Guest editorial: Evolutions and disruptions in retailing service through digital transformation

The retail industry has undertaken many transformations in response to the innovations in technology (Saraogi, 2020). The COVID pandemic accelerated the technological change in the service and retail sector. Due to the swift speed of technology advancements and its wide-range impact on the entire retailing service sector, retailers face an urgent need to transform their business operational model but many of them have not made sufficient progress (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

Through implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data, retailers can now provide more sophisticated and personalized services and products and tailor the website context and messages based on each individual's needs and desires. Augmented reality (AR) enables consumers to superimpose a virtual object on an image of a retail world. Metaverse allows retailers to create a virtual store and provides real-world retail shopping experiences to consumers in a digital environment.

Evolving customer experience and the increasingly diverse customer journeys also pose new challenges to service management in retailing. Today's customer shopping journeys are dynamic and complex. Omnichannel customers create limitless unique shopping journeys across different touchpoints that best meet their needs at the moment. Service management in the ever-shifting retail industry has been a moving target. Effective service management in omnichannel retailing is an empirical question for many brands that have as yet successfully created a digital version of their brand, especially in the aspects of services.

The goals of this special section on retailing services are to showcase cutting-edge research that offers new insights into emerging service models in retailing and ultimately to stimulate intellectual dialogues and new research collaborations among scholars and practitioners in retailing services. Through highly competitive review processes by internationally renowned scholars in the field, we are excited to present five articles that offer diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to the fast-evolving roles of retailing services in the face of digital disruptions. These articles offer a valuable collection of thought leadership papers that help advance the field of service management.

Technology-driven personalized service communications

In "Programmatic advertising in online retailing: consumer perceptions and future avenues", Ciuchita *et al.* (2023) focus on the rise of AI-powered programmatic advertising and examine customer interactions with personalized and context-aware programmatic advertising. Specifically, Ciuchita *et al.* (2023) examined consumers' attitude toward programmatic advertising online and their responses toward the retailers delivering the ads. Through a systematic review of extant literature, this paper compares the difference between traditional advertising and programmatic advertising. The consumer attitude toward programmatic advertising explored in this study is derived from distinctive characteristics of programmatic advertising such as ad relevancy, consumers' risk beliefs related to sharing personal data online and consumers' perceptions of AI as beneficial. This paper helps us understand strategic ideas in improving consumers' attitude toward programmatic advertising and provide several fresh ideas for future research.

AI-enabled customer–firm service interactions

In "Fostering positive customer attitudes and usage intentions for scheduling services via chatbots", Maar *et al*. (2023) approached the changing nature of customer–firm interactions by focusing on chatbots in service interactions. This study investigated how customers respond to chatbots' different communication styles (high vs. low social orientation) and demonstrated customers' perceptions of the chatbot's warmth and competence influence their attitude toward the chatbot and usage intention. Maar *et al*. (2023) further examined whether different generations (Gen Z vs. Gen X) respond differently to chatbots and also whether different service contexts moderate customer–chatbot service interactions. This study offers new empirical evidence of generational differences in user responses to chatbots' communication styles. Expanding their empirical findings, Maar *et al*. (2023) offer important implications for both academics and service retailers to consider when employing chatbots in service contexts.

Re-imagining employee–robot collaborations

In their paper titled "Employee-(ro)bot collaboration in service: an interdependence perspective", Le *et al*. (2023) propose an innovative concept of the Frontline employee–Frontline robot interdependence (FLERI) that re-image the future of human–robot collaborations in service contexts. The unique contribution of this paper is its approach to robots as vital collaborators and interdependent entities in serving customers through joint goal, joint workflow and joint decision-making authority. Le *et al*. (2023) not only offer an extensive overview of current literature, but also propose an integrative FLERI research framework. Le *et al*. (2023) further propose valuable research questions for future research that will surely help advance human–robot collaborations in service contexts.

Technology-empowered investigation into corporate social responsibility story

Emerging technologies transform not only the way customers and firms interact, but also the way researchers can study such interactions. In "Wrinkles in a CSR story: mismatched agendas in fast fashion service brands' CSR reputation", Mickelsson *et al*. (2023) tackled current corporate social responsibility issues in connection with fast fashion brands using structural topic modeling (STM). The STM analysis enabled the investigation of a large volume of company created communications, press releases, media articles and consumer-generated tweets over three years and generated underlying CSR themes frequently argued in the sources and address discrepancies between company's communications about their CSR efforts and new media and consumers' communications about the issue. This paper highlights wrinkles in CSR communication, illustrating mismatches in what three main sources of CSR reputation (company reports, news and social media) communicate different agendas. The study demonstrates how new digital tools like STM can unveil hidden wrinkles in CSR communications. Likewise, new digital technologies hold the potential for advancing future research in retailing services.

Moving forward: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

Technologies continue to evolve. With the recent introduction of ChatGPT, a great deal of optimism for better AI technologies and fear of an uncertain future for humanity simultaneously exist. Although no one has a crystal ball to accurately predict the future of retailing services, we can look at how we learned from the unexpected changes and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In their conceptual work titled "Reflection and predictions on effects of COVID-19 pandemic on retailing", Verhoef *et al*. (2023) offer

critical insights into long-haul structural impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer shopping behaviors and retailing and how retailers need to adjust to the new reality after COVID-19 fades out. This paper also proposes several key predictions which can stimulate future research and help practitioners develop practical persistent recovery strategies from COVID-19.

In conclusion, while this special section has a clear set theme, each article takes a different perspective and addresses a cutting-edge matter. Therefore, we believe that each of the articles helps us to be attentive to the current rapid evolution of the retail industry in connection with retailers' implications of various digital innovative technologies. Furthermore, they stimulate us to expand our research scope and embrace diverse perspectives in understanding the future of retailing services through innovative thinking.

We would like to acknowledge the diligent efforts of the researchers who contributed articles to the special section. We also convey our appreciation to the reviewers who provided valuable feedback to help researchers expand their ideas and improve the quality of the papers. Particularly, we express our gratitude to Jay Kandampully for giving us the opportunity to organize this special section.

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