

Call for doctoral proposals

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INSIGHT AND OPTIMISATION

Proposed supervisors: Dr Emma Macdonald, Professor Hugh Wilson

Dr Emma Macdonald is Senior Lecturer in Marketing and Hugh Wilson is Professor of Strategic Marketing at Cranfield School of Management. They jointly direct the Cranfield Customer Management Forum, a club of blue-chip firms that identifies and spreads best practice in customer management, from CRM and multichannel strategy to experience management and social media. They teach on these topics as well as marketing strategy and communications at Cranfield and are frequent keynote speakers for industry conferences. Their recent article on customer insight was published in *Harvard Business Review* (<http://hbr.org/2012/09/better-customer-insight-in-real-time/ar/1>). Their work has also been published in numerous academic journals including *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *British Journal of Management*, *Journal of Marketing Management* and *Journal of Business Research*, and has won several conference awards.

The research opportunity

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INSIGHT AND OPTIMISATION

We know from our work with the managers who are part of the Cranfield Customer Management Forum that they are concerned with both understanding and optimising their customers' experience. This is also a concern for academics who view the domain of customer experience management as offering a rich agenda for future research (Verhoef et al, 2009).

Customer experience includes all of the encounters that a customer has with the company's paid-for communications and service touchpoints. But it also includes post-purchase usage as well as non-company controlled touchpoints such as retail channel contacts and peer-to-peer encounters, such as talking about the brand with a friend or seeing someone else using it. But most firms have very limited visibility of these. With insight into the holistic customer experience it is possible to understand the relative impact of touchpoints on customer satisfaction and other relationship measures. It is also feasible to identify the linkages between touchpoints as the customer moves along the journey to purchase. For the past three years we have been working on developing better techniques to provide such holistic customer experience insight, such as real-time experience tracking (see our recent article and blogs in *Harvard Business Review* by Macdonald, Wilson and Konus, below). This is an on-going theme of our research; as well as further applications of the real-time experience tracking method, we are also interested in exploring the potential of social media mining to understand the complete customer journey. Research opportunities include (but are not limited to):

- Using real-time experience tracking data in conjunction with sales data to model the customer's journey to purchase, and hence improve on the econometric models currently used by practitioners to evaluate marketing communications
- Evaluating in particular the impact of online and offline word of mouth on the recipient, as well as what drives these behaviours, again using real-time experience tracking
- Applications of real-time experience tracking to understand other behaviours such as purchasing a green product (see also separate call on sustainability and customer behaviour)
- Fusing social media data with sales data to model the impact of customer perceptions on sales.

As well as needing better sources of experience insight, managers are also struggling with the processes of experience optimisation. They are hampered by the traditional product silo structure within the organisation, which may prevent a smooth handover of the customer from one department to another to match the customer journey. Organisations used to doing the talking also find it challenging to listen and respond to customers when the customer is the initiator of a conversation.

Issues worthy of investigation within the domain of customer experience optimisation include:

- how experience insight is disseminated and actioned
- the design of customer experience management structures and processes within the company
- processes of customer relationship management and integrated communications that draw on experience insight.

References

- Lemke, Clark and Wilson (2011), Customer experience quality, *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*
- Macdonald, Wilson and Konus (2012), Better customer insight – in real time, *Harvard Business Review*, September issue.
- Macdonald, Wilson and Konus (2012), Tracking the customer's journey to purchase, *HBR.org*, http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/08/tracking_the_customers_journey.html
- Macdonald, Wilson and Konus (2011), Using mobile phones to capture customer experiences, *HBR.org*, http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/05/using_mobile_phones_to_capture.html
- Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros and Schlesinger (2009), Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies, *Journal of Retailing*

Doctoral researcher profile

These topics suit an aspiring academic who wishes to remain close to practice. They require confidence at networking with practitioners as deep research access is required; this will probably come from at least some years of business experience. A purely qualitative approach would be possible for an investigating the processes of customer experience optimisation, and with target journals such as Harvard Business Review and California Management Review, excellent writing skills would be needed. In addition to these writing skills, more quantitative approaches require a degree of comfort with numbers and a willingness to learn some statistics if you haven't already! The real-time experience tracking method in particular would suit someone who already has significant statistics training behind them.

Application

Candidates with interests in this area are invited to make contact with Dr Emma Macdonald (emma.macdonald@cranfield.ac.uk) for an informal discussion in the first instance.

You will be required to submit a CV together with a research proposal, drafted according to the guidelines provided on our website (<http://bit.ly/bYBN4v>), by 8th March 2013. Please email these direct to Dr Macdonald and not through the research proposal submission form on the website. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to submit a formal application form (deadline 29th March), complete our admission tests and attend a formal interview at Cranfield.

For full details of our PhD programme please visit our website at <http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/p650/Programmes-and-Executive-Development/Doctorates/The-PhD-Programme>

A further, related PhD opportunity also exists which is based on the same real-time experience tracking method and is focused around politics:

Assessing Political Marketing Channel Experiences in the 2015 British General Election

Proposal applications also required by 8th March 2013

Supervisors: Professor Paul Baines, Dr Emma Macdonald, Professor Hugh Wilson

<http://bit.ly/U9r5jq>