
Guest editorial: Re-imagining marketing in a post-pandemic world: challenges, strategies, and solutions

Guest editorial

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Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted individuals/organizations and implied a change in market dynamics. Consumers and organizations have been using innovative business transaction modes to cope with unprecedented marketplace conditions (Foroudi *et al.*, 2017). Relationships between businesses and consumers have faced swift alterations due to restrictions posed by COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing protocols. Behavioural market dynamics have been redefined with the pandemic amid partial and complete lockdowns. Consumers have been shopping for many new-to-them products (e.g. face shields and masks) in new ways (e.g. no-contact methods via e-commerce and at-home delivery) using emerging technologies (smartphones and mobile apps) to venture into new experiences. The convenience of online shopping has motivated consumers to continue these newly acquired habits.

The powerful convergence of marketing and technology has helped consumers to navigate these marketplace shifts. As the world moves beyond immediate survival, some changes may persist and become part of everyday life; others may revert to pre-pandemic tactics (Sheth, 2021). It is interesting and important to explore the relationship between changing consumer behaviour and the need to inform sustainable marketing models (Mehta *et al.*, 2020). With this reasoning, this special issue identifies emerging patterns in consumer behaviour along with necessary transformations in marketing models to cope with the changes COVID-19 has brought, mainly from a qualitative perspective.

The special issue comprises three parts. Through its three papers, the first part enlightens readers on the transformative and emergent consumer behaviour trends in times of crisis. The second part, comprising three papers, analyses how digital transformation shapes shopping patterns and learning contexts in education and start-up space. In contrast, the third part, with two papers, discusses the role of social media in revamping marketing trends and transforming consumer behaviour through innovative methodologies.

Part 1: transformative and emergent consumer behaviour trends in times of crisis

The discussion of transformative and emergent consumer behaviour trends starts with the article “Modelling of consumer challenges and marketing strategies during the crisis”, by Irna Ishrat, Mohammad Hasan, Ayesha Farooq and Fateh Mohd Khan. This article presents a hierarchical interrelated matrix of strategies to counteract consumer challenges in crises. The results suggest that in times of crisis, consumers are more price sensitive, and they tend to adopt new behaviours. Information systems and the formation of crisis management teams are the most critical strategies to implement. Methodologically, this article uses a comprehensive interpretative structural modelling approach, popularly known as cross-impact matrix multiplication, that allows for teasing out structures and mechanisms from complex situations, as is the case of consumer challenges.



The second article follows with identifying the dimensions of the consumer experience in the context of hotels. “Exploring dimensions of the customer experience at budget hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic: an ethnographic approach”, by Smitha Girija, Devika Rani Sharma and Vaishali Kaushal, depicts the tourists’ experiences in budget hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic to underline how this pandemic paved their expectations. The results of this study reinforce the urgency of adopting contactless practices in hotels and restaurants. The digital transformation is a challenge for the future. Methodologically, this research adopts netnography to identify themes from customer reviews.

Staying on the topic of customer experience, the next article titled “Typology of e-commerce shoppers: the case of COVID-19”, by Zahy Ramadan, Maya Farah and Alaa Sleiman, discusses clusters of online shoppers and patterns of behaviour affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that will persist for a long time. To this end, an exploratory qualitative research design was adopted along different categories of e-commerce platforms and in two different moments – during and after COVID – to define shopper segments. The results suggest that emergent segments of online shoppers are duty-bound, e-watcher, makeshift and onli-vorous. Methodologically, this research adopts an inductive thematic approach to interpret data followed by data triangulation methods.

Part 2: digital transformation shaping contexts

Digital transformation has been accelerated with the pandemic; despite the resistance of some consumers, adoption of new technologies in daily life has been inevitable. Nowadays, the resistance is more evident in mobile payment systems and learning contexts. This special issue brings to the discussion those challenging contexts of technology adoption.

In the next article, “Influence of COVID-19 pandemic on the intention to adopt mobile payment systems in India”, Prashant Raman and Kumar Aashish highlight the factors that influence the adoption of mobile payment systems in India. This study proposes a conceptual framework incorporating the uncertainties/risks associated with mobile payment systems. The research suggests that those who had used mobile payment platforms for the first time during the pandemic found that the benefits of using this system outweighed the risks. The study also highlights that future adoption challenges need to be further researched.

In the education context, a shift to online learning was put into force during the COVID-19 pandemic, a learning pattern that came to stay. The article “The prospect of higher education marketing: adaption, transition or hybridisation?”, by Bipithalal Balakrishnan, M.R. Dileep and Sandeep K. Walia, examines the impacts of online/hybrid learning among international students. The study posits that international students appreciate the flexibility that the online learning system brought them; nevertheless, they beg for balanced systems where human contact is also requested. This research adopts ground theory research to build theory.

In the start-up context, the article titled “Does technology make start-ups resilient amidst COVID-19? A qualitative enquiry”, by Anubhav Tiwari, Payel Das, Ritesh Kumar Dubey, Tavleen Kaur, Saurabh Kumar Dixit and Santanu Mandal, explores the response and resilience towards sustainability shown by technology-enabled start-ups during the pandemic. Most start-ups had to digitally shape and renovate their product/service to meet the new-normal demands of the market. Using the framework of the technology acceptance model and its aspects of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use helps start-ups to either leverage or deploy technology to sustain their business.

If social media had a presence in our daily lives before COVID-19, during the pandemic, it became part of the decision processes, and the archetypes of the brands are essentially based on social networks. This section develops the role of social media in destination branding and as an influencer in fashion markets. The article “Destination branding through social media: the juxtaposition of foreign influencer’s narratives and state’s presentation at the event of Pakistan Tourism Summit 2019”, by Farhad Nazir, analyses the dimensions of destination branding in Pakistan. To this end, the authors analysed the narratives of international social influencers to understand voluntary and involuntary brand assets. The results suggest that a stigmatized image of danger persists within superficial stereotypes that flag Pakistan’s tourism. This article discusses topics that primarily need to be voiced in branding ethos. Methodologically, this research is the first to discuss the payback of social influencers in destination branding.

While discussing the social media role, the article “Impact of the pandemic on social media influencer marketing in fashion: a qualitative study”, by Kent Le and Gokhan Aydin, questions the future of social influencers in fashion marketing. This article questions the importance of social media and emphasizes that the overuse of social influencers may diminish their credibility. To avoid this threat, the authors suggest sincerity, authenticity and more quality than quantity in social influencers’ posts. Grounded theory is the base of the study.

Overall, this special issue unveils ground-breaking aspects of multidisciplinary marketing and prevailing marketing trends through qualitative research highlighting current methods. Therefore, the guest editors encourage the scientific community, especially marketing and consumption researchers, to avail the maximum benefit from this special issue.

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- Sheth, J. (2021), “New areas of research in marketing strategy, consumer behavior, and marketing analytics: the future is bright”, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 3-12, doi: [10.1080/10696679.2020.1860679](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2020.1860679).

Further reading

Hartwig, K. and Jacob, F. (2021), "Capturing marketing practices for harnessing value-in-use", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 137-153, doi: [10.1080/10696679.2021.1895671](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2021.1895671).

About the Guest Editors

Saurabh Kumar Dixit, PhD, is a Professor and founding Head of the Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong (Meghalaya), India. His research interests include Consumer Behaviour, Gastronomic Tourism and Experiential Management and Marketing in hospitality and tourism contexts. He has fifteen books to his credit, including *The Routledge Handbook of Consumer Behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism (2017)*, *The Routledge Handbook of Gastronomic Tourism (2019)*, *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism Experience Management and Marketing (2020)*, *Tourism in Asian Cities (2020)*, *Tourism in India: Marketing Perspectives (2021)*, *Consumer Behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism (2021)*, *The Emerald Handbook of Luxury Management for Tourism and Hospitality (2021)*, *Teaching Cases in Tourism, Hospitality and Events (CABI, UK- 2023)* and *The Routledge Handbook of Wine Tourism (2023)*. Presently he is editing the *Routledge Handbook of Collaborative Consumption in Tourism*. He has contributed many research papers in reputed peer-reviewed journals and books. He is an editorial board member of many international journals, such as the *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *Tourism Geographies* and *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*. His detailed profile can be seen at www.routledge.com/authors/i15903-saurabh-dixit

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