

Editorial

We all remember the massive consumer stockpiling in the first weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic, even in categories that were under absolutely no threat of real shortages, such as flour. We also observe that consumers regularly cite privacy concerns as a reason for not purchasing an Alexa device from Amazon. Whether valid or not, the very same consumers will take voice-activated smartphone devices everywhere. In other words (and not surprisingly), customer perceptions continue to matter, when it comes to understanding customer behavior.

The three papers in this issue all reflect this. In one way or another, they all point to customer perceptions as an important motivational force for customer behavior. Each study is positioned in an emerging research field, with the first paper looking at consumer health, the second paper at virtual reality, and the third paper at value-based pricing in business-to-business settings.

The first paper zooms in on customer perceptions on body shape malleability. Authored by Silvan Burri, Sascha Steinmann, and Dirk Morschett, it is entitled “Improving or Enhancing the Self? Beliefs About Body Shape Malleability Influence Consumer Product Evaluation and Preference.” It is based on the key idea that customers may hold different theories on whether body shapes are stable (which implies there is little a customer can do to change it) or malleable (which implies that customers can work on their body shape to improve it). In a rich set of studies, comprising an online survey and two vignette experiments, they find that female consumers that are primed with an belief that body shapes are stable (compared to female consumers primed that body shapes are malleable) evaluate products more favorably that simply improve the optics. At the same time, consumers primed with the believe in body shape stability evaluate self-improvement products less favorably. Hence, to further self-improvement, communicators need to also address the underlying consumer beliefs whether that is actually possible.

The second paper is positioned in the field of virtual reality technologies. Authored by Reinhard Kunz, Christian Zabel, Alexander Roth, and Sebastian Cramer it is entitled “Value Creation in Virtual Reality Gaming: Multidimensional Construction and Measurement of the Service Value Concept in Germany’s Virtual Reality Gaming Service Ecosystem.” In a mixed method approach combining a study with qualitative interviews and a large survey, the authors identify value dimensions of services in virtual reality gaming. The multidimensional value construct correlates with relevant service outcomes (customer satisfaction, recommendation intention), highlight the importance of actively managing the VR service value.

While possibly being less explored, customer perceptions also matter in business-to-business contexts. This is reflected by the third paper in this issue. Authored by Dominik Ebinger and Marc Wouters, it is entitled “Understanding and enhancing price fairness perceptions of value-based pricing.” Ebinger and Wouters tackle the question, why value-based pricing is not as widely adopted in business practice, as academics would expect. Their findings from a series of vignette experiments illustrate one possible reason for this lack in adoption: customer fairness perceptions. If cost-based pricing is the reference standard (either due to reference cases or the industry norm), it will be seen as fairer than value-based pricing. Therefore, marketers interested in employing value-based pricing need to actively manage how customer perceive its fairness.

Taken together, these studies therefore provide valuable evidence for the importance of accurately tracking customer perceptions across a variety of service settings. We thus hope that these studies as well are perceived favorably by the readers of Marketing ZFP.

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