

## **Special issue: Developing customer value across contemporary retail channels: new insights and future directions**

Welcome to this special issue on retailing and customer. This issue gathers a showcase of cutting edge contemporary research in the field of retailing. Retailing content and characteristics and particularly the role of customer within the retailing context are challenged by an array of factors intrinsic to the firm or external to it.

Certainly, customer and particularly consumer behavior is one of the most researched topics in marketing resulting in a good body of knowledge on the issue. Nevertheless, an area of particular interest remains the analysis of customer behavior within the retailing context and the development of customer value across contemporary marketing channels. Enhancing retailing and distribution performance entails thorough analysis of customer behavior dimensions and characteristics.

Consumers present a variety of reactions to marketing stimuli employed by businesses, such as product characteristics, pricing, type of distribution channel and communication strategies. Further, the trend to adopt, by businesses, online retailing, alongside the existence of physical stores, is a development which has transformed consumer behavior. Moreover, retailers can play a significant role in creating and developing consumer attitudes towards a business even with their role within the social context. Consequently, customer responses should be valuable information for upgrading companies' strategies in general and particularly their retailing and distribution strategies.

This special issue presents seven papers, the first four originating from the *8th International Conference of Contemporary Marketing Issues (ICCMi)*, held online, between 11 and 13 September, 2020. The special issue was open to both participants and non-participants of the conference.

All papers included in the special issue propose new insights and perspectives in tapping and analyzing significant problems on retailing and distribution management.

The first paper by Veronica Ungaro, Laura di Pietro, Maria Francesca Renzi, Roberta Guglielmetti Mugion and Maria Giovina Pasca, titled "Transformative service research: a conceptual framework based on consumer's perspective", investigates consumer's perspective regarding the relationship between services and well-being contributing thus to the body of knowledge in Transformative Service Research. Employing an explorative inductive research design through a qualitative approach, the particular study concludes that service sustainability represents the fundamental characteristic that determines the service ability to be transformative, requiring the implementation of the triple bottom line dimensions, i.e. social, environmental and economic. In the consumer's mind, the service categories which present a stronger relationship between service and well-being are healthcare, financial and transport. The paper proposes a conceptual framework describing the consumer perspective of the services' transformative role in promoting well-being, providing thus a theoretical lens for conducting and expanding future Transformative Service Research.

A second paper, by Evi Chatzopoulou, Markos Tsogas and Marina Kyriakou, titled "Retail atmospherics in times of disruption: a PLS modeling approach of the role of emotions in a pharmacy environment", investigates the effect of atmospheric cues encountered in the complex retail environment of pharmacies and, in particular, with respect to the formation of experience rich emotions. The overall aim of this research is to partially explain patronage decisions and behavior in pharmacies. Using a quantitative methodology data were collected through a multistage sampling approach of various week days and times within each day,



recording responses from customers exiting three, aesthetically diverse types of pharmacies in the wider area of Athens, Greece. Based on structural equation modeling techniques the analysis of findings confirms the multidimensionality and complexity of atmospherics in pharmacies and the subsequent effect on customers' emotional state. Emotions, amplified by repeat visitation, have both a direct and a mediated effect on customer loyalty while emotional attachment acts as the mediator. The paper concludes proposing a model which indicates the significant impact of atmospherics in customer decision making even in the complex setting of pharmacies.

In the third paper, titled "Identifying value-creating aspects in luxury hotel services via third-party online reviews: a cross-cultural study", Rodoula Tsiotsou identifies critical value-creating elements of luxury services expressed in ratings and reviews posted in third-party sites and examines cross-cultural differences. To this end, the research analyzes online ratings and reviews of luxury hotels posted on Trip Advisor by various European customers. Eight hundred thirty-eight online user-generated ratings and reviews of luxury hotels were analyzed both quantitatively using MANOVA and qualitatively using text analysis. The study's findings identify, originally, the most critical experiential elements of the luxury hotels offerings for their European Union customers and, secondly, similarities and differences among tourists from various regions of Europe in their post-purchase online behavior as expressed in their ratings and reviews. The paper contributes to the study of post-purchase customer behavior in luxury services from a cross-cultural perspective, whilst also identifying critical aspects of a value-creating customer experience in the luxury context.

The fourth paper, by Miranda Miroso, Kara Xiaohui Ma, Damien Mather, Dana L Ott, Eddy Fang, and Phil Bremer, titled "Fresh food online shopping repurchase intention: the role of post-purchase customer experience and corporate image", investigates consumers' post-purchase experience when buying fresh food online and particularly the key dimensions of post-purchase online customer experience (post-purchase OCE) that impact customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. Moreover, it explores the role of corporate image as a moderator of this relationship. Using an online survey with 317 Chinese fresh food online shoppers and a moderated mediation analysis approach it reveals that four post-purchase OCE dimensions, namely "product-in-hand", "customer support", "benefits" and "packaging" significantly drive customers' repurchase intention by enhancing customer satisfaction. Another important finding is that, for firms with a good corporate image, customer repurchase intention is more easily affected by post-purchase OCE than firms with a lower level of corporate image. The findings inform fresh food e-commerce firms of the critical post-purchase OCE dimensions that mostly drive customer satisfaction and help retain customers. Furthermore, they suggest that firms with a good corporate image must provide high-quality post-purchase OCE that matches the image.

The fifth study, titled "Omnichannel retailing: does it empower consumers and influence patronage?", by Sita Mishra, Gunjan Malhotra, Vibha Arora, and Sandip Mukhopadhyay, analyzes how omnichannel integration influences customer patronage intention highlighting the moderation effect of consumer service experience consciousness as well as the sequential mediating role of consumer empowerment and satisfaction. Analyzing data of 336 young Indian consumers having experienced omnichannel retailing confirms that customers' perceived online-offline channel integration increases their patronage intention both directly and through the mediating role of consumer empowerment and satisfaction. As a moderator, however, consumer service experience consciousness does not necessarily impact consumer patronage interest through the mediating role of consumer empowerment, although it does have a negative impact through the mediating role of consumer satisfaction. The study contributes to the extant literature on omnichannel retailing by highlighting the theory of consumer empowerment in the context of omnichannel retailing and, on a practical basis, it provides insights into designing online-offline retailing integration.

The sixth paper by Samiha Mjahed, Heyam Abdulrahman Al Moosa, Mohamed Mousa, Walid Chaouali, Harrison McKnight, and Nickolas P. Danks, is titled "Using humanness and design aesthetics to choose the "best" type of trust: a study of mobile banking in France". The study investigates the limitations of previous literature regarding choosing the appropriate conceptualization of trust (i.e. interpersonal trust or system trust) and the role of design aesthetics in generating system trust and intention to adopt mobile banking. Two studies were conducted: In the first one, with 261 respondents, it was found that the mobile banking application is perceived to have low humanness. Thus, it is expected that system trust is more appropriate to use than interpersonal trust. In the second study, with 499 respondents, and by using smart PLS, it was demonstrated that system trust is more useful than interpersonal trust in the mobile banking context and moreover that design aesthetics positively influences consumer system trust and intention to adopt. The main contribution of the particular research is that it is the first to distinguish empirically between system trust and interpersonal trust and identify the best choice of mobile banking trust type.

The seventh paper, titled "The role of retailers during brand scandals: insights from a case study", by Sunaina Kapoor, Saikat Banerjee and Paola Signiori, investigates the role of retailers in influencing consumer attitude during brand scandals. The study employs a qualitative methodology and uses the grounded theory approach on the data collected through in-depth interviews with 25 retailers. The study results indicate four contextual conditions and six behavioral antecedents of the retailer's role in the context of a brand scandal. Based on the study findings a six-pronged typology to better understand retailers' role in shaping consumers' brand perception is proposed. The main contribution of the paper is the investigation, for the first time, of the role and influence of retailers in shaping consumer attitude during brand scandals.

We wish to thank each one of the authors of this special issue for their significant and creative contribution on exploring very interesting retailing issues existing in the current Contemporary Environment. Our thanks are also extended to each one of the reviewers for their valuable comments, their patience and effective collaboration. Finally, we express our gratitude and special thanks to Professor Neil Towers and the *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* Editorial Board for giving us the opportunity to organize and administer this special issue.

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