
Guest editorial

A critical review of the research gaps facing service scholars

Introduction

In the two decades that have passed as the *Journal of Services Marketing* published an introspective article that assessed the direction of service research (Grove *et al.*, 2003), the service literature has grown in both volume and impact. It seems well past time for a *critical*, and perhaps occasionally *controversial* review of the progress made in those two decades. The intent of this article is to inspire thoughtful discussion of critical issues that remain unresolved yet are likely to have a substantial influence on research undertaken in the next decade by service scholars. Our goal is to suggest that before service scholars dash off to investigate new constructs and relationships, there are a number of gaps in the service literature that deserve immediate attention as they represent critical obstacles to efforts to advance the services literature.

This editorial is a prelude to the special issue on the theme of service research: a critical review and new direction. The special issue is meant to not just discuss the current state of service research but more importantly, offer unique insights and direction to service scholars as to future research needs. This expanded issue offers insights from over 28 service scholars from around the globe, covering an amazing range of topics.

To begin, a primary objective of the current editorial is to look forward first by critically examining, where we as service scholars have been in recent years and are currently. To paraphrase a well-worn cliché, neglecting the history of a discipline is likely to ensure repeating mistakes while also impeding progress (Russell-Bennett and Baron, 2016). So, throughout this article, we use the past as a guide in identifying issues that need to be addressed if notable progress is to be made in extending the service literature and to gain a perspective as to how best to identify future research needs. Specifically, our effort focuses on identifying areas where research is needed to clarify existing gaps in the service literature that potentially hinder the ability of service scholars to validly and reliably address new concerns that are likely to affect service firms as a result of structural or economic changes. We start with a consideration of the domain of the service literature. Next, issues related to conceptualization and measurement of service constructs are considered. Specifically, the implications of the new service-based dominant logic embraced by marketing scholars worldwide on such issues as the conceptualization and measurement of service experiences, service outcomes, service quality, customer satisfaction and value are identified and discussed.

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/0887-6045.htm>



Journal of Services Marketing
34/3 (2020) 269–277
© Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 0887-6045]
[DOI 10.1108/JSM-02-2020-0065]

An additional concern addressed is the apparent tendency of marketing scholars to “rebrand” old constructs. We also ask whether it is necessary to call for a transformative shift in services when the history of marketing in general, and the service literature specifically, has focused on consumer and societal “well-being” arguably since the birth of marketing as an academic discipline in the USA. We then provide a brief overview of the articles selected for this special issue. The paper then concludes with a summary identification and discussion of specific research topics that the authors identify as likely areas of service research needed in the next decade.

Theoretical base of the service discipline

The number of potential starting points for such a discussion can be described as indeterminant, but why not start the discussion with a central issue like the theoretical base of the discipline? That is, it is difficult to not observe that the marketing literature has largely embraced a service perspective as its dominant logic (Grönroos, 2006; Gummesson, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). This logic suggests that all marketing is service oriented (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Grönroos, 2006) and, along with emphasizing the importance of services research, implicitly infers that value is the basis for consumers’ assessments of their interactions with providers. It is further suggested that all value is co-created (i.e. by the sharing of resources – knowledge and skills – between providers and consumers) and determined in-use or in-context by users (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). This remains an interesting perspective considering that if the provider does not also attribute value to an exchange (experience), it is highly unlikely to be repeated! Given the preeminence accorded to loyalty in the service and marketing literature (Oliver, 1999), this seems an important limitation. Moreover, those advocating for a transformative service perspective ought to be concerned that the dominant logic does not recognize that value should also be co-created for society (i.e. societal well-being). These points notwithstanding, the decision of Vargo and Lusch (2004) to offer their service dominant logic not as a theory, but as a departure point for scholarly debate and discussion was a highly commendable decision that should be supported and applauded. Our effort here is inspired by Vargo and Lusch’s insight as our intent is to encourage critical thought, discussion and research, not to criticize!

The overarching theme of our effort is to examine several critical service marketing constructs and some of the relationships they define. Specifically, the goal is to identify constructs and relationships where unresolved questions about the conceptualization and measurement about key service constructs remain. However, before we begin let us consider what is driving the next era of service research to better understand why it is important to finish important research that was started in the past two-to-three decades! Clearly, notwithstanding the substantial progress made by service marketing scholars in that period, important questions have not been fully addressed. To begin, the need to address these unresolved conceptualization and measurement issues are increasing as changes in the marketplace are sure to create new gaps in our knowledge relative to services. For example, a recent two-year study by the McKinsey Global Institute predicts that intelligent agents and robots (AI) could replace 30% of the world’s human labor force by 2030 (McClelland, 2020). The McKinsey report further suggests that automation is likely to displace between 400 and 800 million jobs

worldwide during this timeframe and require as many as 375 million people to seek jobs in new work categories. However, the other side of the change inherent in the AI revolution is the potential creation of more meaningful jobs, most likely in the service sector. Insightful and valid service research is needed to address the anticipated changes.

Specifically, changes in the structure of the world economy are likely to create important knowledge gaps in the service literature. For example, purchase behaviors are less likely to involve human contact or even visit to traditional brick and mortar stores (Baker, 2018; van Doorn *et al.*, 2017). Critical services in areas such as medical care, transportation, financial services and education are likely to increasingly depend on AI, robots, drones and other technologies (Soon, 2019; van Doorn *et al.*, 2017). This change is likely to affect the way consumers perceive service quality, assess value and attribute satisfaction. It is also likely to call for new outcome metrics. Unfortunately, today service scholars do not appear to have addressed such issues.

A second macro factor that is affecting the direction of service research is the unfortunate elimination of the Marketing History class from PhD programs. This means that few scholars today have any knowledge as to how practitioners and academics responded when similar changes occurred in previous eras. It appears that experimental design, social psychology and consumer behavior seminars are deemed more likely to prepare service scholars to address research opportunities than a generalized knowledge of the history of the discipline. This comes at the expense of the insight inherent in the intersection of practice and theory that was evident in previous eras of scholarly service research. For example, when marketers faced disruptions such as the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s, the Great Depression of the 1930s, two World Wars, several police actions and numerous recessions, they adapted their research to address the effects such macro challenges had on the identification of important service constructs, as well as the appropriate definition, conceptualization and measurement of the relevant constructs. They also were aided by the contributions of numerous managers, popular press authors and government officials. This logic leads to the following research suggestions for future service research efforts:

- *RS1*: How can the acquisition and use of the knowledge inherent in the history of the discipline better inform its future?
- *RS2*: Examination at the intersection of theory and practice is an invaluable source of new ideas for services research.

The domain of the service literature

It has been suggested that marketing scholars need to be historically informed (Hunt, 2011). With that in mind, a brief consideration of how the marketing literature has treated service is in order. To start, the origin of the service literature is often associated with the publication of Shostack's (1977) classic article entitled "Breaking Free from Product Marketing," but marketing scholars had acknowledged service as distinct from physical goods long before. Specifically, scholars as far back as Adam Smith (1776) recognized the importance of service,

which he categorized as either productive or unproductive (Vargo and Morgan, 2005). Recognized as potentially the first service scholar (Vargo and Morgan, 2005), Frederic Bastiat suggested that service (i.e. human effort) applied to physical goods produced utility (i.e. value) that physical goods inherently lacked (Bastista, 1860). Walras (1894) moved somewhat further as he recognized producer and consumer services as integral to the development of economics as a science. However, the emergence of service as a concern of marketing scholars realistically started with Shaw's (1912) publication of what has been recognized as the first scholarly marketing article (Vargo and Morgan, 2005). Specifically, Shaw noted the increasing specialization in the provision of service by marketers attributing functions such as financing, transportation, selling, assembling, assorting and reshipping to marketing (Shaw, 1912; Vargo and Morgan, 2005). Although typically depicted as a means to enhance the value of production by increasing the utility delivered, services continued to be discussed in the marketing literature throughout its early development (Vargo and Morgan, 2005).

In the 1960s service articles began appearing in the mainstream marketing literature including the *Journal of Marketing*. One important effort was Rathmell's (1966) article that suggested that few "pure" services or physical goods existed as products typically were some combination of the two. The common theme of these early service articles was the delineation of services from physical goods (Vargo and Morgan, 2005). Interestingly, after more than two centuries of attempts to delineate service from physical goods, we have arrived at a logic that suggests physical goods have no inherent value as they serve only as a mechanism for the delivery of service (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). Perhaps, this conclusion deserves further consideration.

Rathmell (1966) without using those exact words suggested a product is inherently part tangible good and intangible service. For example, one might say a Nissan truck and a BMW deliver the same service – transportation. So, why did the first author of this paper willing pay four times as much for the BMW? The service provided – transportation – is the same. Now, we can conjure up a number of nonsensical psychological reasons why the BMW has greater value, but the basic fact is that it was the tangibles. It is the way it looks, the leather seats are comfortable, the stereo sounded good and the trunk is large. It has greater value than the Nissan truck that provides the same service! Any survey or experimental treatment, you subjected the first author to if properly designed would identify the car's tangibles as the reason for its greater value. When the door shuts, it simply feels like a high-quality product, not just a "nice ride." Moreover, that assessment was initially made without "using" the service provided by either product. The BMW was purchased sight unseen from a broker used by the author's credit union and the Nissan truck from a childhood friend of a former PhD student who owns a dealership some 150 miles distant. The tangible characteristics drove the initial assessment of the value of the respective vehicles before either was used.

This discussion highlights the service literature's downplaying of the relevance of "tangibles." The tangible physical properties of products do not "offend" a product's intangible service properties.

There should be no battle for theoretical supremacy between tangible and intangible product attributes. That should be determined by consumers. Sometimes a car is purchased for its impact on the environment – its sustainability – a service. However, other users are attracted by the way a product “looks” – that is, its physical appearance. If the service desired is transportation, why are there so many models available? It is because consumers attribute value to tangible aspects of the product such as the design, color, materials and other features? This does not infer that the service provided is unimportant. Rather, it suggests the commonsense conclusion that to some consumers “what” they consume is as important (or even more so) than how it is provided. Traditionally, this was known as “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1902):

- *RS3*: In the delivery of services, there is a need to explicitly consider consumers’ perceptions as to the ability of physical goods to provide utility and thus value to consumers’.
- *RS4*: Research is needed that assesses the relative effects of delivery and use on the co-creation of value in service exchanges.

What seems obvious is that the dominant marketing logic description of value as co-created potentially fail to fully capture the drivers of consumers’ purchase decisions. Currently, marketers are provided little insight as to how to “market” a service experience as the dominant logic suggests that value is co-created in-use or in-context and by the user. First, the literature currently does not address how knowledge or skills are used to co-create value. In addition, rejecting the notion that value can be co-created in exchange means that no insight is offered as to how marketers might enhance the service exchange. As explained earlier, by sharing knowledge, exchange partners (i.e. providers and users) can co-create value by making product search, evaluation, acquisition and disposal more efficient and effective for all parties. In addition, products that satisfy the same need or want come in a variety of sizes, shapes and styles. Clearly, the sharing of resources (e.g. knowledge) allows providers and consumers to co-create better product solutions. Perhaps, the dominant logic could be used to provide more expansive insight than just the depiction of value as co-created in-use users. This leads to the following suggestions for future research:

- *RS5*: Research is needed that assesses consumers’ perceptions as to their ability to co-create value with a service provider outside the in-use or in-context suggested in service dominant logic.
- *RS6*: Research is needed that assesses how service providers can co-create value in a service exchange.
- *RS7*: Interdisciplinary research is needed that assesses how value can be co-created that benefits society in a service exchange.
- *RS8*: Research is needed that assesses how value can be conceptualized and measured as a multi-participant, multi-level construct.

Summarizing research issues related to the domain of service marketing

A major change that has affected the service and marketing literatures is the continuing decline in interactions between

marketing scholars and practitioners. Service scholars traditionally have been more inclined to embrace practitioner – scholar interactions. The annual Frontiers Conference and the Service Centers of universities such as Arizona State, Maryland and Vanderbilt are prime examples of the primacy such interactions have had among service scholars. We must continue and even expand such interactions if the achievements made to date by service scholars are to progress. Because service provision tends to be highly personalized, it is more likely to involve direct provider – user contact. Provider employees represent a window to consumers and a likely source of research opportunities. Simply stated, the domain of services includes products that range in their degree of tangible versus intangible dominance. The extent to which the degree of tangibility versus intangibility informs the marketing actions of practitioners is an area of research need. The in-use value assessments of consumers suggested by the dominant marketing logic are post-purchase. Yet, service providers annually invest in their physical environment (i.e. the servicescape) as a means to attract and retain customers. When service is performed on a physical good (e.g. food preparation in a restaurant) the relevance of tangible aspects of a service are evident. After all, when is the last time you were motivated to visit a restaurant because even though the food was terrible, the service was great? The lack of research that investigates the relative importance of the tangible versus intangible attributes of a service provides practitioners with limited insight as to how to market products.

This discussion suggests that there remains a gap in the literature relative to the determinants of service purchase decisions. In addition, there is also a need for service researchers to identify the personal, situational, service type differences that may affect how consumers perceive their service exchanges. The research suggested by this discussion are identified below. This is followed by the discussion of specific questions that appear to represent potential gaps in the marketing literature beginning with issues related the conceptualization and measurement of key service constructs:

- *RS9*: Service is defined by tangible and intangible dimensions that require separate conceptualizations and measurement items. Research is needed to identify the appropriate conceptualization, the relevant measurement items and the relative effect of the identified dimensions on consumers’ perceptions of their service experiences.
- *RS10*: The effects of the tangible and intangible elements of service experiences are moderated by factors such as consumer characteristics, service type and the usage situation. Research is needed to identify the relevant moderators and their effects on the relative importance of the tangible and intangible elements of consumers’ service experiences.

The conceptualization and measurement of service constructs

Conceptualizing and measuring service value

In this section, we critically explore issues related to the conceptualization and measurement of key service constructs. There has been scant attention paid in the literature in the past two decades to these issues. For example, while there has been substantial theoretical discussion related to value assessments, there is literally no recent discussion as to how this construct is appropriately conceptualized or measured.

While there are exceptions (Mathwick *et al.*, 2002; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), most empirical research that includes value (Cronin *et al.*, 2000) simply conceptualizes and measures value using a three-to-five item scale based on a three-decade old comparison that conceptualizes value as a comparison of the “gets” and “gives” attributed to an exchange or experience (Zeithaml, 1988). Given the attention focused on value in the emergent service-dominant logic literature (Grönroos, 2006; Gummesson, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016), the lack of a comprehensive approach to clarify the conceptualization and measurement of value is puzzling. Specifically, the lack of a well-defined, empirically validated and generalizable measure of the construct that is the focus of what is referred to as the discipline’s dominant logic appears surprising as the empirical testing needed to validate the logic is not possible without such a measure. While some have attempted to achieve such a measure (Albinsson *et al.*, 2016; Ranjan and Read, 2016; Yi and Gong, 2013) the relatively low citations count (approximately 1,200 combined as of this article) suggests little agreement on their validity or theoretical accuracy has been achieved. Simply stated, the co-created value conceptualized in service (dominant) logic cannot be subjected to the empirical testing required if marketing aspires for recognition as a science:

- *RS11*: Research is needed that identifies a conceptualization of co-created value that is based on the current service (dominant) logic.
- *RS12*: Research is needed that identifies a measure of co-created value that is based on the current service (dominant) logic.

Conceptualizing and measuring service quality perceptions

Value is far from the only core service construct whose conceptualization and measurement has been largely ignored over the past two decades in the services literature specifically, and more generally in the marketing literature. Consider service quality perceptions. If value is co-created, then is not it logical that service quality perceptions are also co-created? For example, if a consumer uses their own resources (e.g. their knowledge or skills) to create a service experience (e.g. a dinner party or home remodeling task) is not their assessment of their efforts in transferring the “quality” inherent in the use of their personal resource (e.g. knowledge and skills) is appropriately part of the service quality assessment?

Nevertheless, it has been nearly 20 years since the conceptualization and measurement of service quality has been considered (Brady and Cronin, 2001). As mentioned above, the dominant logic that suggests value is co-created seems equally relevant to consumers’ perceptions of service quality. The popularity of do-it-yourself solutions to home repairs and remodeling, landscaping, auto maintenance, security system installation, tax preparation and many other applications lend credence to the notion that co-creation is likely to be a significant concern as a firm endeavors to assess the effects of consumer co-production. Thus, it seems that a co-created conceptualization and measure of service quality is overdue.

In addition, as discussed earlier, theory since the days of Rathmell (1966) suggests that service is appropriately

depicted as part tangible and part intangible. Thus, it is interesting that scholars have yet to suggest that theory suggests there is a need for a unified conceptualization of the quality constructs. That is, theory appears to suggest that physical goods quality and service quality should be conceptualized and measured as dimensions of a single unified construct. While traditional measures of service quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1992, 1994; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) include tangibility, that conceptualization seems woefully incomplete. Thus, it appears that a “Big Q” conceptualization and measure of service quality is another option worth pursuing. Specifically, a conceptualization and measure of perceived service quality that reflects the notion that consumers integrate their perceptions of the quality of the tangible and intangible elements of a service experience into a single assessment. Such a conceptualization and measure of perceived service quality is consistent with Rathmell’s (1966) notion that all products exist on a continuum between a pure physical good and a pure service:

- *RS13*: Research is needed that identifies a multi-level conceptualization of co-created perceived service quality.
- *RS14*: Research is needed that identifies a multi-level measure of co-created perceived service quality.
- *RS15*: Research is needed that identifies a measure of co-created perceived service quality that reflects the notion that all services are on a continuum between being a pure physical good and a pure service.
- *RS16*: Research is needed that identifies a conceptualization of co-created perceived service quality that reflects the notion that all services are on a continuum between being a pure physical good and a pure service.

Conceptualizing and measuring service outcomes

The conceptualization and measurement of outcomes is another key service construct that that surprisingly has received scant attention. This seems to represent a particularly egregious gap in the services and marketing literatures. Service scholars currently seem to treat nearly any consumer evaluation as a relevant “outcome.” Maybe this reflects marketers’ haste to abandon the exchange in favor of more exotic units of analysis such as an “experience” or “engagement”? Nevertheless, one needs to know what distinguishes success from failure. The most common conceptualization of the relevant outcomes is a 25-year old set of measures that include positive word of mouth, willingness to recommend a provider, user loyalty, repurchase intentions and a user’s willingness to pay a price premium (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). Currently, the dominant logic highlights the importance of value. However, value seems a mid-range outcome; that is, one that does not necessarily result in an exchange or transaction. Satisfaction and perceived service quality are similar evaluative criteria. Therefore, how are outcome measures such as word-of-mouth, loyalty, repurchase intentions and willingness-to-pay affected by the co-creation process? Again, it seems that a multi-level, Multi-dimensional conceptualization and measure of outcomes is needed:

- *RS17*: Research is needed that identifies a multi-level, multi-dimension conceptualization of service outcomes such as word-of-mouth, loyalty, repurchase intentions and willingness-to-pay.

- *RS18*: Research is needed that identifies a multi-level, multi-dimensional measure of service outcomes such as word-of-mouth, loyalty, repurchase intentions and willingness-to-pay.

Summarizing research issues related to the conceptualization and measurement of service constructs

The development of generally agreed upon conceptualizations and measures of key service constructs is critical to the development of service theory and practice. For instance, the failure to identify a consensus as to how value ought to be conceptualized and measured tends to make the theoretical discussion of value co-creation somewhat esoteric. Theory must be tested empirically. This requires measures for the constructs of interest. If value is to become an important part of the strategic management of the consumer decision process, measures are needed so the effects of that process can be assessed. Identifying the elements of co-creation requires valid, reliable and generalizable measures. Similar co constraints are imposed on our understanding of service quality perceptions. Are perceptions of service quality based on the co-creation efforts of providers and users? If so, what are the dimensions of user co-creation inputs? Our understanding of the role of satisfaction in consumers' decision-making is similarly constrained, as is its role in the co-creation of value.

Apparently, unlike the management literature that rewards deep dives into constructs, measures and relationships, the service and marketing literatures are quick to encourage scholars to "move-on" to new topics. In fact, it seems that taking an old idea and "rebranding" it has significant currency. Unfortunately, such efforts seldom advance the discipline. Next, we provide just a few examples.

Rebranding old concepts and constructs

The service experience

A pertinent example of what is meant by the rebranding of old concepts and constructs is inherent in the explanation heard for the lack of attention relative to the issues identified earlier. Specifically, some scholars suggest in conversations or presentations that the lack of attention to issues such as the conceptualization of service quality, value, satisfaction and outcomes is that these constructs are all subsumed in the conceptualization of the service experience. This comment is surprising given that the need to develop scales to measure the customer experience is explicitly recognized in the literature (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Moreover, it takes little imagination to envision these three constructs as drivers rather than direct measures of customer experience. In fact, satisfaction and service quality are explicitly so recognized in the customer experience literature (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In addition, it is difficult to conceive of outcomes not being part of the conceptualization of the customer experience construct.

This leads to an important question as it is suggested that the service experience may not be a novel idea as it seems highly related to prior and existing marketing research streams including customer satisfaction, service quality, relationship

management, customer centricity and customer engagement (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The conceptualization of the service experience is said to include all these constructs, but that does not establish customer experience as a distinct construct. One might suggest that currently what is accomplished is that the idea of a "customer experiences" seems to be the description of a process rather than a construct. Specifically, the customer experience appears to be a description of the "way" (i.e. the process) by which consumers integrate their evaluation of their interactions with a service provider based on the traditional set of criteria identified. It is a given that until a distinct conceptualization and measure of the customer experience construct is identified and validated suggesting that an "experience" construct subsumes the traditional consumer evaluation criteria (e.g. satisfaction, quality, value and outcomes) is getting ahead of ourselves.

A related issue is the ubiquity of the customer experience construct. Is every consumption occasion an "experience"? The literature defines the customer experience as the totality of one's cognitive, emotional, sensory, social and spiritual responses to all interactions with a firm (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Are such involving experiences the norm today? Frankly, the entertainment factor in the Walmart shopping experience or a visit to the local convenience store, fast food provider or gas station seem elusive! The increasing use of online options for everything from banking to pet food seems to further question the relevance of the customer experience. Given that AI appears destined to make even more purchase decisions for consumers, one might further enquire as the relevance of conceptualizing a purchase as an experience. To the skeptic suggesting every transaction represents a service experience seems a thinly disguised effort to justify the importance of marketing. More importantly, does the service experience conceptualization represent an improved means of understanding or evaluating the consumer purchase decision process over the tradition description of the purchase process as comprised of need recognition, search, evaluation, purchase, use and disposal phases?

Whether or not you believe that consumer purchase decisions are appropriately conceptualized as service experiences, there should be agreement that the answer to the question requires empirical testing. Thus, this construct also has a major conceptualization and measurement gap. While some scholars have attempted to identify measurement items for the service experience, it is widely recognized that no such scale currently exists and it is even speculated that the construct may not be unique when compared with such constructs as service quality, satisfaction and value (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). An aggregated service experience model and a disaggregate model that depicts the service experience as an outcome driven by any number of antecedents including perceived service quality, physical quality, customer satisfaction need to be tested to determine if a customer experience conceptualization improves upon the disaggregate model described. Interestingly, while service scholars continue to promote the need for science-based enquiry, the measurement scales needed for the empirical investigations required of science-based disciplines are not being developed by service scholars. This gap is surprising and requires immediate attention:

- *RS19*: Additional research is needed to identify a valid, reliable and generalizable conceptualization of the service experience.
- *RS20*: Research is needed to identify the measurement items needed for a generalizable conceptualization of the service experience so that the reliability and validity of the construct can be empirically assessed.
- *RS21*: Research is needed that compares a reliable and valid conceptualization of the service experience to a disaggregate model of the antecedents and outcomes of a service experience.

The customer (service) journey

A related construct is the service journey. Although finding a concise definition in the literature is an elusive pursuit, the customer journey is described as having a focus on how customers interact with multiple touch points as they move from consideration, search and purchase to post-purchase, consumption and future engagement or repurchasing (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2016). It is suggested that customer journey research is needed to deepen our understanding of customer experience touchpoints, advance customer journey mapping, develop an omnichannel understanding of the customer journey and determine whether specific customer segments prefer specific forms of touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As such, the journey construct appears closely related to models depicting the application of services blueprinting to phases of the consumer decision-making process. Moreover, it is missing an explicit disposal phase the relevance of which has increased dramatically worldwide as sustainability concerns and the popularity of green marketing strategies have grown. Further discussion by scholars of the distinction between the customer experience and the customer or service journey is clearly needed if this construct is to contribute to the services literature. This leads to the following suggestions for research:

- *RS22*: Research is needed that: defines, conceptualizes and develops measures for the customer (service) journey.
- *RS23*: Research is needed that distinguishes the relationship between the customer experience and the customer (service) Journey.

Customer engagement

Customer engagement has a variety of definitions but there appears to be some consensus that it represents a behavioral response that involves a customer's voluntary contribution of resources (knowledge, skills and time) that facilitate a focal firm's marketing efforts (Harmeling et al., 2017). The definitions provided in the literature (Harmeling et al., 2017, Table 1 for a complete set of definition) seem to indicate two approaches to the conceptualization of the construct, one behavioral-based and one strategy related. In terms of usefulness, the late approach that is exemplified by Kumar and Pansari's (2016) definition of customer engagement as the "attitude, behavior, the level of connectedness among customers, between customers and employees and of customers and employees within a firm" (p. 2) appears the most useful.

However, there is a notable gap in this literature that deserves the attention marketing scholars. Specifically, all the

definitions and conceptualizations of customer engagement found in the services and marketing literature focus on the transfer of customer resources to a provider. Practitioners are increasingly turning to Customer Success Managers, who not only educate customers how to better invest their resources in their firm's services but also invest the firm's resources in the customers use of their products so as to maximize the benefits received as a result of their experience. Thus, ensures the value of the firm's services are realized by the customer. In their recognition that engagement should acknowledge that highly successful service exchanges require a two-way flow of resources (i.e. customer to provider and provider to customer, popular press publications (Mehta et al., 2016; Vaidyanathan and Rabago, 2020) identify an innovative way of conceptualizing a core marketing construct ahead of the work of scholarly researchers, again justifying the superior efficacy of scholar-practitioner interactions to lab experiments. This suggests these gaps represent the following research opportunities for marketing scholars:

- *RS24*: Research is needed that defines and conceptualizes customer engagement as a two-way (i.e. customer-service provider and service provider-customers) process.
- *RS25*: Research is needed that identifies and empirically test a two-way (i.e. customer-service provider and service provider customers) conceptualization of customer engagement to develop a valid and reliable measurement scale.
- *RS26*: Research using a valid and reliable scale of a two-way (i.e. customer-service provider and service provider-customers) conceptualization of customer engagement that investigates the relative importance of the bi-directional flow of resources between customers and service providers across product and consumer types, varying purchase situations, consumer and service provider types and situational contexts is needed.

Transformative service research

As a final note, a comment on the call by both services and consumer researchers for the discipline's research efforts to shift to a more transformative role is in order. It is here that marketing scholars' lack of grounding in the history of marketing in general, and services marketing specifically, is most evident. This is evident in two ways. First, the marketing and services literature and scholars performed a transformative function even before marketing grew out from under its economics birthplace. Specifically, starting with the publication of "white papers" in New York City in the late 1800s, marketers and marketing have exhibited a focus on protecting consumers. This transformative focus continued with efforts to address unfair trade practices, the sale of sulfa drugs that led to consumer deaths cosmetics that disfigured users, misleading advertising practices, the use of chemicals that made their way into the food chain, the sale of unsafe products, practices that discriminated against any number of minority or disadvantaged groups and the growing importance of sustainable and green products. Second, the notion that marketers should determine what is good for consumers is antithetical to the notion of a free economy. Professor Gaski (1985) in response to the growing pressure for the adoption of a similar transformative role for marketers in the call for a societal marketing concept eloquently described marketers deciding what was good for society as undemocratic. While dramatic, the call by

scholars for a “transformative” focus on actions of marketers that endeavor to respect, uphold and improve life relative to the effects of consumption (Mick, 2006), appears to delegate the judgment as to what “respect, uphold and improve life” to marketing scholars and practitioners. It might be appropriate to remind service and marketing scholars that it was behaviorist practitioners and academics that introduced the motivational research that led to much of the abuse of consumers into the discipline. Moreover, in 1992 Cooke, Rayburn and Abercrombie identified four schools of thought for marketing, which included a “societal viewpoint.” This societal viewpoint was adopted in the definition of marketing by the AMA in 2004 (Darroch et al., 2004). In addition, it seems that there are four parties whose well-being needs to be a focus every exchange: users (i.e. consumers), providers (i.e. firms), society and the government. This suggests the following research opportunities for services and marketing scholars:

- *RS27*: Research is needed that recognizes that the role of services and marketing scholars is to focus on the impact that their actions have on the well-being of: users (i.e. consumers), providers (i.e. firms), society and the government.

Special issue content

Within the following special issue, leading service scholars offer insights into areas of future research. This section provides a brief overview of these articles.

Commentary: future directions of the service discipline

By: Ruth Bolton

In this commentary, the author suggests the need for service scholars to develop knowledge that is useful to business, individuals, communities, society and the environment. Drawing on Responsible Research in Business and Management (www.rrbm.net), Bolton advocates for greater research focused on sustainability in service ecosystems, automation and topics related to the well-being of service workers.

Service marketing research priorities: service and marketing

By: Christian Grönroos

This article suggests the need to reconsider some of the most fundamental topics of the domain and that is a refocus of research on *service* and *marketing*. It is suggested that without a clear understanding of these foundational topics the study of other research topics related to the service discipline may be less valid.

A total of 27 years of service research: a literature review and research agenda

By: Olivier Furrer, Yu Kerguignas, Cecile Delcourt and Dwayne Gremler

This article examines 27 years of service research seeking to identify the boundaries of the discipline, its most influential articles and suggests the most promising areas of research moving forward. The authors analyze over 3,100 articles across 10 major academic journals and organize them using a growth-share matrix, thus offering insights into both the history and future of the discipline.

Artificial intelligence: disrupting what we know about services

By: Dora Bock, Jeremy Wolter and O.C. Ferrell

The authors discuss the potential implications of AI on both service theories and the service encounter itself. The papers propose an integrated definition of service AI and discusses

dominant service theories relevance to AI and how these theories may need modification or new theories developed all together.

Marketing service environment research opportunities

By: Julie Baker, Kara Bentlev and Charles Lamb

The paper presented here explores the evolution of the service environment literature and identifies key research topics with a specific focus on the physical aspects of the service environment. The authors specifically explore both the interior and exterior environment’s influence on customer response.

Value creation and destruction in social marketing services: a review and research agenda

By: Nadia Zaimuddin and Ross Gordon

In this article, the authors provide a review of the existing literature focused on value creation and destruction within the context of marketing services for social change. Through a systematic examination of multiple value related constructs, the authors offer one of the first reviews of the extant literature in social marketing context. Moreover, they present a healthy research agenda focused around four key themes.

Marketing interdisciplinary work in service research: an agenda for future research

By: Travis Walkowiak, Tomas Hult and Jonathan Beck

The article highlights the need for interdisciplinary research collaboration between service scholars and other disciplines, such as management and computer science, that may offer needed insights to service-related issues. The authors provide support for their call by reviewing interdisciplinary applications of service-dominant logic, in the context of frontline employees and self-service technologies and proposes a research agenda.

The institutional turn in service research: taking stock and moving ahead

By: Kaisa Koskela-Huotari, Jösina Vink and Bo Edvardsson

The authors suggest the need to advance institutional theory in service research. Support is provided by mapping the “institutional turn” of recent service research in drawing theoretical insights for service issues. A conceptual framework and research agenda are presented.

AI voice bots: a service marketing research agenda

By: Phil Klaus and Judy Zaichkowsky

In this article, the authors discuss how AI has possibly changed consumer decision-making, specifically through consumer interactions with bots. Such changes have deep implications for the marketing, management and research of services. The authors provide a review of the related literature and offer insights into future research.

A critical analysis of service ecosystems research: rethinking its premises to move forward

By: Loic Ple’ and Mekhail Mustak

The authors present a critical examination of the extant research focused on the service ecosystem and its traditional four key premises. Through a systematic literature review, the authors reveal gaps within existing analysis of service ecosystems and offer four new propositions for further research. In doing so, the article offers opportunity for renewed conceptualization of the topic.

New directions for service research: refreshing the process of theorizing to increase contribution

By: Roderic Brodie and Linda Peters

In the final article of the special issue, the authors discuss the need for renewed focus on theorizing that is not only contributes to theory, but is managerially relevant to bridge the theory-praxis gap. To provide guidance to service scholars, the article illustrates the theorizing process through a recent literature stream using midrange theory focused on customer-actor engagement.

Discussion

Our objective in writing this article was to suggest that there is a number of gaps in the service literature relative to the core constructs that deserve attention before service marketing scholars chase the many exciting innovations that technology, changing demographics and dynamic world economic changes are sure to present over the next decade. To start, our intent was to add a critical and perhaps controversial air to the special issue's depiction of the next decade's service research opportunities. The informative and exciting debate initiated by the change to a service logic enables us to first suggest that all our core constructs should reflect that a sharing of resources between users and providers. This means we feel services research would be well served by efforts to get the foundational constructs (i.e. satisfaction, quality, value and outcomes) well defined, properly conceptualized, with fully reliable and valid measurement scales identified. Many, if not all the innovative conceptualizations offered recently in the services literature (e.g. the customer experience, the service journey, customer engagement) build on a foundation of existing constructs. If the foundation has substantial gaps, so will the efforts to build on these foundational constructs. It is with this notion, and an absolute antipathy to lack of knowledge about the history of marketing, that this article was written. Early marketing scholars went to great efforts to define, conceptualize and test the basic concepts that drive the theoretical development of marketing in general and services marketing specifically. It also masks clear evidence that early scholars and practitioners were focused on the well-being of consumers and society. That focus has continued throughout the history of marketing. The paradigm shift that is needed is not one that recognizes that consumer or societal well-being needs to be the overriding focus of marketers and marketing research. What is needed is that every marketing exchange needs to focus on the well-being of users, providers, society and the government in order to co-create value that results in successful experiences, customer engagement and outstanding customer journeys. Those needs leave services scholars with quite a number of research gaps to address in the next decade.

J. Joseph Cronin, Jr

*Department of Marketing, Florida State University,
Tallahassee, Florida, USA, and*

Duane M. Nagel

*Department of Marketing, Wichita State University,
Wichita, Kansas, USA*

References

- Albinsson, P.A., Perera, B.Y. and Sautter, P.T. (2016), "DART scale development: diagnosing a firm's readiness for strategic value co-creation", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 42-58.
- Baker, J. (2018), "More robots to hit the aisles at Schnucks grocery stores in the St. Louis area", available at: www.stltoday.com/business/local/more-robots-to-hit-the-aisles-at-schnucks-grocery-stores/article_31d25228-3bf0-55d4-a2c3-c44fa8fe90ae.html
- Bastista, F. (1860), *Harmonies of Political Economy*, J. Murray, London.
- Brady, M.K. and Cronin, J.J. Jr. (2001), "Some new thoughts on conceptualizing perceived service quality: a hierarchical approach", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 65 No. 3, pp. 34-49.
- Cooke, E.F., Rayburn, J.M. and Abercrombie, C.L. (1992), "The history of marketing thought as reflected in the definitions of marketing", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 10-20.
- Cronin, J., Jr., Brady, M.K. and Hult, G.T.M. (2000), "Assessing the effects of quality, value, and customer satisfaction on consumer behavioral intentions in service environments", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 76 No. 2, pp. 193-218.
- Cronin, J. and Taylor, S.A., (1992), "Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 55-68.
- Cronin, J. and Taylor, S.A., (1994), "SERVPERF versus SERVQUAL: reconciling performance-based and perceptions-minus-expectations measurement of service quality", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp. 125-131.
- Darroch, J., Miles, M.P., Jardine, A. and Cooke, E.F. (2004), "The 2004 AMA definition of marketing and its relationship to a market orientation: an extension of Cooke, Rayburn, & Abercrombie (1992)", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 29-38.
- Gaski, J.F. (1985), "Dangerous territory: the societal marketing concept revisited", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 42-47.
- Grönroos, C. (2006), "Adopting a service logic for marketing", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 317-333.
- Grove, S., Fisk, R. and John, J. (2003), "The future of services marketing: forecasts from ten services experts", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 107-121.
- Gummesson, E. (2008), "Extending the service-dominant logic: from customer centricity to balanced centricity", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 15-17.
- Harmeling, C.M., Moffett, J.W., Arnold, M.J. and Carlson, B. D. (2017), "Toward a theory of customer engagement marketing", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 312-335.
- Hunt, S.D. (2011), "On the intersection of marketing history and marketing theory", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 483-489.
- Kumar, V. and Pansari, A. (2016), "Competitive advantage through customer engagement", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 497-514.
- Lemon, K.N. and Verhoef, P.C. (2016), "Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 80 No. 6, pp. 69-96.
- McClelland, C. (2020), "The impact of artificial intelligence – widespread job losses", available at: www.ietfforall.com/impact-of-artificial-intelligence-job-losses (accessed 10 February 2020).

- Mathwick, C., Malhotra, N.K. and Rigdon, E. (2002), "The effect of dynamic retail experiences on experiential perceptions of value: an internet and catalog comparison", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 78 No. 1, pp. 51-60.
- Mehta, N., Steinman, D., (2016), and L. and Murphy, *Customer Success*, John Wiley & Sons, NJ.
- Mick, D.G. (2006), "Meaning and mattering through transformative consumer research", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 1-4.
- Oliver, R.L. (1999), "Whence consumer loyalty?", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 63 No. 4, pp. 33-44.
- Oliver, R.L. (2014), *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer*, Routledge.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1988), "Servqual: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64 No. 1, p. 12.
- Ranjan, K.R. and Read, S. (2016), "Value co-creation: concept and measurement", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 290-315.
- Rathmell, J.M. (1966), "What is meant by services?", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 32-36.
- Russell-Bennett, R. and Baron, S. (2016), "Back to the future! the importance of history in services marketing", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 1-2.
- Shaw, A.W. (1912), "Some problems in market distribution", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 12, pp. 706-765.
- Shostack, G.L. (1977), "Breaking free from product marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 73-80.
- Soon, S. (2019), "Robots can help doctors perform heart surgery remotely", available at: www.cnn.com/2019/10/03/robots-can-help-doctors-perform-heart-surgery-remotely.html
- Sweeney, J.C. and Soutar, G.N. (2001), "Consumer perceived value: the development of a multiple item scale", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 77 No. 2, pp. 203-220.
- Vaidyanathan, A. and Rabago, R. (2020), *The Customer Success Professional's Handbook*, John Wiley & Sons, NJ.
- van Doorn, J., Mende, M., Noble, S.M., Hulland, J., Grewal, D., Ostrom, A. and Petersen, A. (2017), "Domo arigato Mr Roboto: how technology could change the service customer experience of the future – a research vision and agenda", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 43-58.
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2004), "Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 1-17.

- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2008), "Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 1-10.
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2016), "Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 5-23.
- Vargo, S.L. and Morgan, F.W. (2005), "Services in society and academic thought: an historical analysis", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 42-53.
- Veblen, T. (1902), *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, The Macmillan Company, New York, NY.
- Verhoef, P.C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. and Schlesinger, L.A. (2009), "Customer experience creation: determinants, dynamics and management strategies", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 85 No. 1, pp. 31-41.
- Verhoef, P., Kooge, E. and Walk, N. (2016), *Creating Value with Big Data Analytics: Making Smarter Marketing Decisions*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Walras, L. (1894), *Elements of the Political Economy*, Irwin, Homewood, NJ.
- Yi, Y. and Gong, T. (2013), "Customer value co-creation behavior: scale development and validation", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1279-1284.
- Zeithaml, V.A. (1988), "Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 2-22.
- Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996), "The behavioral consequences of service quality", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 2, pp. 31-46.

Further reading

- Brady, M., Knight, G., Cronin, J., Jr., Tomas, G., Hult, M. and Keillor, D. (2005), "Removing the contextual lens: a multinational, multi-setting comparison of service evaluation models", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 81 No. 3, pp. 215-230.

Corresponding author

Duane M. Nagel can be contacted at: duane.nagel@wichita.edu