

# Integrating Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility in Omnichannel Retailing: Strategies, Challenges, And Opportunities

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**Abstract.** In the dynamic world of global retailing, omnichannel strategies have become the dominant model of providing integrated consumer experiences on both physical and digital channels. Keeping pace with societal expectations and regulatory demands for accountability for ethics and environment, incorporating sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in omnichannel constructs has become a necessity. This study explores the conceptual, strategic, and operational dimensions of embedding sustainability and CSR in omnichannel retailing. This paper adopts a conceptual review approach, especially in Malaysia, this research defines sustainable sourcing, ecofriendly logistics, green digital infrastructure, and CSR-based customer engagement as key strategies. Simultaneously, strategic values to adopters are provided by such opportunities as increased brand trust, readiness for regulation, and long-term cost efficiencies. Moreover, the paper emphasises the rising place of AI, big data, and IoT in the optimisation of sustainable operations and sets importance of defining measurable CSR indicators. Adaptability in the regions and inter-sector collaboration especially with NGOs and governmental organisations are known as necessities for scalable and authentic implementation. The findings suggest the need for more empirical studies and the standardisation of frameworks to help retailers find ways to address the challenges and exploit the competitive benefits of sustainabilitydriven omnichannel retailing, in both developed and emerging markets.

Keywords: omnichannel retailing, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, digital transformation

## INTRODUCTION

Omnichannel retailing is a strategic way of operating whereby retailers combine different physical and digital touchpoints to provide a seamless, personalised shopping experience for consumers (Raza & Govindaluri, 2021). Unlike multichannel retail, omnichannel makes it possible for stores to engage customers, adjust their stock and run all platforms in partnership (Huang, 2021). By joining forces, companies make life more convenient and personalised and work towards ensuring that their ethical standards are the same everywhere. Today, companies consider sustainability and CSR to be essential parts of their overall strategy instead of only a way to show a good reputation Ali (2024). NIQ's recent sustainability study indicates that 69% of worldwide consumers prioritize sustainability more than they before and willing to spend extra money on sustainable products (NielsenIQ, 2023). As for the retail industry, 20 hypermarkets, supermarkets, convenience stores, and pharmacy, health, and beauty chains will cease the provision of single-use plastic bags at their 8,000 locations starting October 1, 2024. The retail chains include 99 Speedmart, Aeon, 7-Eleven, TF Value Mart, and Guardian. In line with Asmare and Zewdie's (2022) claim, corporations should include CSR in all aspects, whether online or in-store, for example, with eco-friendly online packaging, energy-saving operations and initiatives supporting the local community at their shops.

In Malaysia, digital retail transactions grew by over 22% every year and more consumers have preferred environmentally and socially responsible brands in the last two years, up by 15%. As a result, there are two changes happening: businesses are adopting digital technologies quickly and there is also greater attention on sustainability (NielsenIQ, 2023). Various businesses like FashionValet and Lotus's are doing more through loyalty programmes, online tools to follow waste and educating people about the environment with the help of NGOs (Loyalty & Reward Co., 2023). Therefore, this paper reviews how sustainability and CSR concepts could be best implemented in omnichannel retail approaches. The document consists of the following parts: looking at how retailing takes place across various channels; exploring what consumers anticipate; analysing strategies for integration and

sustainability; reviewing challenges faced by operators and customers; and considering what may happen in the coming years thanks to AI, IoT and shared efforts by various groups. The study of this paper focuses on drawing lessons from global examples and their application to Malaysian companies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Sustainability And Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) In Retailing

The current retail industry has made sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) essential priorities, rather than marketing strategies Vadakkepatt et al. (2021). Now, these initiatives are significant proof of a company's attention to ethics, following rules and sustainability in the market. Here, sustainability includes managing the environment as well as ensuring equal rights for all, ethical job practises and ethical rules. Buallay (2022) shows through research that companies that report on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects tend to do better financially and in terms of their brand image. This connection plays a key role in omnichannel settings, where doing business involves several different platforms. When companies link CSR throughout all these channels, the customer may always gets the same beneficial message. Dal Mas et al. (2022) emphasise that CSR matters for retailers, because including it in their business practices strengthens their operations and earns customer loyalty. They believe that sustainability goes further than simply selling or donating green products in retail. It mainly relates to a business's internal methods like buying responsibly, supporting worker rights, lowering its carbon footprint, proper waste disposal and responsible shipping. Because they had CSR strategies in place, retailers were able to faster respond to changes in the supply chain and what consumers now wanted, with sustainability as their main protection against such challenges.

Furthermore, trust among stakeholders relies greatly on a company's CSR commitment. Mayorova (2021) reports that making CSR information clear improves the way stakeholders regard European retailers and strengthens the companies' legitimacy. Such effects matter a lot in omnichannel retail places where people have the chance to evaluate a company's ethics on the spot. Nowadays, people look carefully at whether a brand is sustainable both before buying and afterwards through its storeys, online ratings and posts (Syahribulan, Elliyana, & Rosmiati, 2025). Therefore, it becomes especially important for CSR to be real, tangible and discussed regularly in several places.

### The Omnichannel Retailing Landscape

An omnichannel retailing brings together various consumer touchpoints, both online, mobile, in-store and call centre into a single customer experience with real-time data synchronisation and personalised engagement as an underpinning (Solem et al., 2023). Contrary to multichannel systems in which each channel works separately, interconnectivity and transitionless customer movement across platforms are the core of omnichannel strategies (Fahim et al., 2024). This distinction is crucial; as much as multichannel retailing may result in a variety, there is also lack of consistency and data integration. In contrast, omnichannel retailers use dynamic capabilities, like centralised data hubs and AI-driven personalisation, to serve present-day customers' expectations about the convenience, consistency, and real-time responsiveness (Cicea et al., 2022). In regards to Malaysia, Ahmad (2024) found that the omnichannel retailer of fashion gains a more keen consumer purchase intent by offering synchronised inventory views, unified payments processes and flexible delivery methods. Consumers are now coming to expect a frictionless experience, where they are able to browse, purchase, and have post-purchase support from any platform. Omnichannel excellence, therefore, becomes the determinant factor in customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Ng et al., 2021).

One advantage of omnichannel retail is that it updates inventory and logistics details in real time. According to Solem et al. (2023), using data platforms that combine sales information helps match supply and demand to reduce inefficiencies. By using dynamic inventory systems retailers can have reduced their unnecessary inventories and long delays during restocking. As a result, the industry spends less on operations, provides better service and reduces waste within a more tech-based economy. Cicea and colleagues (2022) say that because of the data they collect, omnichannel platforms can offer personalised advice that augments brand loyalty. Personalisation is valuable because it guide customers to behave sustainably when they shop.. Ng et al. (2021) find that tailored shopping makes shoppers happier with what they buy and reduces the waste from returns which often ends up contributing to emissions. When personalisation incorporates sustainability, it helps build loyalty and achieves corporate sustainability results in the omnichannel marketplace.

Ahmad (2024) highlights that retailers in Malaysia should be aware of differences in digital access in different regions. Even though urban shoppers can choose different channels, rural customers usually shop using only phones. For example, if shops are prepared for mobile users, they can appeal and be accessed by people across the entire population. It expands companies' markets and helps promote social inclusion, a main goal of CSR. As per Cicea et al. (2022), clients hope for the same reward and discount policies when they buy things online, in person or with their mobile phones. AEON and Lotus's are two brands in Malaysia that offer loyalty cards involving both printed and digital points. It results in customers remaining loyal to the brand. Similarly, when brands offer discounts for reusing packaging and e-receipts, they can achieve success in both business and CSR fields.

### **Strategies for Integrating Sustainability and CSR**

Sustainability and CSR have to be integrated into the omnichannel retailing in a multidimensional approach spanning the entire value chain. Ethical sources are guaranteed through sustainable sourcing, i.e., the use of certified suppliers and fair-trade networks, improving the brand transparency (Wahyuni et al., 2024). Reverse logistics such as returns and recycling mechanisms and eco-friendly packs are ways of reducing waste- and carbon emission. Environmental footprint of online operations is minimised by digital infrastructure improvements-cloud computing and energy-efficient servers. To build emotional ties with customers, CSR-oriented customer engagement (e.g., cause marketing or community empowerment), increases the strength of the ties. Zaki et al. (2023) believe that the use of CSR promotes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thus couples long-term strategy with the global goals. Furthermore, such innovations such as green stores and electric vehicle fleets facilitate differentiation of retailers in competitive marketplace. Finally, as Wahyuni et al. (2024) explain, the days are long gone when CSR can be considered from a choice perspective: it is a strategic prerequisite for long-term sustainability and stakeholder trust to integrate CSR into the omnichannel operations.

An omnichannel retail business can engage its customers directly in supporting its CSR efforts. This approach not only makes giving easy but also directly involves the customer in the company's social responsibility initiatives (Lee, 2021). Retailers in Malaysia are increasingly incentivizing customers to participate in recycling and other environmental initiatives. This is often done through programs that allow customers to round up their purchases at checkout or take part in take-back and resale programs for used products. These initiatives leverage omnichannel strategies to engage customers directly, allowing for consistent interaction and creating a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability (PwC, 2022). For example, many beauty and fashion brands in Malaysia have implemented take-back programs that reward customers with discounts or loyalty points for returning empty containers or old clothes, demonstrating a move towards a circular economy (CompareHero.my Team, 2020). Sustainability should be considered by omnichannel retailers when working with suppliers. With blockchain or digital certification systems, retailers are able to verify how, where and by whom their products are made (Wahyuni et al., 2024). Companies that implement transparent supply chain traceability through real-time data tracking can significantly enhance customer trust and brand reputation. This practice ensures that the business adheres to international CSR standards and maintains ethical behavior throughout its operations, from sourcing to final delivery. The ability to provide customers with instant access to a product's sustainability journey not only builds confidence but also empowers them to make more informed purchasing decisions (Sultan & Ali, 2023).

### **Challenges in Integration**

The integration of sustainability and CSR into omnichannel retailing is racked with operational and technology complexities in emerging markets (Riaz et al., 2023). One of the toughest tasks is synchronising data from various channels and physical stores, mobile apps, websites, and the third-party platforms while being transparent and traceable (Sousa et al., 2021). Malaysia's Leu and Masri (2021) found inconsistent data management as a pivotal problem of undivided reporting and decision-making. In addition, the technology upgrade necessary for energyefficient digital infrastructure and circular supply chains also entails significant up-front investment, which is problematic with regards to ROI (Cezarino et al., 2022). Harmonising CSR values in all the points of contact from supplier sourcing to customer returns calls for cross-departmental coordination but is a scenario that most retailers are structurally not ready for. Also, greenwashing threats and consumer skepticisms are reputational hazards. surface or pieces-meal initiatives may undermine trust (Riaz et al., 2023). As Mahusni and Ghafar (2020) emphasise, in order to achieve authenticity and effectiveness, integration is therefore needed to be contextual, taking into account local infrastructural limitations as well as the cultural expectations to achieve authenticity and effectiveness in sustainability efforts.

Small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) in the retail industry are not digitalised enough, so this creates a major challenge in omnichannel sustainability (Baldivia & Chowdhury, 2025). According to Hasbullah et al. (2024), a majority of retailers in Malaysia do not utilise advanced technology tools such as cloud-based ERPs and traceability via blockchain. If key technologies are missing, CSR initiatives on different platforms cannot be effectively put into practise. Since the digital divide exists, many players cannot gather, study or use information on sustainability in different areas, so they cannot integrate CSR effectively (Baldivia & Chowdhury, 2025; Riaz et al., 2023). Retail organisations often find that different departments do not communicate well which limits CSR's impact. Cezarino et al. (2022) state that a lot of companies treat sustainability as a standalone practice, rather than including it in both marketing, purchasing, distribution and IT departments. Omnichannel retailing requires companies to be organised, as having consistent channels is crucial. Disparities between digital and physical aspects of a business may result in messages that clash and make the company less efficient, affecting its sustainability and trusted reputation (Ahmad, 2024).

Risks associated with data security in CSR systems are slowing the integration of these tools across various channels (Toker, 2023). Sousa et al. (2021) mention that collecting data from every device in an omnichannel approach could make it harder to control and secure customers' personal and transactional records. Abidin, Nazri, and Zulkifli (2023) emphasize that once CSR programmes collect data with questionable security or break consumer privacy rules, they might cause their company to lose their reputation. Trying to maintain both system transparency and privacy in business leads to additional difficulties in designing sustainable systems. Consumers being cautious and accusing companies of greenwashing is another obstacle in adopting CSR. According to Leu and Masri (2021), Malaysian customers are growing sceptical about CSR campaigns that are not tied to the brand's key operations. Social media enables critics to see any inconsistency between a green product sold online and how the company operates in its stores. CSR needs to be deeply integrated into how a business operates or a company could lose its clients' trust and loyalty over time. Standardising CSR efforts is challenging in Malaysia due to limitations in culture and infrastructure. Mahusni and Ghafar (2020) believe that retail strategies should be adjusted to the needs of local people in terms of shopping behaviour, resources and transportation.

### **Opportunities and Competitive Advantages**

Thaichon (2024) state that in spite of the challenges, the inclusion of sustainability in the omnichannel retailing brings forth unique competitive advantages. Committed practises that include ethical sourcing, low-emission logistics, and community involvement build a deep level of trust to last a long time (Cezarino et al, 2022). In the highly competitive markets, CSR is a differentiator. consumers are ever much interested in supporting brands that are in line with their objectives, which is evident whereby the Malaysian retailers adopt circular fashion or local community support initiatives (Mahusni & Ghafar, 2020). In terms of costs, such sustainable innovations as energy efficient warehousing, simplified reverse logistics, and digitalisation that all contribute to critical longterm operational outlays (Sousa et al., 2021). Besides, a proactive approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) increases regulatory readiness and lessens risk exposure, particularly in light of stricter environmental legislation and evolving environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investment criteria (Lee & Isa, 2023). Firms that maintain high levels of CSR transparency are better positioned to access debt markets under favorable terms, as shown by Uyar, Ben Arfa, Kuzey, and Karaman (2024) in emerging markets. In Malaysia, Mohd Razali et al. (2023) found that companies with more comprehensive CSR disclosure enjoyed a lower cost of equity, reducing their financial risk. Additionally, Manokaran, Ramakrishnan, and Shanker (2023) demonstrate that sector-specific CSR initiatives can help organisations anticipate regulatory demands and manage diverse risk exposures. On the consumer side, research by Sustainable Threads (2024) indicates that authentic CSR messaging combined with information transparency boosts purchase intentions, reinforcing that CSR is not only about compliance but also about sustaining market competitiveness. Collectively, these newer findings reaffirm that proactive CSR is a strategic necessity for navigating today's regulatory, investment, and consumer landscapes not just an ethical or reputational consideration. Hasbullah et al. (2024) propose that the digital transformation, aligned to sustainability goals, offers a resilient future-ready retail infrastructure. Therefore, CSR aligned forms of omnichannel strategies are not the question of ethics only; they are strategic value and market leadership generators of long-term value (Wetzel, Hammerschmidt, & Lenz, 2024).

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA**

The future of sustainable omnichannel retailing is the junction of technology, context adaptation, and crosssection cooperation (Vhatkar, Raut, Gokhale, Cheikhrouhou, & Akarte, 2024). Artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT) is crucial in allowing retailers to optimise energy consumption, provide

personalisation to customers, and monitor supply chain emissions in real-time (Kolasani & Singhal, 2024). Closed supply chain loop and reverse logistics efficiency can be quantified with big data analytics, providing small and medium enterprises with an affordable route to the adoption of circular economy (Khan et al., 2024). Mishra, Paul & Guglielmo (2024) reiterate that real-time analytics enhances the accuracy of logistics, enhances customers' experiences and minimises waste. Liu and Heugens (2024) also reveal the rising power of the NGOs in corporate sustainability development, with untouched horizons in collaborations between public and private in omnichannel.

## CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the increasing need to incorporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility in omnichannel retailing. Crucial actions, including ethical sourcing, reverse logistics, eco-packaging and green digital infrastructure play a crucial role though this presents integration dilemmas in the aspect of technology, costs, and consumer trust (Orji, Kusi-Sarpong, & Okwara, 2024). However, the benefits, which include possibility of brand differentiation, congruence with regulations, as well as long-term resilience, far outweigh the challenges. Enduring development especially in the field AI, internet of things and data analytics are promising avenues for measurement and optimisation. The role of contextual and regional factors as well as cross-sector collaborations needs to be taken precedence to create scalable and effective CSR frameworks (Alshukri, Seun Ojekemi, Öz, & Alzubi, 2024). Eventually, a strategic integrated and evidence-based approach to sustainability in omnichannel retailing will be important in the realisation of commercial success with the global sustainability goals.

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