Editorial:

W&RSETA Conference 2026 Special Issue – The Retail and Marketing Review

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Editor-in-Chief Special W&RSETA issue November 2026
The Retail and Marketing Review

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Volume Special Issue W&R SETA Conference (2026)

Retailing remains one of the most important sectors of economic activity, connecting producers, suppliers, businesses and consumers while making a substantial contribution to employment, entrepreneurship and economic development. Its significance extends well beyond the traditional buying and selling of goods. Retailing is increasingly influenced by technological developments, changing consumer expectations, workforce capabilities, supply-chain management, product safety and the wider social and economic environment.

Internationally, the retail sector is experiencing considerable transformation. The growth of e-commerce, artificial intelligence, digital payment systems, automation and increasingly sophisticated distribution networks is changing how businesses operate and how consumers interact with retailers. At the same time, greater attention is being directed towards sustainability, ethical business practices, food safety, employee development and the resilience of supply chains. These developments demonstrate that retailing can no longer be examined in isolation from the broader economic, technological and social systems within which it operates.

In South Africa, these changes are particularly significant. The retail and wholesale sectors play an important role in employment creation, skills development and economic participation. The coexistence of large formal retail organisations, independent retailers, township enterprises and informal traders creates a distinctive operating environment. Businesses must respond to technological change and international competition while confronting local challenges such as unemployment, constrained consumer spending, infrastructure limitations, skills shortages and unequal access to economic opportunities. Understanding these challenges requires research that extends beyond conventional retail management and marketing perspectives.

The Retail and Marketing Review

Volume 22, Special Issue: W&RSETA Research Conference, pages i-ii

Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24154469

It is against this background that *The Retail and Marketing Review* presents this special issue, developed from research associated with the W&R Seta 2026 conference. The conference provided an opportunity for researchers and practitioners from different academic disciplines to examine issues affecting the wholesale and retail sectors, directly or indirectly, and to consider their implications for business, industry and society.

An important characteristic of this special issue is its deliberately interdisciplinary approach. While the journal's regular publications concentrate primarily on retailing and marketing, the scope of this edition has been broadened to accommodate research that contributes to understanding the wider environment in which retailing takes place.

The contributions reflect this diversity. They address subjects such as technological transformation and artificial intelligence, workforce development, education and employability, entrepreneurship, leadership, business management, supply-chain practices, food safety and consumer protection. Some articles examine retailing directly, while others approach issues from educational, technological, scientific, organisational or socio-economic perspectives. Their relevance lies not necessarily in their immediate focus on retail transactions or marketing activities, but in the implications of their findings for the retail sector, its participants and the broader value chain.

This broader approach is intentional. For example, research into food safety and product quality has implications for retailers' sourcing decisions, consumer confidence and supply-chain accountability. Research into education, skills development and employability contributes to understanding the future capabilities of the retail workforce. Similarly, studies dealing with technology, organisational development and entrepreneurship offer perspectives on the changing conditions under which retail businesses operate.

Readers should therefore recognise that this special issue differs from the journal's regular editions in its thematic breadth and interpretation of subject relevance. Not every contribution falls within the traditional boundaries of retailing or marketing, nor is every article expected to address these disciplines as its primary research focus. Rather, the intention is to bring together scholarly contributions from different fields that have meaningful connections to the wholesale and retail environment.

It is equally important to clarify the publication status of these contributions. Although the research originated from, or was associated with, the *W&R Seta 2026 conference,* this publication is not a collection of conference proceedings. The contributions were prepared and submitted as full academic articles and subjected to scholarly evaluation and peer review. The broader scope of the special issue should therefore not be interpreted as a departure from the principles of academic integrity, research quality and responsible scholarly publication. It represents an editorial decision to accommodate a wider range of relevant research perspectives.

The value of this special issue lies in recognising that the challenges and opportunities facing retailing cannot be adequately understood through a single discipline. Retailing is influenced by developments across the entire value chain, from production and distribution to employment, technology, consumer behaviour and the wider business environment. By bringing these perspectives together, the edition seeks to encourage discussion, stimulate further research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the sector.

We trust that readers will approach the contributions in this spirit and recognise their individual and collective value in advancing knowledge relevant to retailing, marketing and the broader economic environment.

Prof M. C. Cant
Editor-in-Chief Special W&R Seta edition October 2026
The Retail and Marketing Review