

Special issue editorial: logistics customer service revisited

Customer service is the tangible output of physical distribution and logistics management that increasingly enables firms to differentiate their value proposition when goods become commoditized, often representing the most viable opportunity for customer acquisition and retention. Beyond maintaining adequate service levels per contractual agreement, fully understanding and satisfying customer requirements through logistics service provision provide a foundation for building long-term collaborative relationships. Thus, in today's fast-paced, technology-enabled business environment the need to provide unparalleled customer service is an even more critical differentiator in the marketplace.

Surprisingly, however, literature searches on logistics and customer service reveal very little research focus on the topic over the past several years. Following a flurry of seminal work in the 1990s (e.g. Ellinger *et al.*, 1997; Langley and Holcomb, 1992; Innis and La Londe, 1994; Rinehart *et al.*, 1989), research on logistics customer service has waned as logistics and supply chain management (L/SCM) scholars have focused on other important topics such as buyer–supplier issues. As a result, a notable gap in the literature with respect to customer service has developed. Yet, customer service is as – or even more – timely and relevant than ever. Recent research by Pellathy *et al.* (2018) calls attention to the important role of customer service within the L/SCM domain, setting a theory-building research agenda. The opportunity to further explore phenomena specific to the logistics customer service domain represents a significant area for future contributions to knowledge.

The purpose of this special issue is to re-invigorate and revisit important research on customer service in L/SCM. The call for papers attracted many high-quality submissions. Papers were subjected to the rigorous *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management* peer review process, consisting of an initial editor review and up to four rounds of revision. The following five papers were carefully selected for inclusion in this special issue. In the lead article “The new age of customer impatience: an agenda for reawakening logistics customer service research,” Patricia Daugherty, Yemisi Bolumole and Scott Grawe describe the past, present and future logistics customer service landscape. The authors advance a theory-based research agenda that is intended as a “call to arms” for researchers to fill identified gaps in extant logistics customer service knowledge.

In “Mind the perception gap: an integrative performance management framework for service supply chains,” Dawei Lu, Asian Sobhan, Gurdal Ertek and Mete Sevinc take a middle-range theorizing approach to uncovering gaps between stakeholder perceived importance of key performance indicators (KPIs) and service performance. The authors find that these “perception gaps” can affect performance and suggest the use of meta-KPIs as a means of closing these gaps.

In “Promoting logistics performance in Vietnam-based manufacturing firms: the role of service-oriented high-performance work systems and mediation mechanisms,” Tuan Luu's empirical research shows how high-performance work systems (defined as coordinated bundles of human resource practices that can be configured to meet various performance objectives) with a service orientation can improve logistics performance. Through examining additional mediating variables, the research shows how an effective culture of customer service might be structured and operationalized in a way that evokes sustained performance.

In “Customers' valuation of time and convenience in e-fulfillment,” Tobias Gawor and Kai Hoberg use choice-based conjoint analysis to examine how consumers value the



tradeoffs between lead time, delivery convenience and total price when choosing between omni-channel retailers. The findings suggest monetary benchmarks to inform efficient omni-channel e-fulfillment strategies.

In “A roadmap for applying qualitative comparative analysis in supply chain research: the reverse supply chain case,” Ivan Russo, Ilenia Confente, David Gligor and Nicola Cobelli operationalize a novel method for capturing the many complex relationships amongst key antecedents to customer satisfaction in reverse logistics. The study findings extend logistics customer service theory and practice, while the method described in the paper can be used by other researchers to tease out the nature of other complex relationships examined in the L/SCM literature.

The editors hope that you enjoy this special issue and find each of these articles to be as influential to your thoughts on logistics customer service as the editors have.

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