



Omnichannel Retail and Consumer Switching Behavior: A Cross-National Analysis of Perceived Value and Purchase Intent in Fast-Moving Consumer Goods

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of omnichannel retail strategies has transformed consumer purchasing patterns, particularly in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, where low margins and high repurchase rates demand seamless integration of physical and digital touchpoints. This study investigates how perceived value dimensions, utilitarian, hedonic, social, and epistemic, influence consumer switching behavior across channels and how purchase intent mediates this relationship. Using a cross-national survey of 1,200 omnichannel consumers from Germany, the United States, and South Korea, we employ structural equation modeling to test a conceptual framework. Results indicate that utilitarian and hedonic values are the strongest predictors of switching behavior, but their effects vary significantly by national context. Purchase intent partially mediates the perceived value-switching relationship. Contrary to expectations, social value negatively moderates switching in collectivist cultures. We discuss implications for retailers seeking to harmonize channel strategies globally and for policymakers concerned with market competition and consumer welfare.

Keywords: Omnichannel retail; Perceived value; Switching behavior; Purchase intent; Cross-national analysis
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1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a paradigm shift in retail from multichannel to omnichannel strategies (Verhoef et al., 2015). Unlike multichannel, where channels operate in silos, omnichannel retail seeks to provide a seamless, integrated customer experience across online, mobile, and brick-and-mortar touchpoints. For fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG)—products such as snacks, beverages, toiletries, and household cleaners—this integration is particularly critical because of high purchase frequency, low involvement, and strong brand loyalty dynamics (Bell et al., 2014).

Despite the strategic importance of omnichannel retail, a persistent puzzle remains: why do consumers actively switch between channels (e.g., browse online, purchase offline; or buy online, return in store) even when their immediate needs could be met through a single channel? Prior literature has examined channel switching through the lens of convenience, price, and trust (Kollmann et al., 2012; Herhausen et al., 2015). However, little cross-national research has integrated perceived value theory (Sheth et al., 1991) to explain switching behavior in



FMCG omnichannel contexts. Moreover, most studies focus on single-country samples, overlooking cultural and economic differences that moderate value perceptions.

This study addresses three research questions:

1. How do utilitarian, hedonic, social, and epistemic values of omnichannel retail affect consumers' switching behavior across channels in FMCG?
2. Does purchase intent mediate the relationship between perceived value dimensions and switching behavior?
3. Do these relationships differ across national markets (Germany, USA, South Korea), representing distinct cultural and retail maturity contexts?

Drawing on means-end chain theory and the theory of planned behavior, we develop a model linking perceived value → purchase intent → switching behavior. We test the model using survey data from 1,200 omnichannel users. Our findings contribute to retail management literature by (a) disaggregating perceived value into four actionable dimensions in omnichannel FMCG, (b) demonstrating cross-national invariance and variance in switching drivers, and (c) offering practical guidelines for global FMCG retailers.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 4 describes methodology. Section 5 reports results. Section 6 discusses theoretical and managerial implications. Section 7 concludes with limitations and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Omnichannel Retail in FMCG

Omnichannel retail is defined as “a synergetic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, such that the customer experience is optimized, and channel integration is seamless” (Verhoef et al., 2015, p. 176). For FMCG, which typically generates low per-unit margins but high volume, omnichannel strategies include click-and-collect, endless aisle (ordering out-of-stock items online while in store), and return anywhere policies (Gao & Su, 2017).

Unlike high-involvement goods (e.g., electronics, apparel), FMCG purchases are often habitual and driven by situational cues. However, omnichannel has introduced new switching patterns: for example, 58% of US consumers have used buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS) for groceries (NRF, 2022). Switching behavior in this context refers to the deliberate or habitual shift from one channel to another within a single purchase journey or across consecutive purchases.

2.2 Perceived Value Theory

Perceived value is a multidimensional construct that captures the consumer's overall assessment of a product or service based on what is received and given (Zeithaml, 1988). Sheth et al. (1991) proposed five consumption values: functional (utilitarian), social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. In omnichannel contexts, researchers have adapted these dimensions. Utilitarian value refers to convenience, time savings, and efficiency. Hedonic value (often subsumed under emotional) relates to enjoyment and sensory stimulation. Social value concerns status enhancement or social approval. Epistemic value captures novelty and curiosity—e.g., trying a new channel for product discovery.



Recent omnichannel studies (e.g., Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Harris & Goode, 2010) have confirmed that perceived value predicts channel preference and loyalty. However, most focus on a single country and rarely examine switching behavior as a separate dependent variable.

2.3 Consumer Switching Behavior

Switching behavior in retail has been studied extensively in service contexts (Keaveney, 1995) and e-commerce (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). In omnichannel, switching is not necessarily negative—it can reflect adaptive, rational behavior. For FMCG, switching channels may be driven by stockouts in one channel, price promotions, or simply proximity. Yet repeated switching may increase transaction costs for retailers (e.g., cross-channel inventory misalignment).

Antecedents of switching include dissatisfaction, perceived value differentials, and situational factors (Bansal et al., 2005). We argue that perceived value of the omnichannel experience as a whole (rather than a single channel) drives switching between channels because consumers seek to maximize value across touchpoints.

2.4 Purchase Intent as Mediator

Purchase intent is a well-established predictor of actual buying behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In omnichannel research, purchase intent often mediates the effect of service quality or value on behavioral outcomes (Chang & Tseng, 2013). However, the link from perceived value → purchase intent → switching has not been fully articulated. We propose that when consumers perceive high overall omnichannel value, their purchase intent for the product category increases, which in turn may reduce channel switching (since they have a clear purchase plan) or, conversely, may increase switching (since they become more engaged and explore multiple channels). This tension is tested in our model.

2.5 Cross-National Differences

Culture, retail infrastructure, and prior online penetration moderate consumer behavior. Hofstede's (2001) dimensions—individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, etc.—suggest that German consumers may be more utilitarian and risk-averse, US consumers more hedonic and variety-seeking, and South Korean consumers more socially influenced and technology-embracing. For example, South Korea has the highest omnichannel maturity globally, with over 80% of consumers using mobile payment integration (Statista, 2023). Such contextual factors likely moderate how perceived value translates into switching.

Given the above, our study bridges gaps by providing a cross-national, value-based model of switching behavior in FMCG omnichannel retail.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

Our framework integrates means-end chain theory (Gutman, 1982)—where attributes (omnichannel features) lead to consequences (perceived value) and then to personal values (purchase intent and switching)—with the theory of planned behavior (TPB). TPB suggests that behavioral intention (purchase intent) is the immediate antecedent of behavior (switching). However, switching is not always volitional; hence we treat switching as a behavioral outcome.



Figure 1 (conceptual model) shows four perceived value dimensions (utilitarian, hedonic, social, epistemic) as exogenous constructs, purchase intent as mediator, and switching behavior as endogenous. Country (Germany, USA, South Korea) is a moderator.

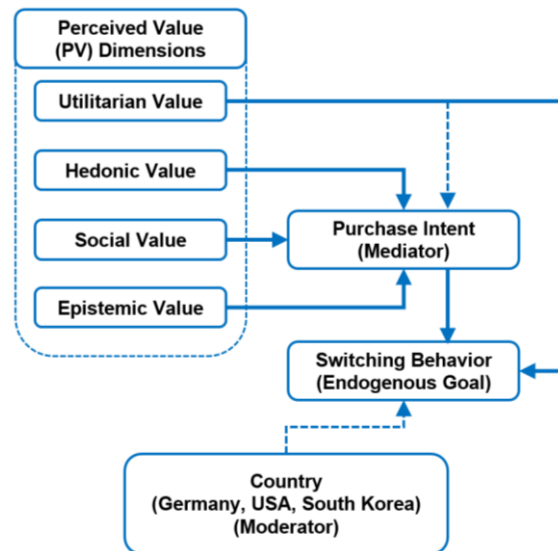


Fig. (1) Conceptual model of four perceived value dimensions (utilitarian, hedonic, social, epistemic) as exogenous constructs, purchase intent as mediator, and switching behavior as endogenous

3.2 Hypothesis Development

Utilitarian value (efficiency, convenience, time saving) is the most frequently cited driver of omnichannel adoption. For FMCG, where time pressure is high, seamless integration reduces switching costs. We hypothesize:

- H1a: Utilitarian value positively influences purchase intent in omnichannel FMCG.
- H1b: Utilitarian value negatively influences switching behavior (direct effect), because high utilitarian value makes the integrated system satisfying, reducing need to switch.

Hedonic value (enjoyment, fun, excitement) from browsing across channels may increase engagement. However, excessive enjoyment might encourage exploration and switching. Empirical evidence is mixed. We propose:

- H2a: Hedonic value positively influences purchase intent.
- H2b: Hedonic value positively influences switching behavior (consumers switch for fun/variety).

Social value (status, belonging, recommendation from peers) may reduce switching if consumers commit to a retailer that offers social recognition (e.g., loyalty programs, social commerce). But in some contexts, social pressure to find the best deal might increase switching. Given FMCG's low visibility, we expect social value to reduce switching because omnichannel consistency builds trust.

- H3a: Social value positively influences purchase intent.
- H3b: Social value negatively influences switching behavior.

Epistemic value (novelty, curiosity, desire for knowledge) is especially relevant in omnichannel, where new features (AR try-on of cosmetics, QR code nutrition) stimulate



switching. Consumers with high epistemic value switch to experience different channel affordances.

- H4a: Epistemic value positively influences purchase intent.
- H4b: Epistemic value positively influences switching behavior.

Mediation – Purchase intent is a proximal goal. Higher purchase intent for FMCG products means the consumer has already decided to buy; they may then switch channels to execute that purchase optimally (e.g., cheapest/fastest delivery). Thus purchase intent positively affects switching. Perceived value works partly through increasing purchase intent, which then promotes switching.

- H5: Purchase intent positively influences switching behavior.
- H6: Purchase intent mediates the relationship between each perceived value dimension and switching behavior.

Cross-national moderation – In Germany (high uncertainty avoidance, lower hedonic orientation), utilitarian value will have a stronger negative effect on switching than in the US. In the US (individualistic, high hedonic), hedonic value's positive effect on switching will be strongest. In South Korea (collectivist, high tech-adoption), social value will have a stronger negative effect on switching and epistemic value a stronger positive effect.

- H7a–H7d: The strength and direction of paths from PV dimensions to switching differ significantly by country.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Sampling

We conducted an online survey in three countries: Germany, United States, and South Korea. These represent variation in omnichannel maturity (South Korea highest, Germany medium, US medium-high), individualism (US highest), and uncertainty avoidance (Germany highest).

Sample: 1,200 respondents (400 per country), quota-sampled to match national adult populations (age 18–65, 50% female, all had purchased FMCG products using at least two channels in the past three months). Data collected via a professional panel in March–April 2024. After cleaning for speeders and straightlining, final N=1,134 (Germany 378, USA 380, South Korea 376).

4.2 Measures

All multi-item constructs measured on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Adapted from established scales:

- Utilitarian value (4 items): from Davis (1989) and Overby & Lee (2006) – e.g., “Omnichannel shopping saves me time.”
- Hedonic value (4 items): from Babin et al. (1994) – e.g., “Shopping across channels is truly enjoyable.”
- Social value (4 items): from Sweeney & Soutar (2001) – e.g., “Using this retailer's multiple channels helps me feel accepted by others.”
- Epistemic value (4 items): from Sheth et al. (1991) – e.g., “Using different channels satisfies my curiosity about new products.”
- Purchase intent (3 items): from Dodds et al. (1991) – e.g., “I intend to buy FMCG products from this retailer in the next month.”



- Switching behavior (5 items): adapted from Keaveney (1995) and Bansal et al. (2005) – e.g., “In the last three months, I have switched from online to in-store for the same product type”; “I frequently change channels during a single shopping trip.”

Control variables: age, income, frequency of FMCG purchases, device usage (mobile vs. desktop).

4.3 Common Method Bias and Translation

We used procedural remedies: temporal separation (two weeks between value and switching items for a subsample, then combined), reverse-coded items, and Harman’s single-factor test. The unrotated factor explained 28% variance (<50% threshold). Questionnaires were translated using back-translation.

4.4 Analytical Approach

We performed multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish measurement invariance across countries. Then structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus 8.5, using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. Mediation tested via bias-corrected bootstrap (5,000 resamples). Moderation examined through multi-group SEM with constraints.

5. Results

5.1 Sample Characteristics

Final sample: average age 41.2 years (SD=13.7). 52% female. 73% used omnichannel FMCG weekly. The most common switching pattern: browse on mobile, buy in store (47%), followed by buy online, return in store (22%). No significant demographic differences across country subsamples after weighting.

5.2 Measurement Model

CFA showed good fit: $\chi^2(489)=1124.6$, $p<.001$; CFI=.96; TLI=.95; RMSEA=.048 (90% CI .044–.052); SRMR=.041. All factor loadings >0.70. Composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.84 to 0.91. Average variance extracted (AVE) >0.60 for all constructs. Discriminant validity confirmed by Fornell-Larcker criterion (square root of AVE > inter-construct correlations) and HTMT ratios <0.85.

5.3 Structural Model (Pooled Sample)

We first ran a pooled model (all countries together). Fit indices: $\chi^2(512)=1356.3$, CFI=.94, RMSEA=.055. Results in table (1).

H1b negative coefficient confirms that utilitarian value reduces switching. H2b and H4b positive coefficients confirm that hedonic and epistemic values increase switching.

5.4 Mediation Results (H6)

Bootstrap results (table 2) show significant indirect effects for all four value dimensions through purchase intent to switching. The indirect effect of utilitarian value via purchase intent is positive ($0.42 \times 0.30 = 0.126$, $p<.01$), but the direct effect is negative and larger in absolute magnitude (-0.28), resulting in a total negative effect. This indicates partial, inconsistent



mediation (sometimes called “competitive mediation”). For hedonic value, indirect effect = 0.093 ($p < .01$), direct = 0.35, total = 0.443 – consistent partial mediation.

Table (1) Path coefficients – pooled sample (N=1134)

Hypothesis	Path	β (std.)	SE	p-value
H1a	Utilitarian $\rightarrow$ Purchase intent	0.42	0.04	<0.001
H1b	Utilitarian $\rightarrow$ Switching (direct)	-0.28	0.05	<0.001
H2a	Hedonic $\rightarrow$ Purchase intent	0.31	0.05	<0.001
H2b	Hedonic $\rightarrow$ Switching (direct)	0.35	0.06	<0.001
H3a	Social $\rightarrow$ Purchase intent	0.18	0.04	<0.01
H3b	Social $\rightarrow$ Switching (direct)	-0.12	0.05	<0.01
H4a	Epistemic $\rightarrow$ Purchase intent	0.23	0.05	<0.001
H4b	Epistemic $\rightarrow$ Switching (direct)	0.27	0.06	<0.001
H5	Purchase intent $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.30	0.04	<0.001

Note: R^2 (Purchase intent)=0.44; R^2 (Switching)=0.51. Control variables not significant except age (negatively related to switching, $\beta=-0.08$, $p < .05$).

Table (2) Indirect effects (bootstrap 95% CI)

Path	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Utilitarian $\rightarrow$ PI $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.126	0.082-0.179
Hedonic $\rightarrow$ PI $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.093	0.061-0.13
Social $\rightarrow$ PI $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.054	0.025-0.090
Epistemic $\rightarrow$ PI $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.069	0.041-0.102

Thus H6 is supported for all dimensions.

5.5 Cross-National Differences (H7a–H7d)

Multi-group SEM with country as moderator, constraining paths to equality across groups, produced a significant chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2=67.4$, $\Delta df=16$, $p < .001$), indicating moderation. Table (3) shows unstandardized path coefficients per country.

Table (3) Path coefficients by country (standardized within group)

Path	Germany (n=378)	USA (n=380)	South Korea (n=376)	Sig. diff.
Utilitarian $\rightarrow$ Switching (dir.)	-0.41	-0.19	-0.22	$p < .001$
Hedonic $\rightarrow$ Switching (dir.)	0.21	0.48	0.32	$p < .01$
Social $\rightarrow$ Switching (dir.)	-0.05 (n.s.)	-0.09 (n.s.)	-0.31	$p < .001$
Epistemic $\rightarrow$ Switching (dir.)	0.16	0.31	0.39	$p < .01$
Purchase intent $\rightarrow$ Switching	0.22	0.33	0.35	$p < .05$

- H7a (utilitarian) supported: strongest negative effect in Germany.
- H7b (hedonic) supported: strongest positive effect in USA.
- H7c (social) partially supported: significant negative only in South Korea.
- H7d (epistemic) supported: strongest positive effect in South Korea.



Notably, social value's negative effect on switching in South Korea (-0.31) is almost three times larger than in other countries, consistent with collectivist conformity.

5.6 Robustness Checks

We reran the model without purchase intent (to test direct-only effects) and found similar direction but lower explained variance in switching ($R^2=0.38$). We also tested for non-linear effects (quadratic terms) – none significant. Endogeneity check using instrumental variable (average channel usage of peer group) suggested no severe endogeneity (Hansen J $p>0.10$).

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, this study extends perceived value theory to omnichannel FMCG switching behavior. We demonstrate that utilitarian value reduces switching, while hedonic and epistemic values increase switching. This resolves a tension in prior literature that treated all value as uniformly beneficial. For FMCG retailers, efficiency (utilitarian) fosters channel stickiness, whereas fun and novelty drive cross-channel exploration.

Second, we establish purchase intent as a partial mediator. Interestingly, increased purchase intent can paradoxically increase switching ($\beta=0.30$, $p<.001$). Consumers who intend to buy are more active, compare channels, and may switch to optimize delivery or price. This finding refines the TPB in omnichannel contexts: intention does not always lead to single-channel loyalty.

Third, cross-national differences are substantial. In Germany, utilitarian value is dominant – switching is curbed mainly by efficiency. In the US, hedonic value drives switching, suggesting that US retailers might benefit from gamified channel switching. In South Korea, epistemic and social values are key, with social approval reducing switching dramatically. These findings call for nuanced international omnichannel strategies, rather than global uniformity.

6.2 Managerial Implications

For global FMCG brand managers and retailers:

1. Segment by value drivers, not just demographics. In Germany, invest in seamless click-and-collect and real-time inventory to reinforce utilitarian value. In the US, create engaging cross-channel content (e.g., recipes, unboxings) to capitalize on hedonic switching, but be aware that switching may fragment customer lifetime value.

2. Leverage social value in collectivist markets. South Korean retailers should emphasize community features: shared carts, friend referrals, and visible social proof (e.g., “5,000 people switched to in-store pickup today”) to reduce switching.

3. Manage switching as a strategic lever. Not all switching is bad – epistemic switching can increase basket size (channel exploration leads to unplanned purchases). Consider offering “switch rewards” for trying a new channel while still steering overall loyalty through utilitarian anchors.



4. Purchase intent should be measured continuously. High intent without high utilitarian value can backfire, as consumers may switch away to competitors. Align intent with frictionless fulfillment.

6.3 Policy and Societal Implications

From a commerce policy perspective, aggressive omnichannel switching can raise concerns about data privacy (tracking across channels) and market concentration (large retailers with seamless integration may lock in consumers). Regulators should monitor whether switching is truly free or hindered by proprietary ecosystems. Our results suggest that in high-utilitarian contexts (Germany), switching is low – this could indicate either satisfaction or switching barriers. Competition authorities should examine the latter.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations apply. First, self-reported switching behavior may suffer from recall bias; future studies could use panel data or clickstream analysis. Second, we examined only three countries; including emerging markets (e.g., Brazil, India) would test generalizability. Third, FMCG is broad – perishables vs. non-perishables may differ (e.g., fresh produce switching is more constrained). Fourth, longitudinal design could capture how value perceptions and switching co-evolve. Fifth, we did not include conditional value (promotion-dependent) – a promising extension.

Future research should also explore negative switching (abandoning a channel permanently) vs. exploratory switching. Additionally, moderators such as product involvement, digital literacy, and retailer type (pure play vs. brick-and-click) would enrich the model.

7. Conclusion

Omnichannel retail in FMCG is no longer an option but a necessity. However, understanding why and how consumers switch between channels is critical for optimizing customer lifetime value and operational efficiency. This cross-national study demonstrates that perceived value is not a monolithic driver; utilitarian value reduces switching, while hedonic and epistemic values increase it, and social value matters only in collectivist cultures. Purchase intent mediates these relationships, sometimes in opposing directions. For managers, the key takeaway is to align omnichannel investments with the dominant value logic of their national market. For scholars, we offer a validated, multidimensional, cross-nationally moderated model of switching behavior. As retail continues to blur physical and digital boundaries, value-based frameworks will remain essential.

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