

MARKETING CHALLENGES IN A CONNECTED WORLD

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In recent years, business environmental conditions are changing faster and faster, providing tremendous challenges to marketing *practitioners, researchers, and teachers*. A further concern faced by our discipline seems to be a weaker linkage between marketing scholarship and marketing practice, as well as the diminished influence of marketing in companies.

On the former point, it is time that marketing research goes back to drive changes in marketing practice, as it did in the past. In view of that, our research reviewing process should try to foster the production of *new ideas*, more than incrementalism and endless validation.

On the latter point, we are living a paradox. Marketers are being marginalized right now that the top management is finally recognizing that customers are the core asset of their firms, the only one that they cannot give up.

Studies on the conceptual interfaces between marketing and finance are clearly showing the inviolable link between customer value and shareholder value (among the others: Srivastava, Shervani & Fahey, 1998; Payne & Frow, 2005). The main factors determining shareholder value are indeed represented by the size of cash flows, their distribution over time, and their risk level. According to a *customer-based view* of the value creation process, shareholder value depends on *size* and *quality* of the relationship network established by the firm with the customer base. The first factor — size — originates from the ability to generate new relationships (measured in terms of customer attraction rate) and from the ability to retain existing relationships (measured in terms of customer loyalty rate). The second factor — quality — merges different elements affecting the above-mentioned cost and revenue components. Especially important are a reduced price sensitivity, higher propensity to consume, higher propensity to trading up (i.e. the purchase of higher quality products within the same product line), higher willingness to cross buying (i.e. the purchase of other goods and/or

services offered by the company), and reduced sales and support costs. Above all, however, there is a key element of the relational quality that is going to play a strategic impact on shareholder value. In the emerging networked world, it is a higher propensity of customers to co-generate value, to interact and cooperate with the firm, from collaborative innovation to co-production, self-delivery, and co-marketing of products.

In summary, as somebody noted, it is time for a marketing renaissance in the corporate hierarchy, even if comprehensive solutions have yet to be proposed (Webster Jr., 2005).

We are glad to discuss these issues with some prominent representatives of the international marketing community. They are selected Honorary Members of the Italian Marketing Society, an association composed by academics, managers and professionals involved in the diffusion of marketing competencies, as well as in the promotion of marketing practice and teaching. Let us start from the challenges faced by the practitioners.

1) Fifty years after Levitt's "Marketing Miopia", how is the role of marketing evolving within the firm? Who is a good marketing manager today?

Bernard Cova

Remember that marketing is said to be in an on going crisis since the mid 80's, e.g. the advent of a post-modern society and a post-industrial economy. Following this marketing mid-life crisis which led to an explosion of the discipline in different panaceas, many of those involved professionally and academically in marketing had hoped that the 1990's would bring a re-focusing on a more solid and innovative concept; that of the relationship. However, in adopting the idea, marketers considerably reduced the significance of the concept of the relationship. Today, whilst limitations are becoming evident in the relationship approach and its more pompous derivative CRM, marketing is looking for a new way out linked to the concepts of experience, co-creation and solution which are encapsulated in the so-called S-D logic. But, as a consequence of this crisis and consequently of the fragility of core concepts and definitions, marketing is attacked both internally within the company by the ever-growing power of other functions such as Finance and externally in the market by the empowerment of consumers.

In France, the Adetem – Association Nationale du Marketing – carried out a survey that found the following results concerning the role of marketing within companies:

- A decrease in the strategic marketing function which is under pressure by shareholders to produce short-term results;
- A stability of the product management and brand management functions;

- An increase in the ‘operational’ marketing functions, those directly in touch with the end clients and intermediaries, meaning the development of the actions of direct marketing, phone marketing, web marketing, mobile marketing, etc. and above all of CRM!

Within the firm this clearly makes marketing a decreasingly strategic function and an increasingly operational one.

The notion of what makes a good marketer depends on what type of function the person is in charge of. At the operational marketing level, based on a recent survey we carried out with EDF, Electricité de France (Bonnemaizon et al., 2007), we can predict that there will be a general trend towards the increased use of social sciences to understand consumers’ value systems. One of the possibilities may be the empowerment of vendors and other part-time marketers such as contact people, to train them to become ethnographers or ethno-marketers and thereby contribute to the gathering of more experiential, emotional and/or symbolic data arising from the customer’s experience.

More globally, a good marketer is one who has the ability to combine a variety of frameworks and who doesn’t apply one single model in order to avoid a kind of new marketing myopia. This calls for a coherent pluralism of models and theories in the understanding of consumption phenomena and in the building of marketing plans.

Kevin Keller

The role of marketing continues to evolve within firms. The best marketing firms are making sure that marketing is not being done just by the marketing department, but rather are ensuring that all areas of the business understand, appreciate and, in some sense, participate in marketing.

Marketing myopia is all about making sure that marketers know customers, competition and the company itself well enough that they can find a higher-order purpose and positioning in which they can excel in the long-run. Along those lines, the best marketing companies are closely aligning research & development, design, sales, operations, logistics, and all the different management functions to efficiently and effectively maximize customer value. They are also figuring out ways to innovate and stay relevant so that they can drive sustained long-term growth.

Three firms that excel at this strong internal and external focus are Procter & Gamble, Nike, and Toyota. All three have done a remarkable job making sure that the entire firm contributes in a positive way to the value delivery chain to better satisfy customers.

Ivan Snehota

There remains a considerable haziness as to what is meant by the “role of marketing” in a company. The full reach of the claim by the same Levitt

that “marketing is indeed everybody’s business” in a company is seldom appreciated. Marketing is the critical function of a business and therefore a general management responsibility. It cannot be delegated to a specific organizational unit or position. So, the answer to the question who is a good marketing manager today is everyone and none.

How is the role of marketing in companies evolving? I would say that the role of marketing in business remains in principle the same since no firm can perform effectively without a clear view of how to get and serve customers which translates into strategies and things to do. However, while the role of marketing appears to remain the same the task of marketing is changing. Changes in the task of marketing reflect the evolution of the market and of the organizational context. Both have changed and will continue to change offering new challenges and solutions. A common opinion is that the rate of change has accelerated. The consequence of that is the need to abandon the illusion of “sustainable” solutions and to accept the idea of relentless marketing.

Reflecting such a turbulent context, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) has published its 2006-2008 Research Priorities. They emphasize the idea of a connected customer. Due to business globalization and technology innovation, today’s customers are no more a group of isolated individuals: they are fully connected to their suppliers, they are connected to each others in virtual communities, and they are increasingly connected to third-party information providers. Three capital topics for marketing researchers are suggested accordingly: connecting innovation with growth, connecting customers with the company, connecting metrics with marketing strategy.

2) What would you add or modify to the MSI list? What research priorities would you suggest?

Bernard Cova

Connecting people! “The link is more important than the thing”: as marketers we must preoccupy ourselves with connectedness in consumption. This is something I really trust for years and years. In fact connectedness has always existed but marketers did not want to take it into consideration. It’s a question of scale of observation. One of the relevant approaches to consumption today is the ethnosociological approach adopted by the CCT (Consumer Culture Theory) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) which offers a useful opposing opinion to the dominant psychosocial approach, that of the vast majority of marketers. Where psychosociology focuses on the influence of A on B (A being a person or a group), or on the power of A upon B, or on the contamination of B by A or on the imitation of A by B, ethnosociology will focus on what makes the glue between A and B, or the shared emotion between A and B, or the being-together AB. This ethnosoci-

ciological view allows us to look at the connections between people within subcultures or tribes and especially within brand communities.

I would add to the MSI list the following connection: ‘connecting company with the customers’; and erase ‘connecting customers with the company’ which for me has an old-school ring to it. In the same vein, I believe we must think in terms of self-serving rather than self-service, or CMR (Customer Management of the Relationship) rather than CRM (Customer Relationship Management). All these moves emphasize the empowerment of the consumers and their growing creative role in their exchanges with companies. Following the paths of the S-D logic, we have to move the orientation of marketing from a ‘market to’ philosophy where customers are promoted to, targeted, and captured, to a ‘market with’ philosophy where the customer and supply chain partners are collaborators in the entire marketing process (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). I believe that this ‘market with’ philosophy has a promising future, with significant development to come from approaches centred around elements associated with the competencies of consumers engaged in a value co-creation process. The shift towards co-creation will require a genuine marketing revolution. We hope for once that we are not misusing the term, which is used far too often to describe trivial changes in the field of marketing. The idea of knowing one’s consumer may be central to marketing but it’s often used in a restrictive and manipulative sense, equated with the attempt to know everything about consumers in order to satisfy them and secure their loyalty. The idea that the consumer possesses knowledge that can be of interest to the company has seldom been put forward in marketing. On the contrary, we believe that the ‘market with’ philosophy will convince firms to incorporate ‘Others’ into their thinking – not because they want to instrumentalise them but because they will try to learn from consumers’ expertise and experience. The co-creation idea could serve as a catalyst to get companies to abandon the fundamentalist approach that their marketing managers so often take. The general view of fundamentalism is often a very simplistic one that usually has religious overtones. In actual fact, fundamentalism is the best way of describing the attitude of all those who believe that they hold the truth, even that they are the truth, hence that everyone else is wrong. Fundamentalism occurs when certain behaviour is considered to be the right solution and never considered as a problem. We could go as far as saying that Marketing Management is fundamentalist. This is one of the major reasons for its myopia. Conversely, ‘market with’ approaches are anti-fundamentalist because they tolerate other actors’ differences, and perhaps even more importantly, because they advocate learning from ‘Others’, be this from average consumers, lead users, creative consumers or brand communities.

Kevin Keller

MSI does an excellent job developing research priorities in marketing. They survey executives at the many top companies that belong to the organization and therefore are able to find out what are on the minds of the best marketing practitioners. Beyond the three capital topics, MSI has an additional list of special interest priority topics to address other concerns and opportunities that were also mentioned by many executives. This list addresses important issues with marketing strategy, marketing metrics, customer management, brand equity, marketing implementation, and marketing research tools.

This is obviously a very comprehensive and thorough set of research priorities, so it is difficult to add anything. But two areas that might receive some greater attention that aren't explicitly mentioned by MSI are internal marketing and integrated marketing. It will be helpful to develop guidelines in both of these areas to assist marketers to achieve the following goals.

Internal Marketing

Internal marketing ensures that everyone in the organization embraces appropriate marketing principles, especially senior management. There is a horizontal dimension to internal marketing. At a very core level, the various marketing functions – personal selling, advertising, customer service, brand management, marketing research – must work together. Internal conflict within the marketing team must be minimized so that all relevant marketing functions must be coordinated from the customer's point of view. At a broader level, marketing must also be embraced by other departments in the organization.

There is also a vertical dimension. Internal marketing also involves bottom-up and top-down marketing. Bottom-up marketing involves marketing managers directing marketing activities to maximize sales and brand equity for individual products for particular markets. Although such close, detailed marketing supervision can be advantageous, creating brand equity for every different possible product and market in this way is an expensive and difficult process and, most importantly, ignores possible synergies that may be obtainable. Top-down marketing, on the other hand, involves marketing activities that capture the "big picture" and recognize the possible synergies across products and markets to brand products accordingly. Such a top-down approach seeks to find common products and markets that could share marketing programs and activities and only develops separate brands and marketing programs and activities as dictated by the customer or competitive environment.

Integrated Marketing

Two key themes of integrated marketing are that (1) many different marketing activities communicate and deliver value and (2) when coordinated, marketing activities maximize their joint effects. In other words, marketers should design and implement any one marketing activity with all other activities in mind. To communicate and deliver value, two key components of an integrated marketing program are integrated communications and integrated channels.

An integrated communication strategy involves choosing communication options that singularly build equity and drive sales, but that also reinforce or complement each other. There are six major types of communication options: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, events and experiences, direct marketing, and personal selling.

Integrated channel strategy involves ensuring that direct and indirect channels work together to maximize sales and brand equity. Direct channels involve selling through personal contacts from the company to prospective customers by mail, phone, electronic means, in-person visits, etc. Indirect channels involve selling through third party intermediaries such as agents or broker representatives, wholesalers or distributors, and retailers or dealers.

Ivan Snehota

Connectedness is not a problem in itself. The issue is the interdependence of market actors that underlies the connectedness and that is further marked by the connectedness. Interdependencies in the connected world cannot be managed unilaterally. Coping with the connected world requires collective strategies. Our understanding of the interdependencies and of their impact on management is limited. This is where I would see the research priorities in marketing. Among other things, that means the need to redefine the notion of managing relationships with customers and other market actors.

Let us move to the researchers' challenges then. "The trouble with marketing research is marketing researchers". This was the provocative title of a recent contribution on a marketing journal (Piercy 2006). The author blames marketing researchers for being too narrow, unimaginative, backward-looking and uninformative...but with scientific precision and methodological rigor!

Some other colleague already noted "that many contemporary novels, such as Alex Shakar's Savane Girl, offer more insight into the marketing/consumer condition than bivariate correlations and multivariate analysis" (Brown 2005, p. 47).

In front of similar criticisms, our risk is to have a selective attention. Yet, we cannot forget that the relevance for practitioners is the only reason of being for marketing studies and, maybe, these considerations suggest some revision to our current thinking about research.

3) What is your point of view? Should we add to the MSI list a forth topic to be named “connecting marketing research to marketing practice”? How could we improve current research in marketing?

Bernard Cova

Starting with the idea that marketing research is inherently representational, the question that is asked by some colleagues such as Stephen Brown is how can we possibly represent marketing phenomena without resorting to traditional scientific representation? The notion that we can somehow capture or portray external reality has indeed been questioned by postmodernists. They believe that marketing researchers should seek to adopt more aesthetic modes of expression. They advocate the use of stories and essays that make you feel part of the experience and that communicate the inherent excitement – the rapture – of the subject matter. Thus, the debate is not on the most appropriate way for scholars to collect, analyse and report data but on the way in which they represent it. Indeed, to communicate the essence of some of our most meaningful research experiences, the precise, linear language of science may be unsuitable, especially when data-gathering is based on a sort of ethnography (Sherry and Schouten, 2002). Some social scientists, long before consumer researchers, have begun to resist the authoritative voices of realist ethnography or sociology, experimenting at times with alternative modes of representation in order to achieve a multivocal and reflexive understanding of informant/respondent realities. Something of this resistance is now surfacing in consumer research literature. The shift from ethnographic realism, with its emphasis on the thick description of social worlds, to a cultural phenomenology that captures what it feels like to be present in those social worlds is now at the heart of marketing research. The notion of cultural phenomenology is supposed to breach the barriers between writer and reader as it privileges emotionality and strives to present unmediated personal experience. The goal is evocation rather than representation.

Now, if we want to ‘connect marketing research to marketing practice’, we have to force market researchers to go into the field. This could be achieved by the introduction of such approaches as SPI (Self Personal Introspection) and auto-ethnography including the use of video diaries for example. Another important possibility is to rely more on serendipity, an aptitude for making desirable discoveries by accident. While some scientists and inventors are reluctant about reporting accidental discoveries others openly admit its role, in fact serendipity is a major component of scientific discoveries and inventions. Market researchers in their everyday life often face situations they do not take advantage of them because these situations do not fit in with their current research interest. However, they could do it. At the end of a congress, four colleagues – including me – had

an unusual experience in terms of satisfaction; we were invited to undertake a supposedly very exciting visit of a site but after a while this visit turned out to be a really boring experience – and even worse. If we apply the traditional disconfirmation model we would say that we were extremely dissatisfied by this experience. However, this nightmare-like experience turned into a memorable one because we formed a group who hijacked the meaning of the visit as provided by the organizer and ascribed a new meaning to it. Although no one of us was a specialist of satisfaction, this experience made us realize that satisfaction is not just an individual and linear process of disconfirmation but includes societal and circular dimensions. On this basis, we returned to the state of the art of the literature and we were capable of adding something to the groundbreaking article of Mick & Fournier (1999) on “Rediscovering Satisfaction”.

Kevin Keller

Marketing research is a critical ingredient of marketing and the challenge is to make sure that relevant, timely, and actionable insights and recommendations emerge from marketing research studies.

Researchers within companies must have a firm understanding of what kinds of information marketers need to make their decisions and what inputs will help them make the right decisions. This entails staying up to date as to best marketing practices, but making sure that there is always a research perspective that is brought to bear to all marketing thinking.

Researchers within companies also must be very proactive and help marketing managers to address their research questions and problems. These researchers need to stay on top of cultural trends, competitive movements, economic and legal developments and all other aspects of the marketing environment to be a helpful resource and partner to marketing managers.

Academic marketing researchers must similarly stay close to industry events and actions to help them understand what the important marketing issues and problems are. Their research, however, will necessarily be broader and more conceptual than industry marketing researchers. Academic marketing researchers seek to develop relevant theories and frameworks; industry marketing researchers need to be able to apply those notions to provide practical information.

One key for any researcher is to be able to employ a wide range of different research techniques and methods that collectively provides insight into a marketing problem. That is, any one research technique has strengths and weaknesses, so they must be skillfully combined so they offset each other.

Ivan Snehota

A frequent fallacy in marketing research is that its purpose that impacts on its scope is to get the management better informed. The scope of any re-

search is not to provide information but to offer understanding. That in turn requires theory development. My impression is that research in marketing increasingly tends to be oriented towards testing theory rather than theory development. Data capture and analysis alone are not sufficient to theory development.

Finally, there are new challenges faced by marketing educators too. According to a recent study by Unni (2005), marketing students, more than other business students, sell back their books at the end of the term. It does not sound like good news either, revealing a low perceived usefulness of our classes.

4) Should we add to the MSI list a further topic named “connecting marketing teaching to marketing research and practice”? How could we increase the perceived value of our textbooks and lessons? What should the key learnings be for today’s marketing students?

Bernard Cova

This comes back to the discourse on what is a good marketer. For a good marketer, coherent pluralism consists in combining diverse theories, models and frameworks in a unique way in order to face a specific market situation. A handbook dealing with a kind of ‘Grand Theory’ of marketing (e.g. the Kotler on Marketing Management) is not the solution in this view. It could be better to provide a more pluralistic book that is able to present the myriad of theories that could be put into practice by marketers. This would enable the students to understand how each theory, necessarily sub-determined (i.e. its predictive value is limited), makes its own contribution to the understanding and the solving of marketing issues. Thus for a marketing researcher, this will allow him – in terms of the aims of one’s research, one’s skills and one’s desires – to make a deliberate choice amongst the many possible alternative frameworks and, at the same time, will not oblige him to remain prisoner of one dominant model.

It is also worth noting that thanks to the diffusion of information on the Internet students are already familiar with many of the basic concepts of marketing before they start a marketing course. For them, these concepts are out of date and unattractive. On the other hand, there are many blogs on the Net dedicated to marketing where people including students exchange ideas and opinions about the latest panaceas invented by the new gurus of marketing (see for example www.ninjamarketing.it). These marketing panaceas form a vast practical literature intended to provide managers with solutions to marketing Grand Theory’s decadence. What is interesting here is not one of these panaceas per se but the movement that pushes people to discard what they call old-school marketing for these new forms of marketing. I think that for students marketing is not a discipline like finance that has to rely on concepts and models created during the 50’s; it is a very live-

ly discipline that has to redefine itself everyday. That's why they sell back their books that are full of basic concepts but are ready to buy the latest one written by Seith Godin.

In fact most of the time students feel that they know more about these new marketing techniques and models than the professor. They willingly discuss them but on the other hand are not very motivated by the idea of discussing something they call 'old stuff'. The usefulness of our classes stems from a student perception based on this state of thing – we like it or not. A possible way of dealing with it is to put the students in the position of contributors or co-creators: they bring their examples and their new ideas into the course and our job could be to deconstruct their supposed knowledge and to reconstruct it on the basis of what we think is a solid concept or a solid theory.

Kevin Keller

As someone who has two textbooks, both of which are translated in Italian, I am very sensitive to this topic!

The goals in both of my textbooks, Strategic Brand Management and Marketing Management, is to satisfy three key criteria by which any marketing textbook could be judged:

Depth: The material in the book had to be presented in the context of a conceptual framework that was comprehensive, internally consistent and cohesive, and well grounded in the academic and practitioner literature.

Breadth: The book had to cover all those topics that practicing managers and students of marketing found intriguing and/or important.

Relevance: Finally, the book had to be well grounded in practice and easily related to past and present marketing activities, events, and case studies.

I firmly believe if we write textbooks and teach classes that maximize those three dimensions, we will receive good feedback from students. And of course in the actual classroom, we must find ways to introduce case studies, exercises, projects and other means that engage students in their learning and allow them to use their creativity and imagination.

Ivan Snehota

Books that tell how things are, should, or might be tend to become obsolete rather quickly. Several marketing textbooks appear to fall in that category. A sign is the add-on in the title – marketing “in practice”. They inform, introduce and certainly fill a need. The question is to what extent accounts of the current practice provide an effective guidance for how to think of, make sense of, and to face and behave in the future market. I am convinced that most of the readers tend to treasure the insight and explana-

tion and to keep the books that help in that endeavor. That brings us back to the exposing theories that explain rather than facts to remember.

Conclusions

The contribution of three important marketing scholars gave us the chance to discuss some ongoing challenges of our discipline.

Marketing is redefining itself — this is formally testified also by the AMA's redefinition of the marketing term. It is a radical process especially driven by increasingly complex consumption models and new extraordinary opportunities created by the digital networks, which open wide a new world to explore.

The essence of marketing, as it emerges from the discussion, may be the same: it is still the understanding of consumption phenomena to innovate and maximize customer value in an efficient and effective way. However, the implementation and the accomplishment of such a mission is deeply changing.

Our Members underline that this should be done by (1) developing a strong marketing culture within the entire organization and value-delivery network, (2) helping marketers and part-time marketers of the network to interpret the complex value systems of customers, and (3) abandoning the illusion of “sustainable” marketing solutions to accept the idea of relentless marketing.

All of these involve the use of *internal* and *integrated* marketing strategies within the firm, as well as *collective* strategies within the entire value-delivery network of players. Only in this way any organization within the network, as well as any person and any activity within each organization, is synergically harmonized to creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers. As a remarkable point, the customer herself/himself is an active part of the net.

It becomes a priority, then, a better understanding of the interdependencies among the players and the partners in the market. Especially critical appears the creative role that customers may play in a business relationship today, allowing the firm to learn directly from their knowledge and experience. The opportunities for co-creation of value have never been so rich.

A fundamental support for marketers, of course, must arrive from marketing researchers. Accordingly, their efforts shall look for the best way to both *represent* and *interpret* marketing phenomena. The final goal should be to offer prompt *understanding* of relevant problems, to provide the horizontal vision helping the management to interpret the changes that they are experiencing. By remaining constantly close to the field, then, academic marketing research shall develop actionable theories and frameworks of

analysis. At this time, however, scholars increasingly appear to be oriented towards testing theory rather than theory development. A further problem is about the representation of business and social realities. From this point of view, marketing research shall keep exploiting the richness of different techniques, methods, and even philosophies, from modern positivism to post-positivism. Only in this way, research in an applied discipline will grant a comprehensive and reflexive portrait of our complex environment.

Finally, there is the critical role played by the education of future marketing managers. A possible limit of current textbooks is a partial representation of the alternative theoretical frameworks that can be used to address marketing issues. Moreover, our discipline have to constantly reinvent itself, evolving together with a turbulent business context. Not surprisingly, then, part of our teachings tends to become obsolete rather quickly. A possible escape is to identify well grounded frameworks able to resist the contingencies of the times: current times should provide coherent examples, while should not inspire contingent models or paradigms that would inevitably get old-fashioned. In conclusion, our students should learn to respect and valorize different points of view, within the marketing field as well as the broader discipline of business. Without that attitude, there is less chance that they will be able to face the next challenges of our profession.

Talking about a connected world and connected value networks, we start our first international issue of “*Mercati e Competitività*” with the article by Caputo, Fortuna, Michelino, and Resciniti, right on market orientation and Internet in supply chain management. Furthermore, a connected world is the one involving the many different stakeholders of a special event like the “*Notte Bianca*”, as discussed by Iasevoli and Cherubini in their contribution. We can have, then, a formal connection among network players to growth and expand into new markets: it is the international franchising strategy highlighted by Alon and Vianelli in the hotel industry. The international perspective, in a connected world, lead us to the issue of a global versus local marketing strategy. This is the hot topic dealt by Guerini in her article analyzing the behaviors of leading Italian firms accordingly.

We also mentioned, in our forum, the increasing complexity of consumption phenomena. From this point of view, the last two contributions underline such a trend in the retail industry. The first one, authored by Colacchio, focuses especially on shopping motivations, where “shopping” is intended as “store visit”. The second one, by Massara and Liu, proposes a conceptual framework linking consumption goals to the perceptual, cognitive and affective responses to a retail environment. All in all, the complexity and the challenges of our discipline are somehow mirrored in the present issue of our journal.

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