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ANZMAC Conferences and JSTP – Continuing the Tradition

This *Journal of Service Theory and Practice (JSTP)* special section with selected papers from the *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) Conference 2017*, hosted by *RMIT* University in Melbourne, Australia, from 4 to 6 December 2017, continues a longstanding tradition of collaboration (Finsterwalder and Garry, 2011; Finsterwalder and Tombs, 2018; Leo and Sweeney, 2017; Mathies and

Patterson, 2017; Sajtos, 2015). Like in previous years, the journal editors, Professor Marianna Sigala, School of Management, University of South Australia, and Associate Professor Chatura Ranaweera, School of Business, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada, have kindly offered to issue a special section with papers from the conference. All papers have undergone a rigorous double-blind review process, and it is our privilege to introduce the *Journal of Service Theory and Practice (JSTP)* special section. It comprises a selection of papers originally submitted to the *Services Marketing Track* and presented at the *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) Conference* in Melbourne.

This special section is entitled “Services Marketing for Impact”, a title that corresponds with the ANZMAC 2017 conference theme of “Marketing for Impact”. In their call for papers, the conference co-chairs had raised the issue that marketing academics are asked to explain the value of their work and how it contributes to society and the people they serve, from consumers through to corporations and governments (Robinson, 2017). Academics were encouraged to showcase research that emphasised the ‘so what’ question and “to reflect on how the marketing discipline can contribute with research that is truly ‘cutting edge’ and leading conversations and societal change” (Robinson *et al.*, 2017, p. 5).

Services Marketing for Impact

In recent years, the value of research has been publicly questioned, and marketing academics are challenged, more than ever, to demonstrate the impact of their research. However, what does generating impact mean? When does service marketing scholars’ work have a major effect? When the number of citations of their work increases? When they publish in journals with high impact factors?

Traditionally, the assessment of research performance has mostly been focused on the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals, citations, and competitive grants won (ABDC, 2018; Zardo, 2017). While these and other indicators might signify productivity and a scholar's reputation within the research community, they might not necessarily reflect true impact on society. For example, Australian universities have been required since 2018 to prove that their research "provides concrete benefits for taxpayers and the government, who fund it" (Zardo, 2017). While Merriam Webster (2019) relates to impact as having "a significant or major effect", the Australian Research Council (ARC) is more specific defining research impact as the "contribution that research makes to the economy, society, environment or culture, beyond the contribution to academic research" (ARC, 2019). Equally, New Zealand's Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF, 2019) aims to facilitate "research activities that provide economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits to New Zealand, including the advancement of Mātauranga Māori [Māori knowledge], and support technology and knowledge transfer to New Zealand businesses, iwi [tribes] and communities" via "the production and creation of leading-edge knowledge [and] the application of that knowledge."

As societal pressure on the funding of academic institutions increases, there appears to be an emerging awareness in the services marketing discipline that more meaningful and impactful research is needed. Various academics have made calls to action (see, e.g., Gebauer and Reynoso, 2013; Finsterwalder, 2017; Fisk *et al.*, 2016; Nasr and Fisk, 2019; Ostrom *et al.*, 2015) to encourage the community of service scholars to be more topical, relevant and impactful. Newer approaches that focus on global societal and environmental issues and the contribution that interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary service research can offer (Finsterwalder and Tombs, 2018) have

emerged from the community of service scholars. For example, Transformative Service Research (Anderson *et al.*, 2013) aims at utilising service concepts and tools to aid with improving health and wellbeing of society.

One key research priority that continues to have a profound impact on consumers, business, and society at large, is technology (Marketing Science Institute, 2018; Ostrom *et al.*, 2015). The selected papers in this special section all address different aspects of the evolving customer-technology interface, from online review platforms to artificial intelligence and cyborgian technologies within service contexts.

The first paper, “Reacting to Negative Online Customer Reviews: Effects of Accommodative Management Responses on Potential Customers” by Rico Piehler, Michael Schade, Ines Hanisch, and Christoph Burmann, investigates effects of explanation and compensation as management responses to negative online customer reviews. Over the last decade, more and more consumers have been sharing their consumption experiences on the Internet. Online reviews have evolved to be a crucial element in how consumers make purchase decisions. According to the 2018 Local Consumer Review Survey, 86% of consumers read reviews for local businesses, and negative reviews stop 40% of consumers wanting to use a business (Murphy, 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that better reviews with higher ratings directly correlate with increased revenues (Vidrih, 2018). In their paper, the authors demonstrate that service providers in the hospitality industry should reply to negative online customer reviews by combining an explanation with compensation. Providing neither an explanation nor compensation is the least effective management response, and should thus be avoided. While the authors focus on the hospitality industry, the study should be seen in a wider context. For example, businesses are facing an increasing threat of “fake online reviews” (Sutton, 2019). By developing effective management response systems,

businesses will more likely increase their attention to the potential damage of fraudulent online reviews.

The second paper, titled “Friend or Foe? Chat as a Double-edged Sword to Assist Customers” by Marion Sangle-Ferriere and Benjamin Voyer, examines the role of chat as an emerging new technology in customer service. Traditionally, the main channel used for customer assistance purposes has been the telephone, but computer-mediated channels have rapidly developed in the past two decades. Statistics show that live chat has increasingly become the preferred choice of contact among customers (99Firms.com, 2019). Given the increasing importance of and reliance on chat in a customer service context, Sangle-Ferriere and Voyer investigate customers’ perceptions of online chat as a customer assistance channel in a business-to-consumer context and their willingness to use it. The authors address also an important gap in research: the nature of the interlocutor. Customers often reach chat through a chatting window or pop-up screen, which provides little information about the nature of their interlocutor. Given this often-blurred nature, this article investigates both forms (human and artificial) of chat interlocutors. The authors contribute to the literature on mediated service encounters and on organizational frontlines by identifying key factors that shape customers’ core needs and motives to use chat in a customer assistance encounter. The paper has societal impact as the commercial use of artificial intelligence (AI) will transform marketing (Gartner, 2018) and change consumer markets and societies. While AI may provide increased convenience and efficiency for consumers, legislators have to ensure that consumers are protected regarding privacy, lack of transparency, and risks of discrimination.

In the third paper “Cyborgs as Frontline Service Employees: A Research Agenda”, Tony Garry and Tracy Harwood explore potential applications of cyborgian

technologies and their integration within service contexts. In particular, the authors address the nature and role of cyborgs as frontline employees and their interactions with customers. On first sight, the topic of ‘cyborgs’ sounds futuristic and dystopian. However, a recent Forbes article describes that the ‘transhumanist’ movement is growing and that “Cyborgs are among us already” (Towers-Clark, 2018). While the “rise of robots” has become a prominent topic in debate within recent years (e.g. Mende *et al.*, 2019; Wirtz *et al.*, 2018), the social trends of human enhancement with implanted technologies represent a novelty, and scholars have pointed out that “debates about the future of society should consider the potential of cyborgs, as well as robots, replacing human beings” (Fox, 2018, p. 7). Tony Garry and Tracy Harwood raise five important research areas (the visibility/invisibility of alteration, its disclosure/transparency to others, the customer acceptance of cyborgs in service contexts, the issue of power balances, and privacy/security concerns). The paper expands recent research in the services marketing literature on technology infusions in service encounters (e.g. Larivière *et al.*, 2017) and contributes to the emerging debate on the concept of cyborgism and its impact on human society.

Conclusion

The three papers in this special section show further advances in understanding and utilizing technology better to create more impact in the service marketing discipline. More work with direct impact on communities, institutions and public policy is needed to advance people’s lives. Future research projects should consider an increase in field work service researchers could get involved in, that also allows them to collect data, for example, via ethnography (Hill, 2002; Rajagopal 2019), storytelling

(Bassano *et al.*, 2019; Kankainen *et al.*, 2012) or action research (Lim *et al.*, 2018) while at the same time aiding with transforming and improving people's lives.

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