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## **Editorial: Social media and proximity marketing**

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Increasing public response to the advancements in information and communication technology and adaptability to technology-based social media channels have significantly increased the outreach of market to geo-demographic consumer segments. The proximity of brands to the remotest consumer segments has driven the welfare-marketing philosophy among large firms, which has enabled the firms to access global brands at affordable prices. Fast-moving consumer goods require proximity to local markets, although economies of scale in certain functions are not effectively achieved and need centralised control. In addition, stakeholder engagement, business leaders, and managers around the world share a common understanding of corporate strategy. Some customer-centric companies are engaged in proximity marketing approach engaging skilled managers and linking decentralised neighbourhood groups through the profit-with-purpose goals of marketing (Maljers, 1992).

Developing the customer relationship is often built around collective intelligence through social media channels and efficient communication tasks that drive interpersonal communications, confidence, and cognitive bonding. Crowd-based brand marketing is characterised by extensive interpersonal communications not only between buyers and sellers, but also between a wide variety of functions performed by the actors at back- and front stages (Rajagopal, 2011). Consequently, conversational interaction has become an important tool to develop proximity and can be achieved by understanding how companies can forge authentic and durable brand relationships with the various segments of consumers when they aggregate geographic marketing. Proximity marketing approach allows firms to not only understand the customer insights, but also realise the power of co-creation and co-evolution of business in the competitive marketplace (Livingston and Opie, 2019). A hybrid conversational-communication style induces positive customer relations, which helps firms to build geodemographic association of brands with the consumers. Firms can develop proximity index based on communication, interactivity, cognitive variables, relationship drivers, competitive touchpoints, and business growth. Proximity marketing approach is used to co-create customer relationship hubs to foster marketing, public relations, and communications strategies to develop a positive consumer-business helix and ecosystem (Schultz et al., 2011).

Successful consumer marketing companies function on 'hub and spoke' model in developing relationships through influencer-member exchange (IMX) process to stay need-based and customer-centric in business. Technological advancements and the changing consumption preferences of consumers prompt the growth of influencer marketing which is an outgrowth of proximity marketing concept (Karagür et al., 2022). The critical impact of IMX depends on the interplay of key influencer characteristics and marketing disclosures. The growing changes in the consumer behaviour correspond partly with the rise of influencer marketing, defined as a tactic in which companies pay people (influencers), financially or in-kind, to produce social media content on behalf of the brands and influence consumers' preferences and purchase decisions. Consequently, the congruence of influencer attributes with the consumers cognition and reasoning abilities drives higher IMX effects (Rajagopal, 2024). An effective, convergent business strategy creates social and customer values by co-evolving the brand in society. The network among society, people, and business stimulates co-creation and collective business designing. The convergence of society and business can be better understood by converging crowd perspectives, IMX factors, and continuous learning about the consumer behaviour, and competitive growth perspectives (Rajagopal, 2021).

The concept of proximity marketing has been explained in context to the various ecosystems and the concept of strategy spinning that affect the business orientation, customer acquisition and loyalty, and market competitiveness of firms. Consequently, business-, social-, crowd-, and behavioural ecosystems significantly contribute to the attributes of proximity marketing. Most companies are currently engaged in the building consumer behaviour on the triple bottom-line principle and aim at earning profit with people, purpose, and sustainability (triple bottom-line), while some companies tend to complement the proximity marketing approaches with effective information management, accountability, brand socialisation (interactive drive), and transformational initiatives forming the quadruple bottom-line (Rajagopal, 2024). Crowd behaviour often requires streamlining to be able to deliver a predetermined course of action. Such behaviour is commonly chaotic, but it enables firms to understand customer performance in general and to develop marketing strategies. Nonetheless, complex crowd behaviours may result from unpredicted interactions among individuals who tend to locally coordinate individual and community issues. However, with a social business goal, a crowd behaves in a self-organised manner and engages in collective dynamics without external control (Moussaid et al., 2009).

This issue of the journal includes five research papers addressing the attributes that influence customer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth and social proximity, trade openness, market responsiveness, and social media effects on customer outreach. These research papers include diverse study areas representing India, Ghana, Nigeria, and Vietnam. The papers included in this issue of the journal broadly discuss contemporary research on consumer behaviour, digital interactions, and transformations in the contemporary businesses. I hope the collection of research papers appearing in this issue will enrich the existing literature on the topic and stimulate future research.

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