

The focus of the first issue of Volume 45 reaches right across the whole breadth of retail and distribution management. The topics include the perceived gap between UK retail academic research and practice, developing a desire to interact with a salesperson scale and to explore possible tools for replacing salespeople on e-commerce websites, customers' perceived value constructs of shopping malls from the perspective of Muslim shoppers, the quality of the internal supermarket organisation, the importance of private labels offered by each retailer on store loyalty, and the impact of varying demand and buffer size on distribution management performance.

The aim of the first submission by Resnick, Blackley and Cassidy is to explore the reasons for the continuing "gap" between UK retail academic research and practice. A relationship marketing lens, focussing on relationship antecedents, is used to develop a deeper understanding of the barriers to collaboration and propose new solutions to close the gap. The research illustrates a marked absence of the majority of the customer-focussed, seller focussed and dyadic antecedents, essential for effective relational exchanges, and highlights that at the heart of the problem lies a lack of shared understanding of mutual relationship benefits with academics currently neither motivated nor incentivised to develop such relationships. Universities should adopt a strategic approach towards building relationships with retailers based upon relationship antecedents. Reward structures should be developed to encourage academics to develop research relationships. Resources should be allocated to better defining and communicating the benefits of a university research relationship with retailers.

The objective of the second paper by Lee and Dubinsky was to develop a desire to interact with a salesperson scale and to explore possible tools for replacing salespeople on e-commerce websites. Three studies were undertaken, with an exploratory phase using in-depth consumer interviews followed by quantitative surveys for Studies 2 and 3. A two-dimensional (instrumental and autotelic) eight-item scale for desire to interact with a salesperson was developed. The results of Study 3 suggested that e-tailers can increase customer satisfaction by implementing effective customer-based information (e.g. customer reviews) and e-contact features (e.g. live chatting with a salesperson). The present research was the first attempt to develop a desire to interact with a salesperson scale. This new scale now makes it possible to acknowledge differences in a desire to interact with a salesperson across demographics, product types, shopping purposes, etc. which should improve customer experience management.

The third contribution by El-Adly and Eid aims to identify customers' perceived value constructs of shopping malls from the perspective of Muslim shoppers and to develop items for measuring these constructs, empirically validate the scale, and carry out an initial investigation of the effect of these dimensions on behavioural outcomes. By means of a multi-dimensional procedure on a sample of over 300 Muslim mall shoppers in the UAE a scale of measurement was developed of the shoppers' perceived value of malls through grouping 30 value items into eight dimensions. The study constructed and validated a scale of perceived value of malls taking into consideration the mall shopper's religion (i.e. Islam). This scale demonstrates that, like any other shoppers, Muslims who shop in malls assess the shopping experience through both cognitive and affective values in addition to the Islamic value of the mall. Muslim mall shoppers evaluate not only the traditional aspects of mall value but also the religious identity-related aspects that contribute to the value creation.



Therefore, mall developers and managers who target Muslim shoppers (residents and/or tourists) should create and maintain the appropriate shopping environment for Muslim shoppers.

The Dutch supermarket industry is dominated by a small number of powerful companies which capture the majority of sales and which compete fiercely with each other. The aim of the fourth contribution by Waal (de) and van Nierop is to explore the lack of attention for the quality of the internal supermarket organisation, i.e. quality of people, internal processes, and performance reporting. There seems to be a gap in both current literature and the quality improvement attention of supermarkets which needs to be addressed, to uncover new sources of improvement. The high performance organisation (HPO) framework is introduced as a validated technique for evaluating the strength of the internal organisation of companies and for proposing quality improvements. The research tests whether the HPO Framework can be used to analyse the strength and performance of supermarkets and to come up with recommendations for improvement. A questionnaire into the drivers of success of supermarkets was constructed which was sent to 400 supermarket franchisers, and the received data were subsequently analysed. The findings suggest that on average the participating supermarkets are well-performing but they cannot yet be classified as high performing according to the HPO Framework. The supermarkets with the highest HPO scores indeed achieve better financial results (both in terms of revenue and margin achieved) than those of supermarkets with lower HPO scores. Finally, we find that larger supermarkets (in square metres floor area) outperform smaller supermarkets on all HPO factors.

The fifth contribution by do Vale and Matos investigates the importance of private labels offered by each retailer on store loyalty, combining different loyalty-driven factors and assessing the importance of private labels on different loyalty stages – attitudinal and behavioural store loyalty. The results stress the positive contribution of private labels on consumers' loyalty across different loyalty stages. However, the findings suggest that this relationship may not be as strong as suggested in earlier studies. Findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, emphasising the complexity of the consumer loyalty construct and that multiple store-related factors can positively contribute to it. The findings indicate that the loyalty factors that contribute to store loyalty are not homogeneous across the different loyalty stages, strengthening the idea that retailers should adopt different loyalty strategies depending on the loyalty stage its target customers are in.

The final contribution by Shah and Khanzode develops broad guidelines in order to design a “just-right” amount forward area i.e., “lean buffer” answering. A dynamically efficient and self-adaptive, knapsack instance-based heuristics is developed in order to make effective storage utilisation. The existing state-of-art under study is supported with distribution centre case and need of model adopting lean management approach in storage allocation policies is investigated along with test results in LINGO. The sensitivity analysis describes the impact of varying demand and buffer size on performance. The presented model demonstrates a novel thinking of lean adoption in designing a storage allocation strategy and its performance measures, while reducing wastes and improving customer value. Future research issues are highlighted, which may be of great help to the researchers who would like to explore the emerging field of lean adoption for sustainable retail and distribution operations.

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