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# Guest editorial: Retailing 2020: a balance of technology and customer experience

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The contributions to this special issue are the best papers presented at the American Collegiate Retailing Association (ACRA) virtual conference Guest Edited by Dr Jeff Campbell from the University of South Carolina, USA. The purpose of the conference was to focus on retailing 2020s: a balance of technology and customer experience on retail operations, marketing and influences on consumer behaviour. This includes social media platforms which continue to have an increased presence in influencer; the understanding of customer journeys, associated areas of consumer decision-making process stages and touch point categories; commercial offerings in modular designs in the virtual environment; brand impression, brand specific associations and brand commitment; and consumer's rationale, intent and potential benefits of webrooming and the distinction between situational and intentional showrooming conduct.

The first paper by Lee and Hamdan investigates how social media platforms continue to have an increased presence in influencer marketing, researchers and practitioners who are seeking ways to optimize the use of these platforms. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of brand encroachment, a level of brand's control over the promotion executed by social media influencers (SMIs), on the importance of interactivity of SMIs. The results of the experimental study suggest that as brand encroachment decreases, there is an increasing importance of being interactive. In addition, with lower brand encroachment, SMIs portray more personal power and passion toward the product or service being promoted.

The second study by Towers and Towers defines and frames the understanding of customer journeys, associated areas of consumer decision-making process stages and touch point categories based on an ownership perspective. The research is based on a detailed literature review of customer journeys, in peer-reviewed marketing and retail journals, within the last decade. The detailed analysis of the journals identified three groups of touch points (brand owned, partner owned/managed and outside the control of brand owner/partner) and three decision-making process stages (pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase) that informed a clearer definition and understanding of the customer journey. The authors have provided a revised definition of customer journey, clarified the decision-making stages and subsequent categorization of touch points from an ownership perspective.

In the third paper, Wu *et al.* conducted an action research study with the aim of understanding current commercial offerings in modular designs in virtual environments and to explore modularity development based on consumer input for the purpose of personalizing three-dimensional (3D) virtual fashion stores. In the diagnosing phase, the authors investigated the modularity structure of cocreating a retail store in two popular virtual worlds: Second Life and The Sims 4. In the evaluation phase, the authors identified modules and modular options for personalizing 3D virtual stores based on a content analysis of consumers' post-design focus group discussions. In the last phase (specifying learning), the authors conceptualized a total of 9 modules and 38 modular options for personalizing 3D virtual stores, including style, price point, product category, colour, presence of avatar, virtual product try-on, music, product recommendation and product customization.

The purpose of the fourth paper by Lee *et al.* is to analyse two global brands (i.e. Benetton and Tommy Hilfinger) and one Indian brand (i.e. Wills Lifestyle) in terms of general brand



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impression, brand specific associations and brand commitment. In addition, the study investigates how the regional differences in India and Indian consumers' affinity towards global brands influence the consumer-brand relationships. The results confirm the importance of global brands over local brands in the Indian apparel consumer market. This study also examined how Indian consumers' affinity for global brands influences their evaluation of the global brands and the local Indian brands.

The purpose of the fifth paper by Arora *et al.* is to extend the model of goal-directed behaviour by including the potential benefits of webrooming and descriptive norms to scrutinize the consumer's rationale and intent behind webrooming. The results of the study revealed that consumers utilized the information collected online to strike better deals offline. Also, webrooming not only stimulated smart shopper feelings amongst shoppers but also assisted them in avoiding certain risks associated with shopping online. Besides, support was also garnered for informative and possession benefits linked with webrooming. The findings demonstrated that past behaviour was evidenced to impact only intentions, and surprisingly descriptive norms emerged as a stronger predictor of consumers' desire as opposed to subjective norms, which was found to be insignificant. While online retailers can utilize the findings of the study to convert webrooming shoppers into buyers, alternatively, offline stores can use the key insights to retain webroomers. Additionally, educators can use the findings of the study to teach the students about the changing retailing dynamics.

The final contribution by Arora *et al.* investigates shoppers' justification behind the showrooming behaviour, and proposes an integrated SOR-MOA framework and a SAP-LAP model for a better understanding of the showrooming phenomenon. The results of the study affirmed the distinction between situational and intentional showrooming conduct. Situational factors have been classified across two categories; store-related (mismanagement at the store, assortment issues) and sales-personal related factors (disrespectful, rude, poor response and dishonest behaviour of the sales staff). However, factors corresponding to intentional showrooming conduct have been characterized as motivational (perceived value, past experience and perceived relative advantage), opportunity (retailer's support and services, channel availability and consumer empowerment) and ability (consumer skills) related factors in aggregation with the stimulus-organism-response ideology. In addition, the study also highlights the consequences associated with the showrooming conduct of the shoppers.

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