**Developing Cultural Competence in a Highly Interactive Service Social Media Environment**

**Abstract**

Social media is an important tool in relationship building and communication with customers (Kumar et al. 2016). A particular challenge remaining is how to achieve a holistic understanding of the contemporary consumer across online and offline environments. Both Kumar et al (2016) and Lamberton and Stephen (2016) emphasise the benefits of longitudinal research to understand the time required for social media to influence customer behaviour. Castronova (2002) first suggested that virtual worlds could be used as ‘petri-dishes’ to study populations. This research is focused on the individual rather than communities and therefore a multimodal longitudinal case study methodology was developed, which includes a Subjective Personal Introspection (SPI) to examine in detail the user/avatar relationship of one of the authors over five years. After a hermeneutic analysis process the authors identified extant acculturation and consumer acculturation theories as the overarching theme. Using these as a lens then reveal a virtual acculturation process within which there was a cultural competence development process (Padilla & Perez, 2008?). The antecedents to this process are identified and the role of self-discrepancy theory explained. This paper extends contemporary migratory consumptionscapes (Askegaard & Özçaglar-Toulouse, 2011) by applying an acculturation lens to the cybermarketspace crossing conceptual boundaries.

Using a longitudinal study within a highly interactive service, social media environment allowed a virtual acculturation process to be observed