
Guest editorial: NOFOMA 2021 conference special issue

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The 33rd annual Conference of the Nordic Society of Logistics Researchers, NOFOMA 2021, was originally planned and organized by the University of Iceland's Faculty of Industrial Engineering and Computer Science and should have taken place early in June of 2021. As the effects of COVID-19 continued to be problematic and affect travel, the conference was postponed to late September 2021, as the 2020 conference, and eventually became virtual, for a second year.

The theme of the conference is "Operational excellence through logistics resilience", becoming the serial topic for the virtual conferences. This topic has ongoing relevance, since COVID-19 has brought logistical problems to society, in addition to the horrifying health problems and loss of life. Logistics operations are of key importance in such times to bring the support needed for the society through humanitarian work, but also with better knowledge in the field of logistics to provide support and secure supplies to industries and the citizens who rely on logistics operations to continue as needed, despite problematic situations.

A positive outcome of organizing the conference virtually is how it became a collaborative undertaking from self-appointed researchers across the major Nordic universities that have traditionally hosted the NOFOMA conference over the years. The scientific and organizing committees teamed up in online meetings and shared the work in terms of review processes, planning and running of the conference program. As such, even though the conference itself had to become virtual, it helped emphasize the ambitions of the NOFOMA research society and underscore the resilience theme of the conference.

Around 70 abstracts were initially submitted to the conference, somewhat fewer than in previous years. Such a downturn could be explained by the timing of the conference and researchers having had to adapt and change due to COVID measures, but also by the fact that the NOFOMA conference has had a stronghold in the physical arena for more than 30 years. At the deadline, close to 30 revised fully papers were submitted and presented at the conference, together with several work-in-progress papers. All full papers have undergone a double-blind review process, and we bring our sincere gratitude to the NOFOMA society reviewers.

After the conference, the authors of six papers were initially invited to improve their manuscripts and submit to the special issue. Following the submissions, a new double-blind peer review process was initiated, and we have the pleasure of presenting three papers from the NOFOMA 2021 conference in this special issue.

In the first paper, "Customer experience dimensions in last-mile delivery: an empirical study on unattended home delivery", John Olsson, Daniel Hellström and Yulia Vakulenko examine the substantial impact of the pandemic on home delivery of groceries and other online purchases. The article investigates how consumers experience unattended home delivery services. Although there is a vast body of research on last-mile logistics, the consumer perspective has received limited attention so far. Based on a field study of nine Swedish households that actively used unattended home deliveries for e-grocery orders, the article shows that unattended delivery experience is a multidimensional construct that consists of consumers' cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, physical and social responses to the service. The study also notes that delivery lead time is critical from the customer experience perspective and impacts consumers' buying behaviour. The article consolidates fragmented knowledge on consumers' last mile experience and demonstrates how SCM and logistics can improve customer experience.



The second paper, entitled “Supply chain risk management strategies in normal and abnormal times: Policymakers’ role in reducing generic medicine shortages” by Victoria Ahlqvist, Nonhlanhla Dube, Marianne Jahre, Jin Lee, Tsegaye Melaku, Andreas Moe, Max Olivier, Kostas Selviaridis, Joe Viana and Christine Aardal, is also strongly related to the pandemic. The onset of COVID-19 exposed the vulnerability of global medicine supply chains and led to calls to investigate how to prepare and respond to disruptions. To fill this gap, the authors have collected primary and secondary data from seven countries to explore how policymakers employed different supply chain risk management strategies for handling shortage risks in their paracetamol supply chains before and during COVID-19. The authors identified 33 risk management strategies that were in place before and/or during the pandemic. The analysis demonstrated that policymakers could use the same strategies in normal and abnormal times to achieve different outcomes. Despite the general lack of preparedness when the pandemic struck, policymakers successfully avoided medicine shortages by using the strategies implemented pre-pandemic with greater intensity or by adapting them if necessary.

The third paper – “How to not lose oneself: the case for relational identity in collaborative supply relationships” by Oskari Rintala – is a conceptual paper, further developing the understanding of identity in supply chain relationships. Despite not being directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the paper is still a relevant contribution in the broader discussion of company and supply chain resilience considering the importance of collaborative supply chain relationships in achieving resilience. The paper draws on social psychology theory using the concepts of identity and identification and discusses how such concepts are also relevant for companies working together in a supply chain context. The two concepts of collective identity and intergroup relational identity are compared and analysed in relation to the role of power imbalance in supply chain relationships. The author proposes that if a company feels threatened in a supply chain relationship, which is more likely in relationships characterized by power asymmetries, a leadership strategy promoting intergroup relational identity is preferable to collective identity.

Resilience has always been on the agenda of logistics and supply chain operations, considering the high interconnectedness of global supply, distribution and transport networks. We have gone through major disruptions before, such as the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan or Hurricane Katrina in the United States. However, until COVID-19, supply chain disruptions were perceived as local events that affect a certain part of supply chains and logistics flows, where switching to alternatives was relatively possible. Pandemics were on the risk maps of governments or large organizations, but they were on the upper edge of such graphs, with their high-impact but low-probability character. With COVID-19, we have experienced a disruption with negative consequences emerging at a global scale. Combined with the very high globalization ratio of supply chains, the impacts became severe.

The geopolitical crises that we are going through during the completion of this special issue and the extreme weather conditions associated with the climate crisis indicate that resilience will be higher on the agenda for all decision-makers in logistics and supply chains. Supply chain resilience strategies that emerge in the form of regionalization, nearshoring, insourcing, redundancy and reconfiguration will affect how logistics networks are restructured and how logistics flows are maintained. Assumptions of continuous flows through permanent supply chains will be replaced by alternative and more flexible operational strategies.

There is no doubt that NOFOMA society will continue contributing to research in resilient logistics operations and supply chains. We thank the authors of all papers that were submitted to 33rd NOFOMA, the industry representatives who shared their experiences and perspectives at the conference, and all the participants who joined the conference and contributed to the discussions.

Finally, we are very thankful for the time and effort that is put in by the reviewers in this special issue, the support from *IJPDLM* editorial team and the invaluable guidance from Professor Chee Yew Wong as chief editor, who helped us during the whole process. We hope you enjoy the contributions in this special issue, and we look forward to seeing you in the future NOFOMA conferences.

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