Journal of Business and Retail Management Research (JBRMR)
Volume 9 Issue 2 April 2015

Editorial Comments

This edition of the *Journal of Business & Retail Management Research (JBRMR)* contains nine scholarly articles conforming to the principal objective of the journal, namely the dissemination of knowledge both applied and theoretical. There is a stimulating selection of papers that explore issues of local import, as well as of regional and international significance. The findings of a number of the papers are significant not only for academics and professionals, but also for policy makers and those responsible for local, regional and national strategy. The editorial board is grateful to the contributors for making this journal the platform by which they have chosen to put their research into the public domain; it is also indebted to the team of reviewers around the globe who have scrutinised each paper in an objective, judicious and professional manner.

The first paper of this edition is entitled: **The effect of corporate reputation on retailer brand equity: A study of two South African grocery chains** by **Beneke** *et al.* The increasingly cutthroat world of the supermarket throws into sharp relief the need for stores and their leadership to be attuned to the needs and expectations of customers. Traditionally the tyranny of the bottom line has dominated planning, policy and procedures and yet this fascinating research makes clear that there is much more to success than profitability and dividends to shareholders. Taking as its focus Checkers and Woolworths, two well established brands within South Africa this paper explores the complex and often neglected area of customer- based retailer brand equity (CBRBE). The value of a brand or its equity is something that can appear difficult to define and quantify, yet those familiar with the world of accountancy are aware that goodwill is factored into proceedings and has become an established element that forms part of the assets of a given entity. This research would appear to give some useful pointers in this regard, especially as it is clear that the retail dynamic looks set to become even more competitive as the likes of Wal-Mart enter the fray. The leadership and strategists of Checkers and Woolworths could certainly gain some valuable insights from watching Robert Greenwald's 2005 documentary: *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*.

In examining groceries in Cape Town and Pretoria this research helps shed light on some of the regional disparities and also reminds the reader that for all the progress that has been made with rather to greater social inclusion, financial advantage still tends to lie with certain ethnic groups. The fact that over two thirds of the respondents were female is telling, but the authors are quite right to remind the stores not to overlook the importance of addressing the needs of male shoppers. With its robust testing of findings this paper has some timely pointers for those formulating forward strategy, for South African shoppers like those elsewhere are becoming increasingly savvy and are desirous of stores that are keenly attuned to their expectations. Furthermore, it is evident that the South African context is significant and this gives stores with a extensive local knowledge an edge that should give them a competitive advantage providing they take significant cognisance of the role and importance of brand equity.

Globally there is a growing recognition of the importance of working to ensure that an economy is well balanced. Finding such equilibrium can be challenging, especially for those countries that have become over reliant on the activities of a particular sector. Our second paper is entitled: **The detection of industrial clusters in Algeria** by **Djamila** *et al*, and here the reader is presented with some insight into current initiatives being undertaken in the Maghreb with a view finding a way forward that is economically beneficial and what is more provides much

needed employment. We are told that this is a fairly recent phenomenon in Algeria, with the drive to develop and enhance clusters having largely taken place since 2007. With hydrocarbons being the dominant sector in the economy it comes of little surprise to discover that some of the oil wealth has been used to pump prime other sectors. The definition of clusters offered here is interesting and one that could well prove useful elsewhere. Yet whilst the wider world might well only see Algeria in the context of oil production and associated industries one of the telling facts included here is that SME's make up some 94% of Algerian companies. The benefits of formal and informal clustering are already apparent in sectors as diverse as beverage and olive oil production. That said, it is clear that progress remains patchy and the paper manages to gather important data appertaining to various key regions that could well prove useful when it comes to further strategic planning, both in the public and private sector.

Clustering has the added benefit of stimulating innovation, something that is increasingly well documented. Initiatives such as the Atlas of Economic Clusters in London have underlines the value of such activity and the role that clusters play in a nation's knowledge economy. Algeria is feeling its way in this regard, but has already shown itself adept at tapping into important external support, a fact that will help both with future research, as well as providing a compelling case for further activity of this nature. It is clear that Algeria faces a raft of challenges, yet the evidence presented here provides a fresh perspective on a nation that for too long has been overlooked and under-appreciated.

Our next paper examines takes as its focus a key element within the relationship between retail outlets and their customers, namely that of service quality. **An assessment of departmental store service effectiveness using a modified SERVQUAL approach** by **Naik** and **Srinivasan** delves into an area that should be of paramount importance to all stores. With SERVQUAL essentially being a formula that examines the disparities between customer expectations and perceptions we find ourselves getting to the heart of the most fundamental of relationships. Little wonder then that one of the five genetic dimensions of SERVQUAL is empathy. The extensive literature provided here makes clear that this area of research has generated considerable interest in recent decades and the Model of Service Quality Gaps (2.1.1) provides some fascinating pointers that challenge organisations in their efforts to recalibrating their approach.

This Indian study demonstrates that in those surveyed the preponderance of shoppers were female. The issue of gender and the differing expectations of each gender is significant and thus it would have been interesting to have this explored in further depth. Age, marital status and educational background are also acknowledged as playing their part, and the information gathered can potentially if interpreted effectively enable certain gaps between expectation and perception to be plugged. The Indian retail market is one that is undergoing rapid change and I note with interest that one of the chief findings was in regard to the value that customers set by, "knowledge of products and services", the authors rightly point out that this has a bearing on staff training, but would also raise questions about the haemorrhaging of knowledge caused by excessive staff turnover. Training itself is often of a vague and token nature and thus this research raises questions as to how best to ensure training that is genuinely tailored to meet the needs of a service quality brief. Whilst there is much here that is fascinating many might well find themselves questioning the point made in the Abstract about the main USP of a service industry, the Abstract states; "the main USP of any industry especially a service industry is a satisfied customer". That reservation apart, this paper contains much that is relevant not only to practitioners and researchers in India, but further afield as well.

Our fourth paper is: **Cost benefit analysis of re-engineering the business process in Nigerian banks** by **Needorn** and **Agwor**. Taking as its focus ten banks in Port Harcourt, this paper presents Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) as a means by which organisations and companies of all types and sizes can appraise themselves with a view to self improvement. The fact that BPR has become a regular feature of the corporate landscape over the last quarter a century begs the question as to why has it been adopted so readily and how effective such a process really is. Pryor (2011) in identifying the importance of flexibility, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness underscores how BPR has the potential to concentrate minds. Yet this research makes clear that there are a whole series of factors that could detract from the impact of BPR. Management buy-in is a priority, as is the realisation that such an undertaking can often be seen as a "painful process". The so-called pain raises further questions as how an organisation is prepared to handle this and the elements that could well take the edge off the pain. Banks and other financial institutions are often notoriously conservative and hierarchical in nature and it would have been interesting to discover how in a Nigerian context candour, objectivity and an attitude of 'without fear or favour' is encouraged. Local circumstances, particularly in regard to status and employee insecurity are also areas that might have added some additional depth to this paper. In stating that; "BPR should never be carried out for the mere sake of it," the authors remind us that tokenism and the tick-box culture have little to contribute to genuine appraisal. The relationship with stakeholders has also undergone a fundamental realignment in recent years and it would appear that BPR if entered into in the right spirit could well attune banks to specific needs and ensure leaner and more enlightened approaches at every level of operation.

The arrival of the Internet has opened up a wealth of opportunities for businesses and customers alike. For many businesses the sheer accessibility of the medium is a real boon and the possibilities to engage with potential customers seems endless, that said, ecommerce is not without its own challenges and needs to be approached in a logical manner. Our next paper: **The right pricing strategy for offline retailers when expanding into the online sales channel** by **Kimpel** and **Friedrich** endeavours to develop a conceptual framework aimed at helping companies decide what pricing strategy best fits. In so doing the authors have ventured into an area that has been largely neglected. One of the major problems is an attitudinal one, for the ubiquitous nature of the Internet means that there is a general assumption that what works in the offline retail field must therefore work equally well online. One is reminded of the line by Oscar Wilde about "a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing". Appreciating the value of insights into the online retail dynamic and it's workings can enable a company to better choose the right price strategies that in the words of this paper enable a "seamless integration of online and offline interactions". Understanding the implications of "high-low" price strategies and "everyday low price strategy" appears to have a significant bearing on success or failure in the online sales arena, there is also the issue of Dynamic Pricing (price change in response to real-time supply and demand) to consider, the latter being especially significant for businesses operating in the hospitality and travel and tourism sectors. Germany's Media Markt is used here as an example of a success in adapting towards appropriate pricing strategies, something that could well provide useful pointers for other enterprises as well as ensuring that cognisance is taken of cost, price credibility and trust. This paper certainly flags up a number of important considerations that if heeded might well reduce risks and help optimise potential.

The Internet has proved itself to be an enormous boon to business in many respects, yet our next paper reminds us that it can also be somewhat of a double edged sword. The sixth

paper of this edition is entitled: **The impact of willingness to engage in negative electronic word-of-mouth on brand attitude: a study of airline passengers in South Africa** by **Beneke** *et al*. The very democratic nature of the Internet has enabled companies to use is as a means to consolidate and develop brand image and reputation, but equally the customer or indeed other parties have at their disposal a tool that enables them to post and disseminate opinions as never before. Businesses spend thousands of dollars to encourage customers and potential customers to visit websites, respond to promotional activities and 'like' products and services, and so it could come of little surprise that the customer too will go online if for whatever reason they feel let down or have a grievance. Increasingly savvy consumers are eager to carry out their own form of due diligence on operators, particular the likes of airlines, restaurants and those engaged in the leisure industry. Where once companies could sealed away and largely impervious to disgruntled clients, the Internet has provided a very public means by which those with legitimate grievances or those of malicious mindset to vent their frustration or spleen.

This study in examining the Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) phenomenon makes clear that real time communications have an impact and if insufficiently monitored and responded have the potential to cause considerable brand damage. In choosing to focus on domestic frequent flyers the reader must be aware that such customers are likely to have a higher percentage of disposable income than the average citizen, will have had a certain level of education and thus will have the linguistic skills and knowledge to know how to sound off in a very public manner. Such activity and its very immediacy has the potential to be damaging. By acknowledging that "increasing usage of the Internet has empowered both companies and consumers" there is a realisation that various parties are in a position to use the Internet for their own ends. Airline passengers are often working against a deadline and are time sensitive, those travelling for work reasons have additional pressures related to scheduled meetings, maintaining credibility and generating sales and thus events that result in delays and stress and certain to trigger anger and a response.

This research reinforces the importance of vigilance and effective communication. Whilst other potential customers may trawl through comments and feedback they will also peruse official responses that seek to set the record straight or deal quickly and empathetically with genuine rather than vexatious posts. Furthermore, airlines and other service providers would do well to remember that their competitors are certain to be monitoring what is in the public domain. No company can afford to take these matters lightly and need to ensure they are geared up to monitor and handle such activity with a view to brand protection.

The seventh paper of this edition is entitled: **Analysis of archetypal characteristics of social customer relationship management** by **Jacewicz** and **Cho**. As business and clients alike embrace the Internet a recent area of study that has developed is that of Social CRM. Social Media's exponential growth has ensured that it has impacted on attitudes and the means by which entities engage and interact. This technological environment is forever pushing boundaries and as this paper makes clear SCRM is reliant on the development of trust that the "mutuality of relationships". By seeking to formulate a holistic model to assist parties there is an attempt to define those "archetypal characteristics" that form the pillars that support effective SCRM, namely trust, transparency, privacy and knowledge sharing. Yet the landscape is such that few people or organisations have grasped the enormity of the change that is taking place, let alone mastered the fundamentals that will enable a comprehensive appreciation of what needs to be in place.

PWC has noted that; "Customers are connecting and having conversations about organisations through social media, whether organisations are actively engaged or not, and
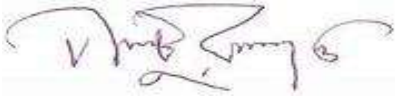
brands risk being compromised if they fail to participate." The paradigm shift that is currently taking place has serious implications customer relationship marketing, thus making research of this nature all the more timely. The living dynamic is certain to become ever more lively and complicated in the coming years and will demand even greater attention and resources if these changes are to be navigated effectively and result in a deeper and mutually beneficial understanding.

The penultimate paper of this edition is entitled: **Information processing model to measure important determinants on job satisfaction** by **Shin, Koh** and **Shim**. Information Systems have become a key dimension of most organisations and yet there is precious little understanding of the precise role of those who perform such vital functions, let alone a real appreciation and acknowledgement of the contribution such workers make. IT workers are rightly or wrongly perceived as doing their own thing and thus are often surrounded by an aura of detachment, a fact that is further reinforced by degrees of separation, different hours of operation and even the lexicon that they employ compared with their co-workers. For many in Information Systems the "Amount of freedom to do my job" is something which appears to suit their temperament, although there is a clear downside in that it often results in other perceiving that work levels are spasmodic in nature. I S professions are often viewed differently and in truth many of use could do with having a far better appreciation of the important and challenging roles that they perform and reassessing the contribution that they make in the world of work as well as in society at large.

This important study manages to get straight to the heart of the problem, namely with regard to motivation and retention. In so doing it has important lessons for HR departments across the board. In exploring 'disequilibrium' the authors elucidate something of the issues that have ramifications for all sorts of companies. What is explored here manages to generate a number of questions including where a job specification and a job role live up to expectations. As the number crunching is done with regard to the research data there are also additional questions that could be asked about attitudes related to the role of gender, differences in perception according to age and whether as a society we have a proper appreciation of worker motivation, for what may well motivate an employee at 23 is not necessarily going to be the same at 33 or 45. Information Systems workers often find that they work seemingly odd or anti-social hours, some can work at a distance, whilst others often feel that there seeming peripatetic lifestyle results gives them liberty at the price of status and enhanced promotion prospects. What is clear is that we would all do well to have a better handle on this subject and thus this paper has made a useful contribution to the body of research in this regard.

The final paper of this edition is a timely reminder that regardless of what potential demand there is for one's product or services various external factor can be instrumental on your ability to engage in business. **Effects of market infrastructure and poor access to markets on marketing of grains in selected states of Northern Nigeria, West Africa** by **Faajir** presents some useful insights into the current state of play in a sector that has the potential to meet both local need, but also supply staple foodstuffs elsewhere. It is often overlooked that Nigeria is a net importer of wheat (especially from the USA) and is home to a number of highly successful flour mills, the big six being Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc, Dangote Flour Mills Plc, Ideal Flour Mills Ltd, Honeywell Flour Mills Ltd, Standard Flour Mills Ltd and Crown Flour Mills Ltd. This paper points out that as things stand there is no Nigerian Grains Board in operation to champion the sector and its needs and thus for small growers, especially in the remote northern regions existing difficulties are not effectively articulated. Market infrastructure remains largely rudimentary and substandard and trade in general is hampered by the paucity of infrastructure.

These adverse conditions impact on development and regional stability and in the light of increased militancy in some quarters should be a reason for concern and action. Growers appear to be left to their own devices and thus it should come of little surprise that progress is at best severely limited. That said the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has been instrumental in assisting the Nigeria Infrastructure Advisory Facility (NIAF) to provide demand-led advice and assistance to Nigerian government bodies at both a federal and state level. Sadly, this study appears to confirm that in the north the situation remains far from satisfactory and goes some way to explaining why there appears to be such a disparity between the development of the north and elsewhere in the country.

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