

Transforming retail channels in the digital era: marketing and operations perspectives

This special issue features a selection of the best papers presented at the 5th Colloquium on European Research in Retailing (CERR), where academics discussed the challenges retailers faced in digitalising their channels and operations so as to continue being relevant for their customers in an omnichannel context. The Colloquium took place at the University of Valencia (Spain) on September 1–2, 2020 and was chaired by Prof. Marta Frassetto (Department of Marketing Department, University of Valencia) together with the CERR advisory board: Xavier Brusset (Director of PRISM Research Centre, Skema Business School), Christoph Teller (Institute for Retailing, Sales and Marketing, Johannes Kepler University) and Herbert Kotzab (Chair of Logistics Management, Bremen University). At the 5th Colloquium, 86 papers were presented, which decisively demonstrates the consolidation of this research community in the field of retailing.

Amongst the many societal megatrends that will affect the future of society, digitalisation will influence the future of retailing significantly. Thus, all areas of retailing, including store management and operations, supply chain and retail channel management, as well as retail marketing and buying behaviour, will undergo a dramatic transformation. In this regard, retail researchers from 21 countries presented their forward-thinking research at the 5th CERR.

The CERR and *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (IJRDM)* have collaborated in publishing outstanding work from the Colloquium since the first CERR in 2012. We are very thankful for the cooperation with the IJRDM, which ensures that the CERR community can disseminate their ideas to the global scientific community in retail research. With this special issue, we certainly hope to contribute towards further expanding the high scientific standing of both the CERR and the IJRDM.

This special issue includes 14 papers that deal with the transformation of retail channels in the digital era. The papers can be grouped into six different topics: (1) digitalisation in retailing, (2) multi/omnichannel retailing, (3) supply chain management, (4) retail strategy and management, (5) shopper/consumer behaviour and (6) international retailing.

Three papers deal with the *digitalisation of retail stores*, referring respectively to digital kiosks, robots and augmented reality.

In the paper “Exploring how digital kiosk customer experience enhances shopping value, self-mental imagery and behavioral responses”, Lao *et al.* contribute to understanding how digital in-store technologies affect the customer shopping experience and in turn shopping value and behavioural responses. The implications for retailers are that digital kiosks can increase customer value and drive sales. Kiosks should be designed to provide functional value but also hedonic value by promoting interaction with other customers and sales staff.

De Gauquier *et al.*, in the paper “In or out? A field observational study on the placement of entertaining robots in retailing”, investigate the role of the placement of humanoid service robots (HSRs) for entertainment applications in retail stores. Using unobtrusive observation at stores, the study found that, when the goal is to create awareness of and interest in the store, the HSRs should be placed outside. The outside placement also resulted in a greater number of transaction and amount spent. However, placement inside the store seems better suited to inducing consumers to enter the store.

Augmented reality (AR) is quite a novel technology for retailers. Bigne and Castillo, in the paper entitled “A model of adoption for AR-based self-service technologies: a two country comparison”, suggest an AR in retail model to study the drivers of the adoption of AR by



shoppers. The model is tested in the cosmetics category, where mobile AR-based apps provide product demonstrations that could drive store sales. A cross-cultural sample compared the model in the USA and Nicaragua, confirming its relevance in both developed and developing markets. The findings of this study seem particularly relevant in the light of the pandemic and the need to restrict consumers' trials of products.

Two papers investigate issues related to *multi/omnichannel retailing*. In the paper "At the source of integrated interactions across channels", Bezes analyses the meaning of channel integration for consumers, how channels should be combined by retailers, and whether the same channel attributes are meaningful regardless of the type of customer. Based on a survey of 1,015 customers of a specialised multichannel retailer, the results show that customers add rather than compare the different image attributes of the online and offline channels to build the perceived congruence of a channel; however, not all attributes are taken into account in judging congruence, and different multichannel segments weigh the attributes differently with regard to the perceived congruence of channels.

The second paper in this area, authored by De Canio *et al.*, "Engaging shoppers through mobile apps: the role of gamification", aims to discuss the interest in adding gamification features to engage shoppers in the use of retailers' mobile apps. Their findings highlight the role of gamification and shopping enjoyment in shopping engagement and intention to buy using a mobile app, and the moderating role of previous online shopping experience in the engagement-app path.

Two papers tackle the challenges for retailers' *supply chain management* as they adapt their channels to digital marketing and operations. Sales-Vivó *et al.*, in the paper entitled "Comparing relationship of quality-satisfaction models: effects of B2B value co-creation", investigate the role of value co-creation and relationship quality in generating economic and social satisfaction within supply chain relationships. The paper adopts a triadic approach, analysing the manufacturer–retailer and manufacturer–supplier relationships, and compares two models with different mediating variables. The study finds stronger support for the model where value co-creation mediates between relationship quality and economic satisfaction.

The paper "Artificial intelligence in retail: applications and value creation logics", authored by Lanlan Cao, reveals that adopting artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to optimise supply chain management is a key driver of AI's growth in retail. Using a multiple-case analysis of 54 retailers, this study identifies five main strategies for AI-related data management and reveals 28 AI-powered solutions, changing 14 business processes, with five management areas involved in AI applications to create value via four logics: automation, hyper-personalisation, complementarity and innovation.

Three papers in this special issue investigate topics related to *retail strategy and management*. In the paper titled "The franchisor–franchisee relationship and customer data management in the digital era", Oueslati *et al.* discuss the challenges of managing customer data in franchise networks. Digitalisation involves a complete restructuring of the data processes and internal and external communication. Sustained by the commitment-trust theory and using a mixed-methods research design, the authors conclude that inter-organisational commitment and inter-organisational communication within the franchise network contribute to better marketing performance related to the management of customer data.

The paper "Spatial decision support for social hybrid organizations: siting new social supermarkets in Austria", authored by Lienbacher *et al.*, tackles a social and ecological "grand challenge" in the European Union, that of reducing poverty and food waste, and the role of social supermarkets (SSMs) in this endeavour. The paper uses geographical information systems (GIS) analysis to uncover the spatial decisions of SSMs in Austria, where SSMs, a hybrid business retail model, are well established.

Retailers tend to diversify store formats to reach a wider market. Egan-Wyer *et al.*, in the paper "Ease or Excitement? Exploring how concept stores contribute to a retail portfolio",

explore how concept stores differ from other experience-based retail formats and, hence, how they contribute to a diversified retail store portfolio. Through a case study of IKEA, built through interviews with managers, retail experts, and consumers, they show that the concept store is an accessible touchpoint that reduces friction on a diversified customer journey.

The topic of *shopper/consumer behaviour* was popular among the papers presented at the Colloquium. We have selected three of the best papers in this area. Sit *et al.*, in the paper “Perceived authenticity of online-only brands (OOBs): a quali-quantitative study with online consumers”, suggest, as a result of a mixed-methods research design, a framework that includes “honesty”, “connection”, “continuity”, “craftsmanship”, and “accessibility”, as meaningful dimensions defining consumer-perceived authenticity of OOBs. The findings suggest opportunities for OOBs to attract customers and encourage electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behaviours.

The paper “Value co-creation between consumers and distributors: the moderating effect of relationship characteristics”, authored by Rubio *et al.*, focuses on customer co-creation with retailers. Their results show that trust and perceived support are crucial in encouraging customer co-creation behaviours; however, the results differ depending on the length of the customer–retailer relationship and affiliation to the retailer’s loyalty programme.

Aiolfi *et al.*, in the paper “Data-driven digital advertising: benefits and risks of online behavioral advertising”, investigate how individuals can be persuaded to make purchases in an online retail context through personalized messages based on online behavioural data. Their findings confirm the controversial nature of online behavioural advertising, as it activates opposing reactions that affect the intention to click on the ad and make a purchase. The credibility and relevance of the ad contribute to its acceptance, while privacy concerns affect avoidance of it. However, the latter has no effect on click intention, confirming the *privacy paradox*.

Finally, this special issue includes one paper on *international retailing*: “Testing the water – prior-online market entry in China”, by Hardaker and Zhang. This paper contributes to the understanding of the evolution of market entry strategy into advanced digital economies. Based on interviews with senior executives of Aldi Süd and Costco in China, the findings reveal how prior online market entry is a strategic response to organisational challenges faced by international retailers in the Chinese market. Prior-online market entry allows retailers to test the market and build relation and network embeddedness with suppliers and customers to facilitate physical store rollout.

Lastly, we thank all those who have contributed to the successful completion of this special issue. This includes the authors for their papers, reviewers for the special issue, as well as for the initial Colloquium for their meticulous work and helpful comments, and all the others that have made and continue to make CERR a success.

As the papers presented here show, the digitalisation of retail and the challenges of attracting and engaging consumers is never over. The new technologies and the combinations with AI as well as with the Internet of Things provide endless opportunities to diversify the services and products on offer to customers. We fully expect that our selection of papers will spur other researchers to further investigate the topics related to retail channel digitalisation presented in this special issue.

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