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Introduction to the Special Section on Cocreating the Customer Service Experience with High Tech and High Touch

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When organizing the 2015 Service Management and Science Forum at Bentley University, we decided to invite both the speakers and the service research community to submit their studies to a special section of *Service Science*. Following a rigorous peer review process, we are pleased to present the following four articles in this special section, which were carefully selected from over fifty conference papers and external submissions. We thank the authors and reviewers as well as *Service Science* Editor-in-Chief Paul Maglio, Managing Editor Kelly Kophazi, and Production Editor Meaghan Maegerle for their work and support.

Technology has clearly changed the way services are provided to customers. The traditional face-to-face interactions between customers and service providers have been gradually replaced by kiosks, personal computers, and cloud-based self-service terminals. The transition to self-service shifts the power in the marketplace from the organizations that provide these services to those who purchase them. Increased competition has therefore shifted the value proposition to creating positive customer experiences in order to achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace. These four articles in this special section present how companies are accomplishing this through articulating the underlying dimensions of service value (Padilla et al. 2017), exploring the process to engage customers through a collaborative service system model (Atiq 2017), examining the role of mobile applications in engaging customers (Viswanathan et al. 2017), and analyzing the importance of brand experience and emotional attachment in affecting brand loyalty (Khan and Rahman 2017). Overall, these four articles greatly contribute to our understanding of how technology and service design approach can help create and facilitate a positive customer service experience.

“Impact of Service Value on Satisfaction and Repurchase Intentions in Business-to-Business Cloud Computing” by Roland S. Padilla, Simon K. Milton, Lester W. Johnson, and Munyaradzi W. Nyadzayo. Accompanying the surge in cloud-based communications and storage, companies are increasingly using the cloud as the platform to store product information, process transactions of goods and services, and manage customers, etc. As companies such as Amazon, IBM, Microsoft, and Google compete for shares of business-to-business (B2B) cloud computing services, it is unclear what value propositions the companies should propose to satisfy business customers. To address this question, this study takes a two-step approach starting with exploratory interviews and following with a questionnaire-based survey of 328 cloud computing users. Based on these survey results, the authors suggest that service value in B2B cloud computing consists of five dimensions: service quality, service equity, confidence benefits, perceived sacrifice, and cloud service governance. Through a structural equation model (SEM), the authors confirm that service value further drives customer satisfaction in the study context. The findings help us better understand the underlying dimensions of service value in B2B cloud computing services.

“Experience-based Collaborative Service System Design Model” by Arzoo Atiq. How does consumer participation enhance the technology-enabled service business model? Driven by this research question, the author conducted an in-depth review to develop a specialized model of service engagement in the design of services. A multiphase process was introduced to develop the experience based collaborative service system design (expCSSD) model. Specifically, the author followed the service system design (SSD) models by summarizing consumer preferences and ideas collected from a field study in the telecommunication industry in a developing country. Those preferences and ideas were then mapped to three theoretical frameworks by articulating links between organization strategies, service design, and activities identifying interactions between consumers and providers, and specifying distinct value aspects through the value cocreation model. Overall, the expCSSD

model provides a holistic understanding of service research related to interactions and technology-enabled service design.

“The Dynamics of Consumer Engagement with Mobile Technologies” by Vijay Viswanathan, Linda Hollebeek, Edward Malthouse, Ewa Maslowska, Su Jung Kim, and Wei Xie. An average smartphone user spends about 37.5 hours each month accessing an average of 26.7 apps. What are the implications of a user’s interactions with mobile applications? In this study, the authors took a longitudinal approach to examine the connection between customers’ mobile engagement and purchase behaviors. Building on a unique data set tracking loyalty program members’ redemption of rewards and purchase histories, the authors develop a vector autoregressive (VAR) model to capture the relationships among frequency of app usage, current app usage, point accumulation, and redemption. Based on 2.9 million records, the authors found that mobile apps foster customer engagement and purchase behavior, and thus represent a “game changer” for marketing communications.

“Brand Experience and Emotional Attachment in Services: The Moderating Role of Gender” by Imran Khan and Zillur Rahman. Based on data collected from bank account users, the authors examine how brand experience (BE) and emotional attachment (EA) improve brand loyalty (BL) in banking services and how such a connection is further moderated by gender. Results from confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation models suggest that BE positively influenced EA, and that both BE and EA have a significant positive influence on BL. In addition, gender also moderates the relationships shared by EA and BE with BL. Specifically, the connection between BE and BL is stronger in males while the connection between EA and BL is stronger in females. The results suggest that marketers should consider not only the rational aspect of consumers, but also their emotional aspects (i.e., they should provide pleasurable BE and develop EA within customers toward the brand).

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