

In this fourth issue of the year, the *APJML* presents a series of papers with a strong focus on consumer behaviour and branding. The topics include: consumer materialism and consumption, service satisfaction and loyalty, retail organisation and management, supply chain performance management, fandom, and country and cultural branding. Our industry spotlight submission this issue is a timely paper on the strategies for brand management during times of economic instability.

Opening this issue is a paper by Wang that examines the shift in social stratification and materialism in China. As the Chinese market moves into a new phase of development, this unique study seeks to understand the political and social level implications for businesses and consumers.

Next, Chan, Barnes and Fukukawa move into service satisfaction and loyalty, with a study on the internet banking behaviours of consumers in Hong Kong; focusing on the effect that dependency on online banking services has on consumer satisfaction. Their study develops a concept of online dependency in online service studies, and identifies a key social and managerial considerations that managers can leverage in developing effective online banking services. Continuing the theme of services, Ram and Wu investigate the role of switching costs in influencing consumer loyalty among Chinese mobile service consumers. Their study identifies interesting characteristics of the Chinese mobile consumer, and suggests strategies and future research possibilities for managers and academics to delve into.

Carrying into the next topic of retail organisation and management, is a paper by Tandon, Gupta and Tripathi. They investigate the factors that affect consumers' shopping experience and perceptions of shopping malls in India. Their findings provide useful insight for managers to offer a more holistic shopping experience for their customers, and serve as a springboard for future consumer studies in this area. Following this, Chang, and Yeh take a look at the Taiwanese hypermarket shopper; examining the shopping behaviours of male and female shoppers. The study sheds light on the importance of gender in shopping behaviour; and identifies common product categories that Taiwanese hypermarket shoppers favour, which managers and academics can capitalise on in future studies.

Taking a break from the marketing topics, Routroy, Pradhan and CV propose a Graphic Theoretic Approach to evaluate the performance of supplier development programmes. Implemented as part of a case study of an Indian manufacturing firm, they validate the utility of this proposed approach to evaluation, providing businesses and academics with an alternative method to examining supplier development programme performance.

Shifting into the context of branding, Huang and Huang explore the evolution of fandom, examining consumers' interaction with human brands, and evaluating the homogeneity of devoted fans. Conducted in Taiwan, their study presents a different take on fandom, and provides unique insight into fans and their interactions with human brands. Next, Esmaeilpour and Abdolvand take an Iranian perspective to the influence of country-of-origin (COO) image on consumer brand loyalty. Conducted in the context of luxury fashion brands, their study develops insight into the Iranian

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luxury consumer market, and encourages brand managers to place emphasis on the role of COO image in their branding strategies. Finally, in response to the increasingly globalised reach of Asian brands, Southworth and Ha-Brookshire investigate the influence of cultural authenticity on consumer perceptions of Asian brands. Specifically, they evaluate how Chinese brands can leverage Asian themes to build perceptions of authenticity in the brand, and increase US consumers' willingness to try the brand. This study proves the usefulness of cultural cues in brand elements, which managers can leverage in their marketing.

This issue's industry spotlight paper is presented by Drewniak and Karaszewski. The paper is aimed at presenting brand managers in emerging markets with various tools to strengthen their brand's position in times of economic flux. Drawing on a multitude of sources, they identify key insights, strategies and implications for effective brand management.

I am grateful for the influx of high quality papers being submitted to the *APJML* this year, and I hope this issue has provided interesting perspectives and unique insights to stimulate future research. I thank the reviewers and EAB for their timely reviews and contribution to the *APJML*; and the authors for submitting manuscripts of exceptional calibre.

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