

FOREWORD

The year 2017 is nearly halfway and still there is no end to the woes of the consumers worldwide. In South Africa a damper has been placed on the economic climate and prospects with the recall of the minister of Finance and his deputy from abroad where they were attending important meetings with investors, bankers and other relevant parties. The appointment of a new minister of finance led to shockwaves both locally and internationally and S&P immediately downgraded South Africa to junk status. Moody's is likely to follow suit in the near future and another down grade will hurt the economy further.

There has been much speculation what will happen in future and it is expected that the South African economy will grow by about 05% in the next year – if not at a negative growth.

It is expected that South Africa will continue to face economic and socioeconomic challenges in the years to come due to amongst others political instability and civil unrest. The issues that retailers and business will have to cope with include exchange rate volatility, the availability of credit and inflation which all impact on the disposable income of the consumer. Some retailers are already feeling the pressure on luxury goods and many shops are closing down – barely months after opening. This in turn puts pressure on shopping centre developers and investors. Retailers have also continued to develop strategies to try and attract customers and to at least meet their previous targets and hopefully to increase margins.

Many retailers have embarked on strategies to expand their product offering in the hope to increase their customer base. These actions include special promotions, aggressive pricing strategies, and adding new product lines not previously offered. Additional to these actions a range of unrelated services are offered by many retailers, such as show tickets, bus and air tickets, pre paid electricity, payment of traffic fines and even withdrawal of cash. All these actions are aimed at attracting more and previously non customers to the store.

Against this scenario it can be expected that many businesses will face serious challenges in the months to come and they will have to look harder for the opportunities that may open up and be exploited.

It will also be interesting to see what will happen on the international front with the changes happening in the USA, France with its new president and other European elections still to come.

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Professor Michael Cant is a full professor and the former Head of the Department of Marketing and Retail Management at the University of South Africa (Unisa). In this position, his responsibility includes: the development of staff; course design; the development of new modules/courses and degrees; and liaison with the business community to ensure that all qualifications are in line with the specific needs of the business world. He acts as promoter for both Master's and Doctoral students.

In 1999 a major retailer in Africa, *MassDiscounters*, sponsored a substantial amount of funds for the development of a BCom degree in Retail Management. This sponsorship has been utilised for research in the field of retailing, course development, and to fund the Chair in Retail Management of which Prof. Cant is the incumbent. He secured these funds largely due to the fact that he and his staff members had been able to assist MassDiscounters, through the academic programmes offered by the Centre for Business Management, to train their employees and develop their own in-house programmes.

Unisa presented a merit award for research to Prof. Cant in 1998, and again in 2002. His research outputs include contract research and contributions to prescribed textbooks, either as editor or as an author. His research projects which deal with student perceptions of certain academic matters, their attitudes towards specific components for the curricula, their needs, and so on have been completed. He has also published a number of research articles in both local and international academic journals. Prof. Cant also services on the boards of the Journal of Retail and Consumer Services.