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Evaluating Digital Channel Expansion Readiness: A Decision Framework for Market Reach, Channel Conflict, Operational Capacity, and Brand Consistency

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Abstract

Firms increasingly pursue digital channel expansion through online marketplaces, social commerce, direct-to-consumer platforms, mobile applications, and digitally integrated retail ecosystems. These channels promise broader market reach, faster customer acquisition, richer data capture, and new revenue opportunities. Yet expansion into a new channel is not automatically equivalent to strategic readiness. The managerial challenge is to determine whether the firm is prepared to scale the channel without weakening existing commercial, operational, or brand systems. Ad-hoc digital channel expansion can produce several unintended consequences. Firms may overestimate market demand, underestimate customer acquisition costs, or duplicate channels that already serve overlapping segments. They may also trigger conflict with distributors, franchisees, retailers, or internal sales teams. When operational systems cannot absorb added complexity, the new channel may expose fulfilment delays, service gaps, inventory problems, and inconsistent customer experiences. This article develops an original decision framework for evaluating digital channel expansion readiness. The framework integrates four assessment pillars: market reach potential, channel conflict risk, operational capacity, and brand consistency. It is designed as a practical managerial tool rather than an empirical prediction model. Its purpose is to help decision makers move from opportunity enthusiasm toward structured readiness evaluation. The central argument is that digital channel expansion should be treated as a readiness decision, not merely a growth initiative. A structured assessment can reduce the likelihood of channel conflict, operational breakdown, brand inconsistency, and under-realised market potential. The framework provides managers with a disciplined way to compare opportunity attractiveness against internal preparedness. It also creates a foundation for future empirical testing and refinement.

Keywords Decision framework, Digital channel expansion, Market reach, Channel conflict, Operational capacity, Brand consistency, Readiness assessment

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Introduction

Digital channels have become central to growth strategies because they allow firms to reach customers through marketplaces, direct-to-consumer platforms, mobile applications, social commerce, and integrated omnichannel systems. The appeal is reinforced by the broader shift toward digital marketing capabilities, customer data use,

and technology-enabled retail formats, which have changed how firms build visibility, interaction, and commercial access [1]. Retail scholarship also shows that digitalisation has reshaped the competitive logic of retailing, making channel innovation a strategic necessity rather than a peripheral marketing activity [2]. However, the same pressure to expand can encourage firms to treat channel

entry as a rapid growth move rather than a readiness decision.

The problem is that many digital expansion decisions begin with market opportunity but stop short of evaluating internal consequences. Firms often focus on potential traffic, platform scale, customer acquisition, or revenue growth while giving less attention to channel conflict, fulfilment capacity, service responsiveness, data integration, and brand governance. Multi-channel and omnichannel research warns that channel decisions require metrics capable of connecting customer, channel, and firm-level outcomes rather than simply counting digital reach [3]. This implies that readiness must be assessed as a cross-functional condition, not as a marketing opportunity alone.

Digital transformation research further suggests that firms cannot assume that adding a digital channel means they possess the capabilities required to manage it. Vial argues that digital transformation involves organisational change enabled by digital technologies, while Warner and Wäger show that firms must build dynamic capabilities through continuous strategic renewal [4, 5]. For channel expansion, this means managers must examine whether the firm has the operational, technological, managerial, and brand systems needed to support a new channel. A marketplace launch, social commerce pilot, or direct-to-consumer site may therefore fail even when demand exists.

This article proposes a decision framework for evaluating readiness before digital channel expansion. The framework is grounded in four pillars: market reach potential, channel conflict risk, operational capacity, and brand consistency. It responds to the need for more integrated omnichannel strategy models, particularly those linking business model transition, channel integration, and execution capability [6]. The article proceeds by defining the readiness challenge, detailing the market reach assessment pillar, and then preparing the foundation for conflict, operational, brand, and integrated decision evaluation.

Digital Channel Expansion Readiness Challenge

Digital channel expansion readiness refers to the degree to which a firm can enter or scale a new digital channel while preserving commercial coherence, operational reliability, and brand integrity. The challenge is not only whether the new channel can generate demand, but whether it can be

absorbed into the firm's existing channel architecture. Studies of omnichannel retailing show that firms must coordinate physical, digital, and hybrid touchpoints in ways that preserve a coherent customer journey [7]. Readiness therefore requires managers to evaluate both external opportunity and internal fit.

Traditional channel evaluation criteria are often insufficient because digital channels blur boundaries between marketing, sales, logistics, service, data management, and customer experience. Buy-online-and-pick-up-in-store research illustrates that a digital channel decision may immediately reshape inventory, store operations, customer flow, and service design [8]. Likewise, augmented reality and interactive retail technologies show that digital channels can alter not only transactional access but also customer engagement, information processing, and experience expectations [9]. This complexity makes isolated market attractiveness analysis too narrow for modern channel decisions.

A readiness challenge also emerges because firms may be at different stages of omnichannel maturity. Some firms possess integrated systems, shared customer data, coordinated fulfilment options, and established governance routines, while others operate with fragmented platforms and siloed channel ownership. Research on omnichannel transition highlights that firms often need business model adaptation before they can execute channel integration effectively [6]. Consequently, the same digital channel opportunity may be feasible for one firm but premature for another.

The decision framework advanced in this article treats readiness as a multi-criteria managerial judgement rather than a single financial calculation. Omnichannel management reviews emphasise that channel strategy requires coordinated decisions across customer experience, operational design, technology, and organisational structure [10]. The framework therefore rejects the idea that a high-growth platform automatically justifies expansion. Instead, it asks whether the firm can convert market reach into sustainable value without creating conflict, overstressing operations, or fragmenting brand meaning.

Market Reach Assessment

Market reach assessment evaluates whether a proposed digital channel can provide access to an attractive, relevant, and economically reachable customer base. Digital marketing research emphasises that firms must connect channel selection to customer behaviour, targeting capability, data availability, and value creation mechanisms [1]. In a channel expansion decision, this means estimating not only total audience size but also addressable demand, segment fit, geographic coverage, and likely conversion potential. A large platform audience is insufficient if the channel does not reach customers who match the firm's positioning and purchase logic.

A strong market reach assessment should distinguish between exposure, acquisition, and profitable conversion. Omnichannel customer experience studies show that customers evaluate channels through integration quality, convenience, and experience consistency rather than through channel availability alone [11, 12]. This means that potential reach must be adjusted for customer willingness to use the channel, likely overlap with existing customers, and the incremental value of the channel relative to current touchpoints. Managers should therefore ask whether the new channel expands the market or merely redistributes existing demand.

Competitive intensity is also central to market reach evaluation because digital channels often reduce entry barriers while increasing visibility-based rivalry. The future of retailing literature suggests that technology-enabled environments intensify competition around convenience, personalisation, service design, and price transparency [2, 13]. In practical terms, firms should assess competitor density, advertising cost escalation, search visibility, platform ranking difficulty, and the bargaining power of dominant marketplaces. A channel may appear attractive in aggregate market size but unattractive once acquisition costs and competitive crowding are considered.

Market reach assessment should be documented using comparable metrics and data sources so that managers can compare channel options before committing resources. **Table 1** defines the dimensions and metrics for assessing market reach potential of a new digital channel. The logic of this assessment is consistent with research calling for better metrics in multi-channel management and more disciplined evaluation of channel-level contribution [13]. It also reflects digital capability scholarship, which shows that firms need analytical routines to close the gap between digital opportunity and marketing execution [14].

Table 1. Market Reach Assessment Framework for Digital Channel Expansion: Dimensions, Metrics, and Data Sources

Assessment dimension	Decision question	Indicative metrics	Primary data sources
Addressable audience size	Does the channel provide access to a sufficiently large relevant audience?	Platform audience, category traffic, search volume, follower or user base, regional user penetration	Platform analytics, market intelligence databases, search trend tools, industry reports, internal customer data
Target customer fit	Does the channel reach customers who match the firm's positioning and value proposition?	Segment overlap, demographic fit, behavioural fit, purchase-intent indicators, customer persona match	CRM records, customer surveys, platform audience insights, social listening, web analytics
Incremental reach	Does the channel add new customers rather than duplicate existing demand?	New-customer ratio, overlap with existing channels, incremental traffic, unique geographic coverage, customer source attribution	CRM matching, attribution models, channel analytics, loyalty data, geographic sales analysis
Acquisition economics	Can the firm acquire customers	Customer acquisition cost,	Advertising dashboards, campaign

	through the channel at an acceptable cost?	conversion rate, cost per click, cost per order, payback period, lifetime value ratio	tests, financial models, historical channel benchmarks
Revenue opportunity	Can the channel generate meaningful and sustainable revenue?	Expected gross merchandise value, average order value, repeat purchase rate, margin contribution, revenue per visitor	Financial forecasts, pilot tests, category benchmarks, internal sales records
Competitive intensity	Is the channel crowded or dominated by competitors with stronger visibility or pricing power?	Competitor count, share of search, marketplace ranking difficulty, price dispersion, promotional intensity	Marketplace scans, search results, competitor analytics, pricing tools, digital shelf monitoring
Geographic and logistical reach	Does the channel extend reach into locations the firm can serve reliably?	Serviceable regions, delivery coverage, cross-border feasibility, fulfilment cost by region, delivery time promise	Logistics data, carrier coverage maps, fulfilment system data, regional sales analysis

Channel conflict assessment evaluates whether a new digital channel will disrupt existing commercial relationships, pricing structures, customer ownership, or channel roles. Digital channel expansion can create conflict when the firm sells directly to customers who were previously served by distributors, retailers, franchisees, or sales partners. Research on multi-channel management shows that channel design decisions can affect both conflict and performance, especially when roles, incentives, and customer access rights are not clearly defined [15]. For this reason, conflict risk should be assessed before launch rather than managed only after partner resistance appears.

Cannibalisation is one of the most visible forms of channel conflict because a new channel may shift sales away from existing stores, dealers, or online platforms without generating meaningful incremental demand. Research on buy-online-and-pick-up-in-store demonstrates that digitally enabled channel combinations can produce complex substitution and complementarity effects across physical and online settings [8, 16]. The managerial issue is therefore not simply whether a new channel sells, but whether it grows the total business. A channel that transfers existing customers to a lower-margin or partner-disruptive route may weaken the overall channel portfolio.

Pricing inconsistency is another major source of conflict because digital channels often increase price transparency and make promotions more visible across customer groups. Manufacturers and retailers may face pressure when marketplace discounts, direct-to-consumer offers, or social commerce campaigns undermine partner pricing expectations. Channel conflict scholarship also highlights technological disintermediation as a long-standing source of tension when digital tools allow firms to bypass intermediaries [17]. Managers should therefore evaluate price governance, promotion rules, and margin protection before approving expansion.

Conflict risk assessment should convert these issues into observable indicators that managers can monitor during pre-launch evaluation and pilot testing. Table 2 catalogues the types of channel conflict and their risk indicators in digital channel expansion. This typology supports a practical readiness judgement by linking conflict sources to early warning signals, mitigation actions, and decision implications. It also reflects the need for more deliberate channel governance in digital and omnichannel business models [18].

Channel Conflict Assessment

Table 2. Channel Conflict Risk Assessment: Conflict Types, Triggers, and Predictive Indicators

Conflict type	Typical trigger in digital channel expansion	Predictive indicators	Potential managerial responses
Sales cannibalisation	New channel targets the same customers served by existing stores, distributors, or platforms	High customer overlap, declining partner sales, low new-customer ratio, margin migration	Define channel-specific assortment segments, targeting rules, and incremental customer targets
Partner pushback	Distributors, retailers, franchisees, or sales agents perceive direct competition	Partner complaints, reduced cooperation, threats to delist, lower promotional support	Establish partner communication, compensation rules, exclusivity offers, or shared fulfilment models
Pricing inconsistency	Digital channel uses discounts, commissions, or promotions that conflict with existing prices	Price dispersion, customer complaints, margin erosion, promotion leakage	Create price corridors, promotional calendars, and channel-specific marketing controls
Brand dilution through channel mismatch	Channel environment conflicts with the firm's brand positioning or service expectations	Low-quality marketplace presentation, uncontrolled sellers, weak content standards, counterfeit risk	Set listing standards, authorise seller rules, content approval, and monitoring routines
Customer ownership	Internal teams or	Duplicate CRM	Define customer

conflict	partners dispute who owns customer data, leads, and post-purchase service	records, unclear lead routing, service disputes, attribution conflict	ownership rules, data sharing protocols, and service responsibility
Promotion and assortment conflict	New channel receives products, bundles, or incentives that existing channels cannot match	Complaints about unfair assortment, channel-specific stockouts, bundle leakage	Use differentiated assortment, controlled exclusives, transparent eligibility rules
Service responsibility conflict	Customers receive inconsistent support depending on the channel used	Conflicting return policies, service handoff failures, unresolved complaints, partner blame shifting	Standardise service policies and escalation procedures across channels

Operational Capacity and Brand Consistency

Operational capacity determines whether the firm can fulfil the promises created by digital channel expansion. E-fulfilment research shows that omnichannel retailing requires coordinated inventory, order processing, delivery, and returns capabilities rather than a simple extension of online selling [19]. Last-mile logistics studies similarly indicate that consumer-driven e-commerce creates pressure for speed, flexibility, and reliability across delivery models [20]. A channel expansion decision is therefore incomplete unless it tests whether the firm can absorb new volume, complexity, and service expectations.

Fulfilment capacity is especially important because digital channels often create demand volatility and fragmented order patterns. Grocery and retail logistics research shows that bricks-and-clicks expansion changes network design,

picking processes, store roles, and delivery planning [21]. Vehicle routing research also demonstrates that omnichannel distribution introduces operational complexity when customer orders must be fulfilled through multiple locations or delivery modes [22]. Managers should therefore assess warehouse capacity, inventory visibility, order routing logic, carrier performance, and returns readiness before approving scale-up.

Brand consistency must be assessed alongside operational capacity because customer experience is shaped by both what the firm communicates and what it delivers. Omnichannel customer experience research shows that customers respond to perceived integration, continuity, and consistency across channel encounters [23]. Authentic omnichannel branding further suggests that firms must create a seamless brand experience while allowing appropriate channel-specific adaptation [24]. A digital channel that expands reach but fragments messaging, service tone, visual identity, or post-purchase experience can weaken brand equity.

Operational and brand readiness should be assessed through thresholds that identify whether the channel is scalable, controllable, and consistent with the firm's customer promise. **Table 3** outlines the operational capacity and brand consistency criteria for expansion readiness. This table links fulfilment, service, technology, data, and brand governance into a single readiness view. It also reflects broader digital transformation research showing that digital initiatives require coordinated organisational, technological, and strategic change rather than isolated channel activation [25, 26].

Table 3. Operational Capacity and Brand Consistency Readiness: Key Assessment Criteria and Thresholds

Readiness area	Assessment criterion	Minimum readiness threshold	Evidence required
Fulfilment capacity	Ability to process additional orders without degrading delivery performance	Forecasted volume can be handled within existing or funded capacity	Order forecasts, warehouse capacity data, labour plans, carrier agreements

Inventory visibility	Ability to show accurate stock availability across channels	Real-time or near-real-time inventory data is available for the new channel	Inventory system audit, stock accuracy tests, integration documentation
Customer service capacity	Ability to handle new enquiries, complaints, returns, and channel-specific questions	Service staffing, scripts, escalation rules, and response targets are defined before launch	Contact centre forecasts, service playbooks, training records
Returns and reverse logistics	Ability to process returns generated by the new channel	Return policy, reverse flow, refund timing, and inspection routines are operational	Returns process maps, cost estimates, policy documents
Technology integration	Ability to connect the new channel to commerce, CRM, payment, analytics, and fulfilment systems	Critical systems are integrated or manual workarounds are explicitly controlled	Integration tests, data flow maps, system ownership records
Brand messaging consistency	Ability to maintain coherent value proposition and tone across the channel	Channel content follows approved messaging and customer promise standards	Brand guidelines, content approval workflows, channel audit results

Visual identity consistency	Ability to preserve recognisable visual identity in channel-specific formats	Product pages, social assets, marketplace listings, and service materials meet brand standards	Creative templates, listing standards, visual audits
Experience governance	Ability to monitor whether customer experience remains consistent after launch	Ownership, metrics, review cadence, and corrective routines are assigned	Governance charter, dashboard design, escalation rules

Proposed Channel Expansion Decision Framework

The proposed framework converts digital channel expansion from an opportunity-led decision into a staged readiness evaluation. It begins with market reach assessment, then tests channel conflict risk, operational capacity, and brand consistency before assigning an overall decision outcome. This sequence reflects research on omnichannel management, which emphasises that channel decisions must integrate customer-facing value, business model configuration, operational execution, and organisational coordination [10, 18]. The framework is therefore designed for managerial use before full launch, although it can also support pilot review and post-launch learning.

The first decision rule is that market reach alone cannot justify expansion if the firm faces severe conflict, weak operational capacity, or poor brand control. Digital marketing capability research shows that firms often experience a gap between digital opportunity and execution capability [14]. Similarly, qualitative evidence on digital technology and marketing indicates that digital tools reshape marketing work, governance requirements, and organisational practices rather than merely adding new communication options [27]. The framework therefore

requires managers to evaluate whether the firm is ready to serve, govern, and sustain the channel after entry.

The scoring logic uses a four-pillar model in which each pillar is rated on a readiness scale and then interpreted through threshold rules. A green-light decision is appropriate when all four pillars meet or exceed threshold, a conditional-go decision is appropriate when weaknesses are manageable through mitigation, and a no-go decision is appropriate when one or more critical weaknesses could undermine the channel. This logic is consistent with decision-oriented omnichannel scholarship that calls for structured evaluation of channel integration, customer experience, and operational feasibility [28, 29]. It also allows managers to treat readiness as a portfolio judgement rather than a single score.

Figure 1 presents the proposed digital channel expansion readiness framework by integrating market reach potential, channel conflict risk, operational capacity, and brand consistency into a structured expansion decision.

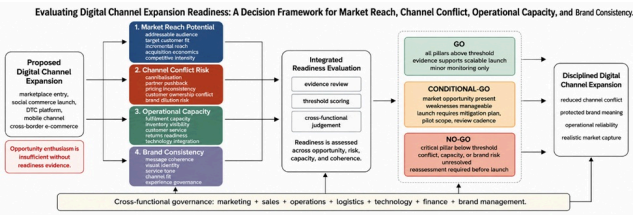


Figure 1. Digital Channel Expansion Readiness Framework: Integrating Market Reach, Channel Conflict, Operational Capacity, and Brand Consistency into Go, Conditional-Go, and No-Go Decisions

The integrated framework should be used in cross-functional decision meetings involving marketing, sales, operations, finance, technology, logistics, and brand teams. **Table 4** presents the integrated decision framework combining all four assessment pillars. It provides a practical scoring model that links each pillar to evidence, threshold interpretation, and decision outcomes. The framework also accommodates manufacturer-side e-commerce concerns, where direct channel expansion requires careful coordination of channel management, partner relationships, and future digital pathways [30].

Table 4. Digital Channel Expansion Decision Framework: Pillar Integration, Decision Logic, and Scoring Model

Framework pillar	Core readiness question	Suggested score range	Green-light condition
Market reach potential	Does the channel provide economically attractive access to relevant and incremental customers?	1 = weak reach, 2 = uncertain reach, 3 = moderate reach, 4 = strong reach, 5 = highly attractive reach	Score of 4 or 5 with evidence of segment fit, incremental demand, and viable acquisition economics
Channel conflict risk	Can the firm expand without damaging existing channels, partners, pricing, or customer ownership?	1 = severe conflict, 2 = high conflict, 3 = manageable conflict, 4 = low conflict, 5 = strategic channel complementarity	Score of 4 or 5 with clear role, pricing partner, and ownership rules
Operational capacity	Can fulfilment, service, technology, inventory, and returns systems support the channel reliably?	1 = not ready, 2 = major gaps, 3 = partially ready, 4 = ready with minor adjustments, 5 = scalable readiness	Score of 4 or 5 with tested systems, capacity plans, and accountable owners
Brand consistency	Can the firm maintain coherent identity, messaging, service tone, and experience standards?	1 = uncontrolled brand risk, 2 = weak governance, 3 = partial governance, 4 = consistent, 5 = strongly governed and adaptable	Score of 4 or 5 with channel-specific brand rules and monitoring

Integrated decision	Should the firm proceed with the channel expansion?	Total score of 4–20, interpreted with critical thresholds	Go if total score is 16–20 and no pillar is below 4
Mitigation requirement	What must be fixed before or during launch?	Qualitative action plan linked to weak pillars	Minor improvement only
Review cadence	How should the decision be monitored after approval?	Pre-launch, pilot, scale-up, and post-launch reviews	Standard monthly review after launch

Managerial Application and Limitations

In practice, the framework can guide a fashion retailer considering entry into a large online marketplace. The market reach pillar may show strong traffic and category demand, but the conflict pillar may identify pricing pressure, partner tension, and risk of brand dilution through uncontrolled product presentation. Research on e-commerce channel management on the manufacturer side shows that such decisions often involve unresolved debates about direct access, intermediary roles, and digital channel governance [30]. The framework would therefore support a conditional-go decision if the retailer can define authorised listings, price corridors, assortment rules, and brand presentation standards before launch.

A second scenario involves a software or service firm exploring social commerce or interactive digital selling. Market reach may be promising because customers increasingly encounter brands through digital touchpoints, but operational and brand readiness may depend on response speed, content governance, and consistency of advice across channels. Studies of omnichannel technologies and augmented digital experiences show that new digital interfaces can change customer expectations and require careful design of interaction quality [9, 29]. In this case, the framework helps managers avoid launching a

high-visibility channel without support processes capable of sustaining the promised experience.

A third scenario involves a retailer adding buy-online-and-pick-up-in-store or another digitally integrated fulfilment option. The channel may strengthen convenience and customer experience, but it also increases pressure on store labour, inventory accuracy, routing, and service accountability. Empirical and conceptual research on omnichannel fulfilment shows that these operational arrangements can be strategically valuable but execution-intensive [21, 31]. Managers should therefore use the framework to decide whether a pilot is more appropriate than immediate full-scale rollout.

Figure 2 illustrates the managerial application pathway for moving from a proposed channel opportunity to evidence collection, readiness diagnosis, mitigation planning, and final expansion decision.

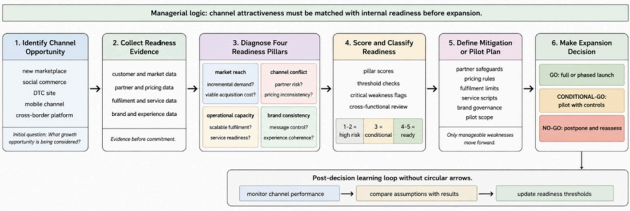


Figure 2. Managerial Application Pathway for Digital Channel Expansion Readiness: From Channel Opportunity Screening to Evidence-Based Launch Decision

The framework has limitations because it is conceptual, judgement-based, and not yet calibrated through empirical testing across industries. **Table 5** provides illustrative application scenarios and highlights framework limitations. Its scores should not be interpreted as precise predictions; instead, they structure managerial dialogue and make assumptions explicit. The framework is most useful when combined with internal data, pilot evidence, and periodic review, especially because digital transformation and channel environments continue to evolve [25].

Table 5. Application Scenarios and Limitations of the Channel Expansion Decision Framework

Illustrative scenario	Likely opportunity	Main readiness risk	Framework use
Fashion retailer	Access to high traffic	Brand dilution, price	Assess incremental

entering a large marketplace	and new geographic customers	comparison, partner conflict, commission pressure	reach, pricing, governance, authorised content, and fulfilment readiness
Manufacturer launching direct-to-consumer e-commerce	Higher customer data access and margin control	Distributor conflict, customer ownership disputes, service capability gaps	Evaluate channel conflict, customer data rules, fulfilment capacity, and partner communication
Retailer adding buy-online-and-pick-up-in-store	Convenience, store traffic, and omnichannel integration	Inventory accuracy, store labour pressure, queue management, unclear service roles	Test operational capacity and customer experience consistency before scale up
Software firm adding social commerce	Direct engagement and lower-friction discovery	Weak content governance, inconsistent messaging, service response overload	Evaluate brand consistency, response standards, lead routing, and acquisition economics
Premium brand expanding to discount-oriented digital platforms	Wider visibility and short-term sales	Positioning damage, price inconsistency, loss of exclusivity	Assess brand channel fit, pricing risk, and customer perception consequences
Regional firm entering cross-border e-commerce	New geographic demand and growth optionality	Logistics cost, returns complexity, localisation, service language barriers	Evaluate geographic reach again, fulfilment, returns, and brand adaptation capacity

Subscription business adding a marketplace listing	Access to discovery traffic and partner ecosystems	Customer data loss, attribution ambiguity, commission effects	Compare incremental acquisition against customer ownership a margin trade offs
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Future Development Pathway

The framework can be developed further through empirical validation using case studies, longitudinal channel launches, and comparative industry analysis. Future research could examine whether firms that apply structured readiness assessments experience fewer post-launch failures, lower conflict, or stronger customer experience performance. Omnichannel customer experience measurement research provides a useful foundation because it links perceived channel integration to customer outcomes and could help validate the brand and experience components of the model [23]. Case-based testing would also help identify which readiness pillars matter most in different industries.

A second development pathway is to transform the framework into a weighted scoring tool. Different sectors may require different weights because a grocery retailer may prioritise fulfilment and last-mile reliability, while a luxury brand may prioritise brand consistency and channel control. Research on e-fulfilment, last-mile logistics, and consumer-driven e-commerce suggests that operational criteria may be particularly decisive in high-volume retail contexts [19, 20]. By contrast, authentic omnichannel brand experience research indicates that brand coherence may be more important where symbolic value and customer trust are central [24].

A third pathway is to integrate the framework with real-time dashboards and decision-support systems. Firms could connect market reach indicators, acquisition costs, partner signals, fulfilment performance, service backlog, return rates, and brand compliance audits into a live channel readiness dashboard. Digital transformation literature suggests that such tools would be valuable only if supported by organisational routines, governance authority, and dynamic capabilities for ongoing adjustment [4, 5, 26]. Future development should therefore focus not only on

analytics but also on how managers interpret, review, and act on readiness signals.

Conclusion

Digital channel expansion is often framed as an opportunity to reach more customers, increase sales, and modernise the business model. This article argues that such expansion should first be treated as a readiness decision. A new digital channel is strategically valuable only when the firm can translate market access into sustainable, coherent, and operationally reliable performance.

The proposed decision framework provides a structured way to assess market reach potential, channel conflict risk, operational capacity, and brand consistency before committing to expansion. Its value lies in forcing managers to compare external opportunity with internal preparedness. By using go, no-go, and conditional-go logic, the framework helps firms avoid premature channel launches while still supporting disciplined experimentation.

The broader contribution is to reposition digital channel expansion as a cross-functional governance problem rather than a narrow marketing initiative. Managers should use structured readiness evaluations to reduce costly missteps, protect brand meaning, and align channel growth with operational reality. Researchers can extend the framework by testing its decision rules, refining its scoring thresholds, and adapting it across sectors, regions, and channel types.

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