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SERVSIG 2012: Innovative Service Perspectives

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This special issue introduces selections from the research presented at the 7th AMA SERVSIG International Service Research Conference in Helsinki, June 7–9, 2012. Initiated by Liam Glynn and Ray Fisk, SERVSIG has been in existence since 1998 and is held in a different country biannually (Fisk and Patrício, 2011). The 2012 conference was hosted by the Department of Marketing and CERS, the Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management at the Hanken School of Economics. Arranging the conference was a great honor as CERS was founded in 1994 to inspire research in service and relationship marketing (www.cers.fi). The conference was chaired by Kristina Heinonen and co-chaired by Anu Helkkula, Maria Holmlund, Tore Strandvik, Christian Grönroos, and Peter Björk. More than 270 participants representing 31 countries from 6 continents—Europe, Asia, North and South America, Asia, and Australia—presented their research. The conference program consisted of 4 key note sessions, 2 special sessions, 1 panel discussion, and 200 parallel presentations. Evening entertainment for the service researchers included a conference dinner at the Finlandia Hall and a White Night Cruise. Creative and innovative research was especially welcomed as the selected theme of the conference was Innovative Service Perspectives.

The keynote sessions contributed to different views on Innovative Service Research. The first keynote session by Rafael Ramírez, Director of the Oxford Scenarios Program, challenged conference participants to reflect upon the future of service research. The second keynote presenter, Petri Kokko, Director of Google Global Sales Learning & Development, talked about customer-driven change. In the third keynote session, Professor Evert Gummesson, Stockholm University, discussed the most crucial questions not currently being addressed by service research: (i) Does service research deal with the important issues?, and (ii) Has service become better during the 40 years since service research took off? The fourth and final keynote session by Professor Micael Dahlén, Stockholm School of Economics, presented stimulating ideas about the future. The panel discussion, with Professor Christian Grönroos, Professor Ray Fisk, Dr. Rafael Ramírez, and Professor Steve Vargo and chaired by Professor Tore Strandvik, debated the impact and drivers of thought-provoking service research. The parallel sessions represented diverse topics such as customers in service, service design, service innovation, sustainability in service, and service value, as well as contexts like business-to-business service, public service, e-service, and social media.

The Nordic School of Service Research and CERS

The interest in services marketing dates back to the 1970s when it emerged in several countries (for historical reviews see, for example, Swartz, Bowe, and Brown 1992; Berry and Parasuraman, 1993; Grönroos, 2006; Kunz and Hogreve, 2011). Two pioneering professors from Finland and Sweden—Christian Grönroos from the Hanken School of Economics and Evert Gummesson from Stockholm University—became Nordic forefront figures in service research (Grönroos and Gummesson, 1985). They later established what is referred to as the Nordic School of Service, which conducts “induction, case study research, and theory generation, to better address complexity and ambiguity in favour of validity and relevance” (Gummesson and Grönroos, 2012, pp. 479). The Nordic School is not restricted to the geographical area of Northern Europe, however, as its researchers have international backgrounds and cooperate with service researchers and research centers around the

world. It is recognized as one of the three leading schools of thought in the field of services marketing (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993, Lages *et al.*, 2013).

About 20 years ago, after Professor Christian Grönroos had founded the Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management, CERS research was primarily centered on concepts such as quality and value in services and relationships, managing business relationships and networks, and determining how these influence the competitiveness of firms. These issues are still being explored, but they have evolved to embrace many other concepts, such as technology infusion in service, service transition in industrial companies, service experience, mobile services, service innovation, ethical marketing, branding, and marketing communication. What is typical of CERS researchers is that they combine and cross-fertilize insights of service marketing and management with other streams of research and utilize many different research approaches and method designs. Emphasis is on understanding service as a phenomenon and approach rather than as a function and “thinking outside the box” to discover novel research topics and produce inspirational findings characterize their research. CERS is in fact rather similar to the other service research centre in the Nordic School; *i.e.*, the CTF Service Research Centre at Karlstad University in Sweden established in 1986 and initiated by Professor Bo Edvardsson.

To advance pioneering and innovative research in the spirit of the Nordic school of thought and nontraditional contributions made to service management theory, in 2010, CERS inaugurated the Grönroos Service Research Award (www.cers.fi). The first recipient of the award in 2011 was Professor Evert Gummesson from Stockholm University. The second recipient in 2012 was Professor Ray Fisk from Texas State University; he was presented with the award at the AMA SERVSIG conference in Helsinki.

Already in 1993 Fisk, Brown and Bitner argued that service research had rapidly developed since the 1950's, with an increasing number of academics conducting research in services marketing.

Service marketing research is constantly developing and changing, and much of it has recently been building on the views of Service-Dominant Logic (cf., Vargo and Lusch, 2004), Service Logic (Grönroos, 2006), and Customer-Dominant Logic (Heinonen et al., 2010).

Conference Theme: Innovative Service Perspectives

Innovative Service Perspectives was selected as the 2012 SERVSIG conference theme to reflect CERS' fundamental research aims; *i.e.*, proposing original research topics, addressing company-relevant issues and challenges, bravely questioning what is taken for granted in research, combining current insight into new knowledge in novel ways, designing innovative research, developing new methods, and presenting thought-provoking findings. Taken together, the articles in this special edition contribute to extending service research in ways that interest both academia and practitioners.

Papers From the 2012 SERVSIG Conference in This Special Issue

The five articles included in the special issue were selected as the result of a blind double-review process to represent innovative aspects in concurrent service research. Cristiana R. Lages, Cláudia M. N. Simões, Ray Fisk, and Werner H. Kunz discuss the foundations and evolution of the service marketing field and the emergence of a global service research community in the first article, titled 'Knowledge dissemination in the global service marketing community'. They foresee a restructuring of research communities and neighborhoods as service marketing becomes a research neighborhood within the emerging broader service research community. They further forecast that other research neighborhoods will emerge within this new community, which could include the fields of service arts, service management, service engineering, and service science. As the service research community expands and new fields emerge, such as service arts, new perspectives and insights with the potential of generating innovative service research will be born.

In the second article, titled ‘A lean approach for service productivity improvements: Synergy or oxymoron?’, Per Carlborg, Daniel Kindström, and Christian Kowalkowski develop six propositions that examine the influence of lean principles on service productivity. They transfer these principles from the manufacturing setting to address productivity in a service context, which has long been a challenge and has produced scant research. The study is valuable because it promises managerial insights regarding how to coordinate and manage productivity efforts in services while taking customer satisfaction into consideration. The study represents an innovative perspective because it has a service perspective that is combined with insights from another stream of research to address a company-relevant issue.

The third article, titled ‘Positive social behaviors and suggestive selling in the same service encounter,’ by Magnus Söderlund represents another, also innovative, type of service research study. Based on experiments, the study highlights that even minor changes in the customer contact person’s behavior during service encounters can have implications for the customer’s reactions and behavior. Thus, the study reminds us of the basics of much service marketing research; more understanding is needed of customers’ microprocesses in service encounters. Literature on personal selling is suggested as one beneficial stream for future study in this endeavor. This is an innovative idea that service research has until now largely overlooked.

The fourth article, titled ‘Applying SPAT in business-to-business supplier switches’ by Erno Selos, Teemu Laine, Inger Roos, Petri Suomala, and Lauri Pitkänen, applies a well-established technique used to analyze consumer relationship switching behavior to a business-to-business context. The SPAT tool represents method development in service and relationship research. It was originally intended for determining how, why, and when consumers switch from one service provider to another, but now its usefulness has been investigated in another drastically different setting. There is an apparent need to develop and refine methods in service research, and SPAT illustrates a successful attempt at such an effort.

In the fifth article, titled ‘Customer participation and value creation: A systematic review and research implications,’ Mekhail Mustak, Elina Jaakkola, and Aino Halinen synthesize research on customer participation conducted over the past 40 years to increase the current understanding of customer participation in the creation of offerings. They offer valuable insights to the ongoing discussion on value creation within marketing while simultaneously identifying many novel topics that are in need of more research. Moreover, currently popular studies on co-creation could be stimulated with the diverse insights from customer participation studies.

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Next SERVSIG Conference

We invite you to participate in the 8th AMA SERVSIG International Service Research Conference with the theme of ‘Services Marketing in the New Economic and Social Landscape’, which will be held from June 13 to 15, 2014, in Thessaloniki, Greece. The conference will be hosted by the Departments of Marketing and Operations Management and Business Administration of the University of Macedonia. Rodoula H. Tsiotsou will be the conference chair, and Yannis Hajidimitriou, Maria Vlachopoulou, Chris Vassiliadis, and Andreas Andronikidis will be co-chairs. Like prior SERVSIG conferences, it will be open, flexible, and fun! Additional conference details are available at: <http://www.servsig2014.uom.gr/>

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