



Prototyping the Omnichannel Solutions

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In omnichannel marketing data and analysis of actual customer behaviour is required together with an innovative process to rapidly translate analytical findings into simple, designed prototypes that can be used to test the future existence of possible channels and types of interactions in these channels. Therefore, we propose and present in this highly explorative working paper, the contours of an empirically based innovation method for prototyping future scenarios in terms of developing input for a realistic and valuable omnichannel strategy. This research may have implications for practitioners and researchers working with services and marketing.

Key words: omnichannel, innovation, prototyping, methodology, design thinking

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How do we predict what we need in the future? How do we know what customers will need, require, ask for and use in the future? Of course, the future has always been hard to predict – although new predictive analytics get closer to targeting the needs in real time (Guhathakurta 2016). While big data and predictive analytics have these possibilities embedded, they are still far from capable of predicting anything else than what digital traces leave behind. The strategic choices on corporate C-suite level concerning the type and degree of being omnichannel present cannot rely solely on big data like large masses of quantitative numbers interpreted by machines. Rather, important decisions concerning the core of business development and marketing, need to be based on analysis of customer behaviour as the foundation for the construction of prototyping future scenarios. Therefore, in this article, we present a test of a method for rapidly designing prototypes that enables marketing managers to achieve the kind of data on the future required to harvest the findings from these prototyped future scenarios, and use it for strategic decisions.

The case involves a Danish optician chain, from which we have been collecting data in 11 physical stores and on the internet. The case is specifically centred on the business transformation from being single channel with focus only on the +100 physical stores in Denmark, towards being - at some point in the future - more omnichannel. However, to fully establish a solid ground for *which* channels the optician chain should include in the omnichannel focus, we conducted a large research project, investigating customer's current touchpoints, needs and preferences regarding eye related issues, whether being physical or digital. Following the actual everyday and naturally occurring practices of customers online, digitally and physically, at the same time or rapidly crossing between modes, we refer to as “phygital” journeys. *Phy*-sical + *di*-gital = phygital.

A networked society (Castells 2009) with mobile devices and increasing information flows demands new ways for retail stores to interact with their customers. Among alternative models of innovation, Omnichannel is highlighted as being central (Houllind 2015; Aubrey and Judge 2012;

Brynjolfsson et al. 2013; Moreno et al. 2014). Omnichannel exists within many different contexts and is defined in various ways. However, common denominators can be found: It is about offering customers a seamless and meaningful experience, regardless of the interaction channel (Aubrey and Judge 2012; Hansen and Kien Sia 2014; Hathaway 2014; Houliind 2015); providing them with relevant communication in relevant contexts; and triggering them when they are most inclined to purchase (Houliind 2015). In other words, it is about blurring the lines between the physical and digital world, and embracing a phygital customer journey (Due, Nielsen, and Kristensen 2016).

This however, calls for much more than the application of marketing initiatives. It calls for a business model with focus on the customer, rather than on the product – a business model that is built upon a thorough understanding of the customers, their needs and interaction with the company, and the effect, which these interactions have on their purchasing behaviour. We argue that when developing an omnichannel strategy, foreseeing future actions and getting a glimpse of how customers perceive and interact with the brand under new circumstances, is highly valuable. Therefore, this article suggests how customer insights can be materialized into physical artefacts, and how prototypes and scenarios can be used to gain insights into the strategic outcome of future omnichannel initiatives.

Building on the large amount of varied types of data collected, we identified several highly relevant findings. However, these findings about customer's crucial touchpoints were "just" analytical findings, and the key argument in this article is that one needs to rapidly test new methodologies and the imagined future scenarios of channels in order to be able to provide strategic advice to the optical retail company about which channels to focus on in an omnichannel business model. This article reports on our method development and testing of these different types of prototyping experiments.

OMNICHANNEL IN THE LIGHT OF INNOVATION METHODS

This article contributes with new knowledge on how to work with prototypes and design and innovation methodologies in a marketing, omnichannel and business development context. The research is related to theories of creative phases in an innovation project and specifically how to work with one of the final phases: rapid prototyping. Although these phases are well-described as theoretical and methodological issues, they have not as far as we know, been investigated and described in relation to the field of omnichannel marketing.

Different theories have throughout the history of creativity and innovation described different phases required for an innovation project. This specifically concerns theories of *Creative Problem Solving* (CPS) (Basadur 1994; Baughman and Mumford 1995; Isaksen and Treffinger 1985; McFadzean 1998; Mumford 2003; Puccio et al. 2006; Sik-wah Fong 1999). Some of the more known phase theories include: Guilford (1950), who described four phases: 1) preparation, 2) incubation, 3) illumination 4) verification; Osborn (1953) who described three phases: 1) find fact, 2) construct ideas, 3) construct solutions; Saren (1984): 1) stimulus, 2) concept, 3) ideas, 4) decide; Isaksen (1985): 1) mess finding, 2) data finding, 3) problem finding, 4) idea finding, 5) solution finding 6) accept; Lundin & Söderholm (1995): 1) concept, 2) development, 3) implementation, 4) closing; Amabile (1996): 1) problem definition, 2) collect information, 3) feedback 4) validation; Darsø (2001): insight, 2) saturation, 3) incubation, 4) illumination 5) verification. On one hand, these theories are all different, but if we correlate for varied terminology, they are actually quite similar in the sense that they describe the process of constructing a creative solution to a problem through phases. However, one particular element in this process is not mentioned in these classical theories, and that is to make prototyping experimentation part of the creative process. Not just as a validation or test phase, but as a part of the analysis and actual innovation process.

Theories of design thinking (Brown 2008, 2009; Curedale 2013; Kimbell 2011, 2015; Lockwood 2009; Rowe 1991), service design (Katzan 2011; Polaine, Løvlie, and Reason 2013; Stickdorn 2012; Stickdorn and Zehrer 2009; Zehrer 2009; Zomerdijk and Voss 2010) and participatory innovation (Buur and Matthews 2008) on the other hand focus on rapid, simplified prototyping as part of the innovation process, where findings rapidly are turned into very simple prototypes that can be tested in future-enacted scenarios. Rapid prototyping may be exemplified as e.g. a simple sketch, a quickly built object out of paper, pens, glue, etc. - which also have been called "pretotypes" (Savoia 2012). Instead of building e.g. a technological device or an user interface, participants construct and use hand-drawn mock-ups and imagine the usability and functionality in real life settings (Due 2016).

Creative embodied working with objects and materials are necessary elements in creative workshops (Bødker and Buur 2002; Brouwer and Dijk 2011; Luck 2010), and this creative workshopping is the necessary prerequisite for construction the prototypes for testing. The phases we have been following, aligned with the Design-Thinking principles (Brown 2009), are to 1) collect data about customers in order to understand them, 2) identify patterns and define problems, 3) imagine possible solutions during creative workshops and construct these solutions as testable prototypes, 4) do the prototyping and 5) evaluate and test in larger scale.

As far as we know, there exists a lot of research about data collection (Jordan 2012), problem definition and creative workshops (Nielsen 2014), but very little about how different prototyping experiments work in real life (exceptions being Brouwer and ten Bhömer 2013; Büscher et al. 2004; Holtzblatt et al. 2014) - and nothing about this in an omnichannel context. In a marketing omnichannel context, where the goal is to understand customer behaviour, needs and types as the ground for choosing the right touchpoints and channels to engage in, our research suggests that it is valuable to do rapid prototyping tests in order to get a quick understanding about the types of solutions that might

work in the future. Hence, we propose a method for learning about the future through prototyping scenarios (Bodker 2000; Simsarian 2003; Selin et al. 2015). The current research, on which we report in this article, contributes to this field by showing different ways of working with prototypes as part of the innovation process, leading towards strategically relevant recommendations about what channels to focus on in an omnichannel strategy.

THE CASE: OMNICHANNEL IN A DANISH OPTICIAN RETAILER

The prototyped future scenarios analysed in this article are carried out within ‘The Synoptik Omnichannel Project’, a research project funded by Synoptik-Fonden. The overall aim of the project was to investigate how Synoptik, a large optometrist chain with more than 100 physical stores in Denmark, could change from being single channelled to being multichannel and perhaps even omnichannel at some point in the future. The aim was to map not only the touchpoints that customers were currently going through, but also to uncover 1) where and in what situations people experience vision impairment, 2) where and how people would like to be approached by an optometrist in their everyday lives, 3) how to ease the customer journey from first awareness of symptoms to purchase of vision aid such as lenses or spectacles, and 4) how and where customer data can be collected and utilized in order to enhance the customer experience in terms of service and courtesy. The project was conducted throughout 13 months.

ANALYSIS: FOUR DIFFERENT PROTOTYPE TESTS

In this analysis, we will focus on four different types of prototyping future scenarios. All prototypes were designed, based on a huge amount of data, analysis of data and identification of moments of truth in the customer journey. We developed possible solutions, and these were designed and constructed as testable prototypes, which then were actually tested as part of the innovation

concerning future relevant channels. The aim of the analysis is to show how rapid prototyping provides knowledge that is otherwise hard to get. As mentioned earlier, the use of survey data and interviews is flawed and very problematic for gaining knowledge about the future. Instead, we propose elements of a different kind of rapid prototyping methodology, leading to close-to-actual knowledge about future customer behaviour. We show examples of four different prototypes to indicate the possible typology and range of the method. Because of this varied nature of the examples, we do not apply a specific grand theory for analyzing the data - other than the overall design thinking methodology (Brown) - but rely on the grounded theory framework (Corbin and Strauss 2014; Glaser 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1999). Grounded theory methods consist of flexible strategies for collecting and analysing data. It includes data-collection and analysis; pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis; discovery of basic social processes within the data; inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes; integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the processes. This builds upon constructivist methods that assume the existence of multiple realities, the mutual creation of knowledge by researchers and research participants, and aims to provide interpretive understanding of the studied world (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001). The examples we have been working with fit into a matrix, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

	Close to existing business	Expanding business
Physical prototypes	Ex 5.1. Prototyping in the store	Ex 5.2. Prototyping out of store
Digital prototypes	Ex 5.3. Prototyping a store on Facebook	Ex 5.4. Prototyping an information site

Figure 1. A typology of different prototyping scenarios

In each analysis, we will describe relevant data and findings from the initial analysis and our considerations about why and how to turn this into prototypes, and then reports on the prototype experiment.

Physical: Prototyping in the store

Regardless that parts of the retail market have already been disrupted by web shops and other online possibilities, our data shows that when it comes to buying spectacles, the physical store is still a highly important touchpoint. None of our 30+ interviewees were willing to purchase a pair of spectacles that they had not physically tried on: The sensation of how the spectacles feel on your face and the touch of the material is not possible online. Even though “home-try-on” solutions theoretically make it possible, both current and prospective users of vision enhancing products stated that they would prefer to visit some type of physical store for both eye tests and fitting of lenses and frames. Figure 2 shows the features that customers would like to see in an optometrist web shop.

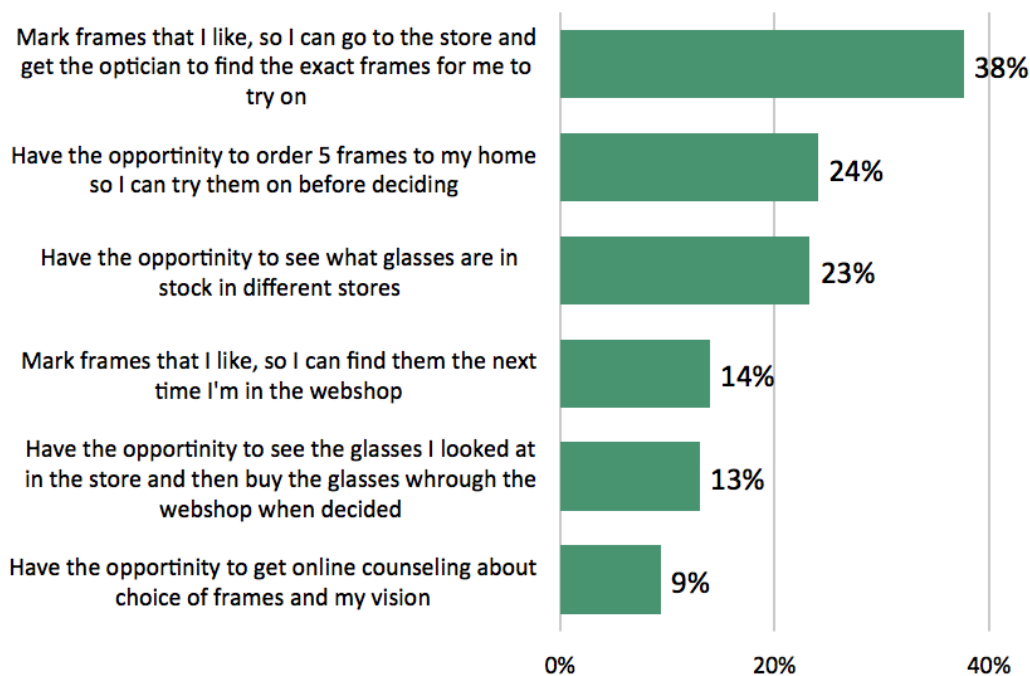


Figure 2. From our customer survey: What features would you like to see in an optometrist web shop?

A key finding was that customers also in a future omnichannel scenario want to visit the store at some point during the phygital customer journey. However, the customers also mentioned, that the store should be connected to the digital buying experience. So we wanted to test what kind of digitally connected types of stores customers would prefer. In co-creation workshops with the staff, we had them co-design how they would like the digital customer profile interface to look, what features they would like it to have, what data would be helpful etc. In addition to that, we presented them with several omnichannel initiatives of leading retailers, in order to get their feedback. On this background, we designed a role-play scenario with different simplified prototypes. We wrote scripts that focused on different data points and outlined the roles of each participant and customer, and created prototypes for use in the role-play: 1) wireframes of the customer profile in order to provide the staff with the relevant customer info and 2) relevant technologies to be tested (see Fig. 3).

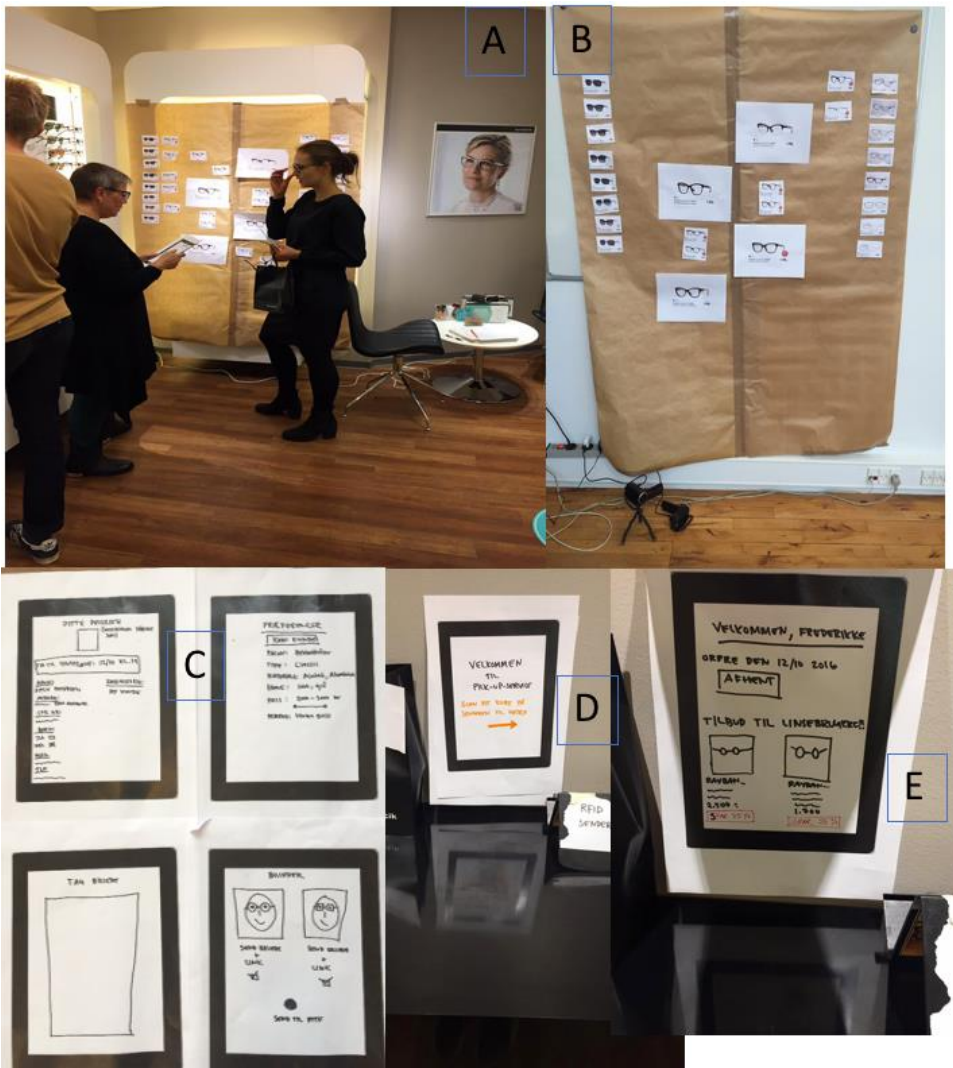


Figure 3. Different physical prototypes which we tested in the shop

The data and technologies were tested through in-store role-play in a Synoptik store, where three staff members were given scripts designed to match 10 customers, played by both users and non-users of vision enhancing products. Through role-play, we wanted to test how both staff and customers perceived the interaction/shopping experience if 1) the staff was given iPads with digital customer profiles, giving them access to data about the customer such as: Preferred brands and colours, browsing history in a web shop, or wish list in a web shop (Fig. 4, C); 2) customers and staff had access to a virtual wall (Fig.4, A,B), where all frames in stock were displayed in imagined 3D; 3)

staff members took photos of customers wearing frames that they liked (Fig 4, C) and uploaded them to customer profiles, instantly accessible on the customer's smartphones, 4) the store had a RFID-based pick-up-point where contact lens users could preorder e.g. saline solution (Fig 4, D) and 5) the staff members were to ask for personal information and sensitive health data outside the eye test room.

The entire scenario was filmed and afterwards, we talked to each participant in order to gain insights on their experience with and reflections on the tested scenario. Testing the data and technologies in this type of role-play-scenario gave a great deal of insight into what hypothetically seemed like a good idea when discussed or proposed by either staff or current or prospective customers, and what actually worked well once it was implemented. An example is the virtual wall (Fig 4, B): During the co-creation workshop with the staff, we presented the idea and showed pictures from another retailer, who had embraced the concept. The reactions we got were very negative: None of the participants wanted to try it in their own store. But once we hung up a simple low-tech prototype and the staff began to use it with the customers, they discovered the value of the concept: The wall allowed the staff to provide customers with a much better service. Not only were they able to show the customer any specific model (combination of colours, material, etc.) he or she was looking for, and instead of sending them to another branch to try on a frame not locally in stock, they were able to show detailed 3D images of any frame and subsequently either order them to the local store or the customer's home address for a home-try-on. As one staff member elaborated: "We can't be sure that people end up in a Synoptik store when we recommend them to look after the product in another store," hence underlining the wall's potential for increasing sale but still keeping the customer in the loop.

Other important findings were e.g. that both customers and staff really appreciated when staff were given insights into what the customers had been looking at in the web shop, and that customers

were very excited about the offer to get their picture taken and uploaded to their profile and found it an excellent service. Overall, the prototyping of this future scenario gave a much better insight into what customers and staff perceived as a good idea when asked, and what they found valuable once they were put into practice.

Physical: Prototyping out of the store

From our analysis of customers' behavioural patterns, one finding was particularly interesting: 38% of all people experiencing visual impairment wait between four months and two years before they seek help from a professional optometrist and get visionary aid. In other words, there is a vast time gap between the customer's identification of their own vision impairment and the point of purchase of visionary aid. The question was therefore how Synoptik could utilize this customer insight and design a valuable customer experience that could shorten the journey from awareness to purchase. The main reason respondents provided was: *"I see what I need to see."* Additionally, respondents reasoned their lack of purchase of visionary aid on laziness or time restraints: *"I will get a pair of glasses once the optometrist comes to my workplace. Until then, I'll do fine. I refuse to spend my free time waiting for an eye test!"* - Male, aged 21, using a magnifier for reading on the job.

The general attitude amongst this customer type was that they would rather go through life with poor eyesight than take the time to see a professional optician. In other words: They needed the optician to come to them. Not the other way around. We found that 36% of all Danes aged 19-34 would prefer to see their optometrist at their workplace, and 24% at their educational institution (Fig. 5). Furthermore, 37% of people aged 18-34 identified their vision impairment for the first time in school. This was mainly because they had problems seeing the board during class. We therefore identified educational institutions as a relevant touchpoint that could be used to trigger people's

purchasing decision. As one informant said: *“I tried my co-student’s glasses on. I then realized that the board did not have to be blurry.”*

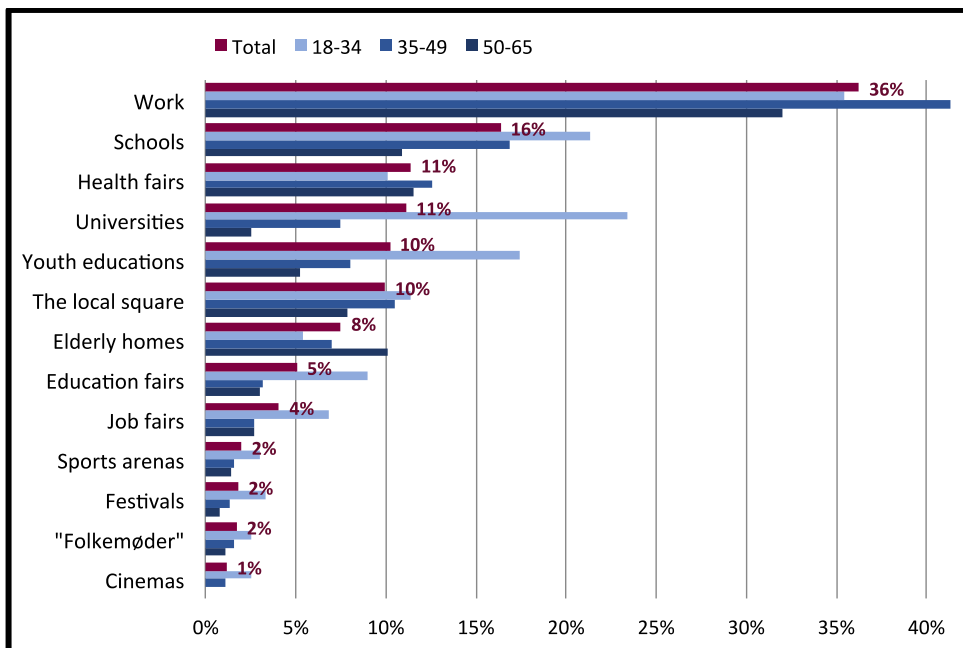


Figure 4. Results from a survey distributed to 1000 statistically selected people in Denmark

A solution to that problem could be to redefine the physical presence and move beyond stores. What if Synoptik tapped into situations in people’s everyday lives and made them aware of the solution, even before they noticed the problem? What if Synoptik could transform the experience of the optician visit from a bleak inconvenient necessity into a valued service? What if they could transform people’s current perception (that they’d rather go through life with poor eyesight than visit an optician) into the perception that Synoptik is their friend in need?

More specifically, what if Synoptik offered mobile pop-up stores as one channel in the large new omnichannel landscape and became able to move around from place to place? Would that make people see a professional? And could it potentially cause an increase in sales for Synoptik in the short run? What if people created a digital customer profile with personal information when they visited the pop-up store, and at the same time, gave Synoptik permission to contact them with e.g.

information/offers relevant to their exact profile of vision, as well as reminders for new eye tests? Could it potentially foster customer loyalty in the long run?

Packed with these research questions, we co-constructed physical prototypes for use in the wild with employees. With the relevant technical equipment, a stand with a small selection of glasses and an optometrist, we created a pop-up store at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at UNCP called Panum Institute (Fig. 5). In order to integrate the digital overlap and make the prototype as “phygital” (Due, Nielsen, and Kristensen 2016) and as close to the future scenario that we wanted the prototype to reflect as possible, we made people aware of the event by hanging up posters with a QR code and a link to an online survey, allowing people to make a specific appointment in advance and submit relevant personal information prior to the test.

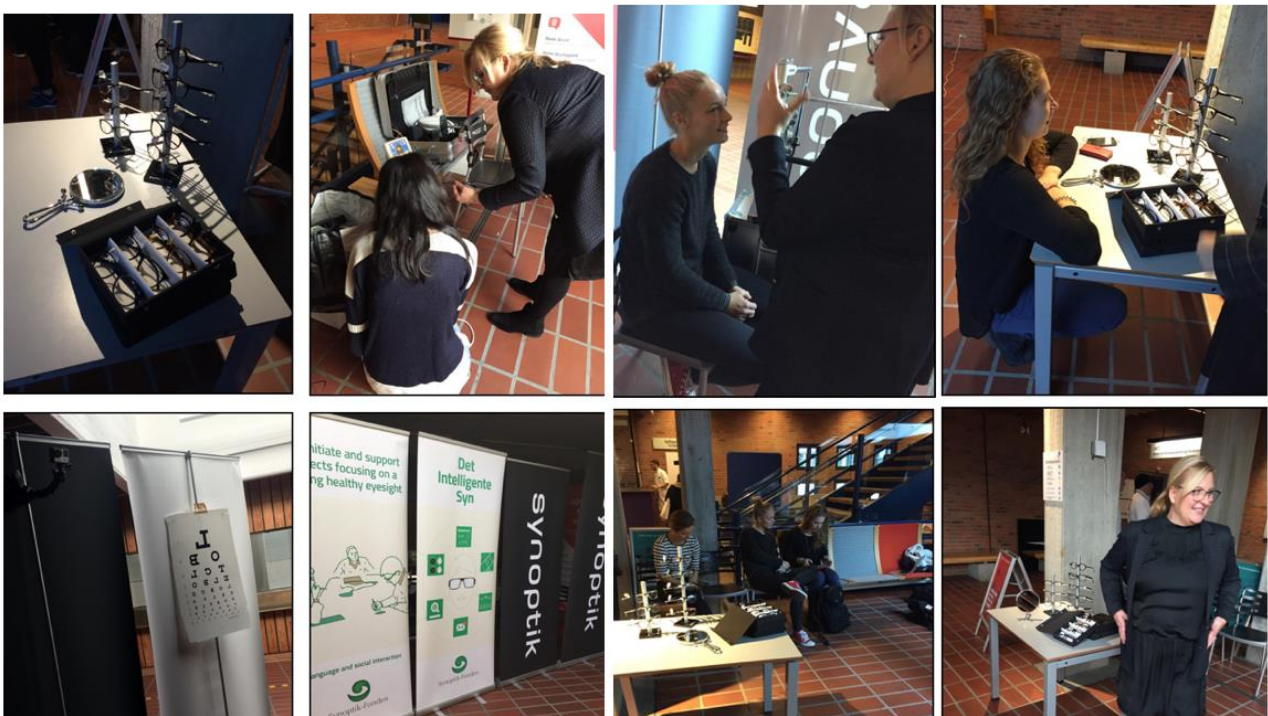


Figure 5. Mobile pop-up store prototype test at a medical university (Panum)

The optometrist offered free eye tests for four hours. During this period, she conducted 10 eye tests.

Prior to each test, we asked people for personal information (name, address, Social Security Number, mail, phone number, household) and permission to use their e-mail to contact them afterwards. We conducted contextual inquiries and asked people about the experience afterwards: What did they think of the experience, how could it be increased in the future and how about submitting personal data in a place much more public than in a normal store?

The concept turned out to be of great interest for both students and staff. In addition to this, people outside the Panum Institute also showed up to get an eye test. They heard about the concept from e.g. grandchildren. We had only planned one test per hour, but because of the huge interest, the optometrist managed to conduct 10. However, we had to reject more than 40 people, due to limited time slots. The online possibility for making an appointment was also interesting. A total of 12 people tried to make an appointment online, whereof eight people submitted all required information and four people began filling out. The attendees' general perception was that the tests were a positive experience and that it was a good service that Synoptik came to see them. Overall, the pop-up store was highly appreciated within a busy and self-motivated target group like medical students at Panum Institute. As one interviewee said: *"I've suspected that I needed glasses for some time now, and when I became aware that you offered free eye tests today, I thought it would be an easy way to find out if I was right."* And another: *"If you weren't here, I don't think I'd ever get my poor eyesight fixed."*

An important insight was also that a lot of people asked us when we would be back, indicating that people actually expected such services to come to them. They thought it was a great service, but weren't amazed that it existed. Another important insight was that in order to create a valuable customer experience, the mobile pop-up shop should give people the opportunity to see the entire collection of glasses digitally and maybe even make it possible for them to order glasses for home-try-on. Related to the issues of omnichannel, the general perception was that a small selection of glasses, such as the one we brought, simply was not enough to trigger people's decision when they

are choosing glasses for the first time. They regard glasses to be a big deal for both in terms of identity and economy. Thus, it really matters to them that they have time to think through their purchase, and that they can purchase their preferred frame from home. This underlines the importance of a digital structure, erasing the boundaries between the physical and digital world.

One of the most important findings was how willing people were to submit personal information in a public place and let Synoptik contact them with relevant information afterwards. Only one person of the total 10 was not willing to submit all the requested information prior to the test. In this case, the person would not submit her social security number before she knew if she needed glasses. Everyone was willing to submit all the requested information, if the test verified their vision impairment. However, the majority was not willing to give their permission for the following e-mail communication unless the content was professional and centered around their customer journey, i.e. an invitation to a new eye test when the time is right, professional health information on how to take care of glasses etc. This indicates that the mobile pop-up shop has the potential to function as an important digital data collection point, where people can be entered into the system upon identification of their vision impairment. Normally, it is not relevant for people to submit data to a retail store before they make a purchase, but in this case, people had a natural motivation.

In sum, our prototype test implies that even though the mobile pop-up shop may not lead to a higher number of direct sales, there is great potential to utilize it as a subscription point, by which access is granted to an online service, to foster loyalty by being present when people need it the most, and to reach out afterwards with personal and relevant professional health information. Our research shows that people experience a HUGE need for a 'helping hand' during the awareness phase and our prototype test indicates that a mobile pop-up store could be the future way for Synoptik to be that friend and thus, transform people's perception of the optometrist visit.

Digital: Constructing and prototyping a Facebook page

One of our primary hypotheses about phygital journeys, was that Synoptik's stores had a potential to market itself to its local community through Facebook. This hypothesis was based on empirical evidence, such as interviews with customers, as well as other research on brand-community engagement on Facebook (Gummerus et al. 2012). To measure Synoptik's potential for community engagement, we created a Facebook page for a specific store, Synoptik Østerbro, and guided the employees on how to create engaging content.

Our subsequent analysis included two distinct prototyping tests, one for measuring community engagement over Facebook, and the other for measuring the potential for omnichannel engagement across channels. For the first test, we created two posts; one that introduced the store on Facebook, and another that advertised new inventory. As we wanted to test how personal networks could augment community engagement, we incentivized content sharing by means of a competition with a prize. After the week had passed, we followed up with employees, and analysed results by means of Facebook's Insight function.

Our second prototype test was conducted through an e-mail campaign, intended to notify Synoptik Østerbro's customers of its newly created Facebook page, asking them to like it. The content of the e-mails was written to prompt brand-community engagement, in the specific sense of seeing Synoptik Østerbro as part of the local community. As a secondary hypothesis, we prototype tested whether a personal appeal worked better than a generic, by constructing the e-mails as an A/B test on subject lines. Thus, e-mail A's tagline contained the respondents name, whereas B's did not.

Between 31/10/16 and 06/12/16, Synoptik's store employees created two posts: A cover photo with all employees, and an advertisement for a set of glasses, which had recently won a design award. The first post was read by 4674 individuals and generated 20 shares and 52 likes. Most shares were conducted by four members of staff, three of which were particularly prolific. The second post had a

comparatively lower reach (993) and engagement (26 likes and 1 share). During this prototype phase, we also monitored employee engagement in order to determine potential issues with Facebook page maintenance in the future. We noticed different levels of enthusiasm amongst employees; some took initiative, while others withdrew entirely.

With our prototype testing phase completed, we evaluated by summarizing significant results statistically, and compared them to relevant benchmarks. Please note that reliable, independent benchmarks of page engagement are scarce, as Facebook does not publish this data. Thus, our first prototype test was compared to reports on industry-wide benchmarks, with focus on retail, compiled by for-profit bureaus. Our second prototype test had a more reliable benchmark, as we could compare with e-mail campaigns created by Synoptik itself. After a week of experimentation, our prototype test yielded three findings:

1. The social media network of Synoptik's employees generated reach and engagement. During our test, we reached 6502 individuals on Facebook, and 1178 engagements, spread over two posts. Both metrics are high, considering two factors. First, these results were achieved "organically", without any costs. Second, Synoptik does not have a national Facebook page, and does not maintain any sort of Facebook presence.
2. Our audience had a demographic composition that was skewed towards females between ages 25 and 34. This is primarily a reflection of the employee's own network.
3. Redirecting customers to engage on Facebook via other communication channels is a significant challenge.

The results of our first prototype test were instantly available on Facebook Insights, which allowed us to include store employees in our evaluation. Considering the limited timeframe, our first prototype

test provided a surprisingly nuanced understanding of the intricacies of brand-community engagement, and employee involvement can be leveraged for results. The winner of our competition, the store manager, shared one post three times and encouraged friends and family to do the same. This propelled reach, and has continually ensured a higher rate of engagement, compared to benchmarks. This dynamic also explains the finding, gained through Facebook audience insights that the demographic composition of the audience consists of females between ages 25-35 (Fig. 6). This demographic composition aligns with the age and gender of the store employees, and reflects that reach mainly consists of those in their personal networks.

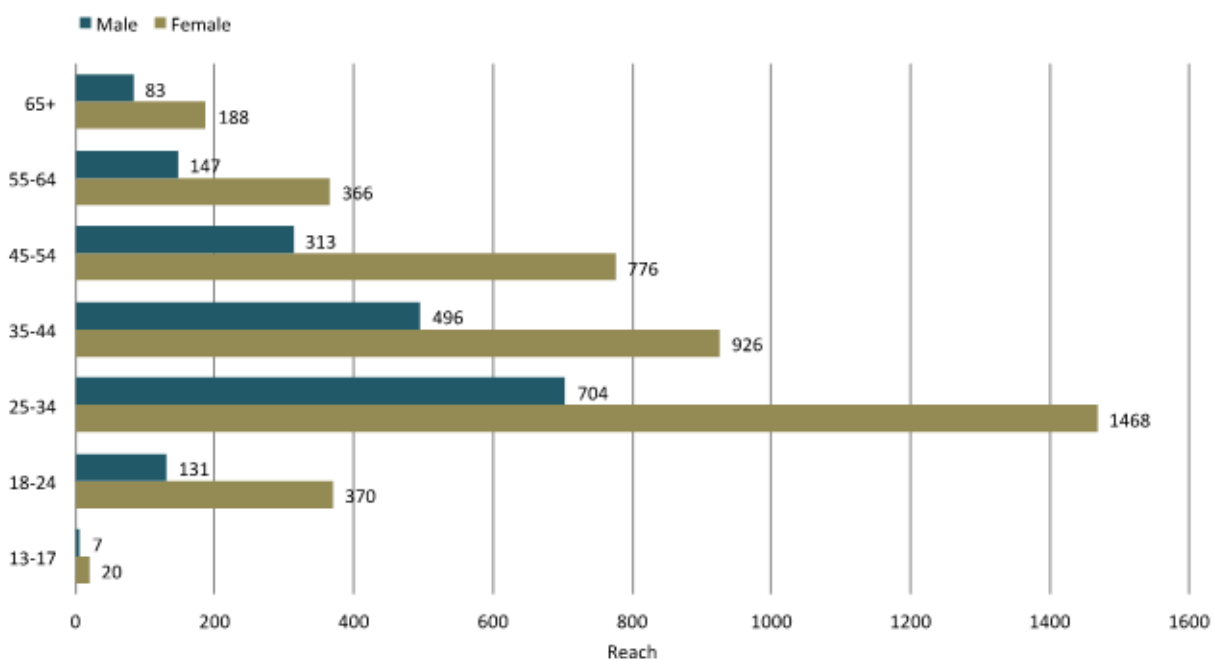


Figure 6. Reach and demographics of the Facebook prototype

Because the friends and family of the staff are currently the ones following the store posts, the propensity to engage with content is high, as it mostly focuses on the daily work of the employees. The engagement rate over that week (calculated as $\frac{\text{engagement}}{\text{reach}}$) was 18%. This compares favourably to retail, over a similar period of time, with a similar amount of posts of 8.23% (Hibma, 2015), as

well as general reports on Facebook engagement with 6-7% (Birdsonganalytics, 2016; LikeAlyzer, 2017). Of course, this is not a viable customer base in the long run. For that reason, we anticipated that existing customers, prompted by the e-mail campaign and enticed by the content and high level of engagement on the Facebook page, would provide a better basis for profitability. However, this expectation was discredited, as can be seen in Fig. 8 below. Grey bars denote Synoptik's own campaigns and the red ones our campaigns. The lower open rate is particularly significant, as it implies that Facebook was not an enticing touchpoint to the majority of existing customers. Click-through rates were more closely aligned to the average rate (3.6% vs. 3%).

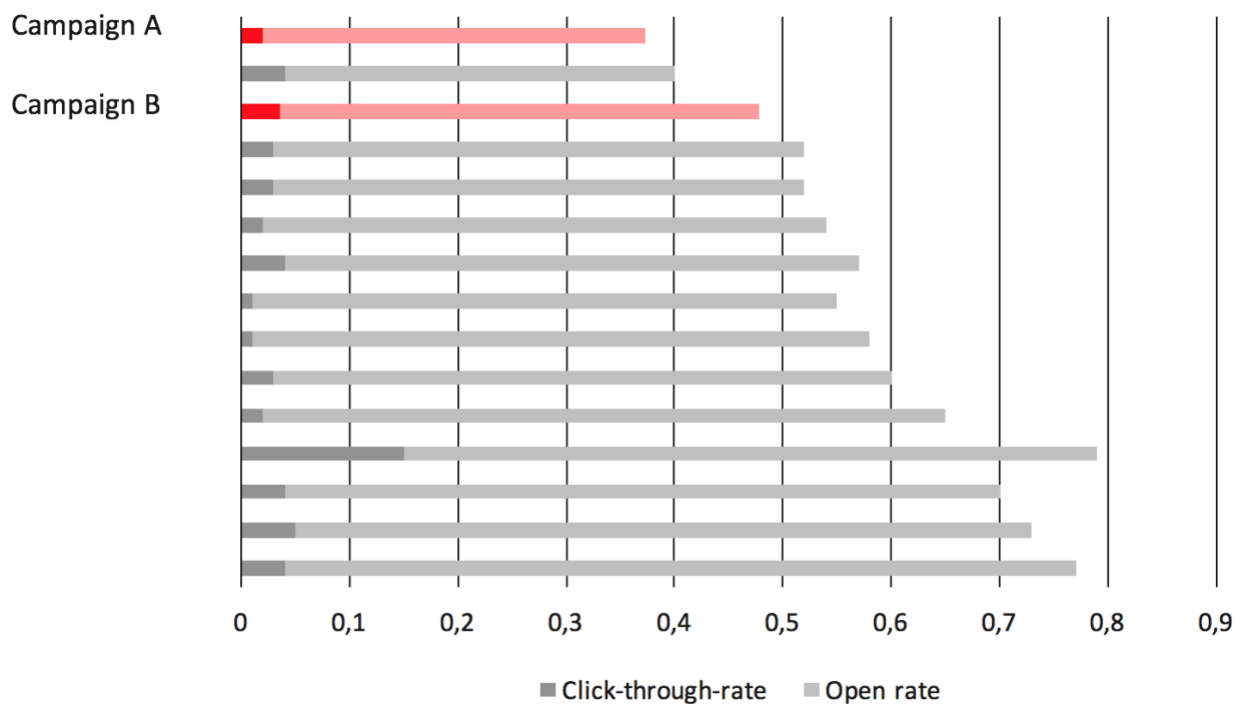


Figure 7. Results from the prototype are marked red. The remaining bars are anonymized campaigns, organized by Synoptik over a similar period of time.

Digital: A neutral fund-sponsored information website

During our in-depth interviews, we found that people in the interest and research phase spent quite some time searching the internet for a proper way of self-diagnosing. One question, which most

people were seeking answers to was: “Is my vision really bad enough to be in need of glasses or lenses?” They often sought on national health sites such as *Netdoktor*, but often found the information inadequate or too narrowly focused on pathology. They also visited blogs, but these were few and the authors were not scientifically trustworthy. They visited different optician’s sites, but did not fully trust the eye tests and guidelines here, which they perceived to be too commercial. What they demanded was neutral information on typical symptoms, basic scientific insights, knowledge on differences between glasses and lenses, and answers to several questions on the fears, prejudices and expectations to what happens with your sight once you begin wearing glasses or lenses.

When customers looked for this information, they rarely found enough of it or sometimes none at all. This knowledge gap stopped many prospective first time users of vision aid in the process of getting glasses, often thinking “My eyesight probably isn’t that bad.” What some of these potential customers expressed a need for, was a digital platform that gathered the different types of information on vision impairment in *one* place to make it easier for them to decide and in the end to buy a pair of glasses. They also stated the importance of the sender of this information to be unbiased and without commercial interest for their decision. This showed an important touchpoint for Synoptik to be present at, and we therefore designed a prototype of a digital platform, corresponding to the needs of potential customers of glasses or lenses, a *neutral fond-sponsored information website*.

To carry out the prototype test, we designed a range of wire-frames, each representing a category from the menu bar, and used *InVision* to link them together. For some categories, we created alternative wire-frames to test what the display of different brands brought to the experience of the website. We did this to explore how present Synoptik as a brand could be, without jeopardizing the credibility of the information website. In the end, we had a prototype of the website that mimicked a browser situation, and gave the potential customers, testing the prototype, an authentic user experience. We tested the information website prototype on four potential customers of glasses and

lenses spread over the different personas we had developed by means of data from video ethnography, deep interviews, observation and participant observation at opticians and elsewhere.

The test was carried out in three parts: A think-aloud test consisting of a mapping of the potential customer's way of finding information on issues concerning vision impairment, another think-aloud test with the potential customer going through the information website prototype, and finally, a semi-structured interview focusing on the experience of and opinion about the prototype website. We wanted to know how Synoptik could be a trustworthy sender of an information website, based on scientific knowledge, and how Synoptik could benefit from the website without costing the website its credibility. We also knew from our interviews that clinical and scientific markers by most existing and potential optician customers were connoted with trustworthiness. This insight was translated into the aesthetics and text of the information website that was held simple and inspired by pharmaceutical layouts. We were curious on what effect the Synoptik brand, that brought with it commercial connotations, would have on the total website experience. That said, we expected the information website to motivate people into buying glasses via a Synoptik link from the information website, as long as the website was offering neutral and correct, but simple and clear information.

Our hypothesis turned out to be right, but our test of the prototype also showed that the most crucial point in order to attract customers and make an information website trustworthy, is transparency. We had made three different wire-frames as possible front pages, which all displayed three different brand logos. One displaying *Synoptik-fonden*, an independent foundation, which partly owns the Synoptik chain; one displaying only *Synoptik*; and one wire-frame presenting the logo of *Øjenforeningen*, a research-based association for protection of eyesight. The potential customers preferred the wire-frame displaying *Øjenforeningen*, which they all found more trustworthy than the one presenting them to a Synoptik logo. But as opposed to what had been outlined in the interviews we had conducted, the untrustworthy sender of the page did not affect the overall credibility of the

information website. They still found it helpful and trustworthy. Displaying the sender on the front page even contributed to that. It made the customers certain of what actor was behind, and did not send the signal that something was being hidden from them. As one potential customer said: “I trust them, because if the website turns out to be wrong, it will directly affect them as a brand.” The potential customers had the same point of view when they were presented to two wire-frames for the *Find en optiker*-page or the *Find an optician*-page, where we had made a link, directing potential customers to Synoptik’s website. We wanted to explore this feature since it would direct new customers to Synoptik, and move the customers’ subscription point to the beginning of the journey, in order to ensure customer data. One page showed a map of Denmark and by clicking on a link, the user was sent to Synoptik’s *make an appointment*-page. The other wire-frame showed a big Synoptik-logo and contained the same link. In the second part of the prototype test, all potential customers used the link, but later in the interview they told us, that the wire-frame with the Synoptik-logo made them feel most comfortable, and contributed to the credibility of the website. What made the *Find en optiker*-page credible was not the map of Denmark, which we had expected, but the Synoptik-logo, that informed the potential customers about where they were being directed to and made them capable of evaluating the information on the website. This made them feel safe. The touchpoint, the neutral fund-sponsored information website is targeting, showed a great potential for targeting new potential customers before they decide to go elsewhere, or stop the process of getting glasses, and this without hiding the Synoptik brand but by putting it in the centre and thereby increasing brand value and supporting a brand position.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The four different examples of working with prototypes in testing environments increased our understanding of customers and their preferences. Thus, the prototypes and test in close-to-naturally

occurring situations, proves to be a very important part of the analysis and innovation phase. In this article, we initially positioned the research within innovation and design studies, and as a valuable contribution to the growing research related to omnichannel marketing. With our four examples, we have shown the value of constructing future-like scenarios through different types of prototypes that can be actually tested.

One thing is to know a lot about customer practices, needs and actual behaviour through highly sophisticated methods like e.g. combining micro-analysis of actions, thick data and big data (e.g. Due and Bornakke 2016). Another thing is to get closer to a qualified assumption on how something new and different could actually work in the future. In terms of getting closer to providing valuable strategic advice about which channels and touchpoints to be present in, prototyping scenarios have turned out to be an interesting phase before concluding any analysis.

Of course, no matter what kind of methodologies one is using, knowledge about future situations will always be an assumption. However, in general terms, we have shown the value of working with quite different types of prototypes as a tool for creating knowledge about customer behaviour, interaction and opinions about a relevant future, whether that being a different kind of store design, store type or digital touchpoint. To sum up, let's have a closer look at the value and potentials of the specific cases.

- Our first analysis, prototyping in the store, demonstrated that roleplaying new ideas stimulated staff and customers, and gave them an opportunity to provide feedback to proposed initiatives.
- Our second analysis, prototyping out of the store, uncovered the potential in using pop-up stores for data collection on new customers, and revealed that meeting customers on their own premises was *expected* by them.

- Our third analysis, constructing and prototyping a Facebook page, showed that leveraging the personal network of store employees can boost a burgeoning online presence on a new platform. Also, we found that redirecting customers from a different, existing platform is a challenge.
- Our fourth analysis, a neutral fund-sponsored information website, provided insights on first time customers, and how Synoptik could market to them early on. Furthermore, we were able to test how Synoptik should brand itself online, showing that transparency and openness had a positive effect.

Besides these distinct learnings and potentials in each specific type of prototyping, there are also general features across the cases, that we now in the light of the grounded theory methodology can describe. These can be summarized in a final short description of the elements in the method of *prototyping future scenarios*:

- collect naturally occurring digital and physical actions, transactions and interactions
- identify patterns and construct findings across data sets
- design the prototypes and test scenario
- enact and test the prototypes in semi-experimental settings with real people
- harvest the findings and results, and use them to modify the analysis and for strategic input

Thus, this research has contributed with new knowledge on how to gain insights about customer behaviour and needs, specifically related to touchpoints and channels in an omnichannel future. Omnichannel is not about being present in *all* channels, but about being present in exactly the channels where customers are and want to be. The key touchpoints in the customer journey need to

be turned into possible channels for the company, and a way forward is to use prototyping scenarios to rapidly test an imagined future.

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