

This project analyzes consumer behavior in online (internet shop) and offline channels (stores) in two markets, which are culturally similar, but differ in market maturity: Germany and Poland. Germany is the biggest economy in Western Europe, while Poland is the biggest economy in the emerging central European region. The project in particular sheds light on cross-channel behavior and usage of cross channel technologies in two differently developed markets. Cross-channel behavior addresses the phenomenon that customers use different channels for information search, purchase and post-purchase activities. For example, customers often search for price information online, but buy the product offline, where they expect the retailer to match the online price. Other customers go to stores, touch and feel the products, talk with the sales personnel, but buy the product later for a lower price online.

We explain such behavior by shopping motives. Depending on how much importance customers attach to information search, product assortment, shopping convenience, price, immediate possession, social interaction and shopping experience, they prefer different channels in the search, purchase and post-purchase stage. Furthermore, we assume that such motives differ with market development; e. g. customers in emerging countries may put more emphasis on price, while customers in developed countries may value the shopping experience more. These are only examples of a larger range of channel attributes that we include in our research.

Cross-channel behavior dramatically impacts the retail landscape. Some traditional offline retailers suffer from declining sales and price pressure, while others proactively develop their online business and implement cross-channel technologies to offer the customer an overall shopping experience. An example of such a technology is click & collect, where customers can buy a product online, which they collect later in the store. Another example is extended shelf, where offline retailers extend their assortment by using instore devices allowing online orders. Furthermore, pure online retailers started to open brick-and-mortar stores to offer an overall cross-channel experience. Amazon, for example, opened the first brick-and-mortar bookstores in 2015 in the US. All these activities aim to keep channel switching customers in the retailers' own channels.

Because of this huge relevance of cross-channel behavior and the scarce research addressing this phenomenon, our project aims to close this research gap. We develop a detailed set of hypotheses about relationships between shopping motives, channel preferences, acceptance of cross-channel technologies and cross-channel behavior (see project description). We further assume that market development and product group characteristics influence these constructs and relationship between them. We test hypotheses using a large-scale survey study with data collection in Germany and Poland. A qualitative study with consumers and managers precedes the quantitative survey. We analyze the qualitative data using content analysis. For analyzing survey data, we apply a large range of statistical methods.

Results can help retailers by stimulating positive forms of cross-channel behavior through targeted promotion of multi-channel technologies. Thereby, they can reduce negative forms of free-riding cross-channel behavior, such as showrooming. At a societal level, the results contribute to decelerate physical store closings.

The project furthermore adds an international dimension to cross-channel behavior, as it analyzes such behavior in two differently developed markets. This is not only important to understand differences in such behavior between countries, but also to forecast possible changes in such behavior with ongoing market development. Furthermore, both countries play a central role in the European economy, as Germany is the biggest economy in Western Europe, while Poland is the biggest economy in the emerging central European region.