Editorial

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Biographical notes: K. Ganesh is currently working as Senior Consultant at Global Business Services, Global Delivery, IBM India Private Limited, Mumbai, India. He holds a Doctorate from Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, India. His research interests lie in the application of heuristics, meta-heuristics, multivariate statistical techniques and multi-criteria decision-making tools to logistics and supply chain management. His consulting exposure includes supply chain network and inventory optimisation. His teaching interests include combinatorial optimisation, green supply chain, knowledge management and balanced scorecard. He has published several papers in leading research journals such as the *European Journal of Operational Research*, *International Journal of Systems Science* and *International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology*.

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Customer service is widely understood as an important profit generating mechanism for a successful organisation. In the early days, customer service was viewed as a vision behind corporate success. The visionary concept has evolved to be seen as a day-to-day process towards market success. A process view has taken centre-stage and treats customer service as an outcome from wide-spectrum of activities. The approach also assumes customer service as a package of diverse service elements. The majority of practitioners and educationists believe that most of the service elements are unexplored. The passage of time has brought several important customer service elements to the light. A few service elements such as quality at source and on-time delivery are focused in academic and industry circles. The remaining service elements such as customer support, after-sales services, lead time, environmental concerns, condition of goods/services, quantity of goods/services, and value added services are left unscathed and overlooked despite their importance.

Recent studies underscore customer service from logistics perspective. Improving customer service is an ongoing focus of the logistics community. Logistics is understood as market winner in the industry. The term 'logistics' denote the systematic and planned movement of organisational resources to attain competitive advantage. Organisational resources include men, material and information that satisfy customers. Organisations mobilise these resources through a wide range of activities called processes. In essence, industry views customer service as processes to move organisational resources. Therefore, the logistics perspective culminates into a process-centric approach for customer service. This study is deeply rooted on process-driven approach for customer service in the premises of logistics. The ultimate aim of logistics is to create customer value and deliver good customer service through processes and systems.

Successful firms prove the value of long-term customer relationships and the importance of customer retention. Emulating successful firms, companies brace for customer retention methods to obviate the cost of customer acquisition. The philosophy that emphasises customer retention through relationship building is known as 'customer relationship management' (CRM). Value-added customer services ensure the organisational efforts towards building long-term customer relations. Latest CRM practices advocate post-purchase services to create customer value.

Emerging market trends visualise a strong requirement for improved customer service and support in developing markets. Industries offer customer support through a network of service centres.

Accordingly, this special issue is aimed at meeting the challenges posed and overcoming the existing gaps. It includes state-of-the-art manufacturing and services industries on some critical research issues pertaining to customer service. This special issue covers areas in the application of multivariate techniques in decision-making models for customer service in supply chain for systems development and implementation. It is intended for practitioners from industry who use techniques

from a wide range of fields: mathematical programming, supply chain and logistics management, and process systems and operations engineering. The practical applications in the form of quantitative and qualitative case studies based on customer service are also the focus of this special issue. The papers of this special issue have real value relevance, be primarily focused on real time implementation and the target audiences of this special issue are researchers, managers, practitioners and consultants.

We are delighted to offer six articles in this issue of the *International Journal of Electronic Customer Relationship Management* to address these matters.

The first research article by Jafar Razmi and Seyed Behrouz Khodadadi is concerned with routing problem with consideration of quality of service (QoS). Authors highlighted that managers need applied approaches to help them in making appropriate routing decisions in the absence of comprehensive analytical methods in this area because of high complexity of such systems. Authors have considered a set of n heterogeneous servers which differ in service time and QoS and the customers are also divided into m levels with regard to their service ranks. Authors presented a threshold policy for heterogeneous servers (TPHS) which depends on number of different customers in the queues as a practical and flexible dynamic routing policy. Two performance measures are discussed by the authors and TPHS is compared with both a static routing policy which maximises the QoS level and the minimum expected delay (MED) policy which minimises the AWT in the queues. Stochastic simulated annealing (SSA) is proposed for optimisation of TPHS.

The second research manuscript by Balan Sundarakani, Prem Vrat and Pradeep Kumar analysed a supply chain model and the dynamic interaction between its variables using system dynamic approach. A causal loop diagram has been developed by the authors to identify the relationship between the variables of supply chain system. Authors have carried out the policy experimentation considering various global economies and their degree of development under different delay conditions. Authors have addressed many important issues related to demand, delay time, inventory, GDP growth, SCMI and degree of development of India and their implications are useful in devising strategic policy and decision-making scenario of India's new liberalised economy.

The third article by Vikram Srinivasan has challenged that in a technology driven age, the organisations are finding it difficult to differentiate their products and services. In particular, authors have highlighted that the service sector face challenges in distinguishing from competitors, as technologies enable competitors to replicate service offerings. This is the reason the authors have chosen a study on the Indian financial sector. The main principle of this paper is to identify, gauge, explore and understand the prevalent 'perception gap' between the stated (internal) personality of a brand and employee (intra-internal) perception of the brand among Indian banks. The study has focused on how a brand is perceived within the micro environment of organisations.

The fourth research survey manuscript by Resmi and Kamalanabhan is in the area of impression management theory. Authors stated that impression management has received increasing levels of attention by organisational scholars in the last 25 years. However, most researches in the area have studied it as a part of social competence, with a special interest in social perception. Authors viewed this research in a different dimension as an exploratory attempt to study impression management as a precursor of entrepreneurial success. 311 entrepreneurs were selected as part of the study, and it was found that

impression management techniques are indeed contributing to entrepreneurial success, along with other variables like personality, social competence and entrepreneurial orientation. Authors concluded that the entrepreneurs are not only fighters trying to self-promote with superiors, but they are also fliers who supplicate even with the subordinates to get things done.

The fifth case study paper by Päivi Iskanius, S.P. Anbuudayasankar and Tom Page stated that the emerging business paradigm agility, namely, the ability to rapidly respond to changes in market and customer demand, addresses new ways of running companies to meet the challenges of today's changing business environment. Authors indicated that the need for agility has traditionally been associated with supply chains operating in high technology industries. However, more traditional industries such as in steel product manufacturing also face similar challenges in terms of speed, flexibility, increased product diversity and customisation. The main objective of this study is to identify those drivers that lead companies towards agility in the metal industry. Authors have analysed the driving forces and the ability for agility in two case networks. Both networks have their origin in the steel product manufacturing, but the changes in the business environment have led them to develop their ability for agility in different ways. Authors have concluded that the need for agility is clearly recognised in both case networks and has to seriously be taken into account in long-run strategy plans of companies.

The last sixth case study article by Mukesh Kumar Barua, Parag Chaporkar, S. Nagarajan and R.A. Malairajan explained that the concept of the Toyota Production System or what is known today in the USA as 'lean manufacturing'; the basic idea behind the system is elimination of waste. Waste is defined as anything that does not add value to the product from customers' perspective. Authors dealt with application of five-S and Kaizen from Toyota Production system for waste minimisation at Eaton line in a medium size manufacturing company. The data collection and analyses resulted in reduction of cycle time of turning machine, broaching, drilling and chamfering, shaping and internal shaping and de-burring and buffing machine. At the same time, reductions in tool search time, material movements and work in progress have also been achieved.

The guest editors would like to thank the authors for their valuable contributions reserved for this special issue and the reviewers for their precious referee work. Special thanks to Professor Bruce Chien-Ta Ho and Professor Tzong-Ru (Jiun-Shen) Lee for their support, guidance, advice and assistance in the preparation of this feature special issue. We hope that our readers will yield lot of insights and benefits from work of these impressive researchers and practitioners of this special issue. Our team welcomes comments and suggestions from our readers, researchers and visitors, and greatly appreciates your feedback. We look forward to building on this special issue with many more issues over the coming years, as we engage in productive dialogue that confronts the dynamic social science and environmental challenges faced in today's world.