.7
Spending less time on shopping	0.725	
Wanting to buy something specific	0.686	
Clear conception of the purchase	0.645	
Avoiding long journeys for shopping	0.503	
Combining several shopping trips	0.494	
Shopping as a leisure activity ^a	-0.478	
Shopping as stress ^b	0.412	
RA2: Risk Aversion / Product and Payment		0.6
Product is unsuitable	0.801	
Product doesn't match illustration	0.763	
Will not disclose credit card number on the Internet	0.565	
Independence Orientation		0.5
Shopping from home	0.766	
Shopping around the clock	0.760	
Principal axis factoring with varimax rotation. KMO measure of sampling adequacy = 0.75; Cumulative explanation of variance = 51.80%		
a loads on two factors to approximately the same degree (high cross loadings)		
b not taken into account in calculating the factor average		
c In many places in the pertinent literature, it is recommended that Cronbach alpha should have a minimum value of 0.7. Since a high number of indicators has a positive influence on the reliability coefficients, values of 0.5 and 0.6 for constructs with two or three indicators, respectively, do not seem unacceptable (Nunnally 1978 p. 245).		

Empirically Relevant Patterns of Behavior and Description of Customer Groups

The customers are divided up according to the channel, which they use for information and purchasing purposes during a buying process. In the overall sample survey of n = 525, **single-channel users** dominate. They are found in all channels. In the case of **two-channel users**, the combination of "information in online-shop" and "purchase in chain store" dominates. The multi-channel combination "information in a store channel" and "purchase in a non-store channel" plays a minor role with a figure of approx. two percent. Only 287 customers from the sample use the three pertinent channels and the groups have statistically relevant sizes (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Customer groups in the sample survey of the multi-channel retailer

Number of Channels Used (Type)	Combination of Channels for <u>Information + Purchase</u>	Number of People
1 (store)	CS + CS	157
1 (non-store)	CT + CT	59
1 (non-store)	ON + ON	40
2 (store for Information + non-store for Purchase)	ON + CS	31
Further usage patterns not relevant for this study		238
Total		525

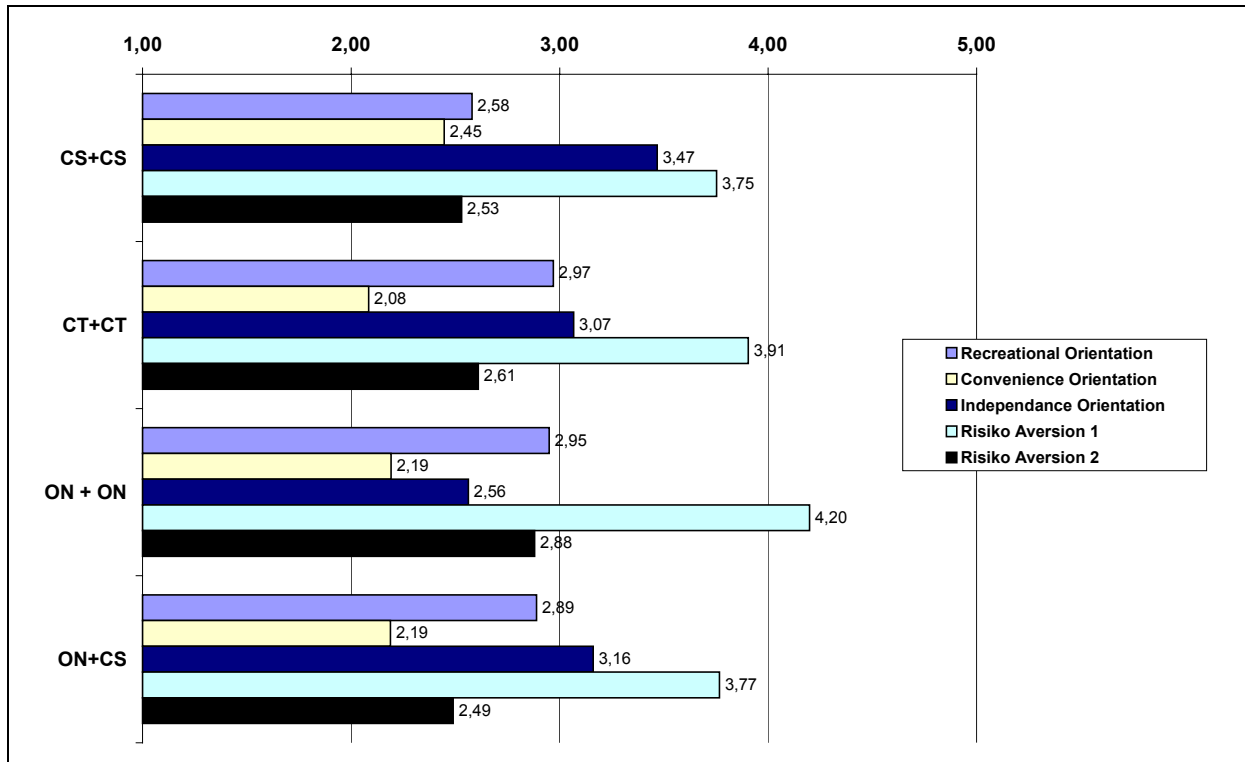
CS = Chain Stores, ON = Online-shop, CT = Catalog

(CS + CS): customers who use the chain store channel to seek information and to make the purchase

(ON+CS): customers who use the online-shop to seek information and the chain store to make the purchase

Fig. 3 specifies the four relevant customer groups based on the five shopping motivesⁱ. Since the shopping motives are measured using the same scale (one to five), the picture also provides information on the motives' ranking within a customer group. With the exception of the (ON+ON) customer group, the same shopping motive ranking applies to all the other groups: convenience orientation ahead of product-related and payment-related risk aversion, recreational orientation, independence and delivery-related risk aversion. Although convenience orientation also takes first place in the (ON+ON) customer group, it is followed in this case by the motive of independence, which is most heavily pronounced in comparison to the other customer groups (Average = 2.56). This shopping motive appears to counterbalance the product-related and payment-related risk aversion and, above all, the delivery-related risk aversion.

Fig. 3: Specification of customer groups according to shopping motives



Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

CS = Chain Stores, ON = Online-shop, CT = Catalog

(CS + CS): customers who use the chain store channel to seek information and to make the purchase

(ON+CS): customers who use the online-shop to seek information and the chain store to make the purchase

Comparison of Customer Groups

The individual customer groups (patterns of behavior) can now be examined with regard to whether they differ significantly in terms of the shopping motives. To check this, the average differences between the customer groups were subjected to a two-sided t-test (Fig. 4 shows the results of the significance test). The main findings of the research are:

1. The individual customer groups differ significantly in terms of shopping motives. The **shopping motives** vary, firstly, between the non-store oriented behaviors (CT+CT, ON+ON) and, secondly, between the customer groups that exclusively use a store or non-store channel. One example of motivational differences within the non-store channels: (ON+ON) customers are more motivated to use the channel by their striving for independence than (CT+CT) customers, and (ON+ON) customers also have a lower delivery-related risk aversion.

Fig. 4: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their shopping motives

Customer Group	CT+CT (n = 59)		ON+ON (n = 40)		ON+CS (n = 31)	
CS+CS (n = 157)	R	***	R	**	R	**
	C	**	C	**	C	*
	I	**	I	***	I	n.s.
	RA1	n.s.	RA1	**	RA1	n.s.
	RA2	n.s.	RA2	**	RA2	n.s.
CT+CT (n = 59)			R	n.s.	R	n.s.
			C	n.s.	C	n.s.
			I	**	I	n.s.
			RA1	*	RA1	n.s.
			RA2	n.s.	RA2	n.s.
ON+ON (n = 40)					R	n.s.
					C	n.s.
					I	**
					RA1	**
					RA2	*

R = recreational orientation, C = convenience orientation, I = independence, RA1 = delivery-related risk aversion, RA2 = product-related and payment-related risk aversion

*** significant at p < .01 level
 ** significant at p < .05 level
 * significant at p < .10 level
 n.s. not significant

CS = Chain Stores, ON = Online-shop, CT = Catalog

(CS + CS): customers who use the chain store channel to seek information and to make the purchase

(ON+CS): customers who use the online-shop to seek information and the chain store to make the purchase

2. The **recreational orientation** is significantly more pronounced for the store-based customer group (CS+CS), than for the non-store retailing formats (see Fig. 5).

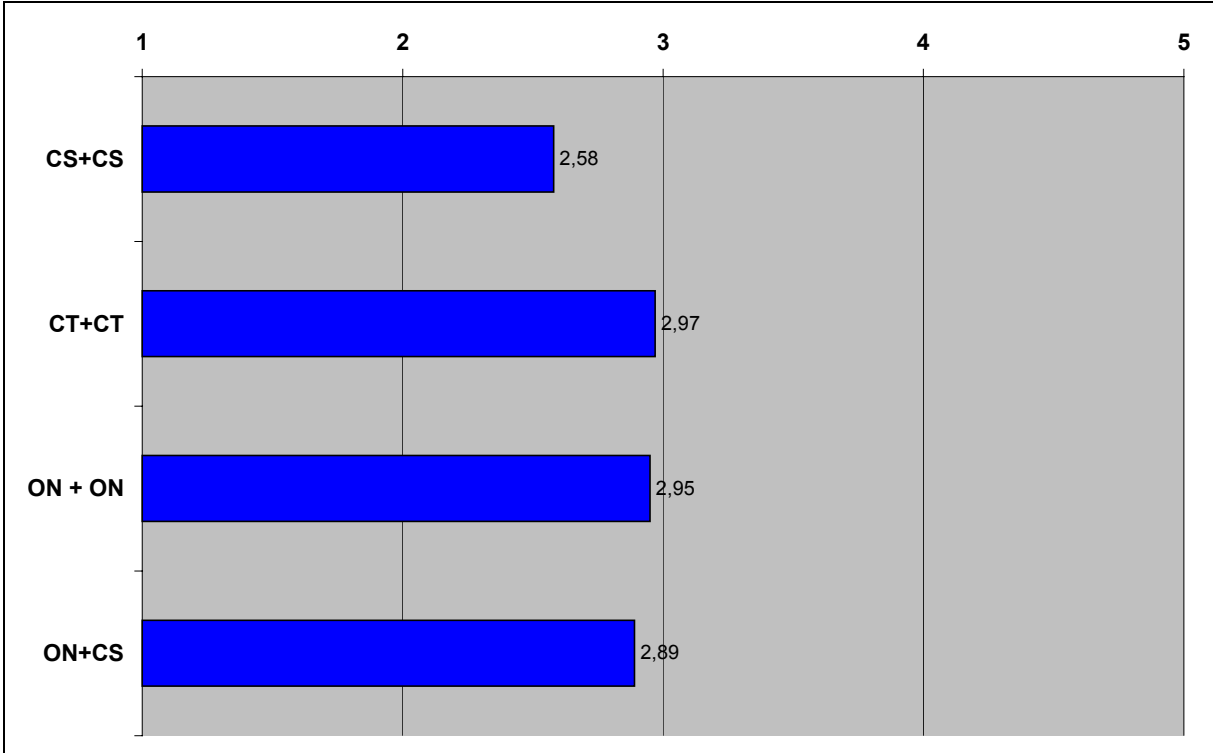
3. The motive of **convenience orientation** is significantly more pronounced for customers of non-store channels, i.e. (ON+ON) and (CT+CT) customers, than for (CS+CS) customers (see Fig. 6).

4. The motive of **striving for independence** is most heavily pronounced for the (ON+ON) customers. The differences to the store-oriented customer group are significant for both non-store customer groups: the mail-order customers (CT+CT) and the online customers (ON+ON). We also find that the mail-order customers strive for independence significantly less than online customers (see Fig. 7). The reason for this result could be that the electronic channel provides more independence (a greater sense of immediacy in the order process, etc.) than the mail-order catalog.

5. **Risk aversion:** in comparison to the store-oriented customers, (ON+ON) customers have a significantly lower delivery-related risk aversion, and they also demonstrate lower

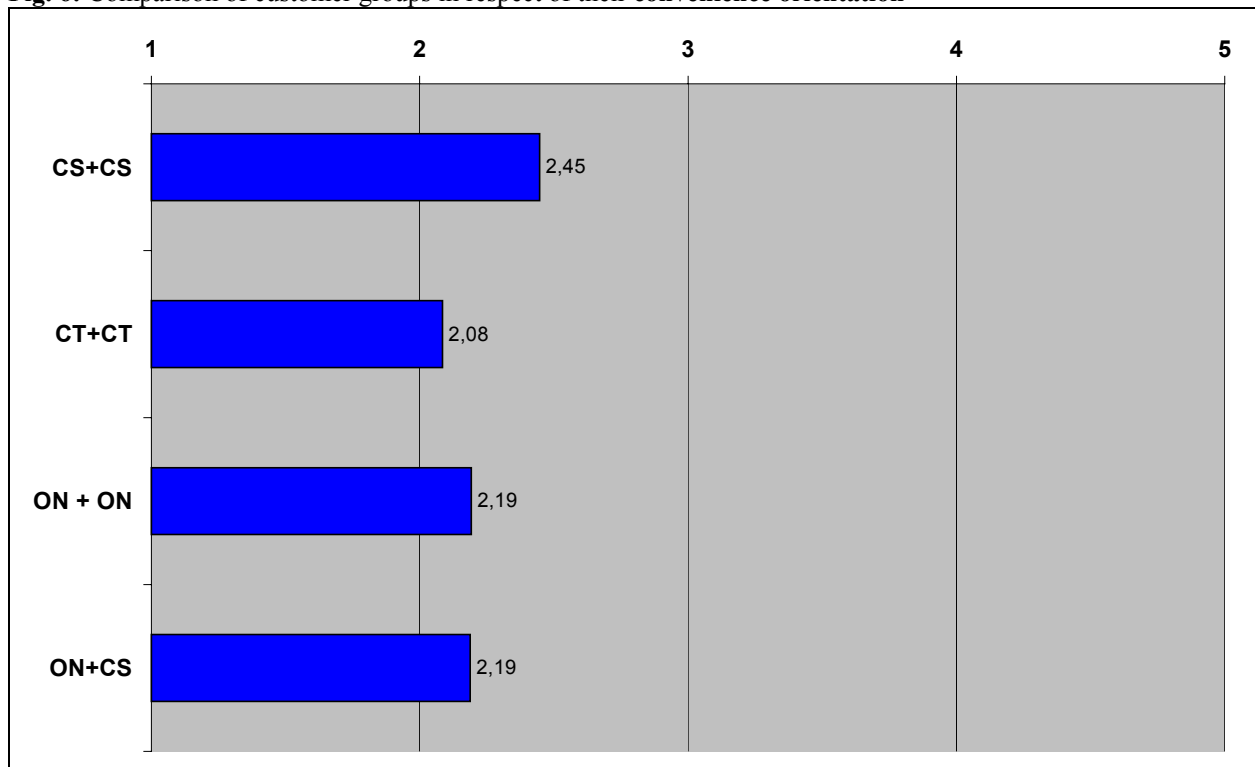
product-related and payment-related risk aversion than store-oriented customers. In contrast, (CT+CT) customers do not reveal any differences from the store-oriented customers in terms of **risk aversion** (see Fig. 8 and 9).

Fig. 5: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their **recreational orientation**



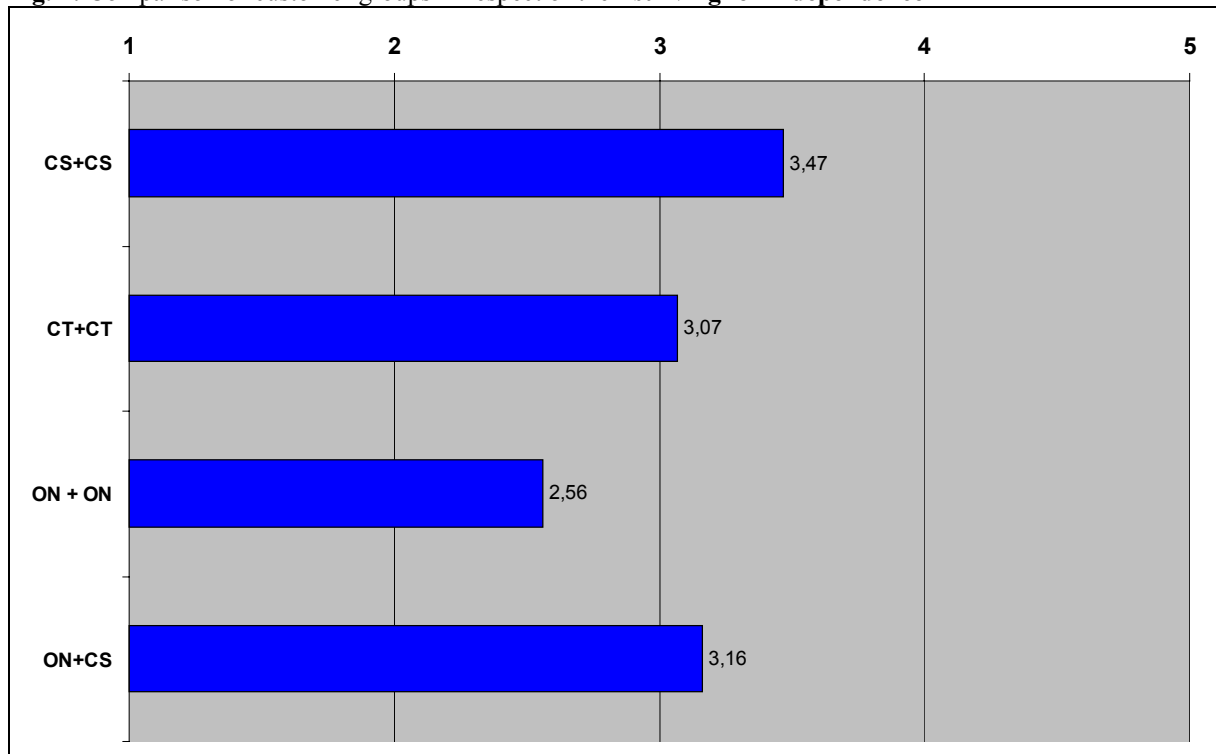
Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

Fig. 6: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their **convenience orientation**



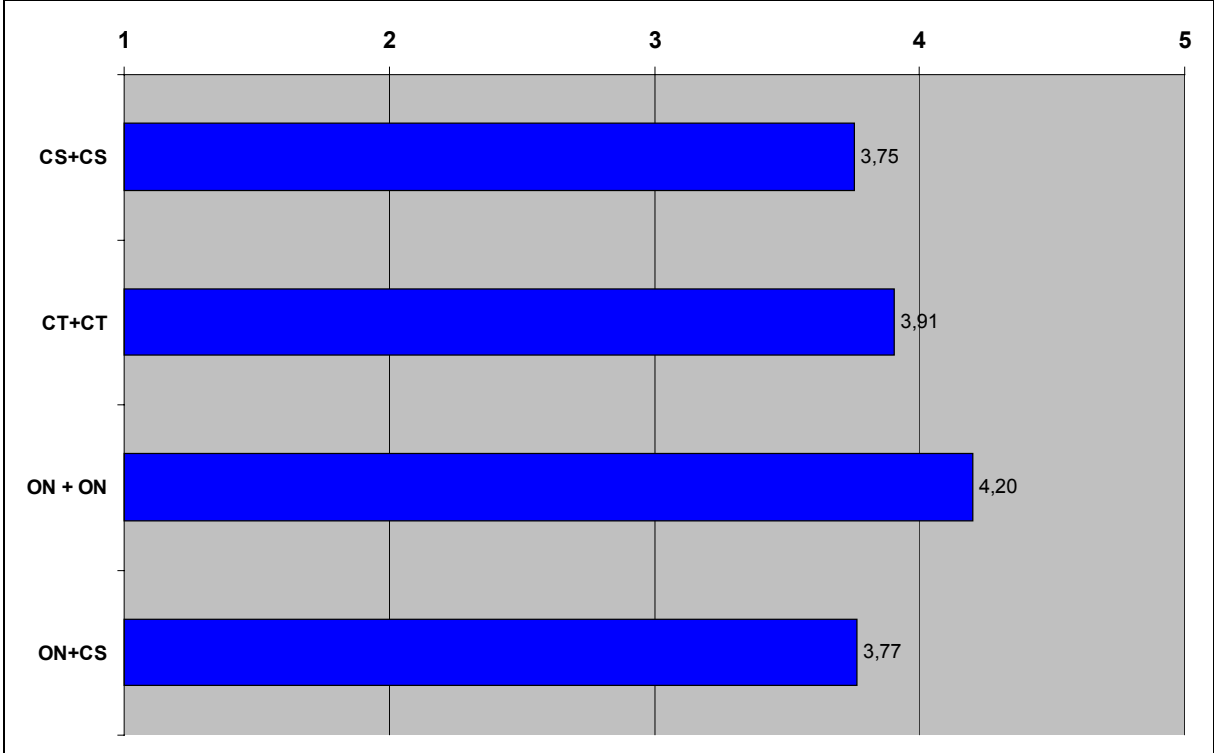
Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

Fig. 7: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their **striving for independence**



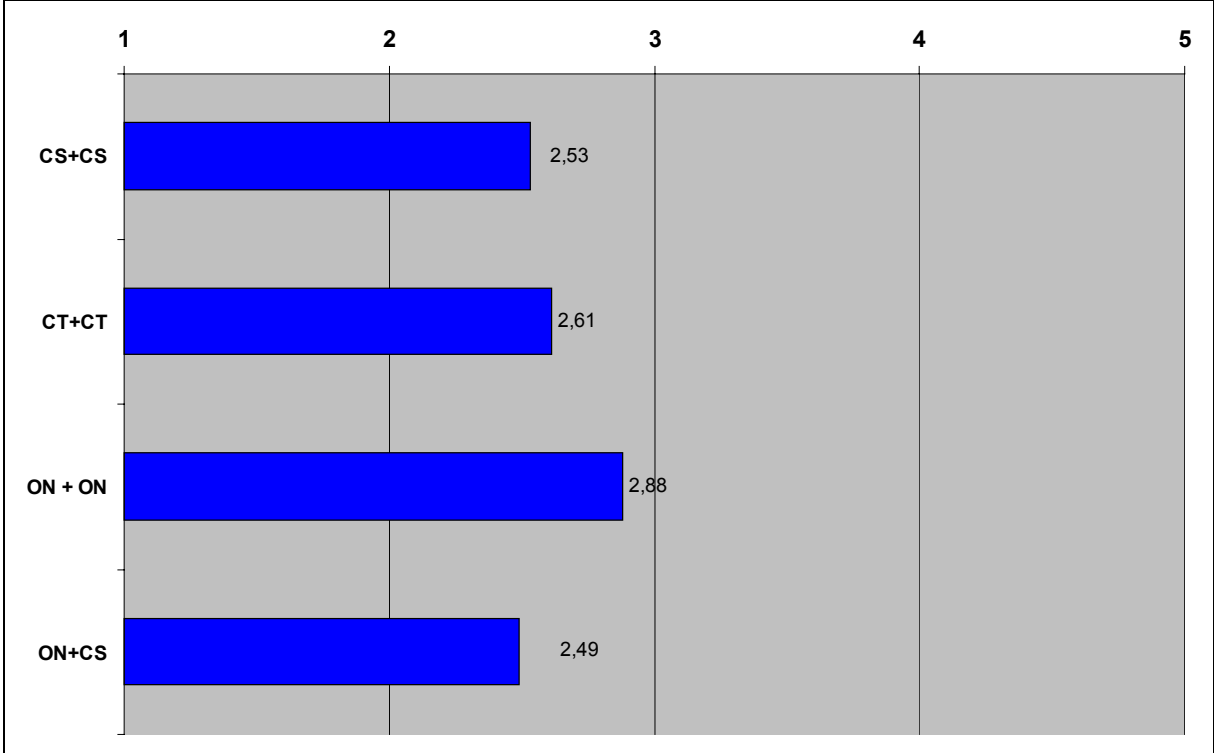
Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

Fig. 8: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their *delivery-related risk aversion*



Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

Fig. 9: Comparison of customer groups in respect of their *product-related risk aversion*



Scale: 1 = "very strong" value of shopping motive in customer group ... 5 = "very weak" value

These findings were related to the single-channel customer. The following are related to the **multi-channel customer** (information in the chain store and purchase in the online-shop). For this type of multi-channel user, the motive of convenience prevails in the information stage (non-store), while, in the purchase stage, the rejection of the online-shop and the preference for chain stores (store-based retailing) is motivated, firstly, by the fact that they have greater risk aversion when it comes to non-store retailing and, secondly, by the fact that the need for independence is less pronounced.

(a) With regard to **convenience orientation** and **recreational orientation**, the customers who seek information online and make their purchase in a chain store (ON+CS) differ significantly from the customers who both seek information and make their purchase in the chain store (CS+CS). They have a stronger convenience orientation and a weaker recreational orientation. They do not differ significantly from those customers who both seek information and make their purchase in the online-shop (ON+ON).

(b) with regard to their **striving for independence** and **risk aversion**, the customers who seek information online and make their purchase in a chain store (ON+CS) differ significantly from the customers who conduct the entire buying process in the online-shop.

5 DISCUSSION

The first conclusion of our research is that five theory-based shopping motives could be identified: convenience orientation, recreational orientation, independence, delivery-related risk aversion, and product-related & payment-related risk aversion. The survey's respondents choose where to make their purchase based on which retail channel is best suited to satisfy their motives.

Secondly, we have detected significant differences between the shopping motives and the patterns of behavior. For single-channel users of non-store retailing, we can conclude that online shoppers are satisfying their need for convenience and independence, while catalog customers, although associating the channel with convenience, make less of a link to independence. Online shoppers and catalog customers associate their channel with lower delivery-related risk aversion, with online shoppers showing even less delivery-related risk aversion than catalog customers. Single-channel users of chain stores seek out shops in order to satisfy their emotional and social needs, which the other channels are not capable of satisfying to the same degree. Multi-channel users, who seek information from the online-shop and then make their purchase in the chain stores, are clearly linking independence of

information from the online-shop with the reduction in product-related and payment-related risk associated with a purchase in a chain store, which allows them to examine and check the products. These findings have several implications for multi-channel management. If a multi-channel retailer is familiar with its customers' patterns of behavior and motives, it can introduce customer-specific and channel-specific measures.

6 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a number of limitations in our research study that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, we analyzed the buying process in terms of a single customer buying a single, specific product. We did not take into consideration the changing behaviors and different patterns of behavior by a single individual.

Secondly, the results only apply to the customers of a single multi-channel retailer. In particular, this retailer is characterized by the following distinctive features: identical prices in all channels, largely identical range of goods in the channels and fixed shipping costs for non-store retailing. It is therefore necessary to examine whether the customers of other multi-channel retailers distribute their information gathering and purchasing over specific channels in the same manner, and whether this is attributable to the same shopping motives.

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ⁱ This table was created by calculating the arithmetic mean for each customer group. To avoid distortions resulting from the different number of indicators per factor (shopping motive), each shopping motive was aggregated across the factor average. The factor averages were calculated as arithmetic means of the absolute values of all the items belonging to the motive, with a factor loading of 0.45 and higher. The basis in each case is the scale from one to five.