

Service research in emerging markets: business as usual?

We are delighted to introduce our special issue on “Service Research in Emerging Markets: Business as Usual?” Our examination of services in emerging markets (EMs) is important because most of the widely utilized models pertaining to services originated in developed economies, while EMs tend not confirm to the market dynamics of these economies. Managing services in EMs has been a difficult proposition for companies because of a number of concerns such as: changing consumer preferences; availability of different service products; evolving mechanism for engaging with the companies; and innovative marketing strategies adopted by service firms. Furthermore, EMs have witnessed a big transformation in consumers’ preferences for services as a result of social, cultural, geo-demographic and psychological factors. Growth in disposable incomes is driving an increase in consumers’ spending power and creating demand for new service delivery systems. EMs are characterized by five core characteristics: market heterogeneity, socio-political governance, chronic shortage of resources, unbranded competition and inadequate infrastructure – which makes them radically different from the developed markets (Sheth, 2011). Although there has been some other recent research published on this issue (e.g. Burgess and Steenkamp, 2013; Roberts *et al.*, 2015; Roy *et al.*, 2018), there remains a need for additional conceptual and empirical work in this area in order to advance the field of services marketing in EMs. The papers in this special issue shed light on some of the important research issues in the services sector in (EMs).

Before introducing the papers that form this special issue, we would like to thank the *Journal of Service Theory and Practice’s* editorial team for its support and also the anonymous reviewers without whose support we would not have been able to put this issue together. With any journal issue, it should not be forgotten that others researchers also submitted their papers which unfortunately did not make the final cut. We would like to thank those contributors for taking the time to submit to our issue and we hope that the feedback they received has been useful in developing their work and that the papers have been able to find a suitable outlet.

When selecting the paper we were mindful of ensuring that the paper clearly fitted with what we were trying to achieve and that they were rigorous in terms of contribution to the wider services theory and practice.

In the first paper Sahi *et al.* examines impact of customer engagement-enabling platforms on value captured by the firm and value acquired by the customer in India. Along with value, the paper also introduces the notion of customer engagement which has been in place for a while, as a construct it is still emerging and the paper positions engagement as a key influencer. Findings reveal the indispensable role of service providers as creators of a meaningful effective learning process and of interpersonal relations with customers for generating more business through customer referrals.

The lens of our second paper by Zhang *et al.* are on customer satisfaction which without doubt is one of the key constructs in the services literature and is well understood. The main contribution of our second paper looks at the wait time and how that influences customer satisfaction. This study also examines the moderating effect of three information formats (formal, informal and hybrid) of opening remark on the relationship between customers’ perceived service-entry waiting time and first impression, and the moderating effect of perceived in-service waiting time on the relationship between first impression and customer satisfaction are investigated.



The next paper we selected looks at how relationships can be built in EMs, particular the idea of relationship comfort and relationship proneness. Based on a filed survey of retail bank customers the authors examine the impact of relationship comfort and relationship proneness on the ability of service firms to build and maintain customer relationships in EMs.

The internal marketing literature posits that internal employees ought to be treated as well as external customers, and where this happens it should lead to superior delivery (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003). Extending this ideal, our fourth paper explores how engaging internal employees informs external customer engagement. The study uses the backdrop of the Bangladeshi retail banking sector; a sector where unlike more developed economies employees are at the heart of the service delivery process. Results show that organizational climates for initiative and psychological safety positively influences employee engagement which in turn has a positive impact on customer engagement and other downstream variables such as customer relationship commitment and switching intention.

The fifth paper has customer rapport at its heart. The paper looks at the gap between namely dealing with perceptions and expectations, given that there continues to be a debate centered on the service features to be included. More specifically this study examined the mediation roles of core, relational and tangible service quality features on the relationship between customer-frontline employee rapport and customer dependency.

Our sixth paper examines service failures and the recovery process. Although research on service failure and recovery is at a mature stage limited studies have provided an integrated perspective on this in an EM setting. This study identifies the essential determinants of customer loyalty from the combined perspectives of three theories, namely, justice theory, expectancy disconfirmation theory and commitment trust theory.

The main purpose of the final paper by Wu *et al.* is to examine how not-for-profit service providers communicate and engage with their customers in the technology sensitive scenario. Results of this study show that a friendly communication style has a significant effect on customer engagement not the authoritative communication style. The functions associated with message content also have positive relationship with customer liking and sharing activities.

We hope that you enjoy the papers that form this special issue, and that the papers provide the basis for your futures research as well adding new insights on marketing of services in EMs.

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