
Editorial – Part 2

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1 Introduction

In the previous issue of *IJEMR*, we introduced the general framework and the main ideas justifying this special editorial project. To avoid repetition of the background themes to the current issue, the reader should consult the previous edition. Here, we present the second part of contributions selected for publication.

2 Contributions to the special issue – Part 2

The first paper is by Daniel Belanche, Luis V. Casaló, Carlos Flavián and Miguel Guinaliú. In ‘Online social networks in the travel sector’, antecedents and consequents of consumers’ (travellers) participation in this kind of social networks are analysed. Though past studies have already focused on the subject, the authors apply an original approach to this research topic distinguishing between two levels of participation: observation and knowledge contribution. These have been found to positively influence consumer loyalty to the host (travel) company. The theoretic constructs and relations are clearly presented and theoretically discussed, all of which are integrated into a model estimated by structural equation modelling. Finally, some conclusions and managerial implications are pointed out, basically: promoting trust development; fostering group cohesion in the network; and promoting their own social networks. Such practices are expected to improve the participation of consumers in online networks, as both observers and knowledge contributors. To close this paper, the authors make a notable effort to share with the audience detailed and interesting future research lines.

The second and third articles research diverse aspects of virtual avatars on consumers’ perceptions and behaviours on websites. This area of avatars is still at an early stage of development, so studies like these are very convenient to delimit this specific framework better and guide future studies.

One of the two is ‘Can avatars enhance consumer trust and emotion in online retail sales?’ by Liz C. Wang and Dale Fodness. The authors start by working with two main research questions:

- 1 Can avatars mimic salesperson in traditional retail stores to create a mutually-beneficial relationship?
- 2 What factors would induce consumers to perceive their human-like interactions with avatars as if they were interpersonal social interactions?

To respond to these questions, they propose a theoretical-based model which illustrates how avatars can contribute to building trust and increasing the positive perception of the online retail experience. To test research hypotheses, an experiment with two factors is conducted;

- 1 avatar presence or absence
- 2 avatar likeability, nested within the presence of avatar condition.

The results support all the hypotheses. Diverse managerial implications and notes for future research are discussed.

David G. Taylor authors the other paper, ‘Putting a face with a name: avatars, relationship marketing and service failure/recovery’. Previous studies suggested that avatars positively influence the consumer’s flow state, arousal, hedonic and utilitarian value, satisfaction and purchase intention. Here the author primarily works with two research questions:

- 1 Do the social cues of avatars have an enduring effect on customer relationships?
- 2 In an ongoing relationship, can an avatar mitigate the effect of a service failure?

Hence, the author widens the scope of past researches by analysing the effect of avatars on consumers’ relationship variables and the influence of service failure. He develops two interesting experiments to empirically test the research hypotheses. Part of the results supports the outcomes of previous studies, though the other part seems to contradict them; for instance, this study found that the presence of avatars do not increase the perception of socialness. These questions are, however, adequately discussed and interestingly interpreted. Finally, some managerial implications and future research guidelines are suggested.

The fourth paper is ‘Resolving the paradox of choice by leveraging the long tail of micro-communities – the case of the mass customising company Spreadshirt.com’, by Albrecht Enders. Here, the author cleverly undertakes the resolution of the problem of choice generated by current mass-customisation tools; i.e., there is a trade-off between the number of options available and the efficiency of the consumer’s decision process. Thus, though more options represent higher value to consumers, there is a point beyond which they might feel unable to properly manage a wide range of potential options; this is the paradox of choice. In this scenario, based on the insights of the long tail framework, the author advocates the democratisation of distribution as a promising possibility to overcome such a trade-off. Hence, thanks to the possibilities now provided by the internet, customers can act as connectors between the mass customising company and their respective micro-communities. This is, in essence, the gist of this article, deeply reflective and well argued by the author, which makes use of a highly pedagogical case study to illustrate his theoretic proposals.

Lyle R. Wetsch and Kristen Pike wrote the following article, ‘Marketing in a Web 2.0 world with a Web 1.0 mentality: the challenge of social web marketing in academic institutions’. Here, they revise general aspects of the so-called Web 2.0, comment on the necessary evolution from past, though still broadly extended, website platforms based on the 1.0 logic, and focus on the particular case of academic institutions’ web platforms. Here, the authors reflect on the ways in which the new web-based applications can add value to institutions and students. They present a collection of recommendations, and also take into account the results of a content analysis applied to the websites of Canadian and US academic institutions, along with their personal communications with administrators at several of these institutions.

The final article, ‘Going with the consumer towards the social web environment: a review of extant knowledge’, by Inma Rodríguez-Ardura, Francisco J. Martínez-López and Paula Luna, offers an extensive and critical literature review of the main research lines related to online consumer behaviour. This paper is particularly interesting for this issue, as it dedicates a full section to show, in a structured and detailed form, a variety of important lines and research themes focused on consumer behaviour in the new social web environment; e.g., consumer empowerment, participation in value creation, virtual

communities and relationships with the brand, etc. Finally, the authors signal diverse implications and recommendations for managing the relationships with customers through the optic of the new web.

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