

## **Guest Editorial Preface**

# **Special Issue on E-Commerce Companies: Engaging the Stakeholders**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Statistics from several credible reports suggest that the e-commerce industry is growing rapidly across the globe primarily because it saves customers' time, efforts, and money (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2019). However, this industry is sensitive to external factors (Alqahtani, 2019; Sila, 2013). It has led to several acquisitions (Razak & Vattikoti, 2018). Those who could constantly engage their internal and external stakeholders could survive and thrive (Acharya & Gupta, 2020; Gupta & Bakker, 2020; Sharma et al., 2019; Westerman et al., 2020; Gupta, 2018; Novoa et al., 2018). To fully utilize the employees' potential, the e-commerce companies need to engage their internal stakeholders, the employees, cognitively, physically, and emotionally into their work (Ojo, 2016; Gupta et al., 2019; Gupta, 2019; Gupta & Shaheen, 2018; Gupta et al., 2018). To remain agile, cost effective, and attractive, these companies also need to make sure that their external stakeholders such as customers, investors, and suppliers are engaged (Singh & Srivastava, 2019). Therefore, it is of paramount significance for the e-commerce companies to know the factors that may affect them. Surprisingly, the research in this area is sparse.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE**

The objective of this special issue is to explore and examine the causes and consequences of engaging stakeholders in the e-commerce industry. The six articles in this special issue present current and rapidly evolving research focusing on the ways and means in which stakeholders in the E-commerce industry can be engaged by the companies. Academic researchers will be valued with the findings and the opportunities presented in the research papers as avenues for future research. The findings of the research paper will also help practitioners to plan their activities in a better way and engage all the stakeholders of the company.

### **CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES**

The first article, "Hedonic and Utilitarian Values behind Engagement of Online Consumers," explains the dynamics behind the process of customer engagement to gain insights into consumers' experience while booking online air-ticket. The authors collected data from 60 frequent air travelers and did content analysis. They identified eight themes which bring forth the importance of utilitarian and

hedonic experiential values while booking online air tickets. They found that to keep consumers engaged, utilitarian and hedonic benefits are important apart from functional aspects of the booking portal. Utilitarian motivation is linked with the benefit that consumer gets after consuming a product and hedonic motivation is linked with the experience which the consumer gathers while consuming the product or service. Utilitarian benefits can be considered as the basic core services. However, to differentiate their services from that of the competitor's companies should focus on hedonic benefits. The paper concludes by identifying the implications of their research for the practice and theory.

The second article, "Consumer-Brand Engagement with e-Commerce Market Place Brands," describes new routes to consumer-brand engagement (CBE) in the context of the e-commerce marketplace. The authors have examined the role of consumer advocacy and consumer involvement on CBE and the impact of consumer brand engagement on brand usage intention and positive word-of-mouth. Results from 408 respondents showed that both consumer advocacy and consumer involvement impacted CBE which in turn had a positive impact on word-of-mouth and brand usage intention.

Engaging stakeholders has become very challenging for companies since there is a very thin line of difference between internal and external consumers due to the mobile-based aggregator model. The third article, "Engaging Stakeholders of Crowdsourced Work: Case of Cab Aggregators of India," deals with the points of engagement and disengagement for the major stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Results from 50 interviews revealed that technology has a dual nature where it not only enhances but also diminishes engagement levels of stakeholders.

E-servicescape environment plays a very important role in engaging the stakeholders. The next article, "Exploring the Role of E-Servicescape Dimensions on Customer Online Shopping- A Stimulus-Organism-Response Paradigm," attempts to understand the role of e-servicescape environment and its effects on e-commerce websites. In the fourth article, the authors have developed a model using the stimulus-organism-response framework, in which the e-servicescape was used as the stimulus, consumer trust was used as the organism and the response was the consumers' purchase intention. Results from 304 respondents showed that e-servicescape dimensions are a strong predictor of trust that strongly impacts customers' purchase intention.

Persuasive research shows that more realistic information sources are more influential in changing attitudes and gaining behavioral compliance. In the fifth article, "Employee Review Websites as Source of Recruitment Communication: The Role of Source Credibility, Realistic Information & Specific Information," the authors have tested whether perceptions concerning source credibility, specific information, and realistic information in the web recruitment context differ on different recruitment media. The authors also examined the role of realistic information, source credibility and specific information as antecedents to organizational attractiveness. Results from 283 student respondents revealed that job seekers perceive company independent websites to be more realistic since they present more realistic and specific information compared to company dependent website.

Banking has always been an extremely information demanding activity. Traditional branch-based banking remains the most extensive method for carrying out banking transactions in most of the countries to obtain, process, and deliver the information to all relevant users. Conversely, internet technology is rapidly changing the means of how personal financial services are being designed and delivered. The sixth article, "The Moderating Effect of Individual Differences on the Acceptance and Use of Internet Banking: A Developing Country Perspective," has extended the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology model by including trust as a proxy. The authors have also investigated the moderating effect of a set of socio-demographic variables in shaping consumer perceptions towards using internet banking. Results from 408 internet banking consumers revealed that performance expectancy, social influence, trust, and effort expectancy had a significant influence on behavioral intention.

## CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The objective of exploring and examining the causes and consequences of engaging stakeholders in the e-commerce industry was realized in this special issue. Several factors such as hedonic and utilitarian values, consumer involvement and advocacy, technology, e-servicescape, realistic information among others were scientifically identified as antecedents to engaging consumers online. Similarly, the factors that are positively affected when stakeholders invest their physical, emotional, and cognitive energies simultaneously into their work were identified as brand usage intention and positive word of mouth, purchase intention among others. Given the research evidence that this issue provides, e-commerce companies are encouraged to give due importance to the factors that affects engagement levels of their stakeholders as engaging stakeholders seem to have several positive outcomes. Scholars in the future may work on examining the intervening roles of some of these variables in the engagement nexus and generalize these results to other contexts.

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