

## Services marketing and customer experience in a post-disciplinary era

### ANZMAC conferences and *JSTP*

Over the years, the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) conferences and the *Journal of Service Theory and Practice (JSTP)* have established a firm partnership in offering a *JSTP* special issue to ANZMAC conference participants. Early beginnings were the ANZMAC 2010 Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, in collaboration with *JSTP*'s outgoing Editor, Professor Jay Kandampully, Ohio State University, USA, and the incoming Editors, Associate Professor Chatura Ranaweera, School of Business, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada, and Professor Marianna Sigala, School of Management, University of South Australia, Australia, and the first special issue was subsequently published in 2011.

Following this inaugural collaboration, other ANZMAC conference hosts have followed suit. Continuing this tradition, it is our pleasure to introduce the *JSTP* special issue entitled "Services marketing and customer experience in a post-disciplinary era". The special issue comprises a selection of papers originally submitted to the "Services marketing and customer experience track" and presented at the ANZMAC annual conference which was hosted by the UC Business School at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand from 5 to 7 December 2016. The main conference and doctoral colloquium attracted 383 delegates from 28 countries. The main conference received 413 paper submissions and, with a rejection rate of 26 per cent, 306 competitive papers were accepted. The "Services marketing and customer experience track" was the second largest track of the conference which entailed a total of 16 tracks. The conference had wide range of workshops and special sessions, amongst them the "Meet the Editors" session, with 18 journals represented, a special session on "customer experience" and the inaugural "Service research retreat", the latter workshop was initiated by the guest editors of this special issue to bring together like-minded service scholars. In this workshop-type special session, academics in groups worked on a dedicated topic to advance current thinking in service marketing and management beyond the discipline.

### Post-disciplinarity in services marketing and customer experience research

This special issue is entitled "Services marketing and customer experience in a post-disciplinary era", a title that aligns with the ANZMAC 2016 conference theme. Over the last few years, research has advanced to a stage where researchers in the services marketing and customer experience fields have not only intensified collaborating with scholars from disciplines outside the marketing arena, but owing to existing and recent challenges in society, like climate change, mobility, energy, natural resources, health and well-being and others, boundaries between the disciplines are being left behind by taking a post-disciplinary perspective that goes beyond disciplines (Coles *et al.*, 2006). Sayer (2003, p. 9) points out that "post-disciplinary studies emerge when scholars forget about disciplines and whether ideas can be identified with any particular [discipline]". In other words, post-disciplinarity focusses on the phenomenon or problem at hand and not on a discipline that is supposed to deal with it. This is because the problem that needs addressing is not a discipline-specific one.



This might be a sign of an emerging dominance of the issue or societal challenge that needs addressing, over the discipline in which it could be located, researched and potential solutions developed. For example, issues in health and well-being have motivated service researchers to initiate the field of “Transformative service research” (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Anderson *et al.*, 2011, 2013). This has led to combining the disciplines of well-being/health research and service research. Post-disciplinarity here is visible in some emerging collaborative service research which combines researchers from different areas, such as from systems theory, policy, service research and marketing, social anthropology, social work, health and well-being (see, e.g. Hepi *et al.*, 2017) to resolve well-being, social and other issues (see, e.g. Blocker and Barrios, 2015; Mulcahy *et al.*, 2018) irrespective of which discipline these researchers come from or which researcher/discipline takes the lead.

In customer experience, research boundaries have been dropped by looking into issues that appear to be occurring on a global scale, such as natural disasters (see, e.g. Brown and Perkins, 1992; Finsterwalder and Grey, 2016; Loureiro, 2014; Tombs *et al.*, 2017), their impact on consumers and businesses alike, and how the different actors can deal with such disruptive events.

Mirroring such approach, papers in this special issue indeed transcend research disciplines (Jessop and Sum, 2001). The first paper, “Incorporating visual methods in longitudinal transformative service research” by Sarah Dodds, Sandy Bulmer and Andrew Murphy combines the disciplines of well-being, healthcare and services marketing to investigate consumer service experiences, dimensions of consumer value and value co-creation in a transformational service setting: complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). These concepts are well established in the literature at a conceptual level and have been studied in the context of co-creative healthcare practice styles (e.g. Frow *et al.*, 2016; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2017); however, the extant literature still suffers from a lack of empirical work that has explained the process of value co-creation, for example, where it starts, how it develops and where it ends (Grönroos, 2011). Dodds, Bulmer and Murphy’s article in this issue addresses this gap by taking a novel longitudinal research approach using a three phase design over a 12-month period. In particular, they use storytelling interviews and visual elicitation techniques (ZMET) to uncover what have been difficult to articulate concepts; namely, how value is experienced and co-created in the sometimes sensitive context of healthcare. This article provides an excellent and detailed account of the three phase research programme, the methods and analysis used to examine consumer experiences of CAM healthcare services. Apart from the value that this article has as a methods paper it also shows how these methods were able to provide confirmation and elaboration of consumer value themes by adding the previously underreported themes of spiritual value and esteem value. By conducting the research as a longitudinal research programme, the authors were also able to gain what they see as a “deeper understanding of the transformation that CAM consumers experienced with CAM healthcare services” as well as following the process of value co-creation, in many cases, that started, stopped and/or developed over that time.

The second paper, titled “When service failure leads to sin: exploring service transgression and customer forgiveness in a multi-faith context” by Yit Sean Chong and Pervaiz Ahmeda, again examines services from a multidisciplinary perspective. In this article, the authors use the lens of religious norms and beliefs to examine the notion of service transgression. In particular, they use a qualitative study of Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu participants to examine service failures which violate consumers’ religious or spiritual convictions. The religious observance to food intake makes a novel and previously unexplored context within which to study the role of consumer forgiveness following a service transgression or failure (e.g. where food service providers wittingly or unwittingly include religiously “prohibited” or “unclean” components in their meal offerings). This study contributes new insights into consumers’ psychological processes of sense-making as they negotiate the personal dilemmas and challenges that these transgressions cause in relation to their religious identity. From the findings of the study,

the authors develop a new typology of conflict framing categories that are unique to this form of service transgression. These include: “damaged identity” due to a perceived threat to one’s personal or social identity through actually consuming non-permissible food, resulting in feelings of guilt that must be alleviated by the consumer and the service provider through recovery strategies of apology, repentance and/or commitment to good works; “identity at risk” where the consumer discovers the presence of non-permissible food ingredients prior to consumption, resulting in feelings of anger and frustration where the target of these emotions and the onus on service recovery falls solely on the service provider; “identity preservation” where the transgression may be unintentional and, therefore, does not represent a sin against the sacred, however service recovery still needs to be done in order to preserve the consumer’s identity. As the authors explain “the major difference for this conflict framing is in the nature of forgiveness which may promote reconciliation in the form of repatronage behavior”.

The third paper “When exit is no option – the impact of switching costs on customer complaint behavior” by Maxi Bergel and Christian Brock examines consumer psychology in the context of services marketing. Specifically they show, in the results of a two study examination, the effects that the different dimensions of switching costs (financial, procedural, relational) have on consumer dissatisfaction response styles and their associated evaluation of the firm’s service recovery attempts. According to the authors, “to assume that switching costs primarily promote customer retention and impede switching providers in [the] case of dissatisfaction, ignores the fact that customers can react in different ways toward dissatisfaction”. This research unpacks this dilemma by integrating three streams of service research: switching costs as a means for customer retention, dissatisfaction response styles following a service failure and the perceptions of complaint handling aspects of service recovery. The authors conclude that, in the context where switching costs are used by the firm, customers’ reaction to dissatisfying service failures will be dependent upon the type of perceived switching cost used to help retain the customer. For example, where the switching cost is a financial penalty then the result of dissatisfaction is likely to be negative word-of-mouth whereas with procedural and relational switching costs the customer is more likely to complain and ready to provide constructive criticism. This paper also adds to the service recovery literature by establishing the moderating role of financial and procedural switching costs on the relationship between the customer’s perception of complaint handling justice and customer’s satisfaction. Moreover, the article presents a very interesting and practical table of service and complaint management activities that can be utilised by managers when employing different switching cost strategies.

**Jörg Finsterwalder**

*UC Business School, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, and*

**Alastair Tombs**

*UQ Business School, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*

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*JSTP* has developed into a very significant scholarly outlet for services marketing and customer experience researchers and, also thanks to the two journal editors and

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a new vision and research priorities (Ranaweera and Sigala, 2015), the journal is on a very promising trajectory to further improving its standing in the field. Guest editorial

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